

## A HEALTHY ATMOSPHERE BREEDS LIFE

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Every planet and many stars and satellites including the sun and moon are surrounded by a layer of gases, commonly known as atmosphere. The atmosphere is basically a combination of gases which have an effect on the body they envelop. The atmosphere of Mars, for example, reacted with the major elements on the surface of the planet, which studies show was iron, causing it to rust and thereby gives Mars its reddish colour. The atmosphere of Venus is so thick that it reflects most of the sunlight that reaches it. Since Earth is its closest neighbour, Venus appears as the brightest object in the sky besides the sun and moon. The atmosphere of earth, on the other hand, protects life by creating pressure allowing for liquid water to exist on the Earth's surface, absorbing ultraviolet solar radiation, warming the surface by trapping the heat from the sunrays and reducing temperature extremes between day and night.

Atmosphere is essential to life. For some decades now, scientists, ecologists and other interested



parties have been decrying the wanton destruction of the atmosphere through the felling of trees, release of large amounts of CFC's (Chloro-Fluoro Carbons) and other greenhouse gases and extensive pollution. Disturbing the composition of the atmosphere has terrible consequences and we are facing some of them, like hotter climates, paucity of rain, melting ice caps and natural disasters like tsunamis and cyclones. The reason for all this is simply, lack of care for the atmosphere.

The family is like the planet earth. If life should flourish and if the members of the family are to grow into respectable, caring, motivated, positive and successful people then a lot depends on the atmosphere around the family. The home is where the family resides. How does our family home come across to people? Is it a place of love and concern where people are welcomed and looked after or is it a war-zone from which people run away? Is the atmosphere of the home like earth's which fosters life and development or is it like some other planet, toxic and detrimental to life?

### Testing the Atmosphere

The environment that children grow up in will directly and significantly influence the person that they become. It is up to the adults in the family to provide a

peaceful coexistence based on love and respect. How can we check the suitability of the atmosphere of our home?

Studies show that the strongest, healthiest families have certain qualities in common. Although there are many qualities that can feature on this list, I have noted only three. These "protective factors" help create a safe and healthy environment for adults to be the best parents they can be—and for the children to learn, grow, and develop to their best potential:

**1. Stress Management Strategies.** It's a given that parenting is stressful. How we deal with stress can make all the difference in how it impacts our families. Developing creative problem-solving skills, a positive attitude, strategies to bounce back from difficulties, and reaching out for help from trusted sources when needed helps increase parenting resilience—and helps manage whatever life throws our way.

**2. Children Who Have Social Skills.** While all kids can be challenging sometimes, children who can express and control emotions and know how to get along with other people are more likely to be part of strong families. Strong families have children who feel safe at home and in other settings.

**3. Having a Family Network.** Strong families have connections to other family members, friends and community. From child rearing help, guidance and information to community and



other resources, a family network offers emotional support and assistance—and opportunities for fun, as well!

Now that we have seen some of the characteristics of a healthy family, let us look at some of the characteristics of an unhealthy or dysfunctional family. There is no typical dysfunctional family. Often, such a family is composed of well-meaning individuals doing their best. Nevertheless, scholars point out certain characteristics which are visible across dysfunctional families.

**1. Unpredictability and Fear.** These are perhaps the most common signs. Fear usually stems from the unpredictable behaviour of one or more members of the family. This unpredictability may have to do with financial matters, emotional states or reactions to different situations. Family members become fearful of the actions of unpredictable member/s since aggression is often involved.

**2. Conflict.** While a certain amount of conflict is expected in a normal family, constant heated conflict is not. If a serious argu-



ment erupts over a slight misunderstanding on a frequent basis, then something is definitely not going right.

**3. Lack of Forgiveness and Communication.** Closely connected with conflict are the qualities of forgiveness and communication. Without these there is an erosion of love, respect, trust and peace. Families will gradually drift apart and will lack the motivation to come together and resolve their problems.

Being a healthy or unhealthy family is not something that happens overnight. It is human nature to make mistakes and have areas in our lives that are not perfect, and often times families may go through unhealthy periods due to certain circumstances. What really and ultimately defines a healthy or unhealthy family is how long they persist in mostly positive or mostly negative behavior patterns.

**ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT**

It does not take any effort at all to drift along from day to busy day without giving any time at all to thinking about whether or not our home atmosphere is healthy and allows members to flourish and enhance our personalities. We can get so in-

involved in budgeting for food, clothing, and health requirements that we tend to leave out the emotional and spiritual needs of the family, which are much greater than the other, material needs.

It is deplorable that we have enough time to work our job, seek a promotion, view our favourite sport or film or soap, shop, party or do whatever else that might remotely enthrall us, but we have little or no time to spend qualitatively as a family.

Healthy families have parents who spend time with their children both inside and outside the home and encourage them to participate in extracurricular activities, including sports and social events. They encourage their children to talk about their

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feelings. These types of parents also have a healthy self-esteem and teach their children to value



themselves. Here are a few things that can help us enhance the atmosphere of our homes:

♦ **Spending Time Together** – Presence is a prerequisite for family life. You cannot talk of a family if members are constantly away or missing, except for special reasons. Children regard the presence of parents as signs of care and connectedness. Parenthood is a vocation from God and the influence of parents on kids is their greatest legacy. Availability to talk about issues, experiences, plans etc. whether around the food table or elsewhere goes a long way to fostering health in family life.

♦ **Express Affirmation and Encouragement** – Showing love and care for one another is an important part of every relationship. Words and gestures have the power to make or break relationships. Often we take for granted our own feelings and those of the other person. How many people suffer silently be-



cause they feel unloved in a family, whether it is parents who feel that their child is not grateful for their hard work and sacrifice or children who feel that their parents do not understand them or have no time for them. Don't hesitate to say "I love you"; "You can do it"; "I am there for you". Families that express affirmation and encourage each other are more likely to be happier and achieve better results.

♦ **Keeping the Communication Lines Open** – Members must feel free to express their views, opinions, likes and dislikes in an atmosphere of freedom and respect. No one must feel suppressed or left out. Developing a habit of listening is crucial. Owning up for mistakes, apologizing and asking for forgiveness are very important. Parents must make themselves available to their children so that their children can open up and confide in them.

♦ **Praying and Working Together** – "A family that prays together stays together." Prayer is the adhesive that keeps the family together. It makes God the center and allows each member to draw from the rich fountain of God's love and grace. Prayer alone cannot sustain us, we need to work as well and in a home work is abundant. Though a lion's share of housework usually falls on the wife or mother, delegation of chores and responsibilities can enormously help improve the atmosphere of the home. When each one plays a significant part in fulfilling household duties, cohesiveness is fostered. □