

WHAT IS A FAMILY?

- People giving and receiving love.
- People accepting and loving each other UNCONDITIONALLY, with no strings attached.
- People talking and listening to each other.
- People care about what happens to each other and let it show.
- People get angry with each other and then love each other again.
- People loving – and celebrating – the differences among them.
- People laughing and crying without feeling ashamed.
- People reaching out, instead of fencing in.

Family life has good and bad times. Families are people: people giving strength to each other when needed, caring and letting it show, leaning on each other and feeling loyal to each other – NO MATTER WHAT

Bradshaw on: **THE FAMILY**

RULES IN A FUNCTIONAL FAMILY

The rules in a functional family will be overt and clear. The husband and wife will be aware of their family's differences in attitudinal, communicational, and behavioral rules. These differences will be understood and accepted as neither right nor wrong. They will be acknowledged as simply different. Each partner will be working toward compromised solutions. This certainly does not mean there will never be any conflict; the capacity for conflict is a mark of intimacy and a mark of a healthy family. Good, healthy conflict is a kind of contact; in dysfunctional families, problems are denied.

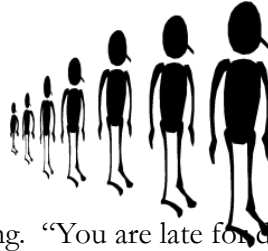
Conflict is inevitable because each person is unique, and family systems have different rules. For example, in my family of origin, we opened our Christmas presents on Christmas Eve. We opened them fast, and we didn't save the paper. In my wife's family, they opened their presents on Christmas morning. They liked to spend time opening their presents. Others watched while each person opened their presents. They saved the ribbons and paper.

Now, who's right? Obviously, no one is right. Our families represent two different sets of Christmas celebration rules. Celebrational rules have less voltage than parenting or financial rules.

Rules with higher voltage include how to raise the children, the right method of discipline, how to handle money, and what should be spent and saved. These rules lend themselves to conflict, and working out these differences takes many years.

FAIR FIGHTING RULES

In a functional marriage, the couple is committed to working out their differences. They do not stay in conflict, nor do they cop out by agreeing not to agree. They strive for contact and compromise. Fighting is part of contact and compromise. Functional couples have problems and fight, and they learn how to fight fairly. To fight fairly, you must?



1. Be assertive rather than aggressive.
2. Stay in the “now.” Avoid scorekeeping. “You are late for dinner. I feel angry. I wanted everything to be warm and tasty.” rather than “You are late for dinner as usual. I remember two years ago, on our vacation, you... etc, etc.”
3. Avoid lecturing and stay with concrete, specific behavioral details.
4. Avoid judgment. Stay with self-responsible “I” messages.
5. Maintain rigorous honesty at all times. Go for accuracy rather than agreement or perfection.
6. Don’t argue about details, e.g., “You were 20 minutes late,” “No, I was only 13 minutes late.”
7. Don’t assign blame.
8. Use active listening. Repeat what you heard them say to the other person. Get their agreement about what you heard them say before responding.
9. Fight about one thing at a time.
10. Unless you are being abused (or are in danger), hang in there. This is especially important: Choose a solution rather than being right.

GOOD FUNCTIONAL RULES FOR FUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

Good functional rules will allow each family member to express **The Five Freedoms**:

1. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.
2. The system is dynamic – constantly changing but seeking openness and growth as its members adjust to feedback and stress.
3. The rules are open, overt, and negotiable.
4. There is mutual respect and balance – togetherness – individuation.
5. When anxiety is low, the force toward individuation automatically emerges.

Rules allow for flexibility and spontaneity. Mistakes will be viewed as occasions for growth. Shaming will be strongly prohibited. Good functional rules will promote fun and laughter. Each person will be seen as precious, unique, and unrepeatable.

