



Normal Functioning Family

Is there any way to tell if my family is functioning normally?

Many parents ask themselves this question, but there is no simple answer, since there can be such broad definitions of the term normal.

Still, there are several characteristics that are generally identified with a well-functioning family. Some include: support; love and caring for other family members; providing security and a sense of belonging; open communication; making each person within the family feel important, valued, respected and esteemed.

Here are some other qualities to consider when evaluating how well your own family is functioning.

- Is there ample humor and fun within your family, despite the very real demands of daily life?
- Does your family have rules that have been clearly stated and are evenly applied, yet are flexible and respond to new situations and changes in the family?
- Are the family's expectations of each person reasonable, realistic, mutually agreed upon and generally fulfilled?
- Do family members achieve most of their individual goals, and are their personal needs being met?
- Do parents and children have genuine respect for one another, demonstrating love, caring, trust, and concern, even when there are disagreements?
- Is your family able to mature and change without everyone getting upset or unhappy?

Maintaining A Healthy Family

In order to provide a supportive, emotionally healthy family environment, you need to devote some thought and energy to the following questions:

- **Do you treat each child as an individual?** Each child has his own temperament, his own way of viewing and interacting with the world around him. Parents may love their children equally, but naturally will have different sorts of relationships with each of them. Individualize your relationship with each of your children, reinforcing their strengths and talents and avoiding making unflattering comparisons with their siblings or friends.
- **Does your family have regular routines?** Children and parents benefit from having some predictable day-to-day routines. Morning schedules, mealtimes and bedtimes are easier for everyone when they follow a pattern. Children also appreciate family rituals and traditions around birthdays, holidays and vacations.
- **Is your family an active participant in your extended family and the community?** Families work better when they feel connected and supported by friends and relatives. Usually such relationships require that parents make an active effort to get together with others socially or for civic projects.
- **Are your expectations of yourself and other family members realistic?** Your child's self-awareness, knowledge and skills are constantly changing. Observe, read and talk to others to learn what can reasonably be expected of your child at each stage of development. Parents, too, have limitations on what they can accomplish, given their resources and the time available. There are no "superparents," just individuals doing their best.
- **Does the time you spend with your family members contribute to good relationships among you?** Most of the time you and your child and your spouse spend together should be fun, relaxed, meaningful and relatively conflict-free.
- **As a parent, singly or as a couple, are you taking care of your own needs?** You should be leading a healthy personal life (including proper diet, exercise and sleep habits). Set aside time, however brief, for things you enjoy. Your children will thrive when your own emotional needs are being met. They do best when they are reared by parents who are in a harmonious relationship with each other.
- **Do you take moral and social responsibility for your own life?** You are the most important role model for your child. Demonstrate your value system through actions as well as words.

Last Updated 11/21/2015

Caring for Your School-Age Child: Ages 5 to 12 (Copyright © 2004 American Academy of Pediatrics)

Information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

