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of NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA



FAMILY STRENGTHS RESEARCH PROJECT

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*Although the eight qualities of
Australian Family Strengths Template
came as no surprise, their significance
is in the fact that they were spoken
and described by families rather
than theorised by researchers.*

Acknowledgements

The *Family Strengths Research Project* has been an interesting journey into what some Australian families think about the strengths of their families. This journey has been guided and boosted by many people, to whom we are grateful.

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Judi Geggie
Assistant Director
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Executive Summary

What gives a family the resilience to manage the ups and downs of life? Why is it that some families fall apart while others overcome crises and strengthen in the process? What are the qualities of these resilient families?

Over the past two decades, family researchers have searched for answers to these questions. John DeFrain and his colleagues have been studying family strengths in 27 countries. Their cross-cultural research identified a variety of qualities, which contributed to the family members' sense of personal worth and feelings of satisfaction in their relationships with each other. DeFrain and colleagues posit that strong families across the world tend to share six major qualities: commitment to the family; appreciation and affection for each other; positive communication patterns; enjoyable time together; a sense of spiritual being and connection; and the ability to successfully manage with stress and crisis.

Family strengths research has been absent in Australia until last year, when a fruitful partnership between John DeFrain, the Family Action Centre and the Federal Department of Family and Community Services was formed. To determine which qualities Australian families perceived as family strengths, the Family Action Centre in consultancy with John DeFrain initiated the *Family Strengths Research Project*. The Family Action Centre received funding from the Federal Department of Family and Community Services for two projects; the Building Family Strengths Project and the Family Strengths Theme Research.

The *Building Family Strengths Project* developed an *Australian Inventory of Family Strengths* consisting of 85 strength statements. Over 600 volunteers who identified themselves as members of a family with strengths filled out this inventory. The *Family Strengths Theme Research* entailed a qualitative analysis of family strengths stories provided by more than 70 family members in the form of open-question surveys and interviews.

The *Family Strengths Research Project* report outlines the structure and the results of both studies. Furthermore it discusses how the findings of both projects have been incorporated

to produce an *Australian Family Strengths Template*. This Template is founded on eight qualities, which were identified in the studies as family strengths. The qualities are *Communication, Togetherness, Sharing Activities, Affection, Support, Acceptance, Commitment, and Resilience*.

The Family Action Centre proposes that the *Australian Family Strengths Template* offers a framework from which a range of community resources can be developed and other research projects can be initiated. The report offers recommendations in both areas. Several projects are presented in which the *Template* is used as a guide to develop resources and programs, which will assist family health practitioners and families to recognise their own strengths and to use these qualities to strengthen their resilience against the challenges of family life. Other research projects are suggested which will continue to increase our understanding of family strengths.

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Introduction

The *Family Strengths Research Project* is the result of a fruitful collaboration between the Family Action Centre – a family focussed Centre with experience in working with families in the field, Dr John DeFrain – a leading Family Strengths researcher, and the Federal Government, who over the past 2 years has been developing policies and implementing strategies to strengthen family relationships (National Family Strategy, 1999).

The Family Action Centre (FAC) is based at the University of Newcastle, as part of the External Relations Division. The FAC's mission is to be a leader in developing programs and practices that support families and build communities. This is achieved through service, dissemination, research and consultation. The FAC's work is based on the fundamental principle that families are the cornerstone of our society and that it is in the best interest of society that government and community services continue to find ways to assist families in their efforts to strengthen their relationships.

*Families
are the
cornerstone of
our society*

Through its programs the FAC has developed strategies which support families and build communities. For example, in FAC's Caravan Project, professional staff assist and support caravan park families whose housing choice leads to their marginalisation. The FAC also runs programs, which place trained volunteers with families with young children (Home-Start) and school-aged children (Homelink) to assist, support and strengthen the family relationship. These programs recognise the value of the motivating, mentoring and modeling capabilities that volunteers provide when linked with families or students. It is through the Caravan Project, Home-Start and Homelink, that the FAC has come to acknowledge the empowering quality of focussing on family's strengths rather than family dysfunctionality. Volunteers and professional workers have found that families in crisis often neglect to see the strength they have and focus on the weaknesses that appear to become exaggerated in stressful situations. Furthermore, they have found it vital to encourage marginalised families to recognise their own strengths in order to empower positive actions and thoughts.

*Families in crisis
often neglect to
see the
strengths they
have*

In 1997, John DeFrain of the University of Nebraska approached the FAC regarding an opportunity to broaden his international study “Families Strengths Across Cultures”. John DeFrain had, at the time, spent over 20 years studying families strengths in 27 countries. Since 1974 more than 17,000 family members have participated in a collection of 53 studies by 63 researchers allied with Nick Stinnett, John DeFrain, and their colleagues

(DeFrain, 1999; Olsen & DeFrain, 2000; Stinnett & DeFrain 1985).

*Strong families
across the
world tend to
share six major
qualities.*

In summary, DeFrain and his colleagues have identified from their cross-cultural research a variety of qualities which contribute to the family members’ sense of personal worth and feelings of satisfaction in their relationships with each other. DeFrain and colleagues posit that strong families across the world tend to share six major qualities: commitment to the family; appreciation and affection for each other; positive communication patterns; enjoyable time together; a sense of spiritual well-being and connection; and the ability to successfully manage with stress and crisis.

It was decided that DeFrain’s academic standing and the FAC’s field experience, would make for a fruitful partnership. DeFrain made a one month visit to Australia in 1998 in order to determine the suitability and compatibility of FAC and returned to FAC in July-December, 1999 for his 6 month sabbatical.

It was during DeFrain’s visit in 1998 that a seminar was conducted by the Federal Department of Family and Community Services which raised interest for bureaucrats working on family, health, aged care and disabilities policies and strategies. Four senior researchers from the Australian Institute of Families Studies also attended. Examining the American Inventory of Family Strengths (see Appendix B), the participants recognised the value of the strengths approach but showed concern in regards to the language used in the inventory, as some items were not appropriate to Australian families and culture. It thus became apparent to many that it was timely for a study to be undertaken in Australia, which would investigate the strengths of Australian families.

This strengths approach was in line in the Federal Government’s National Families Strategy. “This strategy has provided an excellent opportunity to assemble evidence on what it is that influences outcomes for families – why some flourish in straitened or challenging circumstances; why others falter despite comfortable material surrounding and no obvious external threats” (Hambling, 1999, p. 2).

It was through the Federal Department of Family and Community Services that the FAC was granted funding in 1999 for a *Family Strengths Research Project* to develop an Australian inventory of family strengths, that would assist community agencies when working with families and assist families themselves.

The main aim of the *Family Strengths Research Project* was to increase our understanding of the strengths of Australian families. It was hoped that this project would provide the data necessary to develop curriculum for teachers to provide language and an understanding of family strength qualities for counsellors and social workers, and to provide the government with insights into family strengths, which in turn, could inform their policies to support and nurture families.

*Main aim ...
was to increase
our
understanding
of the strengths
of Australian
families*

The importance of government being well informed is reflected in the words of Helen Hambling (1999) “Social institutions and the social and economic environment created by specific government policy can clearly affect the resources available to families and therefore the strength or the ability of families to perform these functions” (p. 3).

The FAC gained funding in two stages for the *Family Strengths Research Project*.

1) “Building Family Strengths – A Resource for the Community (BFSP)

This project was funded by the Federal Department of Family and Community Services in February, 1999. This project aimed recruit nationally a large number of self-identified strong families or families with strengths to assess which qualities these families considered as family strengths in Australian culture. To carry out this assessment, this project aimed to develop for the first time an *Australian Inventory of Family Strengths*. It was hoped that the findings of this project could then become a resource for Community agencies and governmental policies that aim to strengthen families. The methodology and results of this project will be discussed in detail in Part A of this report.

2) “The Family Strengths Themes Research” (FSTR).

This project was funded by the Federal Department of Family and Community Services, National Families Strategy in March, 2000. This project aimed to conduct a qualitative analysis of the survey and interview material collected during the implementation of the BFSP Project. The qualitative analysis aimed to extract reoccurring strength themes in the family’s stories and to define the language used by families to describe these strengths. The methodology and results of this project will be discussed in detail in Part B of this report.

Throughout this report we refer to *family strengths* as "Those relationship patterns, interpersonal skills and competencies, and social and psychological characteristics which create a sense of positive family identity, promote satisfying and fulfilling interaction among family members, encourage development of the potential of the family group and individual family members, and contribute to the family's ability to deal effectively with stress and crisis" (Stinnett, Chesser & DeFrain, 1979). Other frequently used terms and abbreviations are explained in the Glossary of this report.

*family strengths...
a sense of
positive family
identity*

This report consists of six chapters. The history and the background of the *Family Strengths Research Project* has been outlined in this chapter. In Part A, the *Building Family Strengths Project* is discussed in detail with chapter 2 outlining its methodology and chapter 3 presenting its results. The *Family Strengths Theme Research* is discussed in Part B with chapter 4 outlining its methodology and chapter 5 presenting its results. The chapters in Part A and B are research-oriented in that the material presented is quite methodological and at times statistical. For those readers who have less interest in the technicalities of the research projects, a summary has been included on the title pages of Part A and B. The results of Part A and B are discussed in less technical, but in more practical terms in chapter 6. It is in this final chapter that the *Australian Family Strengths Template* is presented and recommendations are made in regards to the implementation of the *Template* in future family strengthening projects.

