

WHAT IS FAMILY?

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A family consists of two or more people who live together or are related by ancestry or marriage. Families are different sizes and family members are different ages. Our family of origin is the family we grew up in, and our nuclear family is our spouse and our children. They can be “extended family” – close friends, neighbors, aunts, uncles, or grandparents. A family is made up of people who are bound together by birth, by law, or by love. A family provides care, support, acceptance, and love.

Because all people have different personalities, each member in your family is separate from every other member. It is only natural then that your family members may have disagreements and hurt feelings. However, disagreements may be helpful as they allow everyone to share their feelings and frustrations. Most importantly, disagreements get the problems out in the open...then they can be solved.

A death or divorce puts a family through a tremendous upheaval and change. Someone dies, or someone moves out. Everyone is hurting in their own way. The relationships within the family take on new dimensions. Tempers are short. Problems, weaknesses, and mistakes are all part of life. At times, these make you or other family members not very likeable. But the natural bond of family is still there.

Families change. People grow old. Family members die. Babies are born. New members arrive. Children grow up and move away. Some families separate and form new families. Being a family means giving that little extra, even when you really would rather not. Being a family means sharing life!

For so very long, I read everything that I could find regarding single parent families. I was determined to rebuild from our loss. Grief was not going to win. However, the new shape seemed to elude me. Until one day, I read [Traits of a Healthy Family](#), by Dolores Curran*. As I read chapter after chapter, I found myself saying, we can do that!

From that day on, I refocused my family goal. We were going to become a healthy family. Our shape and size was not as important as the emotional environment we lived in with each other. My new goal was to leave my children the legacy of a warm loving family where we all flourished and became the best “us” we could be.

* TRAITS OF A HEALTHY FAMILY

The healthy family...

1. communicates and listens.
2. affirms and supports one another.
3. teaches respect for others.
4. develops a sense of trust.
5. has a sense of play and humor
6. exhibits a sense of shared responsibility.
7. teaches a sense of right and wrong
8. has a strong sense of family in which rituals and traditions abound.
9. has a balance of interaction among members.
10. has a shared spiritual core.
11. respects the privacy of one another.
12. values service to others.
13. fosters family table time and conversation.
14. shares leisure time.
15. admits to and seeks help with problems.