Functional family rules can be summed up as follows:

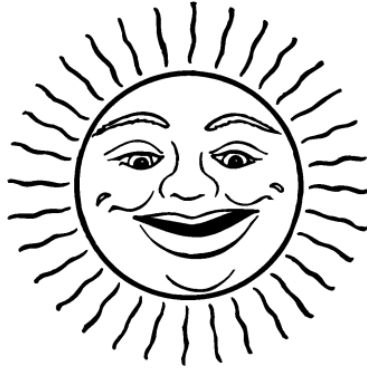
- Problems are acknowledged and resolved.
- The five freedoms are promoted. All members can express their perceptions, feelings, thoughts, desires, and fantasies.
- All relationships are dialogues and equal. Each person is of equal value as a person.
- Communication is direct, congruent, and sensory-based, i.e., concrete, specific, and behavioral.
- Family members can get their needs met.
- Family members can be different.
- Parents do what they say. They are self-disciplined disciplinarians (and appropriate role modes.)
- Family roles are chosen and flexible.
- Atmosphere is fun and spontaneous.
- The rules require accountability.
- Violation of other's values leads to guilt.
- Mistakes are forgiven and viewed as learning tools.
- The family system exists for the individuals.
- Parents are in touch with their healthy shame.

One paradoxical aspect of functional and healthy families is that as individuation increases, togetherness grows. As people separate and move toward wholeness, real intimacy becomes possible. The poet says, "The mountain to the climber is clearer from the plain." We need separation to have togetherness.

Needy and incomplete people seek others to complete them. They say, "I love you because I need you."

Individuated persons who have faced aloneness and separation know they can make it alone. They seek a partner because they want to love, not because they need to be completed. They say, "I need you because I love

you.” They offer love out of generosity rather than need. It should be obvious that the rules of an open, healthy, functional family described here are quite different than the components of the poisonous (closed dysfunctional) family.



10 TRAITS OF HEALTHY FAMILIES

At one time or another, most parents wish they had a training manual explaining ways to help raise their children. With today's pressures, how do some families thrive even in rough times? Healthy families have some general traits from which to draw strength. Here are ten traits consolidated from "Insights," a general parenting guide, and "Create the Spirit of the Family," a resource on rural parenting. Both are available to the public, free of charge, from the Alaska Council on Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse.

1. **COMMUNICATE AND LISTEN** - Focus on attentive listening and "hearing" the feelings behind the words. Listen to your children talk about how things are today - try to see through their eyes and help them see through yours.
2. **AFFIRM AND SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER**—Recognize that your role as a parent is to guide and influence and that your child may decide to live differently from what you want. Allow for differences without withdrawing your love and acceptance.
3. **RESPECT EACH OTHER**—Show respect for your children's ideas and individual contributions to the family.
4. **DEVELOP TRUST**—Build a base of friendship and trust with your child. Minimize nagging and yelling and maximize friendly discussion.
5. **HAVE A SENSE OF PLAY AND HUMOR** - Set aside time for fun with your children - walks, listening to music, playing games together, bubbles, painting, etc.
6. **SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES** - Build important decision-making skills by letting youngsters make decisions whenever possible - what to wear, when to study, etc. When kids feel useful, have a sense of belonging, and feel important, the need for "false highs" is lessened.
7. **TEACH A SENSE OF RIGHT AND WRONG**—Practice making agreements with your children. Let them know your limits, what you are willing to negotiate, and what will happen if an agreement is broken. Make sure your children play a part in making the agreement, deciding on consequences, and then following through.
8. **NURTURE RITUALS AND TRADITIONS** - Find ways your children can feel significant in the family: sharing chores, cooking, helping pay the bills, planning a trip - or simply telling them what makes them so special to you.
9. **FOSTER FAMILY TABLE TIME AND TALKS**—Have a family dinner all together. Begin "family meetings" where everyone can share their ideas and be heard. Eat dinner with the TV turned off. Have family dinner at least once a week.
10. **ADMIT TO AND SEEK HELP FOR PROBLEMS**—Don't hesitate to get help. Around the country, parents and children are finding help and alternatives in support groups and local agencies.

DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY SYSTEM CHARACTERISTICS

Dysfunctional homes are those in which one or more of the following occur:


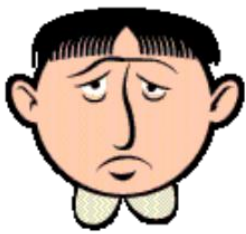


- Abuse of alcohol and/or drugs (prescribed or illicit).
- Compulsive behavior such as compulsive eating, dieting, working, cleaning, gambling, spending, exercising, and so on; these practices are addictive behaviors, as well as progressive disease processes; among their many other harmful effects, they effectively disrupt and prevent honest contact and intimacy in a family.
- Battering of spouse and/or children.
- Inappropriate sexual behavior on the part of a parent toward a child, ranging from seductiveness to incest.
- Constant arguing and tension.
- Extended periods of time in which parents refuse to speak to each other.
- Parents who have conflicting attitudes or values or display contradictory behaviors that compete for their children's allegiance.
- Parents who are competitive with each other or with their children.
- A parent who cannot relate to others in the family and thus actively avoids them, while blaming them for this avoidance.
- Extreme rigidity about money, religion, work, use of time, displays of affection, sex, television, housework, sports, politics, and so on; obsession with any of these can preclude contact and intimacy, because the emphasis is not on relating, but on following the rules.

If one parent displays any of these kinds of behaviors or obsessions, it is damaging to a child. If both parents are caught up in any of these unhealthy practices, the results may be even more detrimental. Dysfunctional families come in many styles and varieties, but they all share one effect they have on children growing up in them: these children are to some extent damaged in their ability to feel and relate.

Women Who Love Too Much by Robin Norwood

THE FAMILY CONSTELLATION IN DYSFUNCTION

(ADAPTED FROM “THE FAMILY TRAP: 1976 BY SHARON GEGSCHEIDER)

The Role	Visible Qualities	Inner Feelings	Represents or Provides for Family	Characteristics	W/O Help	With Help
<p style="text-align: center;">THE HERO</p> 	<p>Visible success</p> <p>Always does what's right.</p>	<p>Inadequate</p> <p>Insecure</p>	<p>Self-worth</p> <p>(The family can be proud)</p>	<p>High achiever</p> <p>↑ grades</p> <p>↑ friends</p> <p>↑ sports</p>	<p>Becomes workaholic – Responsible for everything – Marries a dependent person</p>	<p>Accepts failure as a normal part of the learning process</p> <p>Responsible for self – Good executor – has boundaries</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">THE SCAPEGOAT</p> 	<p>Hostility</p> <p>Defiance</p> <p>Anger</p>	<p>Hurt</p> <p>Guilt</p>	<p>Takes the focus off the alcoholic</p>	<p>Negative attention</p> <p>Refuses to compete with Family Hero</p>	<p>Unplanned pregnancy –</p> <p>“Troublemaker” in school and later in the office setting – Prison?</p>	<p>Accepts responsibility</p> <p>Good advisor</p> <p>Acts with courage</p> <p>Accepts reality</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">THE LOST CHILD</p> 	<p>Withdrawn</p> <p>Loner</p>	<p>Loneliness</p> <p>Fells Unimportant</p>	<p>Relief</p> <p>(One child not to be worried about)</p>	<p>“Invisible”</p> <p>Quiet</p> <p>No friends</p> <p>Follower</p> <p>Can't make decisions</p>	<p>↓ zest for life</p> <p>Sexual identify problems</p> <p>Promiscuous or stays alone – premature death</p>	<p>Independent</p> <p>Talented</p> <p>Creative</p> <p>Imaginative</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">THE MASCOT</p> 	<p>Fragile</p> <p>Immature</p> <p>Needs Protection</p>	<p>Fear</p>	<p>Fun & Humor</p> <p>Comic Relief</p>	<p>Hyperactive</p> <p>Learning Disabilities</p> <p>Short attention Span</p>	<p>Ulcers and cannot handle stress</p> <p>Compulsive clowning</p> <p>Marries a HERO</p>	<p>Self-care & Self-responsibility</p> <p>Fun to be with</p> <p>Sense of humor</p>