PART A

Building Family Strengths Project

Content

This section of the report details the development of the Australian Inventory of Family Strengths and the recruitment procedures of family members to fill out the inventory (Chapter 3). Furthermore it outlines the results of the participants' responses to the inventory (Chapter 4).

Abstract

For the *Building Family Strengths Project*, an Australian Inventory of Family Strengths was developed based on previous research, the American Family Strengths Inventory and focus group discussions. The Australian Inventory of Family Strengths consists of 85 positive statements about family life. The self identified strong families were asked to rate their agreement with each statement. Over 600 family members filled out the inventory. The results showed that the majority of respondents perceived their family as strong, happy, satisfying and loving. Furthermore, the results showed which statements of the inventory strong families agreed with. How these results are used is discussed in Chapter 6.

Methodology

2.1 Participants

The *Family Strengths Research Project* (FSRP) recruited over 600 family members through community networks and media news stories (see 2.3.2 for details). The volunteers identified themselves as members of a strong family and completed an inventory of family strengths, a survey, and/or participated in an interview and/or a focus group.

The *Building Family Strengths Project* (BFSP) is based on the data collected from the focus groups and the Australian Inventory of Family Strengths (N = 605).

The respondents who completed the inventory were predominately female (61%), married (65.3%), employed (70%), had post-school qualification (57%), and had family income between \$20,000 and \$60,000 p.a. (52%). 15% of the respondents were children aged between 12 and 17. In general, the sample group can be described as white Australian, middle class and well-educated. All respondents perceived their family unit as strong.

2.2 Measurements

For the FSRP, four methods of data collection were developed and implemented. The project started with six focus groups to gain insights into the qualities that Australian families identified as strengths. The focus group discussions were taped and transcribed, and informed the development of the other three methods of data collection, i.e. the Australian Inventory of Family Strengths, the Survey of Family Strengths, and the family interview format. The last two measurement tools will be discussed in more detail in Part B, as they formed the basis for the *Family Strengths Theme Research*. All tools were approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Newcastle.

2.2.1 Demographics

All measurement tools included a demographics sheet (Appendix C) asking the respondent for personal details such as gender, age, family role (mother/father), primary language, level of education, relationship status, employment status, occupation, occupation of partner, gross household income and age of children. Furthermore, the

respondents were given four family definitions and they were asked to select the one that best described their understanding of a family. They also had the option of writing their own definition. The aim of this exercise was to gain insight into the respondents' understanding of the term '*family*'. The four family definitions were the following.

1. The basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their own or adopted children.
2. People who are united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adoption and have a commitment to each other's well-being.
3. People who feel strongly connected by common threads, who share life experiences, and have a concern for each other's well-being.
4. People who live together and who are committed to each other, share values and life circumstances.

2.2.2 Inventory of Family Strengths

An 85 item inventory was developed for this study to assess which qualities were perceived as family strengths. The development of the inventory is discussed in 2.3.1.

The developed Australian Inventory of Family Strengths (see Appendix A) consisted of 85 positive statements preceded by the phrase 'In our family....' The participants were asked to rate their agreement with each statement on a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Definitely agree) to 6 (Definitely disagree). The respondents also had a 'Doesn't Apply' option.

The items represented six categories:

- sharing life together (14 questions)
- caring for each other (11 questions)
- communicating effectively with each other (11 questions)
- valuing each other (11 questions)
- connecting spiritually for well-being (14 questions)
- growing together through challenges (14 questions)

To represent each category, a global category item was included:

- We enjoy the times we share together
- We really care for each other
- Our communication is effective
- We value each other
- We have strong spiritual connections that enhance our well-being
- We look at challenges as opportunities for growth

Furthermore, four global items were added to assess in a relatively simple way whether the respondent was a member of a strong family. A negative response to any of these 4 items meant the inventory was unsuitable for the study, as it would not represent a strong family by our broad definitions. These items were:

- We love one another.
- Life in our family is satisfying to us.
- We are happy as a family.
- All things considered we are a strong family.

2.3 Procedure

2.3.1 Development of Inventory

The six major qualities of strong families defined by Stinnett and DeFrain (1985) were used as a guideline in the development of the inventory. These qualities are 1) commitment to the family; 2) appreciation and affection for the each other; 3) positive communication patterns; 4) enjoyable time together, 5) a sense of spiritual well-being and connection; 6) the ability to successfully manage stress and crisis. Based on these qualities, DeFrain and colleagues developed an American Family Strengths Inventory (DeFrain & Stinnett, 1985, 2000) (Appendix B). Initially, the Family Action Centre (FAC) intended to use this inventory for the FSRP. However, after conducting six focus groups in Newcastle (n = 4), Bendigo (n = 1) and Brisbane (n = 1), it became evident that some items in the American inventory were not suitable for Australian families. The participants of the focus groups identified which qualities they perceived as Australian family strengths. Although the concepts behind the identified strengths were similar to the concepts identified by DeFrain and colleagues (DeFrain & Stinnett, 1985, 2000; Olsen & DeFrain, 2000; Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985), the language to describe the concepts varied. It was therefore decided to develop an Australian Inventory of Family Strengths. Approximately 80% of the statements in the Australian Inventory of Family Strengths came from the American Family Strengths Inventory. The other 20% was based on the material collected from the focus groups. Furthermore, the Australian Inventory differs from the American in that it asks the respondents to rate their agreement with a statement on a Likert type scale, rather than identifying the statement as a strength or a growth area as is required in the American Inventory. This addition enhances the statistical interpretation of the inventory.

2.3.2 Recruitment

Participants in the Family Strengths Research Project were self-identified members of a 'family with strengths' or a 'strong family'. Through an extensive media campaign, families were invited 'to give their understanding of what makes a strong, happy Australian family'. In particular family members who belonged to 'a strong or happy Australian family' were invited (for some examples of recruitment see Appendix D). The families who responded were sent a package containing an information sheet, a consent form, demographics sheets, one to three Australian Inventories of Family Strengths, and one survey. To ensure confidentiality, the inventories and surveys were number-coded and separated from the consent form when returned.

The media campaign was carried out in two phases:

Phase I – August-November, 1999

- Publicity materials such as flyers, posters, information sheets and cover letters were designed and used to publicise the project and recruit participants.
- A University of Newcastle media liaison officer prepared and distributed 8 media releases nationally, targeting the major suburban newspapers.
- Approximately 500 letters (with copies of media releases) were sent to smaller community newspapers and magazines. Particular attention was given to ensure that media agencies for diverse cultural and ethnic groups were included.
- Approximately 200 letters were sent to child care and community agencies in the Hunter Valley.
- Letters or faxes were sent to 50 radio stations all over Australia. Community radio stations and stations catering to cultural groups were particularly targeted.
- A4 posters were distributed around shopping centres and the University campus.
- Dr John DeFrain conducted workshops and seminars in several venues around Australia promoting the project (Perth, Darwin, Port Macquarie, and Melbourne).
- Dr DeFrain and Judi Geggie (assistant director, FAC) were interviewed on radio, television, by newspapers, and magazines (see Appendix E).
- The Family Strengths Conference was organised in Newcastle in November 1999, to promote this study and research on family strengths. This conference also generated a great amount of interest from government and community agencies, individuals, cultural groups, radio, television, and newspapers.

1,500 packages (approximately 1,500 surveys and 3,600 inventories) were distributed.

Phase II – February, 2000

- A media release was sent to 200 newspaper and radio stations around Australia. Response to this media release was particularly successful in gaining the attention of rural newspapers and radio stations in NSW and Victoria. Judi Geggie (assistant director of FAC) was interviewed by eight rural radio stations (See Appendix E).
- Participants were mailed a package which contained the following items:
 - Introduction to FAC Brochure
 - One survey and three inventories
 - Memo stating when the survey and inventories needed to be completed and by whom
 - A memorabilia hunt leaflet requesting families to send in stories, pictures, cartoons, printed items, children's drawings, candid family photos, old newspaper clippings, etc.

By the end of Phase II, 618 packages (approximately 618 surveys and 1,854 inventories) were distributed.

In total, 2,118 packages (approximately 2,118 surveys and 5,454 inventories) were distributed.

2.3.3 Statistical Analysis

The data from the returned inventories was analysed with the aid of the statistical package SPSS. A factor analysis was conducted to determine whether particular items could be grouped into factors that represented different family strengths. Furthermore, the factor analysis was also used to investigate the possibility of shortening the inventory.

RESULTS

This chapter will present the results from the analysis of the Australian Inventory of Family Strengths. It will examine the family definitions the respondents gave preference to, the response percentages to the inventory's items, and the results of the factor analysis.

3.1 Family Definitions

In general, the respondents varied in their preferences for a particular family definition. None of the definitions was preferred above the other definitions by a majority of the respondents (see Table 3.1a). However, some interesting differences in preferences did occur when the responses were compared according to relationship status and age group (see Tables 3.1a and 3.1b). For example, none of the divorced participants chose the second definition and they preferred the third definition at a higher percentage rate, as did the respondents in defacto relationships. Table 3.1b shows that the over 45 group had less preference for the fourth definition, which had a higher response percentage in the youngest age group.

