



10 Things You Should Know About...

Healthy Family Functioning

1. Loving relationships promote physical health. How we manage our relationships is related to how healthy we feel, how quickly we recover from injury, and even how long we live. The negative impact of social isolation on health is comparable to that of cigarette smoking.
2. Loving relationships promote mental health. Better marital quality protects against serious psychological problems, like depression, and enhances social and work functioning.
3. In healthy relationships, family members turn to each other for care and comfort when they feel upset. When adults are secure in their relationships, they are more confident and better adjusted, as are their children. Diminishing affection and emotional connection threaten the stability of marriage.
4. Conflict in families is normal. Healthy conflict involves respecting the needs of both oneself and others, and the ability to “mend” bonds following disagreements. Healthy conflict is free of criticism, hostility, belligerence, contempt, and withdrawal.
5. Supportive family environments are important for the recovery from mental health problems, such as PTSD, and are protective against relapses.
6. Major life events, even positive ones such as the birth of a child, put a lot of stress on families. Increased mutual support, communication, and sensitivity are needed during such times.
7. Marital problems ripple throughout the whole family. Improving marital functioning can enhance children’s emotional, social, and academic development.
8. Research shows that couple therapy improves relationship quality. Unfortunately, most unhappy couples do not seek help. Unhappy couples who seek couple therapy have better relationship outcomes than those that do not.
9. Couple therapy or couple education, both offered by the VA, can help with a wide range of relationship and individual problems. Common reasons for seeking treatment are communication problems, frequent arguing or tension, low emotional closeness, to prevent separation, and intimacy and trust concerns. Even happy couples can choose to use couple therapy or education to further strengthen bonds.
10. Over 400 VA chaplains, social workers, psychologists and nurses have been certified by the PAIRS (Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills) program to lead “From Warrior to Soul Mate” retreats for Veterans and their spouses. For more information about the PAIRS program for Veterans, visit veterans.pairs.com or contact Chaplain Dick Millspaugh at dick.millspaugh@va.gov.

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Visit the Rural Clergy Training website for more information about caring for our Veterans,
www.ruralhealth.va.gov/ruralclergytraining.