



WHAT IS A FAMILY?

Suggested Grade Level: K – 3

Length of Time: One session of 45 minutes or two sessions of 30 minutes each

Goal

- Students will see that the common bond that holds all kinds of healthy families together is love and caring.

Objectives

- Students will be able to define what makes a family and describe a variety of families.
- Students will be able to identify common characteristics within all families.
- Students will learn that families have some similarities and some differences.

Academic Standards

- Reading: Ask and answer questions about key details, events or information in a text.
- Speaking and Listening: Describe familiar people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.
- Social Studies: Explore the concepts of likenesses and differences in school subjects.

Educators' Notes

What Is a Family? is an introductory session focusing on students' own experiences and questions. It includes a discussion of a book on families: *The Family Book* by Todd Parr or *Who's in A Family?* by Robert Skutch (for younger students) and *Families* by Susan Kuklin or *All Families Are Special* by Norma Simon (for older students). This unit is good to use as part of a larger curriculum sequence on family.

In this lesson, it is important to broaden students' understanding of what families are and to explore the notion that the common bond that holds all healthy families together is "love" (and caregiving). Students will brainstorm and discuss family structure and diversity. Students will also share information from their own experiences.

If there are students with different family configurations in your class or school, such as families with two moms or two dads; stepparents; a transgender parent; adoptive parents; or foster parents, it is useful to find out the language they use to refer to their families to help answer questions that may arise. If there is only one such student in your school, be careful not to continually single him or her out as an example.

Materials: Chart paper and markers.

Suggested Books

The Family Book, Todd Parr. (PreK – K)

Families, Susan Kuklin. (4 – 5)

Who's in a Family? Robert Skutch. (PreK – 1)

All Families Are Special, Norma Simon. (2 – 3)

Have available in the classroom or visit the library to see books with diverse families.

Activity 1

Label a piece of chart paper “What do we know about families?” Ask the class the following questions and record their answers on chart paper.

- What do we know about families?
- Who is in a family?
- What do family members give or share with each other?
- What responsibilities do family members have?

Families can be defined in many ways. Each one is unique. Most fall into a category or group of families that children can define. Familiarize students with the terms (see Family Definitions) used to describe different family models. Make sure to include all the different kinds of families that are in your classroom. At the same time, it is important to name a wide variety of families (such as single parents or LGBT-headed), especially the ones that are not represented in your classroom.

For younger students you can draw picture symbols or use magazine cut-outs of each family member next to each family model. For example, for “extended family,” draw grandparent(s), parent(s) and children. It is also important for children to define for themselves who is in their family. Their description may include a pet, a church member, a neighbor or someone else.

Activity 2: Read one of the suggested books, depending on grade level.

As you read the book, ask children to watch for these different kinds of families: “Let’s see how many different kinds of families we can find in this book.”

As you read, pause and ask, “What do you see in this picture? Who’s in this family?” Sometimes it might be appropriate to say, “What do we call this kind of family?” At the end of the book you might say, “Are these all the kinds of families that there can be?”

End the lesson by asking, “What is important in all families? What makes a family?”

Extensions

Give students a sheet of unlined paper. Have them fold it in half. Have them draw two different kinds of families doing something together. Have them title each picture and indicate which kind of family is illustrated in each and what they are doing.

Older students can write a poem about what “family” means to them or what is important about families.

Assessment and Evaluation

- Are all students participating in the discussion?
- Do they understand what some significant components of a family are?
- Can students define or describe four or more families?
- Can students name two things that they think are important about healthy families

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy (Draft). March 2010. <http://www.corestandards.org/>
National Council for the Social Studies <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands#1>