3.2 Inventory response percentages

In table 3.2 the response percentage to each item is presented. For parsimony and a general overview, the response percentages in this table are presented in three categories, i.e. Agreed, Disagreed and Doesn't Apply. In the 'Agreed' column, the response percentages to the three 'agree' options (definitely agree, agree and somewhat agree) have been collapsed together and the 'Disagreed' column contains the collapsed percentages to the three 'disagree' options (somewhat disagree, disagree, definitely disagree). Appendix G contains the response percentages for each Likert scale option.

Several observations can be made from Table 3.2, which are presented in point form below.

- Global item #81 shows that all participants agreed that their family was strong.

- The response percentages of the global items indicate that the majority of the participants agreed to some degree that their family was strong, happy, satisfying and loving. These results therefore suggest that the overall response percentages of the inventory tell us which items strong families can relate to and agree with.
- The majority of the respondents (60% to 100%) agreed with all the statements. The 'Agreed' percentages were predominately above 90%, with the exception of 18 items which had percentages between 60% and 89%. The lowest agreement (60.5%) was for item #60, "We often say, 'She'll be right, Mate'." The below 90% 'Agreed' responses fell predominately in the categories 'Connecting Spiritually for Well-being' and 'Growing Together through Challenges'.
- Only nine items of the inventory scored a higher than 5% (but no more than 12%) 'Doesn't Apply' rate. Five of these items, however, fell in the 'Growing Together through Challenges' category.

3.3 Factor Analysis

A factor analysis was conducted on the 85-item inventory. It was found that there was a high correlation between the items indicating that the items were measuring a similar phenomenon. The six categories on which the inventory was based did not appear as distinct factors. In fact, a principal component analysis using a varimax rotation extracted only four factors. These factors grouped together items from different categories. The results of the factor analysis are presented in Appendix H.

Table 3.1a Response rate to Family Definitions according to relationship status

Family Definition	Total Sample N = 605	Married n = 364	Defacto n = 22	Divorced n = 11	Single n = 132
The basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their own or adopted children.	14	14.6	9.1	9.1	13.6
People who are united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adoption and have a commitment to each other's well-being.	28	31	22.7	0	22.7
People who feel strongly connected by common threads, who share life experiences, and have a concern for each other's well-being.	24	20.6	40.9	45.5	28.8
People who live together and who are committed to each other, share values and life circumstances.	19	17.3	13.6	9.1	24.2
All of the above	3	4.4	0	9.1	.8
Own definition	8	8.2	9.1	18.2	6.8
Other, i.e. chose two or three of the given definitions	4	3.8	4.5	9.1	3

Table 3.1b Response rate to Family Definitions according to age group

Family Definition	12-17 n = 75	18-25 n = 52	26-35 n = 84	36-45 n = 154	46-55 n = 124	56+ n = 63
The basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their own or adopted children.	9.3	15.4	8.3	9.7	20.2	23.8
People who are united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adoption and have a commitment to each other's well-being.	24	23.1	33.3	25.3	33.1	27
People who feel strongly connected by common threads, who share life experiences, and have a concern for each other's well-being.	25.3	36.5	21.4	24.7	21.8	22.2
People who live together and who are committed to each other, share values and life circumstances.	28	19.2	22.6	22.1	12.1	7.9
All of the above	1.3	0	0	4.5	4	6.3
Own definition	9.3	1.9	11.9	7.8	6.5	7.9
Other, i.e. chose two or three of the given definitions	2.7	3.8	2.4	5.8	2.4	4.8

Table 3.2 Inventory response percentages

Global items

	Item	Agreed	Disagreed	Doesn't apply
10	We love one another.	99.8	.2	0.20
41	Life in our family is satisfying to us.	99.7	.2	0.20
46	We are happy as a family.	99.8	.2	
81	All things considered we are a strong family.	100.0		

Global Category items

	Item	Agreed	Disagreed	Doesn't apply
38	Our communication is effective.	95.7	4.3	
40	We enjoy the times we share together.	99.8	.2	
50	We really care for each other.	99.2	.7	0.20
57	We value each other.	99.5	.3	0.20
78	We look at challenges as opportunities for growth.	95.5	3.8	0.70
84	We have strong spiritual connections that enhance our well-being.	74.2	16.7	9.10

Sharing Life Together

	Item	Agreed	Disagreed	Doesn't apply
1	We like to give each other a chance to do new things.	99.3	.2	0.50
2	We have a number of common interests.	96.7	3.3	
3	We like to have fun together.	99.5	.5	
8	We feel comfortable with each other.	99.5	.5	
9	We enjoy hearing our grandparents' stories about the past.	84.7	3.8	11.50
14	We enjoy simple, inexpensive family activities.	98.2	1.2	0.70
16	We like having a place we call 'home'.	99.5	.3	0.20
21	We feel strongly connected to each other.	99.5	.5	
22	Hanging out together builds strong relationships.	95.5	3.3	1.20
23	We have lots of good times together.	98.7	1.3	
28	We often laugh with each other.	98.2	1.8	
35	Observing family rituals and customs is important to us.	87.8	7.5	4.70
67	We enjoy sharing our memories with each other.	97.0	2.3	0.70
83	We enjoy having unplanned, spontaneous activities together.	96.0	2.8	1.20

Caring for Each Other

	Item	Agreed	Disagreed	Doesn't apply
11	We are able to forgive each other.	99.3	.2	0.50
12	We enjoy helping each other.	98.3	1.7	
19	We like keeping our promises to each other.	98.7	.5	0.80
20	We like to show affection to each other.	96.8	3.0	0.20
24	We feel close to each other.	98.8	1.2	
26	We like to be kind to each other.	99.2	.8	
32	We like to hug each other.	92.0	7.2	0.80
36	We enjoy being thoughtful of each other.	97.8	2.2	
42	We wait for each other without complaining.	83.8	15.5	0.70
73	We grow stronger because we love each other.	99.2	.5	0.30
82	We give each other enough time to complete necessary tasks.	95.2	3.3	1.50

Communicating Effectively with Each Other

	Item	Agreed	Disagreed	Doesn't apply
4	We like to share our feelings with each other.	94.2	5.8	
13	It is easy to cue into each other's feelings.	95.2	4.8	
15	We like talking openly with each other.	96	3.8	0.20
17	We listen to each other.	98.8	1.2	
25	We respect each other's point of view.	98.7	1.3	
27	Talking through issues is important to us.	97.0	2.7	0.30
37	We give each other a chance to explain ourselves.	96.7	3.2	0.20
43	We enjoy our family discussions.	96.7	2.7	0.70
48	We share jokes together.	99.2	.8	
51	Putdowns are rare.	89.3	10.1	0.70
58	Sarcasm is not generally used.	82.5	17.5	0.50

Valuing Each Other

	Item	Agreed	Disagreed	Doesn't apply
6	Responsibilities are shared fairly.	87.6	11.2	1.20
31	Everyone gets their say in making decisions.	94.7	4.5	0.80
34	Individuals are allowed to make their own choices.	96.7	3.0	0.30
39	We allow each other to be ourselves.	99.5	.5	
47	We find it easy to trust each other.	98.0	1.8	0.20
52	We like to do things for each other that make us feel good about ourselves.	94.6	4.4	1.00
53	We have reasonable expectations of each other.	97.5	2.0	0.50
54	We have a high regard for each other.	99.3	.7	
55	We respect the roles each of us play in the family.	98.5	1.2	0.30
56	We are honest with each other.	99.2	.8	
85	We accept that each of us has different ways of doing things.	96.8	3.2	

Connecting Spiritually for Well-being

	Item	Agreed	Disagreed	Doesn't apply
7	We feel a strong connection with the land.	72.8	19.1	8.10
30	We have a hopeful attitude towards life.	99.0	.8	0.20
33	Our home feels like a sanctuary for all of us.	97.7	2.0	0.30
45	We have a strong sense of belonging.	98.7	1.2	0.20
59	We enjoy looking at our family history.	88.2	9.6	2.20
60	We find it easy to make plans and then to carry them out.	90.4	9.5	0.20
61	We feel strong connections with our ancestors.	73.4	22.9	3.70
62	There is a feeling of safety and security.	99.0	1.0	
63	We feel connected with nature and the world around us.	88.0	9.1	2.80
64	It is easy to share our values and ideas with each other.	98.3	1.5	0.20
65	There is a sense of peace.	96.2	3.3	0.50
74	We believe love is a powerful force that keeps us together.	97.7	2.0	0.30
76	We benefit in many ways from our belief in a higher being.	72.0	17.8	10.20
80	Our personal religious and moral beliefs are compatible with each other.	88.7	6.2	5.20

Growing Together through Challenges

	Item	Agreed	Disagreed	Doesn't apply
5	A crisis has helped us to grow closer together.	81.8	6.9	11.40
18	We find solutions to our problems when we talk about them.	97.7	2.0	0.30
29	We try to change the things we can.	96.1	2.4	1.50
44	We can work together to solve very difficult family problems.	94.5	2.7	2.80
49	A crisis helps make our relationships strong.	86.6	4.2	9.20
66	We often say, 'She'll be right, Mate'.	60.5	31.2	8.30
68	We are able to face daily issues confidently.	98.7	1.2	0.20
69	We like to support each other.	99.3	.7	
70	Our friends are there when we need them.	94.8	4.3	0.80
71	A crisis makes us stick closer together.	89.3	3.5	7.20
72	We always find something good comes from a crisis.	83.4	8.9	7.70
75	We can make changes in our plans to meet changing circumstances.	98.8	.7	0.50
77	We have the courage to take risks that will improve things for our family.	92.6	5.4	2.00
79	We feel it is important to accept the things we cannot change.	94.0	5.3	0.70

PART B

Family Strengths Theme Research

Content

This section of the report explains in detail how the qualitative analysis was conducted on the surveys and interviews (Chapter 4). It explains the difference between the *General Theme Analysis* and the *Focussed Theme Analysis*, and what the language analysis entailed. The results of the qualitative analysis are outlined in Chapter 5. First of all the seven extracted strength themes are defined and illustrated with quotations from families' stories. The challenges families face are then discussed. And finally, the coping strategies families used to deal with crises are outlined.

