

Creating a Strong Family American Family Strengths Inventory

*A Teaching Tool for Generating Discussion on the
Qualities that Make a Family Strong**

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Research in the United States and around the world has found that strong families have a wide variety of qualities that contribute to the family members' sense of personal worth and feelings of satisfaction in their relationships with each other. One of the first steps in developing the strengths of one's family is to assess those areas in which the family is doing well and those areas in which family members would like to grow further.

The qualities of strong families in America can be broken down into six general categories, as outlined in the following pages. Put an "S" for **Strength** beside the qualities you feel your family has achieved and a "G" beside those qualities that are an area of potential **Growth**. If the particular characteristic does not apply to your family or is not a characteristic important to you, put an "NA" for **Not Applicable**.

Family members doing this exercise will be able to identify those areas they would like to work on together to improve and those areas of strength that will serve as the foundation for their growth and positive change together.

This American Family Strengths Inventory has been validated through research with more than 21,000 family members in the United States and 26 other countries around the world. These studies of family strengths have been conducted since 1974 by Nick Stinnett, John DeFrain and their many colleagues.

For more information about this research, see:

DeFrain, J. (1999). Strong families around the world. *Family Matters: Australian Institute of Family Studies*, 53 (Winter), 6-13.

Olson, D.H., & DeFrain, J. (2000). *Marriage and the family: Diversity and strengths*, 3rd ed. Mountain View, California: Mayfield.

Stinnett, N., & DeFrain, J. (1985). *Secrets of strong families*. Boston: Little, Brown.

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American Family Strengths Inventory

Enjoyable Time Together

In Our Family . . .

- We have a number of common interests.
- We like to have fun together.
- We feel comfortable with each other.
- We like to give each other a chance to do new things.
- We enjoy hearing our grandparents' stories about the past.
- We enjoy simple, inexpensive family activities.
- We like to have a place we call "home."
- We feel strongly connected to each other.
- Hanging out together builds strong relationships.
- We have lots of good times together.
- We often laugh with each other.
- Observing family rituals and customs is important to us.
- We enjoy sharing our memories with each other.
- We enjoy having unplanned, spontaneous activities together.
- All things considered, we have adequate time for each other and we enjoy the time we share together.**

Appreciation and Affection for Each Other

In Our Family . . .

- We appreciate each other and let each other know this.
- We enjoy helping each other.
- We like keeping our promises to each other.
- We like to show affection to each other.
- We feel close to each other.
- We like to be kind to each other.
- We like to hug each other.
- We enjoy being thoughtful of each other.
- We wait for each other without complaining.
- We give each other enough time to complete necessary tasks.

- We are able to forgive each other.
- We grow stronger because we love each other.
- All things considered, we have appreciation and affection for each other.**

Communicating Effectively with Each Other

In Our Family . . .

- We like to share our feelings with each other.
- It is easy to cue into each other's feelings.
- We like talking openly with each other.
- We listen to each other.
- We respect each other's point of view.
- Talking through issues is important to us.
- We give each other a chance to explain ourselves.
- We enjoy our family discussions.
- We share jokes together.
- Putdowns are rare.
- Sarcasm is not generally used.
- All things considered, our communication is effective.**

Valuing Each Other and Demonstrating Commitment

In Our Family . . .

- Responsibilities are shared fairly.
- Everyone gets a say in making decisions.
- Individuals are allowed to make their own choices.
- We find it easy to trust each other.
- We like to do things for each other that make us feel good about ourselves.
- We have reasonable expectations of each other.
- We allow each other to be ourselves.
- We have a high regard for each other.
- We respect the roles each of us plays in the family.
- We find it easy to be honest with each other.
- We accept that each of us has different ways of doing things.

- _____ We build each other's self-esteem.
- _____ **All things considered, we value each other and are committed to our well-being as a family.**

Spiritual Well-Being

In Our Family . . .

- _____ We have a hopeful attitude toward life.
- _____ Our home feels like a sanctuary to all of us.
- _____ We have a strong sense of belonging.
- _____ We enjoy learning about our family history.
- _____ We feel strong connections with our ancestors.
- _____ There is a feeling of safety and security.
- _____ We feel connected with nature and the world around us.
- _____ We feel a strong connection with the land.
- _____ There is a sense of peace among us.
- _____ We believe love is a powerful force that keeps us together.
- _____ We benefit in many ways from our belief in a higher being.
- _____ It is easy to share our spiritual values and beliefs with each other.
- _____ Our personal religious beliefs are compatible with each other's.
- _____ **All things considered, we have strong spiritual connections that enhance our well-being.**

Managing Stress and Crisis Effectively

In Our Family . . .

- _____ A crisis has helped us to grow closer together.
- _____ It is easy to find solutions to our problems when we talk about them.

- _____ It is always important to change the things we can.
- _____ We can work together to solve very difficult family problems.
- _____ A crisis helps make our relationships strong.
- _____ We try not to worry too much because things usually work out OK.
- _____ We are able to face daily issues confidently.
- _____ We like to support each other.
- _____ Our friends are there when we need them.
- _____ A crisis makes us stick closer together.
- _____ We always find something good comes from a crisis.
- _____ We find it easy to make changes in our plans to meet changing circumstances.
- _____ We have the courage to take risks that will improve things for our family.
- _____ We feel it is important to accept the things we cannot change.
- _____ **All things considered, we look at challenges as opportunities for growth.**

Global Measures of the Family's Strengths

In Our Family . . .

- _____ We love one another.
- _____ Life in our family is satisfying to us.
- _____ We are happy as a family.
- _____ **All things considered, we are a strong family.**

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