

Vital signs of a healthy family

Q: *I grew up in a dysfunctional family. Now that I have a family of my own, I'm wondering what a genuinely healthy family looks like.*

A: YOU ARE NOT ALONE. Many people have grown up in dysfunctional families. The reality is that every family is dysfunctional. Romans 3:23 tells us "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sin causes people to become impaired. Impaired people create dysfunctional families. Some families are more dysfunctional than others, but no family is perfect. The good news is that all families have strengths as well. We want to help you recognize the signs of a strong and healthy family so you can put into practice the things that will make your family healthy.

A Picture of Health

What makes some families healthier (more functional) than others? Family researchers have worked on answers to this question for years. A great deal of research has been collected. Although we have summarized the results of this research in previous "Home Life" articles (see June 7, 1998 and July 16, 2000 issues of THE LOOKOUT), we believe the information is certainly worth reporting again. We will discuss six of the most important traits found in healthy families. Like diet and exercise are to one's physical health, these practices are elements of a family's health.

Healthy families cultivate

commitment. They do all they can to promote each other's welfare and happiness. Christians are committed to the institution of family as well as to one another. We think this is important to mention in light of the way our culture is misrepresenting family (for example, gay "marriages" and cohabitation). Without commitment to one another and the family unit, the following five healthy practices will suffer greatly.

Healthy families spend time together. They enjoy being together and don't fall for the fib that quality time

What makes some families healthier than others?

can happen without spending a quantity of time together. This doesn't mean they do everything together, but they do enough things to develop closeness and stay connected.

Healthy families engage in positive communication. They enjoy talking and listening to each other. Their communication penetrates the surface and reaches a deeper level of feelings. Even the truth about how one feels is shared in a loving way (Ephesians 4:15).

Healthy families express appreciation and affection. How many times do we have good thoughts but hold on to them instead of sharing them? Human nature tends to put the most effort into expressing our disappointments. Healthy families do not withhold words of appreciation and

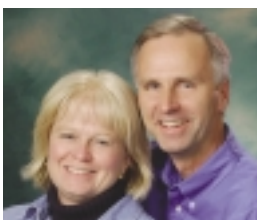
affection. Instead, they heap appreciation and affection upon one another.

Healthy families cope with conflict and crises optimistically. Whenever a conflict arises or a crisis hits one of these families, they come together rather than coming unglued.

Healthy families nurture spiritual well-being. Healthy families are committed to living spiritual lives. Faith is a practical part of their everyday lives. These are the six vital signs found among the healthiest families.

Your Family Check-Up

As you know, it's not enough to just picture what a healthy family looks like; we must take these healthy patterns and make them part of our own family's functioning. Read again the information about the six traits of healthy families. This time, assess your own family's health. Identify where your family is strong and openly review the areas where your family needs more attention. Get the input of every family member who is old enough to contribute. Once you have done your family check-up, be sure to celebrate your strengths. Resist the temptation to focus on what is wrong with your family. Instead, concentrate on all the good that is happening in your home life. Now you are ready to tackle one of the work areas. Pick a weak area and start working to make your family even stronger. Although we must put forth effort and do our part, it is God who makes a family strong. "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1). ■



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Send your questions about family life to Phil and Bev Haas in care of THE LOOKOUT, 8121 Hamilton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45231 (fax 513-931-0950). Letters used for publication may be edited for the sake of space, clarity, or confidentiality. We regret that personal replies are not always possible.