Abstract

For the *Family Strengths Theme Research* two sample groups were selected. For the first sub-sample, 55 surveys or interviews were selected based on the demographic details of the respondents, which had to approximate the Australian population to some degree. These 55 text documents were used for the *General Theme Analysis*, which aimed to extract recurring themes in the stories of families regardless of background, family structure or status. For the second sub-sample, 14 sole parent families and 10 blended families were selected. Their surveys or interviews were used for the *Focussed Theme Analysis* to determine whether themes could be extracted specific to that family-type.

The qualitative analysis resulted in the extraction of seven strength themes; *Communication, Togetherness, Sharing Activities, Affection, Support, Acceptance* and *Commitment*. Furthermore, the analysis identified several recurring challenges faced by families, such as communication breakdown, parenting problems and relationship dynamics. The coping strategies that families used to deal with these challenges were also identified and these included communication, support from each other and others, and sticking it out together. Sole parents found strength in the support from extended family and positive co-parenting arrangements. Blended families recognised the commitment to the stepfamily as a strength and emphasised the importance of time to strengthen the bond between the stepfamily members.

Methodology

4.1 Participants

The *Family Strengths Research Project* (FSRP) recruited over 600 family members through community networks and media news stories. The respondents, who volunteered their participation, identified themselves as members of a family with strengths, and completed an inventory of family strengths, a survey, and/or participated in an interview.

The *Family Strengths Themes Research* (FSTR) is based on the qualitative data collected during the FSRP, i.e. the surveys (n = 179) and the interviews (n = 33), which from now on will be referred to as ‘text documents’.

The respondents, who completed a survey or participated in an interview, were predominantly female (76.4%), white Australian (85.8%), employed (63.2%), had post-school qualifications (75.2%), and had a family income between 20,000 and 60,000 p.a. (51 %) (see table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Demographic characteristics of total and sub-samples

Sample	Gender %		Education Level %		In Paid Employment %
	Male	Female	High School qualifications	Post-school qualifications	
Total	23.6	76.4	24.8	75.2	63.8
GTA	25.5	74.5	51.1	48.9	61.8
FTA Sole Parents	0	100	28.6	71.4	57.1
FTA Blended Families	0	100	40	60	70

Due to the qualitative nature of the research and time constraints, it was decided to select a sub-sample for the *General Theme Analysis* (see 4.3.1 for explanation). The Department of Family and Community Services (the funding body) requested the selection to be based on a representative sampling technique. Therefore, 55 text documents were selected, which approximated the Australian population on the following demographic characteristics.

- a) *Family types*: the Australian Bureau of Statistics makes a distinction between family types depending on their place in the cycle of formation (ABS, 1997). Families generally start off as an *intact family* (two natural parents with child(ren)) and may become a *one-parent family* following a marriage breakdown. “If the lone parent re-partners, the resulting family is classified as a *step family*. When children are born to the new couple relationship a *blended family* is formed” (ABS, 1997, p.1). 74% of the families with children aged 0 to 17 are intact families, 8% are step/blended families and 18% are one-parent families (ABS, 1999a). These percentages were used as selection criteria to determine the family type distribution in the sample, which resulted in 41 intact families, 10 one-parent families and 4 step/blended families.
- b) *Relationship status* (married versus defacto ratio): 5.3% of the couples in intact families have a defacto marriage (ABS Census Data, 1996). This percentage resulted into 2 cases out of the 41 intact families.
- c) *Education level*: in 1997, 40% of the Australian population aged between 15-64 had post-school qualifications (ABS, 1999b). In our sample, only 21 participants living in intact families had high school qualifications. All these cases were included in the sub-sample. To maintain a reasonable sample size, another 20 intact family members were selected with post-school qualifications, resulting in a sub-sample in which 51% of participants had high school qualifications. The desired 60% could not be achieved without reducing the sample size considerably.
- d) *Family income level*: in representation of the Australian families, 50% of the couple families selected had a dual income. Furthermore, families were selected on their family income level according to the ABS income distribution table (ABS Census Data, 1996) (see table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Income level of total and sub-samples

Income level in %	< 20000	20001 – 40000	40001 – 60000	> 60000
Total	15.1	27.1	27.1	30.7
GTA Couple Families	2.4	28.6	23.8	45.2
FTA Sole Parents	50	21.4	28.6	0
FTA Blended Families	11.1	33.3	33.3	22.2

The obtained sub-sample consisted of 41 females (74.5%) and 14 males (25.5%) aged between 22 and 53. The respondents of the selected sole parent and blended families were all female. The gender distribution in the selected intact families was 34.15% male and 65.85% female. 11% of the sub-sample had a non-Australian ethnic background.

For the *Focussed Theme Analysis*, (which entails an in-depth study of sole parent and blended families, see 4.3.3) all respondents living in a sole-parent family (n = 14) and in a blended family (n = 10) were selected. All respondents were white-Australian females, aged between 32 and 53. See tables 4.1 and 4.2 for demographic details.

4.2 Text Documents

For this study, the surveys and interviews of the selected sub-samples were transcribed and analysed with the aid of QSR NUD*IST software.

The Family Strengths Survey was a structured questionnaire with open-ended questions asking the participant to write stories and comments on family structure, family strengths, challenges, stress and crisis management, areas of growth and improvement, commitment, communication patterns, affection, family time, spirituality and role division. In response to these questions, the participants wrote anything from a paragraph to 4 pages of text.

The interviews were semi-structured in that the interviewer worked from a set of probes focussing on the same areas as the above-mentioned survey.

4.3 Procedure

The research methodology used is also known as manifest analysis in that the analysis was not based on or directed by any theories, but was based on the stories of the families. The extracted themes were inductive in that they were formulated from the responses rather than pre-determined by the question-structure. The manifest analysis of the text documents involved several stages of evaluation and revision. In each stage a subset of cases was selected and analysed on content.

The first subset of 7 cases (from diverse demographic backgrounds) was used to extract themes per case and to compare the extracted themes from each case with other cases. Based on this subset an initial coding system was devised consisting of 7 major reoccurring themes. The second subset of 9 cases was used to evaluate the devised coding system and to improve the theme structure. The preliminary results of the content analysis of the first and second subset were presented to the funding body. Based on these results, the research aims were formulated and determined, and are presented below.

4.3.1 General Theme Analysis

The *General Theme Analysis* (GTA) entailed a procedure in which the 55 text documents of a sub-sample were coded according to the devised theme structure. The focus of this analysis was to determine which themes reoccurred in the stories of families with strengths regardless of background, family structure or status. In particular, reoccurring themes were extracted which described the strengths, the challenges and the coping strategies of the families. On regular intervals, the coding procedure was checked, evaluated and revised.

4.3.2 Language Analysis

Within each extracted family strength, a language analysis was conducted to determine the terminology families used to describe this strength. The aim of this analysis was to extract frequently used terms, expressions and verbalisations, which then could be used in the communications campaign of the Stronger Families & Communities Strategy.

4.3.3 Focussed Theme Analysis

The funding body defined particular family groups within the sample as interest areas, i.e. sole parent families, step/blended families, and rural families, and worthy of an in-depth theme analysis. Due to time constraints, a *Focussed Theme Analysis* (FTA) was conducted on 14 sole parent families and 10 blended families, but not on rural families. The aim of this analysis was to assess whether different themes from the GTA could be extracted that may be related to issues specific to that family type. This assessment was achieved through a content analysis and a theme extraction process similar to that outlined above in 4.3.1.

Results

5.1 Theme structure

The theme structure developed at the beginning of the project remained quite stable over time. At regular intervals, the rate at which each theme was occurring was measured. Any inconsistencies were followed up through revision and establishing clear theme boundaries. After all the text documents were coded, an intensive revision and evaluation of the theme structure was carried out. As figure 5.1 shows, most themes remained fairly stable over time and after the final revision. The exceptions to this, however, are the themes *Togetherness* and *Sharing Activities*. The increase in the occurrence of these themes is due to several factors, such as an increasing sensitivity to the material, a clearer definition of the themes, and a maturity of the coding methodology.

