



Healthy and Unhealthy Family Patterns

By Dale Fiegland and Robbi Cary

In his memoir, *Conspiracy of Grace*, Dale Fiegland shares about his pain, brokenness, and wild life. He shares about about running from God for years; his sudden, surprising request for God's help; and his crazy journey of transformation. Because he's a counseling pastor, the book's appendix offers ideas for those who desire to find God's help, hope, and healing.

In "Appendix C: Thoughts on Enjoyable Living and Sobriety," Dale explains that it can be advantageous for us to learn about the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy families. We can evaluate the traits of our family of origin and our current family, and we can choose which traits we want to develop.

The following lists were created from many resources. They give common traits of healthy families versus unhealthy families. The overarching key components include how we deal with our emotions, communicate, and work through problems. Additional important aspects include having faith and moral principles, understanding our value and purpose, and striving to grow.

We pray that these guidelines will inspire and encourage you to seek God's assistance and healing, and to grow.

FAMILY PATTERNS

<i>Healthy Family Traits</i>	<i>Unhealthy Family Traits</i>
<p>COMMUNICATION & EMOTIONS</p> <p>Conversations and communication are frequent, open, honest, clear, and kind.</p> <p>Family members feel heard. Questions are asked.</p> <p>Family members are able to feel and express laughter, pain, tears, and appropriate anger.</p> <p>Family members are able to share their thoughts, problems, mistakes, dreams, and successes with each other.</p> <p>Words and actions are in harmony with each other.</p> <p>Individuals follow through on what they say.</p>	<p>COMMUNICATION & EMOTIONS</p> <p>Communication and conversation may be infrequent or unkind (with faultfinding, name-calling, and teasing).</p> <p>Anger and emotions are either excessive (yelling or silence), or repressed and denied.</p> <p>Instead of speaking honestly, messages may be indirect, deceptive or dishonest. People may deny the truth about what is happening, what has been said, or how they feel.</p> <p>Individuals may say one thing, but do the opposite.</p> <p>Promises are broken.</p>
<p>AFFECTION & APPRECIATION</p> <p>Affection is shared (with touch, hugs, and kisses).</p> <p>Family members' strengths, gifts, and accomplishments are valued and celebrated with appreciation, encouragement, and compliments.</p>	<p>AFFECTION & APPRECIATION</p> <p>Very little encouragement, affection, or hugs are shared.</p> <p>Rather than being valued, people may be put down, belittled, laughed at, or ignored.</p> <p>People's mistakes are magnified.</p> <p>Instead of offering grace and forgiveness, grudges and resentments grow.</p> <p>Family members may be emotionally unavailable and self-absorbed. Or, they may be enmeshed in one another's lives and try to control others.</p>
<p>PROBLEMS, CONFLICTS & SAFETY</p> <p>Problems and conflicts are discussed, worked through, and resolved.</p> <p>Rules are clear, simple, and relatively few.</p> <p>Children's failings are met with instruction and discipline, rather than with anger.</p> <p>Differences are treated kindly.</p> <p>Failures and shortcomings are forgiven.</p> <p>Family members feel safe—both physically and emotionally.</p>	<p>PROBLEMS, CONFLICTS & SAFETY</p> <p>Problems and conflicts aren't handled in healthy ways and remain unresolved.</p> <p>Too many or too few rules exist.</p> <p>Family members may feel unsafe—physically or emotionally.</p> <p>One or more addictions may be present.</p> <p>Life is chaotic and stressful.</p>

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FAMILY PATTERNS

<i>Healthy Family Traits</i>	<i>Unhealthy Family Traits</i>
<p>UNITY, FUN & SELF-RESPONSIBILITY</p> <p>There is a balance of togetherness and independence. The family values itself as a team unit, and every individual is also valued and appreciated.</p> <p>Togetherness is enjoyed in a variety of ways, including mealtimes, activities, stories and traditions shared, and trips and vacations (as funds permit).</p> <p>Family members assist and support one another (with chores, during difficult times, and in pursuit of goals).</p> <p>Members also strive to take responsibility for themselves. Growth and self-discovery are encouraged.</p>	<p>LACK OF UNITY, FUN & SELF-RESPONSIBILITY</p> <p>Certain people may be blamed for everything or carry most of the responsibility, while others are excused.</p> <p>Individuals become stuck in the same type of actions, thoughts, and responses. Growth is minimal.</p> <p>Fun, purpose, and time spent together may be lacking.</p>
<p>MORALS & FAITH</p> <p>The family has a strong faith in God, high moral values, and a principled philosophy of life, all of which are shared and discussed. Faith in God includes seeking His help and trusting Him to bring blessings from difficult and painful situations.</p>	<p>MORALS & FAITH</p> <p>There is little knowledge or pursuit of moral values.</p> <p>There is little knowledge or understanding of God and His grace, help, and truth.</p>
<p>PERIODS OF STRESS</p> <p>During times of stress, healthy-lifestyle practices continue to be utilized, including rest, faith, pursuing health, and seeking aid when needed.</p>	<p>PERIODS OF STRESS</p> <p>During times of stress, life becomes more chaotic and painful.</p>

Regardless of our past or current struggles—with God’s help—we can heal and grow. With God’s assistance, it is possible for one person to change and influence others.

Reviewing the list of healthy and unhealthy family traits we can consider these questions:

- How did our family handle each area?
- How do we currently handle these aspects?
- What area would it be helpful to grow in first? What area do we desire to grow in?
- Have we sought God’s aid?
- Do we need to seek the assistance of a pastor or counselor?

A Family Manifesto

**Our family seeks to be kind and positive; value one another;
work together as a team; and have fun together.**

We seek to communicate well and with kindness.

Everyone is free to share thoughts, successes, dreams, hurts, fears, and appropriate anger.

We discuss our differences and work to resolve conflicts. Mistakes are forgiven.

**We seek to grow closer as a family; grow as individuals;
and grow in knowing and following God.**

**In times of stress and difficulties, we aim to use positive coping skills
that include resting, eating well, and seeking help if need be,
all the while we continue leaning on God and His good promises.**

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

Casey, Karen. *Good Stuff from Growing Up in a Dysfunctional Family: How to Survive and Then Thrive*. Conari Press, 2013.

<https://www.dairyherd.com/article/9-characteristics-strong-family-working-relationship/>

<https://www.boundless.org/adulthood/8-steps-to-break-a-cycle-of-family-dysfunction/>