

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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The American Family Strengths Inventory helps families discuss and record the qualities that make them strong and develop a plan to strengthen those they want to improve. This is one in a series.

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 a family's strengths is to assess those areas in which the family is doing well and those areas in which family members would like to grow further.

This American Family Strengths Inventory has been validated through research with more than 24,000 family members in the United States and 34 other countries. This research has been conducted since 1974 by Nick Stinnett, John DeFrain and their many colleagues.

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.

Instructions for Using the Inventory

- The qualities of strong families in America can be broken down into six general categories, as outlined in the following pages.
 1. Put an "S" for **Strength** beside the qualities you feel your family has achieved.

2. Put a "G" beside those qualities that are an area of potential **Growth**.
3. Put an "NA" for **Not Applicable** beside those characteristics that do not apply to your family or are not a characteristic important to you.

- Discuss your views on the strengths of your family. Remember that each family member will see the family somewhat differently from everyone else. These differences are not problems. Rather, these differences are strengths. You can all learn from each other by discussing how you see the strengths of your family and the areas of potential growth.
- Look at what your family does best: Identify your strengths.
- Celebrate! Even when things are difficult, recognize your family's positive characteristics. Celebrate those strengths in a way that is meaningful to your family — maybe by going out to eat or doing a special activity together.
- Identify the strengths that you as a family want to improve or increase.
- Have fun making a plan and doing family activities that build on your family strengths.

Use the form on page 2 to write a plan with your family.

Our Plan

Based on our discussion of our family's strengths, these are a few of the things we will be doing in the coming weeks and months to enhance the quality of life in our family.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Signed

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Researchers

To contact the researchers who developed the American Family Strengths Inventory, see:

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Resources

For more information about this research, see:

Strong Families Around the World: Strengths-Based Research and Perspectives, John D. DeFrain and Sylvia M. Assay, editors. Published by Haworth Press/Taylor and Francis in 2007.

Family Strengths, a chapter by John DeFrain and Nick Stinnett in the International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family (2nd edition) edited by J.J. Ponzetti et al. Published by Macmillan Reference Group, New York in 2002.

Marriages and Families: Intimacy, Diversity, and Strengths (sixth edition) by David H. Olson, John DeFrain and Linda Skogrand. Published by McGraw-Hill Higher Education in 2008.

Secrets of Strong Families by Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain. Published by Little, Brown in 1986.

UNL for Families Web site at unlforfamilies.unl.edu. Published by the University of Nebraska—Lincoln. Resources for couples and families; created by UNL Extension Educators from a family strengths perspective; updated regularly.

American Family Strengths Inventory[©]

Enjoyable Time Together	
<i>In our family . . .</i>	
	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	
<i>In our family . . .</i>	
	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	
<i>In our family . . .</i>	
	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	
<i>In our family . . .</i>	
	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	
<i>In our family . . .</i>	
	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	
<i>In our family . . .</i>	
	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	
<i>In our family . . .</i>	
	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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