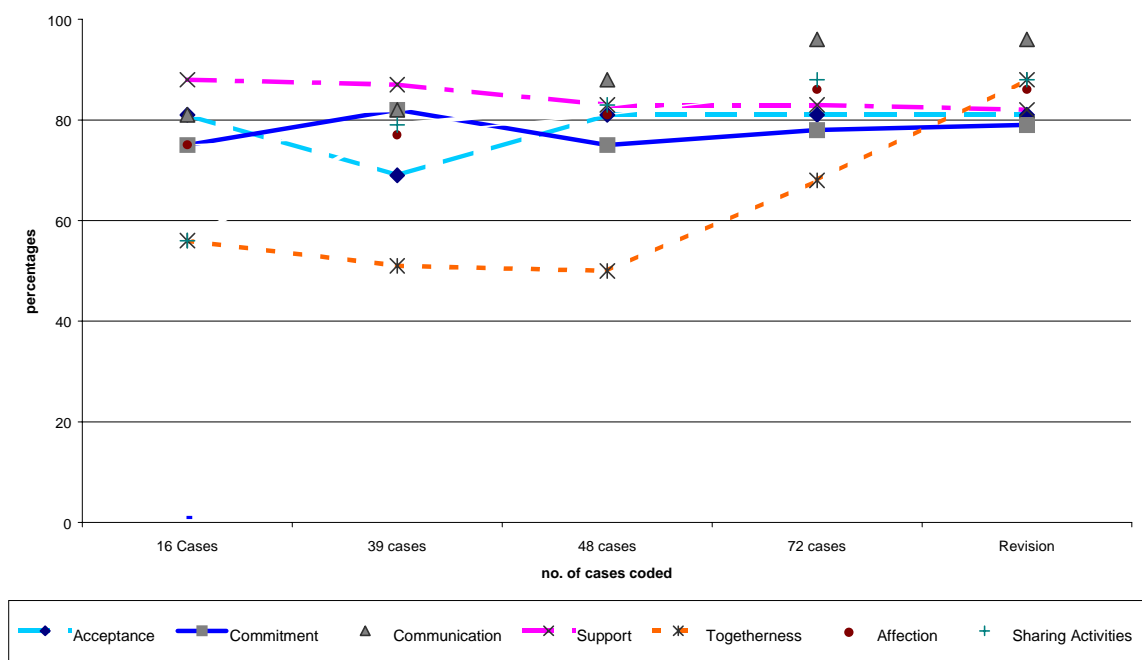


Figure 5.1 The rate of occurrence over time

The stability in the rate of occurrence over time reinforces the main premise of qualitative research, that the number of cases becomes irrelevant if the quality of the text is high. It can therefore be postulated that the rate of occurrence of each theme in the *General Theme Analysis* (GTA) sample (n = 55) would remain stable even if more cases were added to the sample. However, due to the number of *Sole Parent Family* (SPF) cases (n = 14) and *Blended Family* (BF) (n = 10) cases, it is important to view the rate of occurrences in these samples as indications rather than as stable factors.

5.2 Extracted Themes

Seven major strength themes were extracted from the family's stories; *Communication*, *Acceptance*, *Sharing Activities*, *Togetherness*, *Affection*, *Commitment* and *Support*. (The names given to these strengths correspond as much as possible to the language used by the respondents.) Although these strengths will be presented in this chapter as distinct themes, it is important to note that these strengths are intrinsically connected and often overlap with each other. For example, most families use *Communication* to express and demonstrate the other strengths. Most families derive a sense of family or belonging from the strengths *Togetherness* and *Commitment*. And the strength *Togetherness* is often expressed through *Affection*, *Sharing Activities*, *Commitment* and *Communication*. (All strength themes are defined and discussed in more detail in 5.3)

Under the headings of the major themes *Communication*, *Commitment*, *Togetherness* and *Support*, eight sub-themes were extracted (see table 5.1). These themes described a distinct feature of the major theme. Their rate of occurrence was interesting enough to define them as a sub-theme, but not high enough to consider them as a major theme (rate of occurrence ranged between 29% and 69%). Initially, *Sharing Activities* and *Affection* were sub-themes of *Togetherness*, but their rate of occurrence became significant enough to define them as major themes.

Furthermore, in the *Focussed Theme Analysis*, four strength themes were extracted which described a particular strength for that family type. In the *Sole Parent Families* (SPF) two themes reoccurred: *Support from Extended Family and Friends* and *Positive Co-Parenting*. Likewise, in the *Blended Families* (BF) two strength themes reoccurred: *Commitment to the Stepfamily* and *Time Bonds* (see 5.4 for in-depth discussion on these themes). In table 5.1 the major and sub-themes are presented for each sub-sample.

Table 5.1 Strength themes and their rate of occurrence in %

<i>Strength Themes</i>	GTA 55 cases	SPF 14 cases	BF 10 cases
Communication	98	93	90
* Humour	29	50	30
* Honesty	27	43	40
Togetherness	89	71	80
* Sharing Values	69	57	60
Sharing Activities	91	93	80
Affection	87	79	100
Support	78	93	100
* External Support	29	43	30
Acceptance	78	79	100
Commitment	81	64	70
* to Partner	31	0	50
* to the Children	29	43	30
* to Extended Family	27	50	30
* to the Community	51	43	30
Support from Extended Family & Friends		57	
Positive Co-Parenting		36	
Commitment to Stepfamily			70
Time Bonds			50

5.3 Strength Themes: Definitions and Language Analysis

In the following, each strength theme that was extracted in the *General Theme Analysis* (GTA) will be defined and illustrated with quotes. Within each theme that had a rate of occurrence above 60% (see table 5.1), the key words/expressions used by the respondents to describe this strength will be highlighted. Furthermore, in the content analysis, it became apparent that some strength themes were also viewed as coping strategies (see 5.6). Therefore, descriptions will be offered of those strength themes that were identified as coping strategies by more than a quarter of the sample. Finally, the differences between the 3 sub-samples for each theme will be discussed. In studying the comparisons between the groups, it is important to keep in mind that the GTA sample consists of 41 nuclear families, 10 sole parents and 4 blended families, and therefore does not represent a particular family type as the SPF and BF sample do.

5.3.1 First Strength - Communication

Definition:

Interacting with each other in a predominately open, positive, honest, and frequent manner. The family members feel listened to and heard. Family members are encouraged to express their feelings and to speak up when something is upsetting them. Some families like to include all family members in discussions about the family's future.

Communications patterns in our family could best be described as open and honest. We all have input and all get a chance to put our point across. We do a good job communicating with each other because we are aware that you will be listened to. Communicating problems and coming up with solutions are handled quickly. (Sole parent)

We talk very freely about our joys, concerns and plans. We talk often on the phone if we can't get together. We share a freedom to discuss anything that comes our way whether it be a relationship, worry or joy, a job hassle, a study problem, a health problem or something political. (Mother of nuclear family)

Our children are allowed to express their anger within defined boundaries. They are listened to and acknowledged. We try to encourage positive behaviour and minimise negative behaviour. (Mother of nuclear family)

Key words and expressions (in order of frequency):

- **Talk:**

'We talk things through'

'It's routine that if we've had any conflict we talk about it, and don't let it continue on'

'We sit down and talk together when there is a decision to be made that affects the whole family'

'We always talk about their day when they come home from school and we always sit together for dinner and talk'

- **Communicate/Communication:**

'G. & I communicate very well and this has been our main strength'

'We try to communicate well – listen when another is speaking, maintain eye contact, speak at their level, etc.'

'I got through it by being able to communicate to my family'

'Communication is probably our major strength'

'We tend to focus on our communication as one of the most important things that glues us together'

- **Discuss:**

'Any major event is discussed 'round table''

'My decision to go to Uni was discussed as a family'

'We discuss problems and everyone has input'

- **Positive:**

'Between us, the communication is always positive'

'If we want to 'criticise' we try to put a positive spin on it'

'We are determined to be positive in our communication with each other'

- **Listen/hear:**

'Willing to hear the hard stuff without taking it personally'

'Listen to each other without blaming if things get hard'

'Each person has a right to be heard'

'We coped with all that by listening to each other's worries and fears'

- **Tell:**

'Most of the time, we tell each other what a good job the other has done'

'The children are quite willing and keen to tell us things'

'I know how K. feels about these things because she tells me'

- **Open(ly):**
 ‘By talking about it all openly and helping each other, the whole situation was manageable’
 ‘We talked openly with the children about my condition’
 ‘Tucking into bed is also a good ‘open talking’ time’
- **Express:**
 ‘We express our feelings to each other’
 ‘The children are learning to express all their emotions and that it’s okay to be mad, angry, or sad within defined boundaries’
 ‘Feeling safe to express what we experience and to know we will be heard’
- **Honest:**
 ‘We know that we can be totally honest with each other’
 ‘...as long as you have someone you can speak honestly to’
- **Sit down and:**
 ‘We sat down and wrote out the pros and cons lists’
 ‘We sat down and talked things through’
 ‘We always sit down for our evening meal and talk about our day’

Communication as a coping strategy:

Communication was identified in the GTA and BF samples as the most common coping strategy families use to deal with a challenge. (Ironically, keeping the communication up to the family standards is also indicated as the main challenge in most families (see table 5.3)).

It’s routine that if we’ve had any conflict we talk about it, and don’t let it continue on. We just try and resolve things as we go. (Sole parent)

We all agreed that some days were just ‘awful’ and even managed to laugh a lot in between. By talking about it all openly and helping each other, the whole situation was manageable. We became closer as a result I think. (...)I’m certain good communication is at the core of being able to cope with crises. Whenever there is any kind of stress, we always talk about it as best we can, or talk to someone else outside the family. It doesn’t really matter, as long as you have someone you can speak honestly to. (Mother of nuclear family.)