CHEMICALLY DEPENDENT PERSON

Hi, I'm the chemically dependent person in this family. Some call me the alcoholic. Some call me an addict. Whatever you call me, I'm the one with a lot of power. You see, I can control the whole family. Everyone is busy trying to cover up the fact that I drink too much. Everyone in the family is trying to pretend that there is no problem. But, there is a problem. You see, one minute I'm Mrs. nice gal, happy, apologetic, accommodating. But then, when I drink or have a hangover from last night, I become mean; I break my promises, I yell, I throw things, and sometimes I even hit people. This is really confusing, not only to my family but to myself. I don't want to be this way. I feel guilty and ashamed. I'm terrified that others might find out that I am not perfect and I'm weak, that I am not who I pretend to be. I'm afraid that I might have a drinking problem... so I deny my drinking. I deny it to my family, to my co-workers, to my friends, and even to myself. I deny it until I hit my bottom, whatever that takes. Sometimes, a DUI gets me into therapy. Sometimes, I lose my job, family, and all my friends. All of this gets me into treatment. Sometimes I have an accident. Sometimes, I try suicide. Sometimes I die from my disease.

What can people do for me?

Love me for who I am; don't judge me harshly for having a disease. Whatever you do, don't pretend I don't have a problem.

CODEPENDENT

Hi, I am the CODEPENDENT. Some people call me the Co-Alcoholic or the Enabler. I'm the one closest to the Alcoholic/Addict. I'm the one who is busy trying to keep the family together. I have the role of making things look GOOD to the outside world. I try soooo hard to please everyone, especially the alcoholic/addict, that I sometimes "make myself SICK." I often have headaches, backaches, and stomach problems. I get so TIRED! I take all the responsibility for this family, I cover up for the alcoholic/addict, and I pour out his drinks. I call in sick for him. I buy him alcohol/drugs when he wants me to so I can avoid conflict. I take care of the kids, the house, and my co-workers. I guess I try to take care of everyone. I take care of everyone except MYSELF. I guess I feel I don't deserve to take care of myself. I'm too busy looking at others' needs, faults, and problems.

I blame the alcoholic/addict for most of my problems. I often yell at him and tell him what a terrible person he is. Sometimes, I get so tired that I decide to join him in his drinking. I feel I need a break too. So, I may begin drinking or using a lot to cover up the PAIN. Boy, I get ANGRY! But I cover that up, too. You see, I don't know who I am. That scares me, and I avoid looking at me. I feel that if the alcoholic/addict stops drinking/using, everything will be all right.

What can you do for me?

Don't pretend that there is NO PROBLEM. Listen. Suggest help. Be prepared to hear the anger. There's a lot of anger. My recovery includes realizing I can't control others and I need to focus on what I need to change about ME.

HERO

Hi, I am the HERO in the family. I'm usually the firstborn, but not always. I am the one who is called the RESPONSIBLE ONE – the OVER ACHIEVER. I excel at everything I do. I don't try anything unless I know I'll excel. I am an A student, the president of my freshman class, the top basketball player on the freshman team, a member of 5 different clubs, and president of 3 of them, and I attend church every Sunday. If you want something done, just ask me. I'll do it. I strive for perfection. But you know, I never quite make it; no matter how hard I try, I can't quite do an adequate job; it's never quite enough. It's the same way at home. I take care of my younger brothers and sisters. When my Dad's out drinking, and my Mom's too tired or sick to take care of them, I wash their clothes, cook for them, get them ready for school, and put them to bed at night. I don't know when I'll ever get a chance to do something for me, something fun for ME. I wonder if all oldest children are supposed to do this. Maybe if I were a better person, my Dad wouldn't drink, and my Mom wouldn't get so angry or so sick. I feel so inadequate. Nobody knows how I feel. I have to keep the family secrets because I'm scared that it's MY FAULT that my Dad drinks, and I'm scared that someone will come and take him away.

What can you do for me?

Tell me I'm not alone, that other people have these feelings too. Tell me about ALATEEN and the 12 Steps. Tell me it's okay to Talk and to Trust and to Feel. Tell me it's okay to make mistakes, to play and have fun. Most of all, tell me that it's not MY FAULT that my Dad drinks.

SCAPEGOAT

Hi, I am the family SCAPEGOAT. You know, the troublemaker, the rebel, the one who gets blamed for all the problems. I'm the one who gets tired of pretending that this family is perfect, that there's nothing wrong. Hey, there's no way I'm pretending anymore. This family is screwed up royally! I'm tired of being "nicey nice" like my sister, "Miss Hero."

