

CHARACTERISTICS OF Strong Families



All families are different, and all families have problems. It is important to remember there is no such thing as the “perfect” family. Living in a family means living with constant change and change often causes stress. Some families, however, are better than others at dealing with the stress that some problems create. Family scientists call these successful families “strong families.” Many scales weighing things such as the quality of the marriage bond and the quality of parent-child bonds help to tell strong families from not-so-strong families.

Research studies have identified common characteristics of strong families. As you read over the traits of strong families, keep in mind that no family is perfect. Be careful not to focus so much on what you are not doing well. Rather, think about what you can do to make your family stronger.

Commitment

Strong families commit themselves to promoting each other’s happiness. The commitment comes from sharing meaningful experiences, from involvement in setting family goals, and from seeing these goals carried out. Commitment is a vital factor in developing a sense of caring and unity among family members. Regular family talks encourage family commitment.



Expressed Appreciation

Strong families do much more than feel appreciation. They express it. They let each other know, through words and actions, that they are special. They accept, appreciate, and support each other as wonderful, one-of-a-kind persons. Family members take time to verbally notice each other’s efforts and thank them for what they do. For instance, telling Mom thank you for the delicious meal, or telling your little brother that you really liked it when he helped you clean your room.

Time Together

Strong families often work, play, eat, and attend religious and social functions together. They share duties and arrange their lives so they can spend time with one another. When needed, strong households cut down on outside activities to have quality time together on a regular basis. The time they spend together is intentional time, which often involves humor, spontaneity, and wit. After all, it is easy to spend time together when the time spent is fun.



Good Communication Skills

In strong families, all lines of communication are open. Information flows freely. Members of strong families put forth the effort to hear what the other person says and feels. They also are comfortable voicing opinions of their own, are open to change, and feel free to be themselves. Though they don't always agree, they do get everything out in the open. They handle disagreements creatively by using conflict management skills and showing forgiveness.

Spiritual Strength

Healthy families live by the golden rule; treat others as they would have others treat them. This promotes

sharing, loving, and compassion. Many strong families read inspirational books and value activities such as praying, singing, and meditating. They share similar values and feel a guiding force in their lives.

A Positive Outlook

Strong families deal with stress and crises in helpful ways. They often see crises as chances or challenges, rather than being defeated. They search for the silver lining in each dark cloud they meet, and they stick together. Strong families believe they can handle and survive any crisis that comes their way. They also know there are many resources in the community to help them.

Involvement with Friends and Community

No family is an island. Strong families stay in touch with friends and relatives, are friendly with neighbors, and are willing to help others in time of need. They also admit problems and are willing to reach out to professionals and others for help.



Family Action Plan

Talk about one or more of the characteristics of healthy families with your spouse, or better yet, with your whole family. With young children, be sure to talk on their level so they will understand. Talk about ways to strengthen a certain trait in your family. Pick out one or two ideas and write out a simple plan of action that each family member can sign. Hang it where everyone can see it and promise to help each other follow through.

Identifying Family Strengths

All families have strengths, and all families have room for improvement. Think about your own family. Complete the following scale focusing on your family.

Review the seven strengths before marking your ratings. If possible, see how your spouse and other family members see your family's strengths.

FAMILY STRENGTHS	Very Strong	Some Growth Needed	Much Growth Needed
Commitment			
Expressed appreciation			
Acceptance of individual uniqueness			
Time together			
Fun activities			
Good communication			
Forgiveness			
Spiritual strength			
Positive outlook			
Involvement with friends and family			

Family Talk

Gather family members, maybe over dinner or over a big bowl of popcorn. Let each person answer the following two questions: "What are two things you really like about our family?" and "What's something about our family you'd like to be different?" Encourage discussion, honesty, and an accepting and positive atmosphere.



Sources

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