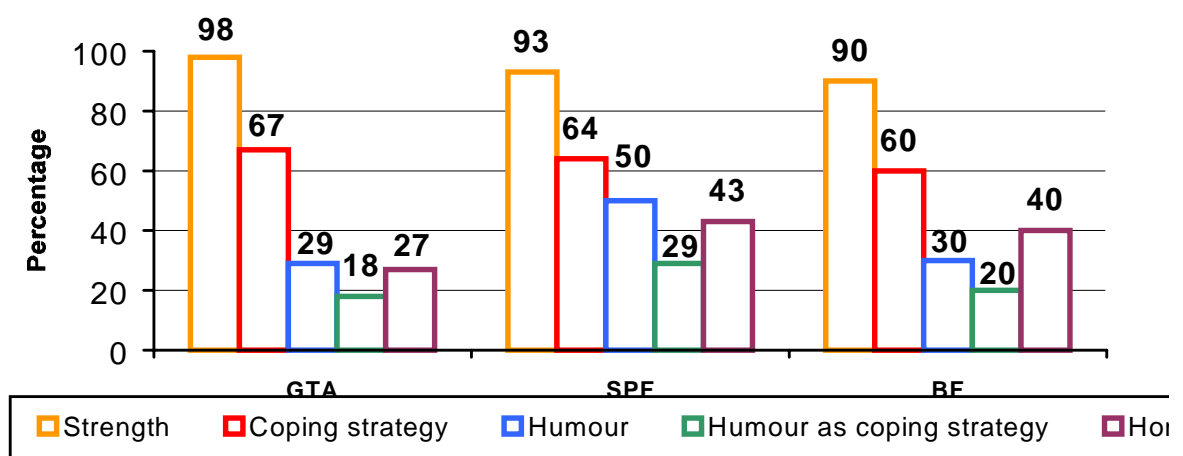


Figure 5.2 Rate of occurrence of *Communication* and its sub-themes as strengths and as coping strategies.

Comparison between samples:

Communication had a high rate occurrence for all sample groups and was considered as an important coping strategy by most families.

Using *Humour* in family communication and as a coping strategy had a higher rate of occurrence in the SPF sample than in the other samples.

The occurrence of honesty was higher in the SPF and the BF samples than in the GTA sample. This could indicate that in the formation of new family structure open, honest communication becomes necessary to overcome any misunderstandings.

5.3.1.1 Humour (sub-theme of *Communication*)

Definition:

Using and valuing humour in the family communication, e.g. with jokes, ‘mucking around’, and highlighting the funny side of a situation.

We laugh a lot (Sole parent, Mother of blended family, Mother of nuclear family)

We quite often laugh until we are all crying and the original joke is forgotten. (Mother of nuclear family)

Humour as a coping strategy:

Besides the joy, laughter and fun they derive from their sense of humour with each other, some families acknowledge it as a coping strategy (especially in the SPF sample). In these families, humour is used to lower the stress levels and some families like to use their sense of humour to see the funny side of a difficult situation.

Even through difficult times we have always tried to find something to laugh about. (Mother of nuclear family)

(Our) sense of humour gives our family the ability to laugh at ourselves, not get too stressed and find creative solutions to problems. (Sole parent)

The laughter can sometimes release some of the pain. (Mother of nuclear family)

5.3.1.2 Honesty (sub-theme of *Communication*)

Definition:

Truthful and open communication, which in turn fosters trust and prevents misunderstandings. Some families believe *Honesty* is an essential family value and parents encourage children to maintain this value.

All four of us have been brought up to tell the truth no matter what the consequences. If you have done something wrong, speak up and stop the problem from getting bigger. If something is worrying one of us, we encourage each other to speak up and tell it like it is. We all talk and share the problem. (Father of nuclear family)

Sometimes, the truth is not what we want to hear, but at least we all know where we stand with each other. (Mother of blended family)

5.3.2 Second Strength - Togetherness

Definition:

This theme was particularly challenging to define, because it describes an intangible essence of Australian family life. After several redefinition stages, it was finally defined as the ‘invisible glue’ that bonds the family and gives the family members a sense of belonging.

Invisible Elastic is another strength. That’s the best way I can think of to describe the bond between us – the members of the immediate family plus the rapidly extending family (partners and children). This bond means that we always get together for traditional family occasions and even when someone lives a big distance away (as I do) we all keep in touch with letters and phone calls, etc. When I think about it this is the biggest strength because this keeps us together through good times and bad! (Mother of nuclear family)

Togetherness is substantiated by;

- ♦ **teamwork**: sharing the load of daily living and dealing with the ups and downs of family life as a unit,
Looking back, it was a tough year but I think we share a cohesion, sense of teamwork, that we support whoever is down. (Mother of nuclear family)
My understanding of a family is sharing workload, responsibilities to family and work, respect for each other, caring attitude, being there for each other. (Mother of nuclear family)
- ♦ **availability**: being there for each other,
A sense that family will be there. Sometimes in families we are tied up with our own ‘things’, but if there is a need, family comes first. We are able to draw on that sense of family being the cornerstone of stability. (219)
- ♦ **involvement**: sharing each other’s interests and life events,
... we consciously act as a family in that we try to do a lot of things together. Simple things like sitting down to the evening meal together at the kitchen table, having holiday times together as often as possible and supporting each other in our daily activities as well as celebrating each person’s sporting participation. (Father of nuclear family)
- ♦ **rituals**: e.g. having meals together, having a special family evening every week or fortnight,

celebrating birthdays and Christmas according to the family tradition. 'Ritualised' *Togetherness* occurred in 31% of the GTA sample and 29% of the SP sample. Interestingly, only one *Blended Family* referred to 'ritualised' *Togetherness*. In blended families two sets of family traditions have to be integrated and adapted, which can take time.

As previously mentioned, mealtimes are always together and I think our ability to enjoy food and discuss anything at this time is a bonding time'. (Mother of nuclear family)

Key words and expressions (in order of frequency):

- **Together:**

'Whatever we do we are together'

'We are a family, we are together'

'The challenge was answered by all the family pulling together'

'We have always put an emphasis on doing things together'

- **Share:**

'We share time/interests/beliefs/evening meals together'

'We shared the load and were able to support one another'

'They shared their grief with each other'

'We share responsibilities/jobs/roles/workload'

- **Close/Closeness:**

'We are so close and there is a very strong bond between us'

'It was our closeness that led us to decide to have our daughter'

'The hardship/crisis/challenges brought us close together'

- **Bond:**

'We are very well bonded; we've been over mountains and in very low gullies and we just hold hands and ride out the storm'

'After a close shave in a car the family bonded together closely'

'There is a very strong bond between us'

- **Being there:**

'We'll be there for each other come hell or high water'

'Mum has always been there for us'

'We talk and are there for one another in a crisis'

'The commitment family members have for each other is demonstrated by always being there'

- **Sense of belonging/family**

'We provided lots of opportunities for the children to develop a sense of belonging'

'Our strong sense of family helped us overcome the crisis'

'Our extended family gives us a sense of belonging'

Togetherness as a coping strategy:

Togetherness is viewed as a coping strategy in all sample groups, in that the family 'pulls together' to form a united front to deal with the challenges that come their way.

Interviewer: "What happens when things are not working well in your family or there is a crisis?"

Mother: It's like the three musketeers, it's like all for one and one for all. (Sole parent)

...having no family support we had to rely on each other and stick together because it was basically up to us to keep going. (Mother of nuclear family)

We rally together in a crisis. (Mother of nuclear family)

When someone in our family has a problem (...) we pull together to find the solution. (...) We have found that the only way to face life is to do it together no matter where we are and to always talk everything through, not just with T and I, but the children too and to listen to each other, not just the words, but the thoughts and feelings behind the words. (Mother of nuclear family)

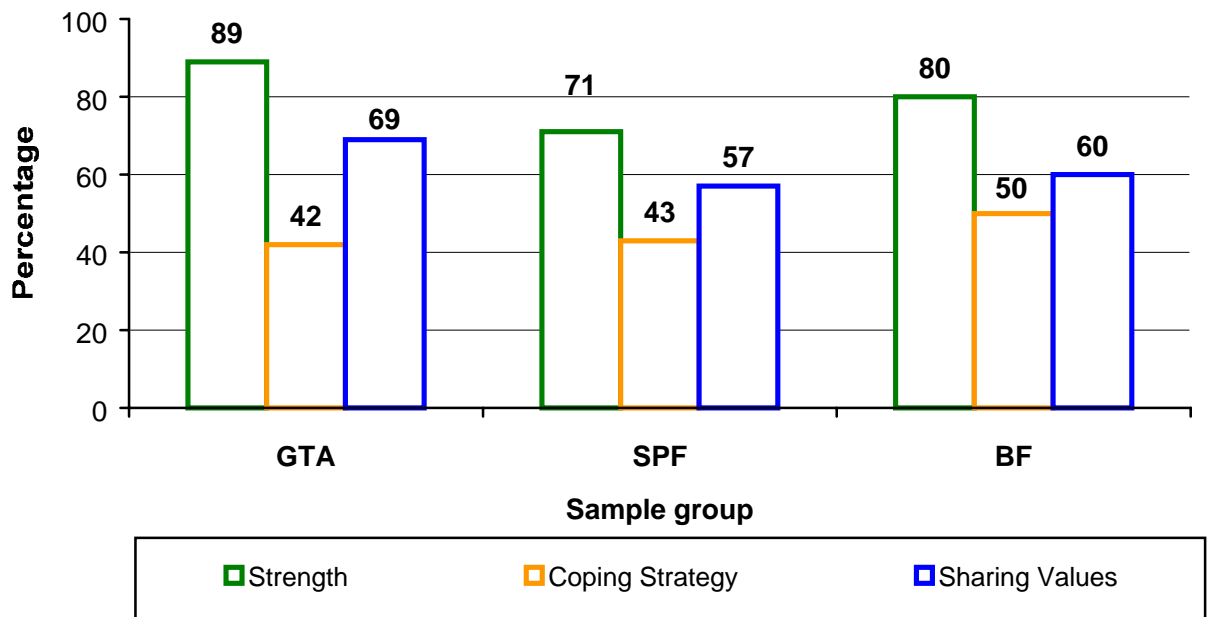


Figure 5.3 Rate of occurrence of *Togetherness* as a strength and as a coping strategy and *Sharing Values* as a strength

Comparison between samples:

Occurrence of *Togetherness* is lower for the SPF sample compared to the other samples, which may be due to the breakdown in the partner relationship. In all sample groups, at least 80% of the families that mentioned *Togetherness* referred to *Shared Values*, which suggests a strong link between these themes.