Who could live up to her anyway? Wow – Little Miss Perfect! So, I decided to find my own way of getting attention. I get A LOT OF ATTENTION now. Maybe not positive attention, but attention. They can't pretend I don't exist. I skip school; I destroy things, I fight, I use "inappropriate language," I drink booze and use drugs because that helps kill the pain for a while. What pain, you ask? The PAIN of always being rejected, always being the bad guy, always being the cause of all my family's problems. Even though I cover it up well by pretending I'm tough and that I DON'T FEEL, I'm really HURTING on the INSIDE. I feel that nobody loves me, that nobody cares, that I'm a nobody, and a nobody doesn't deserve to live. Sometimes, I feel like ending it all. You know, like taking too many drugs or blowing myself away. I know I need help, but I'm so hard to reach.

What can you do?

Tell me that you CARE. That I am okay the way God made me. Tell me that you can help me find a way to succeed. I could use support, and I may need alcohol and drug counseling. Most of all, tell me that I CAN do it.

LOST CHILD

WHO am I? That's what I hear all the time. "WHO are YOU?" I feel like I'm INVISIBLE or something – that no one knows I exist. I don't cause any trouble. I don't like trouble – it scares me. When my family fights, I run away to my room and hide in my closet. That's where I feel safe. Sometimes I turn up the music really loud so I can't hear anything. At school, I never talk to anyone except when they talk to me. I don't say anything in class or make any trouble. People ask me, "What's the matter, the cat got your tongue?" They call me SHY. Oh, I hate the word SHY. I don't think I trust others. I'm usually a loner. I feel really lonely most of the time, except when I talk to my dog. He's the only one I trust. He listens to me and loves me no matter what. When I was little, I had big fantasies and imaginary friends who talked to me and listened to me. They wanted me. It seems like I never smile. I guess there is nothing to smile about these days, is there?

AM I SAD? Yeah, I guess I'm really sad. When I feel sad and lonely, I sometimes eat a lot. Then I feel guilty and ashamed. Kids at school say I'm fat and a TUB. That makes me feel even sadder and lonelier. When people ask me what I do for fun, I tell them that I read a lot. I guess I'm a "bookworm." And I love to draw and paint, but nobody knows I do. I do it for myself, and I don't want others to know because I won't be invisible anymore, and they might want me to talk about what is happening in my family – that would be devastating.

What can you do?

Tell me that you want to be my friend. Help me build trust by being honest with me. Tell me about ALATEEN and groups at school. Most of all, TELL ME I'M NOT ALONE.

MASCOT

Hi (Tell Joke) – Hey, this is my role. I make people laugh. My family tells me I’m cute and funny and that I should be a comedian when I grow up. See this (Funny Gesture, etc.)

Sometimes, I can’t sit still for long periods of time – like in school. The teacher said she thinks I’m “hyperactive,” whatever that means. That’s why I’m not supposed to eat sugar, and I LOVE sugar. Kids say in school that I can make the funniest faces. See (Make Face) – pretty good, huh? I’m also very good at not answering the questions people ask me. Like I manipulate my way out of things and situations. I talk about something else instead of answering their questions. Everyone in school knows who I am. I’m invited to all the important parties because I’m the “LIFE of the party”. I’ll put a lampshade on my head to make people laugh. I’ll do almost anything for a laugh. My family needs me because I add a sense of relief to the everyday chaos. They can stop thinking about THE PROBLEM – you know, my Dad’s drinking when I’m around. Yeah, I’m important – I think. Maybe I can hold this family together for a while longer. I really never know who is planning on staying or who is leaving. When my parents fight, they always say, “I’m leaving and never coming back,” but nobody has left yet. Maybe if I keep making them laugh, they will decide to stay. Sometimes I feel so insecure. I KNOW I MUST BE CRAZY

What can you do for me?

Get to know the “REAL” me underneath these masks. Tell me I’m okay the way God made me. Don’t let me fool you with all my jokes and humor because there’s a lot of hurt inside. Invite me to ALATEEN where I’m not alone. Most of all, please tell me I’M NOT CRAZY.