

Relationship Skills: What Is A Strong Family?

OBJECTIVES:

1. Describe common characteristics of a strong family
2. Identify your family's strengths
3. List steps that will help your family become stronger

HANDOUTS:

1. *Strong Families Enjoy ...*
2. *Case Study: Mary and John's Family*
3. *My Family's Strengths*
4. *Steps to a Stronger Family*
5. *Take Home Message for This Session*

ITEMS NEEDED FOR THIS EDUCATIONAL SESSION:

- Handout materials for participant workbooks
- Scrapbooking materials
- Digital camera and printer dock
- Flipchart and markers
- Pencils and pens

GETTING STARTED

Answer any new questions that may have arisen and check to see if any participants brought pictures in for their workbooks. Before the program, make sure that the rocks, beans, and container are the right sizes in order to make this activity work effectively. Label each rock with a characteristic of a strong family (see handout **Strong Families Enjoy ...**)

We are going to start off our session today with a demonstration. I need a volunteer to help me. You will notice that on this table we have six big rocks and a container that is almost full of dry beans. Now assume that the container represents the next week of your life. The beans will represent all the things you normally do. It could represent working, spending time with friends, doing housework, going to church, shopping or whatever you do in a week. The rocks will represent the six characteristics of strong families that we will be talking about today.

Even though having a strong family is very important to you, you may not have been able to fit every characteristic into your schedule (the container of beans represents an individual's weekly schedule). Now, I'd like for you to fit as many rocks as you possibly can into the container—your schedule—without going over the brim. (Give the volunteer time to try.) How do you feel? How can you rearrange the rocks—your priorities—so that they will fit into the container—your schedule? (Ask the audience for suggestions.)

Maybe you should try another approach. Why don't you take the rocks out, and pour the beans into another container. This time, let's prioritize differently. Put the rocks in first. Now, how many rocks fit? (All of them should.) Now, pour the beans in over the rocks. Look how many of them still fit. The point is this: If you don't manage your time according to your priorities the things that are really important to you will seldom get done. Granted, some of your normal activities may have to be changed or eliminated. You have to decide what is really important.

ACTIVITY:

Strong Families Enjoy ...

Write the six characteristics of strong families on a flip chart. Distribute **Strong Families Enjoy ...** handout.

We just learned that a strong family has certain characteristics. Although making our families a priority is important, it is not the ingredient of a strong family. What are the other reasons why some families are strong and others fragile? Why do some families stay together while others fall apart? Today's lesson will familiarize you with common characteristics of strong families, help identify your family's strengths, and help you continue to strengthen your family.

Two researchers, Nick Stinnett and Jack DeFrain from the University of Nebraska, studied the characteristics of strong families. They surveyed over 3,000 families. The participants were from cities and rural areas, and ranged from being very poor to very rich. Both single parent and two-parent families were surveyed as well as families of many different races and ethnicities.

When they analyzed their results, the researchers found that strong families shared six characteristics:

- They were committed to each other and made their relationships with each other a high priority.
- They let each member know on a daily basis that they were appreciated.
- They talk to each other about small things and big issues.
- They spend time together.
- They believe in a greater power and have shared beliefs.
- They are able to cope with difficulties and crises.

Discussion: Ask the group these questions and integrate their comments onto the flip chart:

- Are you in agreement with the list? Why or why not?
- Are there other things that should be included on the list that are not already on there?
- Thinking back to the rocks and beans demonstration, do you better understand the importance of making your family a priority?

ACTIVITY: **John and Mary's Family**

Distribute the case study about “John and Mary,” and have participants work in small groups to discuss the questions at the end of the case study. Read through the case study with the group before they discuss it in small groups.

We're going to look at one family to better understand what the characteristics of a strong family are. Mary and John just had a new baby two weeks ago—a little girl they named Sarah. Mary also has a 4-year-old son named Josh, and they live with Mary's mother, Katherine. John is Mary's boyfriend, and they have been together for about a year. John is excited to be a dad for the first time, but is a little scared of the responsibility. Josh's Dad is no longer in Mary's life—which is often very frustrating to Mary. John listens to Mary when she gets frustrated, and he loves to spend time with Josh.

Mary's mother won't let John live with them, but she does let John come over as often as he wants—although he is not allowed to spend the night. Katherine loves to have her family over on Sundays for dinner after church. Often there are many aunts, uncles, and cousins that come over—especially in the summer.