5.3.2.1 Sharing values (sub-theme of *Togetherness*)

Definition:

Having similar feelings about what is important in life, similar beliefs, a code of ethics and/or a spiritual base, which gives the family a sense of belonging or togetherness. *Sharing Values* could be seen as the main ingredient to the ‘invisible glue’ underlying the major theme *Togetherness*.

... the moral, ethical, social, spiritual fibre in a family is very important and helps in the social structure of a community by its positive, active actions. (Mother of nuclear family)

The fact that we share one another's respect for the environment and mankind makes us grow together and gather strength. (Mother of nuclear family)

I would describe our belief systems as spiritual in nature – ethically sound, full of compassion for those who are marginalised, strong sense of social justice etc. This above all has been a congealing factor in our family. (Mother of nuclear family)

Keywords and expressions (in order of frequency)

- **Values**

'We place great value on family life and making the most of our time together'

'The value of the family unit with its extended family and friends are most important to us'

'We share the same ethical/religious/spiritual/moral values and beliefs'

'Our values and beliefs are very similar'

- **Beliefs**

'We share the same ethical/religious/spiritual/moral values and beliefs'

'The family is a major focus in our beliefs'

'We do not have specific religious beliefs, instead value and tolerate others' beliefs'

- **Spiritual/spirituality**

'My parents and I have a strong spiritual base'

'Shared spirituality helps a lot'

'We are spiritually satisfied, which leads to a full and happy life together'

'Our whole family shares the same spiritual beliefs'

- **Believe**

'We believe sharing a common faith, which we try to teach the children, is also important'

'We all believe in Jesus Christ/God/Christianity'

5.3.3 Third Strength – Sharing Activities

Definition:

The things that all members of the family do with each other to reinforce and strengthen their togetherness. The respondents mentioned a wide range of activities that they enjoy doing together, e.g:

- ♦ outdoor activities: sports, camping, picnics, BBQs, beach activities, walking and cycling;
- ♦ indoor activities: cooking, playing games, reading stories, crafts, watching t.v./videos, listening/playing music, special family evenings
- ♦ social activities: meeting other families with children, going out for dinner/movies/theatre
- ♦ holidays
- ♦ sharing interest in each other's hobbies: attending each other's performances/sport matches, parents becoming involved in the children's school/sports/hobbies.

... over the years we have done a lot of family activities, skating, camping, walking, boating, swimming etc. We believe this is helping our children catch the idea of strong family bonds. (Mother of blended family)

Just the times we are able to spend together doing things we all enjoy, such as fishing, camping, going away for a few days to the beach. Hopefully these good times help us through the not so good times. (Mother of nuclear family)

Keywords and expressions (in order of frequency)

- **Do/go together**
 ‘We go skiing/walking/to the beach/to friends/bike riding/away/on holidays together
 ‘We do housework/things/shopping together’
- **Spend time (together)**
 ‘We spend as much time as possible together’
 ‘We love spending time together’
 ‘We spend a lot of time at home/at the beach/attending sporting activities/listening to music/travelling’
- **Play**
 ‘We play (board)games/cards/sports/computer games/chase together’
- **Holidays**
 24% of the families (who indicated *Sharing Activities* as a strength) mentioned holidays as a valuable family activity, and they like to plan a holiday or long weekend on a regular basis.
- **Camping**
 20% of the families (who indicated *Sharing Activities* as a strength) enjoy camping as a holiday activity.
 ‘The most enjoyable time together as a family is when we camp’
 ‘We enjoy camping with our friends’

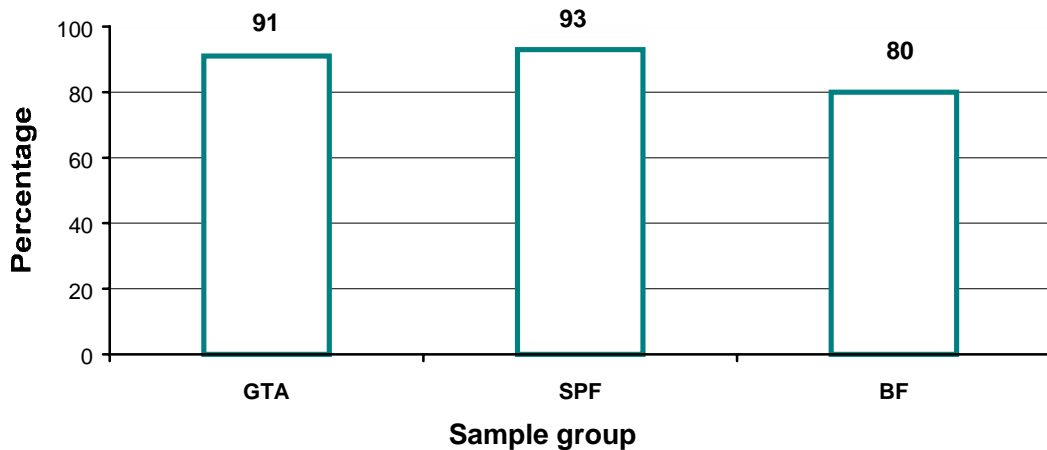


Figure 5.4: Rate of occurrence of *Sharing Activities* as a strength.

Comparison between samples:

Sharing Activities had high rate occurrence for all families, though to a lesser degree for the BF sample compared to the other samples.

5.3.4 Fourth Strength - Affection

Definition:

An expression of emotional connection among family members. To love and care for one another. To show concern and interest in each other. To do things for each other.

The affection we show towards each other is simple stuff like a cuddle in the morning, or just a pat on the head and a question on how things are going, how you slept and what's on the agenda for today and being genuinely interested in the answers. (Father of nuclear family)

Affection is expressed by some hugging, teasing (not put downs), chatting together, having special times, celebrating each other's birthdays, celebrating each other's achievements, buying or making appropriate gifts. (Mother of blended family)

Expressions of affection are often ritualised in families, e.g., with greetings or farewells; at bedtime (goodnight kisses/hugs, reading stories together), and during celebrations such as birthdays and Christmas. 'Ritualised' *Affection* occurred in 20% of all three samples:

I remember talking with my husband about this when our first child was born. We made a decision that every night when we were tucking the children into bed we would give a kiss / hug and say "I love you". We felt that if we didn't make this a ritual we could possibly forget to say it and give hugs, etc. (Mother of nuclear family)

Keywords and expressions (in order of frequency)

- **Hugs and Kisses**

'We show our affection through hugs and kisses'

'We hug and kiss each other daily'

'Lots of hugs and kisses!'

- **Love**

'We love each other dearly and are concerned for each other's welfare'

' We regularly tell/say to each other 'I love you''

'We love each other and let each other know through notes/phone calls/face to face/cards/birthday celebrations/showing interest/physical affection/being there/support/encouragement'

- **Affection/Affectionate**

'We are openly affectionate to each other'

'We express our affection physically' (hugs, kisses, cuddles, holding hands, touch, sitting on lap)

- **Cuddles**

'Kisses and cuddles are common and are a great silent expression of our love for each other'

'We express our affection for each other physically: cuddles, kisses, hugs, holding hands'

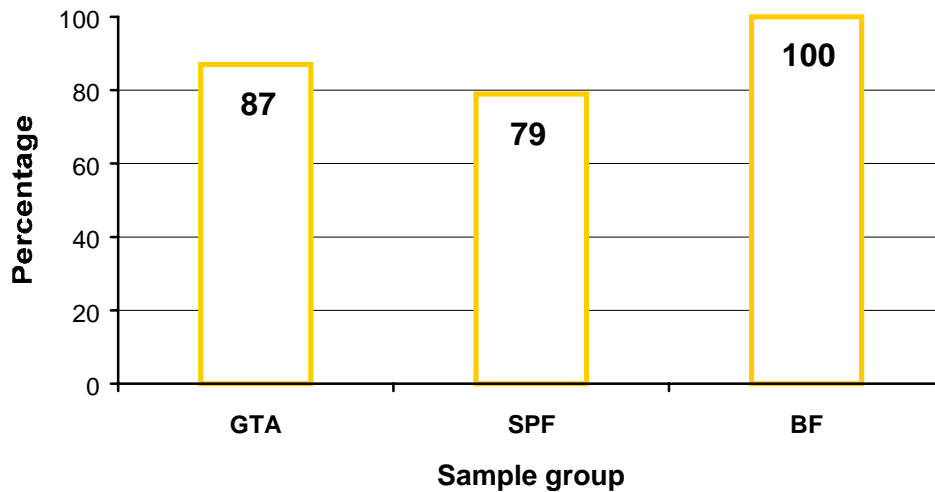


Figure 5.5 Rate of occurrence of *Affection* as a strength.

