

## Strong families—strong futures

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Have you ever wondered what qualities successful, strong families share? What is it that makes some families strong and others fragile? Why do some families stay together and others fall apart?

Researchers, John DeFrain and Nick Stinnett from the University of Nebraska, have found some answers to those questions through interviewing over 3,000 families. Strong families share six major qualities: commitment, appreciation, communication, time, spiritual wellness and coping ability.

### Commitment

Commitment is a foundation characteristic. It means that the family comes first. These families live in the same world as everyone else, they have difficulties, hard times, quarrels and troubles. However, bad times do not destroy them. They take an "until death do us part" attitude. Sometimes commitment means sacrificing personal desires, cutting out activities, civic involvements or work demands in order to enhance family life.

### Appreciation

Strong families let each member know, on a daily basis, they are appreciated. Dr. Don Clifton, head of the Gallup Organization says that he believes it takes about ten positive comments to repair the damage done by one negative one. Appreciation helps children grow and flourish as their self-esteem is bolstered by the recognition of their positive attributes.



### Communication

In the book, *The Friendship Factor*, A.L. McGinnis says that the average couple spends seventeen minutes per week in conversation. This is in contrast to the strong families in the DeFrain, Stinnett studies. Strong families spend lots of time in conversation. They talk about the small, trivial matters as well as the complex, serious issues. They spend time together and both listen and talk.

### Time Together

What makes a family happy? Take a few minutes right now and close your eyes and think back to some of your best



childhood memories. In groups where this exercise is shared, there is usually a common factor in all these memories—doing things together. Strong families spend lots of time together.

Strong families agree that their relationships are important. They know that quantity and quality go together. Strong families:

- Eat meals together on a routine basis.
- Work together as a team to get chores done.
- They play catch, go camping, picnicking, bicycling, take a walk and enjoy other outdoor activities.

■ They get involved in indoor recreation. They play games, read books, tell stories, watch movies, put together puzzles.

■ They participate in community activities. They go to church, school games, concerts, plays and activities, participate in 4-H or scouting.

■ They celebrate special events.



### Spiritual Wellness

■ Strong families believe in a greater power that can trans-

form lives, can give strength to survive the difficult times and can provide hope and purpose. Having spiritual beliefs is one of the secrets to the success of strong families. Spirituality adds to family life in the following ways:

- Gives life purpose.
- Promotes a positive outlook.
- Provides

guidelines for living.

- Gives freedom from negative emotions.
- Encourages friendship and support of like-minded people.
- Supports tradition.
- Integrates religious heritage.
- Involves prayer.
- Coping Ability

Some families fall apart when faced with terminal illness, death or other crisis situations. Others pull together and draw strength from each other when challenges come along. Stinnett and DeFrain identified six strategies that

strong families use when they face crises. Most do not use all six during a given situation. But, strong families often use at least one of the six strategies.

1) Maintain a positive perspective—being able to see something good in a crisis or bad situation gives hope.

2) Pull together—each person contributes, no one feels totally responsible for the problem, no one carries the load alone.

3) Go get help—strong families have a strong social support system, they seek help from church, friends, neighbors, professionals and other associates.

4) Use spiritual resources—spiritual beliefs provide a philosophy of life and give hope and comfort.

5) Keep communication open—open communication allows individuals to express their feelings.

6) Are flexible—strong families adapt to change, are willing to change jobs, learn a new role or skill, further their education, move or do whatever is necessary to overcome the crisis.

Families are celebrated during the month of November. As part of your celebration, pick at least one of the characteristics to work on with your family each of the next six months. Celebrate being a strong family with a strong future.

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**November is  
Celebrate Families Month!**