

Characteristics of a Healthy Family

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For the past decade, the media has bombarded us with stories and information about “dysfunctional” families. These stories are usually outlandish and tragic. While all families are made up of imperfect people who make mistakes at times, the institution of the family still works. In his book, *Five Signs of a Functional Family*, Dr. Gary Chapman wrote about several characteristics that help families to work well.

As I have had the privilege of counseling many families in the past several years, I have also noticed characteristics that help to create a healthy family. A healthy family is one in which the needs of the family members are being met. It is meant to imply growth and change, as families and relationships are dynamic. Some characteristics of a healthy family are:

1) **There are clear boundaries in the family.**

*Parents take the leadership role. They recognize their responsibility is to train and to teach their children.

*There is a strong bond between the husband and wife. The husband and wife prioritize their relationship and purposely nurture that relationship.

*Children are kept out of tension between the husband and wife.

*The husband and wife do not make disparaging or negative remarks about one another, especially in front of the children.

*Decisions are made in the best interest of the family.

2) **Relationships within the family are seen as important.**

*Parents purposely make an effort to establish relationships with their children. It is the parents' responsibility to establish that relationship. Likewise, it is also the responsibility of the grandparents to establish the relationship with their grandchildren.

*Parents support the children's activities and are involved.

*Parents plan “fun times,” where memories are often made.

3) **There is open communication among all family members.**

*Communication does not go through one person. Mom does not act as the interpreter.

*There is not a “message carrier” in the family. Children are encouraged and allowed to speak for themselves.

4) **Conflict is allowed.**

*Family members are allowed to disagree with one another and voice their disagreement.

*When conflict occurs, it is resolved.

*There is freedom and safety within the family for mistakes and failures.

*There is forgiveness and “a moving on” from conflict.

5) Family members have an attitude of service toward one another and others.

*This attitude typically begins when a child is quite young. The young child frequently wants to “help.” Although the task will most likely take longer, allowing the child to help will encourage the child to feel a part of the family.

*Family members purposely serve one another.

*The whole family serves others.

Although families are not always structured with these characteristics, families and relationships are dynamic and changeable. With purpose, patience and time, positive change is possible in family dynamics.

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