

Children and Families

Nurturing and Dysfunctional Aspects

Title Placeholder

Dysfunctional Families: It Is Hard to Define

There are common traits found in families that are considered to be healthy, and other traits found in families experiencing excessive stress which can lead to dysfunctional behavior

Without taking Cultural, Economic, or Social Consideration into Account the Following Information Highlights Some Common Traits of Healthy Families and Warning Signs that a Family May Be Under Too Much Stress and in Danger of Becoming dysfunctional.

Characteristics of Healthy Families

Healthy families are open to others outside the family system

Members are allowed to go outside of the system for help when needed

Parents set clear generational boundaries, i.e. parents are care givers; children are secure in the role as siblings, children and individuals

Families recognize stressful situations and handle them appropriately

Characteristics of Healthy Families

The family members:

work together to minimize stress and focus on their strengths

work together to find solutions to problems

focus on what is controllable focusing on solutions, not blame develops and revise rules to deal with daily routines

Characteristics of Healthy Families

The Family:

Feels empowered as the result of dealing with stress (crisis=opportunity)

Recognize the difference between the symptoms of stress and the sources of stress. They address the sources of stress

Areas of Stress for Healthy Families

Finances

Dealing with children's behavior

Insufficient couple time

Lack of shared responsibilities for household upkeep

Communication with children

Insufficient time for self

Quilt for not accomplishing more

Couple/relationship issues

Insufficient family play time

Over-scheduled family calendar

Parent/Child role reversal

Resentment toward the person with the problem

Blame primarily care giver for staying in the situation

Individuals may be prone to depression

Develop fear of becoming close to others

Fear of losing the primary care giver

Learn to discount feelings and needs

Irrational belief system

Multiple unresolved losses

Stages of Stress

"I can do and be everything."

Creates built in failure and guilt

"I can't do and be everything."

Self Acceptance

"I don't what to do and be everything."

Choice

"I don't want to do anything."

Burnout

Symptoms of Families Under Excessive Stress

Constant sense of urgency and hurry
Sense of tension underlying sharp words and misunderstanding
Mania to escape to a room, car, office, or anywhere
Feelings of frustration for not getting things done or caught up
Feeling that time is passing too quickly

Symptoms of Families Under Constant Stress

Frequent desire to return to a simpler time of life
Little me or couple time
Pervasive sense of guilt for not being or doing everything to and for the people in your life

Transitions and Dynamics that Can Lead to Excessive Stress

A Mental Illness
An addiction of legal or illegal drugs
Overly rigid religious beliefs
An abusive spouse
An abusive parent
A physical disability
An Emotional or behavioral problem
Responsibility for an aging parent
An infant/toddler
An adolescent
An adult child living at home

Families: Nurturing and Dysfunctional

Nurturing

People feel free to talk about feelings
All feelings are OK
Person is more important than performance
Individual differences are accepted

Dysfunctional

People compulsively protect feelings
Only certain feelings are O.K
Performance is more important than person
Everyone must conform to die strongest person's ideas, values, priorities

Families: Nurturing and Dysfunctional

Each person is responsible for their own actions
Respectful criticism and appropriate consequences for actions guide behavior
There are few shoulds
There are clear flexible rules
Control and criticism is paramount
Punishment, shaming, blaming guide behavior
There are lots of "shoulds"
There are unclear, inconsistent and rigid rules

Families: Nurturing and Dysfunctional

Atmosphere is relaxed
Lots of joy, humor, and caring
Faces and works through stress
People have energy
Atmosphere is tense
Lots of anger, fear, and pain
Avoids stress
People feel tired

Patterns that Frequently Occur in Dysfunctional Families

One or both parents:

Have addictions or compulsions (drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, gambling, overworking or overeating) that have strong influences on family members

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Use threats or physical violence as a primary means of control

Patterns that Frequently Occur in Dysfunctional Families

One or both parents

Exploit children and treat them as possessions

Unable to provide physical, financial social, or emotional support

Exert strong authoritarian control over children

Children In Dysfunctional Systems

May be forced to take sides in conflicts with parents

Experience reality shifting, i.e., what is said contradicts what is actually happening

Feel ignored, discounted, or criticized for their feelings and thoughts

Feel inappropriately intrusive or inappropriately distant

Excessive structure or no structure

Exposed to developmentally inappropriate activities (drugs/sex)

Problems from Living in Dysfunctional Settings

Lack of trust:

In the world

In the behavior and words of others

In their own judgments and actions

In their own sense of self-worth; may experience problems in their academic work, their relationships, and identities

Healthy Families

Emotional expression is allowed and accepted

Family members can ask for and give attention

Rules are explicit, consistent and flexible to adapt to situations

Individuality is respected

Members are encouraged to pursue interests and boundaries are honored

Children are treated with respect and do not fear emotional, verbal, physical or sexual abuse