

Getting Connected, Staying Connected

The World Couples and Families Live In Today: The Truth About Marriage and Family

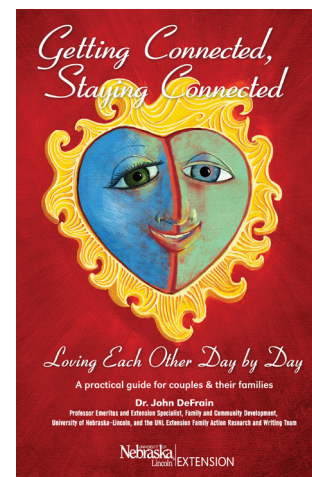
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What is the truth about marriage and family today? How are families doing? Even though the news might indicate otherwise, the best information available indicates that, in general, couples and families are doing reasonably well. But is there room for improvement? Of course. This is No. 1 in a series of 20 NebGuides that focus on building and maintaining strong couple and family relationships written by a team of University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension Educators.

What makes a happy couple? A successful family? The answer lies in the *strengths* of the relationship rather than the structure of the family. These strengths have emerged from research over the past 35 years involving 28,000 family members in 38 countries around the world:

- *Appreciation and affection for each other.* Genuinely felt, and expressed regularly.
- *Commitment to the family.* Work and other priorities are not allowed to take too much time away from family interaction. The family is highly valued by its members, and individuals are faithful to each other.
- *Positive communication.* Family members enjoy talking with each other and listening to each other. The interactions are open, honest, straightforward, and pleasant.
- *Enjoyable time together.* Similarly, family members like to be with each other and spend a considerable amount of time enjoying each other's company. They are good friends.

- *Spiritual well-being and shared values.* Family members share a sense of hope, optimism, faith, safety, and happiness together. Their home is a sanctuary and their relationships bring them comfort. Spiritual well-being can be seen as the caring center within each individual that promotes sharing, love, and compassion.
- *The ability to manage stress and crisis effectively.* Strong families are not immune to troubles in life, but they know how to work through hard times *together* rather than exploding and blaming each other when difficulties arise. The question is *not*, "Who's responsible for this happening?" The question is: "Where do we go from here?"



For more information about strong couple and family relationships, refer to the book *Getting Connected, Staying Connected*, which can be ordered online at amazon.com.

The six strengths are not independent of each other. *Appreciation and affection* make *positive communication* happen; *commitment to the family* makes it easier to *manage stress and crisis effectively*; *spending enjoyable time*

together contributes to a sense of *spiritual well-being and shared values*, and so forth. The six qualities are so closely related to each other, in fact, that it's possible to think about one major couple and family strength that embodies all the rest: a feeling of positive *emotional connection with each other*. The family strengths can be seen as a very useful working definition of *love* in a family. Love is both a feeling we have for each other and a series of positive behaviors that we express toward each other.

Often, in our highly competitive and materialistic society, we lose sight of the fact that positive, loving relationships are the greatest gifts we have.

Challenges Couples and Families Face in Our Society

Life has never been easy, and as family researcher David H. Olson says, "All the problems in the world either begin in families or end up in families." Families can create their own problems. For example, if family members choose to be argumentative and violent with each other, this brings on a host of difficulties for them of their own making. Other problems the family does not create, but are thrust upon the family by the outside world. For example, war. An individual family does not cause a nation to go to war, but individual families are forced to deal with the consequences of war.

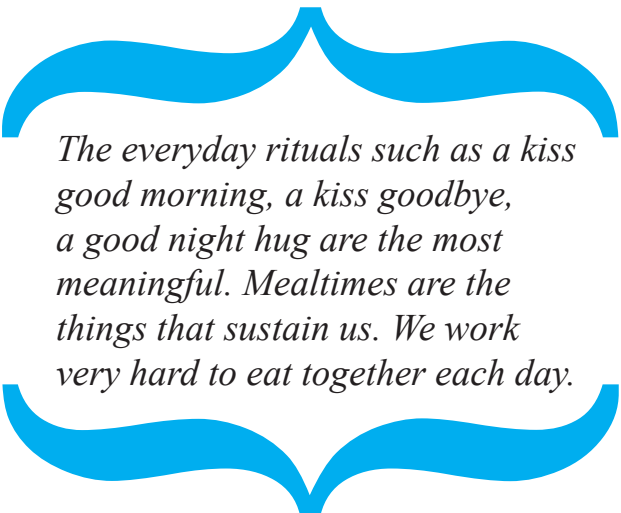
Here are 10 major challenges families face today:

- Stress, change, and materialism
- Lack of time for oneself and significant others
- Increasing use of child care outside the family
- Instability of couple and family relationships
- Violence, criminal victimization, and fear
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs
- The Internet and human relationships
- Changing gender roles and the balance of power in families
- Urban migration and overcrowding
- Financial problems and the global economy

Advantages of a Sound Marriage

If it is true that all the problems in the world either begin or end up in families, the importance of the family as an instrument of safety, stability, and comfort for individuals becomes undeniable. And, the foundation of many families is a strong marriage. If the couple relationship is in danger, the whole family faces difficulties.

Sociologist Linda Waite argues that marriage can be good for a person's physical and mental health, good for financial stability, good for one's sex life, and good for one's children. Like exercising and eating right, getting married is another step toward living longer and better.



The everyday rituals such as a kiss good morning, a kiss goodbye, a good night hug are the most meaningful. Mealtimes are the things that sustain us. We work very hard to eat together each day.

Why would this be so? In a strong marriage the partners value and cherish each other. They care for, counsel, nurture, encourage, and love each other, helping their partner through life's most difficult times and enjoying countless good times together. These innumerable little gifts partners bestow on each other lead to a better and more confident attitude toward life, the belief that one can succeed in her or his efforts.

For greater understanding of the topic in this publication, refer to *Getting Connected, Staying Connected: Loving One Another Day by Day* written by John DeFraim and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Family Action Research and Writing Team. (2012). Bloomington, IN: iUniverse.

Resource

Waite, L., & Gallagher, M. (2000). *The case for marriage: Why married people are happier, healthier, and better off financially*. New York: Doubleday.

This publication has been peer reviewed.

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**Index: Families
Family Life**

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