

## Family Health Promotion

Describing health is complex and has many different facets as it is expressed in different ways in different families in everyday life

### **The Individual's Health –**

Physical  
Functional Capacity  
Mental Balance  
Social Relations  
Compromise

Family health can be defined as experiences of wellbeing and unwell-being. These experiences are highly subjective. Feelings of helplessness or coping with no trouble at all are closely tied with varying daily situations and time.

Health depends a lot on the individual's economic, social and physical milieu

Health promotion looks at the health of individuals within the context of influencing systems.

Influencing systems - family, community, culture and physical environment – are the elements that must provide the economic, physical and social conditions compatible with health and a healthy lifestyle.

Health promotion cannot successfully promote change in an individual's lifestyle without looking at the systems that sustain it.

### **The single most important system is the family**

#### **Health Promotion – A Family Affair**

- ✧ Families have everything to do with health
- ✧ Children develop most of their strategies for interacting with their environment within the family
- ✧ It is within the family that most adults make decisions regarding health-related behaviors such as dietary habits or taking time for physical exercise
- ✧ Family members usually exhibit similar attitudes and behavior with regards to smoking, physical activity and eating habits
- ✧ Families influence the behavior of their members – adults and children
- ✧ Families shape the physical and social environments that are the determinants of health

### **Health Promotion – Healthy Behavior Starts at Home**

- ✧ Children develop their health-related behavior in the family
- ✧ House rules, encouragement from family members, emotional support and positive or negative reinforcements are extremely strong influences on a child's health-related behavior
- ✧ For instance, how food is viewed and used in a family has a powerful influence on a child's eating behavior and his or her future dietary choices
- ✧ Parents attitudes also make a difference as to whether or not children will adopt certain behaviors
- ✧ Nolte et al (1983) found that a child whose parents disapprove of smoking is five times less likely to start smoking than one whose parents show no objection
- ✧ It is not surprising that parents have an influence on children
- ✧ Many people, however do not realise the multi-directional nature of family influences
- ✧ Children, adolescents in particular exert a great deal of influence on their parents' use of leisure time and planning of meals
- ✧ Parents may give in to their children's demands for instance regarding dietary habits
- ✧ Children can also influence their parents in positive ways. For instance school-based prevention campaigns have successfully influenced parents through their children

### **Health Promotion – Families are where we live**

Families shape the economic, social and physical environment of their members – all the conditions that are determinants of health

- ✧ Economic status is strongly related to health status
- ✧ Health improves as income improves
- ✧ The health of a society appears to improve when the spread between rich and poor diminishes

### **Health Promotion – The Healthy Family**

- ✧ Beyond the influence of learned behaviors and the availability of healthy choices in the home, family health is related to very basic family characteristics
- ✧ A family environment that enables children to develop autonomy and a sense of responsibility generally leads to them adopting a healthy lifestyle

Children from families offering open communication and emotional support are linked with following healthier diets, while couples who share in decision making and tasks while participating in common activities also have healthier lifestyles.

Low family cohesion, high family conflict too rigid or too liberal family boundaries, lack of clear communication and poor support are consistently linked with poor health.

### **The Nurse - the advocate**

To promote and sustain family health the primary role of the nurse is that of an advocate. It can be argued that the most important thing is not what nurses do with families (clinical) but how much time they spend with them (the family).

The value and importance of nursing is that of being there as a “caring presence” rather than doing set tasks.

The role of the nurse in family health promotion is as an advocate in dealing with complex social systems, as an identifier of community based resources and as a direct liaison between family and community systems

The WHO (2000) encourages this role and also encourages its expansion to work directly towards family-related support structures that influence broad social, economic and policy changes.

As an advocate for health promotion within the family the nurse should give priority to the following realities –

- Safety as part of family health**
- Lifestyles as part of health**
- Role of family’s social networks**
- Coping strategies**

### **Coping Strategies**

- ✧ Talking
- ✧ Expressing feelings
- ✧ Positive attitude to life
- ✧ Comparisons
- ✧ Common rules and agreements
- ✧ Independence of parents
- ✧ Humor
- ✧ Recognition of own limits

### **Other Domains of Promoting Family Health during Child's Hospitalisation**

- ✧ Reinforcing Parenthood
- ✧ Looking after the child's welfare
- ✧ Sharing the emotional burden
- ✧ Supporting everyday coping
- ✧ Creating confidential care relationship

**The nurse can take up the following in order to enhance his/her delivery of family health promotion, namely-**

- 1. Entering a place of unknowing**
- 2. Practice and Education**
- 3. Learning and Teaching through Relationships**
- 4. Taking Risks**
- 5. Becoming a Reflective Practitioner**