Mary has been feeling frustrated lately because she says she doesn't have enough money. She's frustrated that John isn't there enough for her and the baby, and she doesn't have a car. John tries to come over as often as possible, but he has been busy working at Wal-Mart in the evening, and helping his brother cut lawns during the day.

Mary and her family are active in their church—particularly in the church choir. John tries to go with Mary and her mom as often as possible. Katherine and Mary are frustrated by the demands of the children and are eager for any help they can get. Mary is grateful for the support that her mother gives her, but often feels like she has no privacy, and is treated like a child.

In your small groups, discuss these questions:

- What are Mary's strengths?
- What are John's strengths?
- What are the strengths of Mary and John's family?

When you reconvene the group, list John and Mary's strengths as individuals and as a family on a flip chart based on the group's input. Also, explore these questions with the group:

- When you first read John and Mary's story, did you consider that they had all the strengths we listed? Were you surprised by all the strengths they had?
- Do you think that having a strong family is a high priority for John and Mary? Why or why not?
- When you think of your own family, might it have more strengths than you first thought?

ACTIVITY: **My Family Strengths**

Distribute the handout entitled **My Family Strengths** and have participants fill it out individually. Then ask for volunteers to share their responses with the group.

You have an opportunity now to think about your own family. What strengths does your family have? What strengths would you like it to have?

Have participants create a scrapbook page using the photos that they brought in from home. If any photos depict strong family characteristics, have them identify the characteristics as a small notation on the page. Encourage them to use the page to create a picture of the strengths they hope their family will have in the future.

HOMEWORK:

Have participants complete the handout **Steps To a Stronger Family**. Give participant the take-home message for this session and have them write down their action steps on the take-home message. Remind them to place the take-home message in the magnetic frame.

CLOSING:

Today, we learned about characteristics of strong families and identified our individual family strengths. Lastly, each person was able to identify ways that he/she could strengthen his/her family. Each of these is a way to create, re-create, and sustain healthy families and positive environments in which we live.



Strong Families Enjoy

A STRONG COMMITMENT TO EACH OTHER:

Strong families make their relationships a high priority. They face the same difficulties and problems as we all do. But the bad times do not destroy them. They work together to solve their problems.

SHOWING CARING AND APPRECIATION:

Showing respect and affection for the uniqueness of each family member is important.

OPEN COMMUNICATION & GOOD LISTENING:

Families who share beliefs and feelings, and listen to one another feel more connected. Communication is one of the key elements of family relationships—whether it is spending time talking about little things, or big issues!

SPENDING TIME TOGETHER:

Strong families try to find time to spend time together. Family time helps one to not feel lonely. It helps create a feeling of family.

SPIRITUAL WELLNESS:

Strong families believe in a greater power. Shared beliefs help to create a bond between family members.

AN ABILITY TO COPE:

Strong families pull together and draw strength from each other when problems arise.



Case Study: Mary and John's Family

Mary and John just had a new baby two weeks ago—a little girl they named Sarah. Mary also has a 4-year-old son named Josh, and they live with Mary's mother, Katherine. John is Mary's boyfriend, and they have been together for about a year. John is excited to be a dad for the first time, but is a little scared of the responsibility. Josh's Dad is no longer in Mary's life—which is often very frustrating to Mary. John listens to Mary when she gets frustrated, and he loves to spend time with Josh.

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Adapted from *Caring for My Family*

Case Study: Mary and John's Family

What are Mary's strengths?

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What are John's strengths?

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What are the strengths of Mary and John's family?

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Adapted from *Caring for My Family*

My Family Strengths

Here are some things that our family is very good at:

.....

.....

Here are some things that make our family a happy place to be:

.....

.....

You might have listed the following characteristics in your answers.
Now rate yourself in these areas:

	Needs Lots Of Work			Doing Great	
1. A strong commitment to each other	1	2	3	4	5
2. Showing caring and appreciation	1	2	3	4	5
3. Open communication and listening	1	2	3	4	5
4. Spending time together	1	2	3	4	5
5. Spiritual wellness	1	2	3	4	5
6. Able to cope with problems together	1	2	3	4	5

Steps to a Stronger Family

An important step in building a stronger family is setting goals for how you want to change and the steps you will take to meet those goals:

One way I want my family to be stronger:

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Two steps I will take before the next session to make my family stronger:

1.

.....

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2.

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Take Home Message for This Session

Directions: Think of one step you will take before the next session and write it down in the space provided. In addition, write down the time, date, and location of the next session.

**Making my family
a priority is the first
step to a strong family.**

My Action Steps:

.....
.....

The Next Session:

.....
DATE

.....
TIME

.....
LOCATION

