1. **What is a Family?**

A primary social grouping whose members are related by blood, adoption, marriage, or common residence where the members have mutual and reciprocal processes that seek to enhance the functioning and socialization of all members. Family has primary responsibility for the socialization of their children.

(Schatz)

They are people who have some connection which generally includes a shared history, emotional connection, interdependence, and common goals. They may or may not have biological or legal ties.

1. **What Makes a Family Functional?**

Emotionally Safe Environment

A Resilient Foundation

Privacy

Accountability

An Apology

Allow Reasonable Expression of Emotion

Gentle on Teasing and Sarcasm

Allow People to Change and Grow

Parents Work as a Co-Parenting Team

Courtesy at Home First

Encourages Siblings to Work Together

Provides Clear Boundaries

Has Each Others’ Backs

Get Each Other’s Sense of Humor

Eat Meals Together.

Follow the Golden Rule.

(Aletta.)

**Discussion: How would you define an “unhealthy” or “dysfunctional family”?**

1. **What do individual family members need?**

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Original Model)**

Physiological needs: food, water, warmth, rest

Safety needs: security, safety

Belongingness and love needs: intimate relationships, friends

Esteem needs: prestige and feeling of accomplishment

Self-actualization: achieving ones full potential including creative activities

**These are broken into: basic needs psychological needs, self-fulfillment needs.**

**Hierarchy of needs summary:**

1. human beings are motivated by a hierarchy of needs
2. needs are organized in a hierarchy of prepotency in which more basic needs must be more or less met (rather than all or none) prior to higher needs.
3. the order of needs is not rigid but instead may be flexible based on external circumstances or individual differences.
4. most behavior is multi-motivated; that is, simultaneously determined by more than one basic need.

(McLeod)

**Discussion: Why are families important? What expectations do we have of family members?**

**4. Family systems and family dynamics**

All families function as social systems. Understanding systems concepts is very important as an introduction to the elements in a family.

A system, any system, is defined simply as a whole made up of interrelated and interdependent parts. The parts exist in a state of balance, and, when change takes place within one part, there is compensatory change within the others.

Systems become more complex and effective by constant exchange of both energy and information within their environment. When this exchange does not take place systems become ineffectual.

In every family, it is possible to see the elements that compose social systems. For example,

* + - A family has a purpose or a goal
    - A family system is made up of essential parts in common with other social systems.
    - There is order to the working parts, a hierarchy and specialization unique to that family system.
    - Families have boundaries as do each family member.
    - All systems have power or energy. Food and the provision of other physical needs can be seen as power; so can family activities, rituals, and beliefs.

In thinking about systems and families, the concept of boundaries is very important. Where are the “edges” of a family system?

**Discussion: Provide some examples you believe make up appropriate “edges” for a family. How do foster families create “edges?**

(Schatz)

**Example: Johnny, 10 years old, is stealing from kids at school. How should you address this?**

What if you find out Johnny has a new baby sister who is getting all the attention at home, Johnny’s father has been drinking and staying away more, Johnny’s mother is depressed, and Johnny’s behavior started only after the baby was born.

**Discussion: How is understanding the family system important in addressing Johnny’s behavior?**

(Thomilson)

Family dynamics are the patterns of relating, or interactions, between family members. Each family system and its dynamics are unique, although there are some common patterns.

Family dynamics often have a strong influence on the way young people see themselves, others and the world, and influence their relationships, behaviors and wellbeing.

What influences family dynamics?

* Nature of the parents’ relationship
* Having a particularly sot or strict parent
* Number of children in the family
* Personalities of family members
* An absent parent
* The “mix” of members who are living in the same household
* Level and type of influence from extended families or others
* A chronically sick or disabled child within the family
* Events which have affected family members such as an affair, divorce, trauma, death, unemployment,, homelessness
* Other issues such as family violence, abuse, alcohol or other drug use, mental health difficulties, other disability
* Family values, culture and ethnicity, including beliefs about gender roles, parenting practices, power or status of members
* Nature of attachments in family (i.e. secure, isecure)
* Dynamics of previous generations (parents and grandparents families)
* Broader systems – social, economic, political including poverty.

(Jesuit Social Services)

1. **Building Strong Families: Characteristics of strong families (communication, roles, rules/norms, values, decision maker/division of power, etc, development)**

**Handout: What Makes Your Family Strong?**

(North Dakota State University)

1. **Six Strengths of Strong Families**
   * + Appreciation and affection: caring for each other, friendship, respect, playfulness, humor
     + Commitment: members of strong families show a strong commitment to one another, investing time and energy into family activities. Families show commitment through trust, honesty, dependability, faithfulness and sharing.
     + Positive communication: Successful families are often task oriented in the communication, identifying problems and discussing how to solve them together. Strong families also spend time talking with and listening to one another just to stay connected. Some of the most important talk occurs when no one is working at connection: open-ended, rambling conversations can reveal important information. Positive communication includes giving compliments, sharing feelings, avoiding blame, being able to compromise, playfulness, agreeing to disagree.
     + Enjoyable time together: quality time in great quantity, sharing memories with each other, enjoying each other’s company, simple (inexpensive) good times, sharing fun times.
     + Spiritual well-being: hope, faith, compassion, shared ethical values, oneness with humankind
     + Successful management of stress and crisis: adaptability, seeing crises as challenges and opportunities, growing through crises together, openness to change, resilience.

