

The Healthy Family

We all want to improve our families, but many are not sure how to do that. Research has proven that there are several areas in which we must focus our attention to help prevent the breaking up of our homes. By studying the common characteristics shared by successful families, you can better understand how to strengthen your own family. The following list contains the most important traits of the healthy family. By strengthening these areas in your own family, you will improve relationships and increase your chances of a stable home.

1. Communicating

This is the most important quality that must be developed. Get to know one another by talking and *listening*. Learn to respond rather than react. Use family meal time for conversation between all members of the family.

2. Affirming and Supporting

All family members must express appreciation for and give praise to one another. Do not pressure with unrealistic expectations.

3. Respecting Others

Start with respect for self, and then learn to respect individual differences within the family. *Learn* to live with one another. (Respect is not the same as approval.)

4. Trusting

This must begin with parents who trust each other deeply. Give children opportunities to earn trust, and let them learn to accept responsibility for their own behavior.

5. Sharing Time

Lack of time and energy is your family's worst enemy. Develop a sense of play and humor. Learn to balance private time and collective leisure time. Prioritize your activities and *make* time for one another.

6. Fostering Responsibility

Exhibit a sense of shared responsibility. As children grow, gradually give them more responsibility. This means more than doing chores, and does not necessarily mean orderliness and perfection. The consequences of irresponsibility are valuable lessons.

7. Teaching Morals

Parents need to teach clear and specific guidelines about right and wrong. Each family has different values, but the parents should agree on values they consider important. Avoid inconsistency between example and teaching.

8. Enjoying Traditions

Family rituals and traditions give us a sense of stability and a sense of belonging.

9. Sharing Religion

The potential for satisfying family relationships is far greater among religiously oriented families than among those who do not share a faith. Worship together regularly. Pass on the faith in positive and meaningful ways.

10. Respecting Privacy

Respect the right to be alone, to be different, and to change. Have more mutually negotiated rules as children mature.

11. Valuing Service

Serve others, whether inside or outside of your family. Be responsive to others' needs. Keep volunteer time under control.

12. Getting Help

Even the best families have problems. Seek help in the early stages of a problem. Not all problems can be solved within the family. When necessary, seek professional assistance.

It must be emphasized that every member of the family has to work toward improving relationships and strengthening the family. It is not solely the mother's responsibility. As the family improves so will society in general. No matter how healthy your family is, we know you want to make it even better.

For additional information on this subject we highly recommend the book *Traits of a Healthy Family*, by Dolores Curran, 1983, Winston Press, Minneapolis.