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Creating a Healthy Family, Part 2

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Part 1 of this article described the five arenas affecting the health of an individual. This article describes how these arenas apply to the family unit.

Being healthy, as defined in Part 1, applies to families as well as to individual family members. Generally, a healthy family is one that functions to the best of its ability physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. As with an individual, different families have different circumstances. What is healthy for one family might not be healthy for another family.

By definition, families consist of multiple people. The individual health of each member impacts the overall health of the family unit. This is because each family member affects the social arena of the other family members. Furthermore, when one family member experiences a health challenge, it impacts the other members in a variety of ways. For example, if a parent is critically ill, it affects their spouse and children on multiple levels. They might feel sad or fearful (i.e. emotional arena), worry about what will happen to them if their loved one doesn't recover (i.e. mental arena), have a crisis of Faith (i.e. spiritual arena), or begin to feel physically ill because of the extreme stress of the situation (i.e. physical arena.)

One way to evaluate your family's health is to evaluate the status of each health arena for each family member. If you discover an overwhelming trend in a particular arena, the entire family would probably benefit by collectively addressing that arena. For instance, if most family members have a weight issue, the entire family would likely benefit by addressing the family's eating and exercise habits. Also, you can assess if an individual member has imbalances that adversely impact the entire family. For example, determine if someone has a schedule that disrupts the rest of the family.

Another way to assess the health of your family is to evaluate each arena for the entire family unit. The **physical arena** is anything that physically impacts the family members. In addition to diet and exercise, consider the physical environment. Is there enough space for everyone to comfortably coexist? Are there safe places for your children to



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play outside? Is anyone allergic to your pet? Making constructive changes in areas that adversely affect family members will help improve the overall health of your family.

The **mental arena** of a family consists of the beliefs they collectively share. These beliefs often become part of the mental chatter that creates the individuals' mental arena. Sometimes these ideas are consciously communicated, but often they are not. For example a family might have a belief that certain chores are appropriate for girls and others are appropriate for boys. They might assign house work based on this belief, but never discuss it with their children. Other examples of family beliefs might be, “Winners never quit and quitters never win,” “Family business is only to be discussed with family members,” and “Family members support each other no matter what.” When evaluating your family's mental arena, it is important to determine whether or not your family beliefs support each family member in being the best person they can be.

If you identify a belief that is not supportive, consider creating a new belief in that area. When you identify beliefs that are helpful, be mindful to consciously share them with your children, especially when they are young and establishing their own belief system. As children mature and develop their own beliefs, the family unit might have to make room for multiple opinions.

The **emotional arena** of a family is the arena of feelings. When evaluating this arena for your family, consider the general mood of the entire group as well as each person. For example, consider whether or not most family members are generally happy, depressed, fearful, or angry. Also consider whether or not stress and tension abound at family gatherings. Do you laugh and enjoy each other's company? Isolated issues between individual members can also impact the entire unit, so consider them too. Remember, a healthy arena is one that supports all family members in optimizing their personal health.

Your family's **social arena** consists of relationships, habits, and hobbies that affect the family. This includes practices such as eating meals together, having family activities, and reviewing your children's homework. When evaluating this arena, determine whether or not your family has practices and relationships that assist it in being balanced, supported, and united. Do you have time to enjoy each other's company? Do you do positive things together? Do you support each other? Do you have other support systems that would help you if there was a family emergency? Strengthening



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your family social arena assists individual family members in having healthy social arenas.

The **spiritual arena** for a family deals with the family’s values and philosophies. This is different than the family beliefs that create the mental arena. Family beliefs tend to deal with the “whats” of life. They tend to address what to do or not to do, what consequences occur for certain behaviors, what you believe is right or wrong, etc. Values tend to deal with the “whys” of life. They tend to address why you want your family members to do certain things, why you believe certain consequences occur, why you believe something is right or wrong, etc. This is also the arena where parents teach their children the values they need to develop their character. This arena helps children develop a paradigm that assists them in understanding the various experiences they will have throughout their life.

Many parents focus on their children’s health. Expanding your concept of health to include your family’s health will not only benefit your children, but will also benefit you. Ensuring your family unit has healthy practices will make it easier to help your child experience optimal health. Also, healthy children need healthy parents. Just like on a plane, in the event of an emergency you must put on your mask first. You can’t give your best to your children if your health is failing. So, be good to yourself. You deserve it and your family needs it!

Be well.