(DeFrain)

1. **ACEs and Protective Factors**

The CDC has identified Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as risk factors for:

* Risky health behaviors
* Chronic health conditions
* Low life potential
* Early death

(CDC)

Being placed in foster care is an Adverse Childhood Experience. HOWEVER, risk factors are not predictive factors because of Protective Factors.

The Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework is a national research-based initiative that aims to develop and enhance five specific characteristics (called protective factors) that help keep families strong and promotes optimal development of children.

Protective factors are attributes in individuals and families that, when present, alleviate or eliminate risk in families and increase their health and well being. Protective Factors aid parents in finding community resources, positive support, and coping strategies.

Families are often identified and categorized in terms of risk factors by government, agencies and communities. Research shows that risk factors do not dictate positive or negative outcomes - protective factors do. For example, a child of a family experiencing divorce is at risk for depression. On the flip side, protective factors, such as social/emotional support from a nurturing family member or friend, negates the risk of depression for that child. Likewise, the stresses that occur from job loss or foreclosure can be combated by the protective factors of seeking help from community resources and making social connections that build a positive network of support. Your protective factors act as a shield to counteract your risk factors. They are built through daily interaction with the people and systems that families encounter. They are not complicated or theoretical. They are distinctive traits of healthy family life - many of which you are already living.

The 5 Protective Factors are: parental resilience, social connection, knowledge of parenting & child development, concrete supports in times of need, and social emotional competence of children.

(Michigan Strengthening Families)

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# What Makes Your Family Strong?

            Families are the basic, foundational social units in all human communities around the world. Strong families have healthy relationships and practice [positive parenting skills](http://www.extension.unl.edu/web/hfc/parenting)  They know their [family strengths](http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=1103) and those areas where they could improve.

            Research at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln recently focused on families who believe they are doing well. Family members from all 50 states and 27 countries were asked, "[What makes your family strong?](http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=1057%20)"  The families surveyed identified six essential strengths in order to create the best possible environment for each and every family member.

[Appreciation and affection](http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=952)– Appreciation and affection are about caring for each other as family members. Sharing positive emotional feelings with each other and being nice to each other are just a couple of ways families show appreciation and affection.

[Commitment](http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=955)– Members of strong families show a strong commitment to one another, investing time and energy in family activities and not letting their work or other priorities take too much time away from family interaction. Commitment is trusting, respecting, accepting – putting your family first.

[Positive communication](http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=956)– Communication is a key to a strong family. It should be open, honest and straightforward. Positive communication is about telling others how you feel, compromising or at least agreeing to disagree, as well as verbal praise and giving compliments.

[Enjoyable time together](http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=1060)– Family time should be fun time. When adults think back on their childhood, it is the happy memories they cherish. Families should work to create customs and rituals that provide them with many enjoyable memories. Many times these do not have to involve lots of money or supplies. [Family activities and fun](http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=286%20) are just finding time to be together. Sharing family mealtimes is just one way to spend enjoyable time together.

[Spiritual well-being](http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=1101)– Spiritual well-being is the hope, faith and optimism a family shares. It is the sacred connections they have or the religion or spirituality they possess. [Spiritual well-being](http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=1102) is also the caring, support and compassion that families feel.

[Successful management of stress and crisis](http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=1058) - Strong families have the ability to manage stress and crisis in their lives in positive, creative ways. They work together rather than pulling apart. Crisis and stress are opportunities to help other family members which in turn helps themselves.

From: North Dakota State University Ramsey County Extension www.ag.ndsu.ramseycountyextension

In the category, “Enjoyable Time Together”, the survey included the following statements. Try your own survey by placing an **“S”** for **Strength** beside the qualities you feel your family has achieved.  Place a **“G”** beside those qualities that are an area of potential **Growth.** . Place a **“NA”** for **Not Applicable** beside those characteristics that do not apply to your family or are not a characteristic important to you.

In our family:

-         We have a number of common interests

-         We like to have fun together.

-         We feel comfortable with each others.

-         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 feel strongly connected to each other.

-         We often laugh with each other.

-         Observing family rituals and customs is important to us.

-         We share memories with each other.

-         We often laugh with each other.

-         We enjoy the time we have together.

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