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NebFact



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Creating a Strong Family **What Is A Strong Family, Anyway?**

John DeFrain, Extension Specialist, Family and Community Development

One question that has fascinated researchers in the field of family studies for many years is, "What constitutes a strong family?" In essence, what are the qualities that make for success in families? Finding an answer to this question is important, because with this foundation of knowledge we can help people learn about family strengths and give them the information necessary to create their own strong family.

Our research at the University of Nebraska for more than 20 years has focused on families in the United States and around the world who believe they are doing well. Information has been gathered through in-depth family interviews, observations and written questionnaires. Family members from all 50 states have participated in a series of more than 50 studies. More than 60 researchers at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and allied universities in America and other countries have been involved in these studies. More than 17,000 family members in 27 countries have participated in this research.

Amazingly, when you ask people around the globe, "What makes your family strong?" the answers are remarkably similar from culture to culture. Our model of family strengths has six general qualities:

Appreciation and affection

People in strong families deeply care for one another, and they let each other know this on a regular basis. They are not afraid to express their love.

Commitment

Members of strong families show a strong commitment to one another,

This is one of a series of eight NebFacts, including two publications which introduce the series and provide a broader perspective.

- [What Is a Strong Family, Anyway?](#), NF00-439
- [Qualities of Strong Families](#), NF00-446
- [Appreciation and Affection: Developing an Emotional Bond](#), NF00-440
- [Commitment: The Family Comes First](#),

investing time and energy in family activities and not letting their work or other priorities take too much time away from family interaction.

Positive communication

Successful families are often task-oriented in their communication, identifying problems and discussing how to solve them together. Perhaps even more important than this, however, strong families also spend time talking with and listening to one another just to stay connected. Some of the most important talk occurs when no one is working at connection: open-ended, rambling conversations can reveal important information which helps smooth out the bumps of family living.

Enjoyable time together

One study of 1,500 schoolchildren asked, "What do you think makes a happy family?" Few replied that money, cars, fancy homes, television sets or Disney World made a happy family. The kids were most likely to say that a happy family is one that does things together, a family that genuinely enjoys the times they share with each other.

Spiritual well-being

Religion or spirituality also can be important to strong families. Spiritual well-being describes this concept, indicating that it can include organized religion, but not necessarily so. People describe this in a variety of ways: some talk about faith in God, hope or a sense of optimism in life; some say they feel a oneness with the world. Others talk about their families in almost religious terms, describing the love they feel for one another with a great deal of reverence. Others express these kinds of feelings in terms of ethical values and commitment to important causes. Spiritual well-being can be seen as the caring center within each individual that promotes sharing, love and compassion.

Successful management of stress and crisis

Strong families are not immune to stress and crisis, but they are not as crisis-prone as troubled families tend to be. Rather, they possess the ability to manage both daily stressors and difficult life crises creatively and effectively. They know how to prevent trouble before it happens and how to work together to meet challenges when they inevitably occur in life.

File NF439 under FAMILY LIFE
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- [Positive Communication: Smoothing Out the Bumps in Family Life,](#) NF00-442
- [Enjoyable Time Together: A Journey of Happy Memories,](#) NF00-443
- [Spiritual Well-Being: Sacred Connections,](#) NF00-444
- [Successful Management of Stress and Crisis,](#) NF00-445

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