

Parenting 101



10 ways to strengthen family relationships

Building a healthy family requires effort and intentionality. But the effort is worthwhile since the quality of family relationships is known to affect personal health and well-being, the outcomes of children's adult lives, work performance, financial soundness and stability, and to increase either the strength or the fragility of communities. Research reveals that strong families do the following:

1. Nourish the marital relationship

The marriage is the foundation for a strong family. Marital satisfaction is strengthened when partners express a sense of personal responsibility for the success of the relationship and spend time alone together.

2. Exhibit commitment to family

Members of strong families feel a sense of family identity and make their family a priority. Members are motivated to defend the unity and continuity of their family by investing energy to make relationships work and grow.

3. Express appreciation and demonstrate respect and trust

Frequent expressions of unconditional love are critical to family health. Satisfied couples maintain a five-to-one ratio of positive moments (e.g., mutual pleasure, passion, humor, support, kindness, generosity) to

negative moments (e.g., complaint, criticism, anger, disgust, contempt, defensiveness, coldness).

4. Employ effective communication skills

Sharing thoughts and feelings, discussing problems together, and carefully listening to one another are common among strong marriages and families. Messages are direct, consistent, and clear. When conflict arises, it is managed promptly and remains issue-focused. Positive communication leads to reconciliation, so members know how to forgive and be forgiven.

5. Adapt and manage stressors/crises

Strong families are not insulated from problems, but they are able to make the necessary adaptations to life's vicissitudes. They effectively mobilize resources (e.g., social support, faith, communication skills)



and try to formulate realistic perceptions of stressful events. Flexibility and adaptability are crucial in promoting family resilience during times of hardship.

6. Foster spiritual development and a faith commitment

Families are important agents in helping members develop a code of ethics for dealing with others, a reverence for life, and a greater purpose for being. Shared spiritual convictions afford a sense of purpose, meaning, and connectedness among family members.

7. Spend quality time together

While there are many competing demands for time, strong families deliberately schedule time to engage in meaningful and enjoyable activities with each other.

8. Create and participate in family rituals and traditions

Traditions—particularly those which reflect cultural roots—shape family life, reveal the family's identity, and tell the family's story. Holiday rituals of tree decorating and food preparation, nighttime rituals of stories

or prayers, and annual treks to a favorite destination are all ways in which families share meaning and memories together.

9. Nurture intimacy

Strong relationships permit individual autonomy but foster emotional, physical, and spiritual closeness. The emotional health of children is affected by the depth of the emotional relationship between their parents.

10. Share responsibility

In strong families, each member contributes fairly to the daily tasks of family life and displays appreciation for the work that other family members do.

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