Comparison between samples:

All the BF respondents viewed *Affection* as a family strength.

5.3.5 Fifth Strength - Support

Definition:

Assisting, encouraging, reassuring each other, and looking out for each other. The family members feel equally comfortable in offering and asking for support from each other. The type of support ranges from practical support to emotional support:

... even though my family is dysfunctional (and I know all families function in different ways), there were lots of arguments and conflicts and stuff within my family growing up and my mum and dad got divorced and sometimes home life isn't always the perfect place to be but the one good thing that underpins everything in my family is that you support each other and that you are there for each..... In my external family we support each other, and particularly I think my family forgets about a lot of its dysfunction during difficult times and that's when my family really comes together. We seem to be able to put aside all these little bickering type differences and just be there for one another. (Sole parent)

Being a strong family unit means if one of the family have a challenge, there are many family members to listen, advise and support them through this time. (Sole parent)

My understanding of a family is being there for one another whenever needed, and not judging, love unconditionally, supporting each other whether we agree or not. (Mother of nuclear family)

Key words and expressions (in order of frequency):

- **Support**

‘Our strength is that we always stand united and support each other in times of need’
 ‘We support each other in our daily activities / to follow our personal goals / when we are down / through tough times / in our work and hobbies’
 ‘The children support and look out for each other’
 ‘Our extended family / my wife / my family is very supportive of me / us’

- **Help**

‘We help each other out/in times of need/with daily living/through the difficult times with any concerns’
 ‘Everyone in the family helps with chores and helps one another when needed’
 ‘When one family member needs help we all combine as one and help as much as possible’

- **Need**

‘If friends or relatives are in need of assistance we pull together to help out by offering whatever we can’
 ‘If someone has a need there is usually a family member to help out’
 ‘If one of us needs assistance, we try and help’

- **Being there**

‘We are always/just there for each other’
 ‘I know my family is there. It’s like breathing air, it’s always going to be there’
 ‘If any member needs another, they are there’

Support as a coping strategy:

Approximately a third of each sample group viewed the support they receive from each other during a crisis or in a challenge as a coping strategy:

After I was made redundant, I had 100% support from the family and when I began training for the Ambulance Service and had to pass heaps of exams, I still had all the support I needed with the family travelling to Sydney to see me on weekends and putting up with me being away for six weeks straight. (Father of nuclear family)

Whenever there is a crisis in the family, we all pull together and help collectively which brings us closer together. (Sole parent)

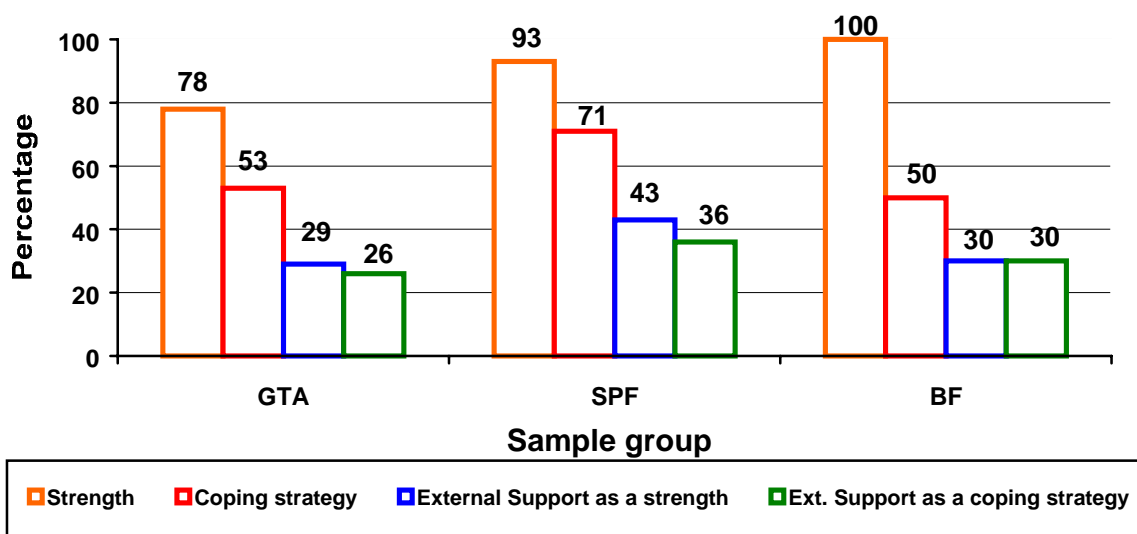


Figure 5.6 Rate of occurrence of Support and External Support as a strength and as a coping strategy

Comparison between samples:

Support had a high rate of occurrence in the SPF and BF sample, which may be related to the challenges of family separation and reformation. In the SPF sample, *Support* had the highest rate of occurrence as a coping strategy. (In the GTA and BF sample, *Communication* had the highest rate of occurrence as a coping strategy). The rate of occurrence of *External Support* is also higher in the SPF sample compared to the other samples.

5.3.5.1 External Support (sub theme of *Support*)

Definition:

When the family or a family member seeks help from an external source. The respondents mentioned the following sources: counsellor, teacher, support group (SANDS, ADHD support group, Bonnie Babies), pediatrician, Homecare, psychologist, Tresillian, health practitioners, and parenting courses.

External Support as a coping strategy:

Most respondents who referred to *External Support* viewed this type of support as a coping strategy. The rate of occurrence as a strength and as a coping strategy are therefore fairly close. Some families indicated that they were quite comfortable with seeking outside support if they felt it would benefit the family or particular relationships within the family. Furthermore, the stories indicated that the decision to seek external support was preceded by a considerable period of struggle.

... we are okay about seeking outside assistance to help us along. (Mother of nuclear family)

We ended up using a counsellor at my request, my husband joined in. I am very clear about our roles now and how I expect him to respond. We no longer need a counsellor, but the emotional nurturing is now a two way street. (Mother of blended family)

We joined a self-help group (SANDS) for grieving parents and made many friends. We found a supportive midwife who took us (and others) through the next pregnancy. We made a new, extended family through this group of people. (Mother of nuclear family)

The biggest 'crisis' so far was a tax audit where I did most of the paperwork till late at nights, M did the most cursing and T and I had the most fights. We ended up seeing a psychologist at the Behaviour Clinic at Wallsend Hospital. (Mother of nuclear family)

My son has ADHD, which means a lot of extra workload. However, I have done a lot of reading on the subject. By combining a wonderful school which includes a remedial teacher, a great pediatrician, a great tutor and the work I do with him, he is coming on really well. (Sole parent)

5.3.6 Sixth Strength - Acceptance

I actually asked J this morning what was good about [our family]? She said, and I think that's the word 'Acceptance', "You can have a really rotten day and you're able to walk in the front door and say 'I've have had the biggest shit of the day, I want to kick the cat, so I'm going to my room and I don't want anyone to disturb me.'" And she said, "You know, we've got this space where if we don't want to be disturbed we don't have to be. We don't have to answer what's wrong right there, we can talk about it later if we need to." It comes from the idea of having a democratic household rather than an authoritarian one. (Sole parent)

Definition:

Showing respect, appreciation, and understanding for the other family members' individuality and uniqueness. Acknowledging, valuing and tolerating individual differences. Allowing other family members individual space for their own interests. In communication, giving the other family members an opportunity to have their say and voice their opinions. Agreeing to disagree if opinions differ. Being non-judgmental.

Key words and expressions (in order of frequency):

- **Respect:**
 - 'We respect each other's opinions/ beliefs/individuality/special talents/differences/privacy/space/rights'
 - 'A mutual respect for each other'
 - 'We teach our children to respect others'
- **Accept:**
 - 'They are accepting of my beliefs'
 - 'We accept each other for who she/he is'
 - 'Accepting of each other's different ways'
 - 'Acceptance of differences / individuality / the choices the other makes'
- **Differences:**
 - 'We acknowledge each other's differences'
 - 'Accepting of each other's different ways'
 - 'An appreciation of each other despite personality differences'
- **Individual:**
 - 'We see each other as individuals, and respect and celebrate our differences'
 - 'Our children are very different from one another, as unique and individual'
- **Tolerance**
 - 'We foster tolerance'
 - 'A strength is a tolerance of diversity'
 - 'We are tolerant of others'
 - 'We deal with our differences by using a bit of tolerance'
- **Appreciate:**
 - 'We appreciate the choice not to share'
 - 'We appreciate each other'
 - 'An appreciation of each other despite personality differences'
- **Space/time out:**
 - 'Giving each other space'
 - 'Each of us likes our space and enjoys time alone'
 - 'We respect each other's space and privacy'
 - 'We allow each other time out'

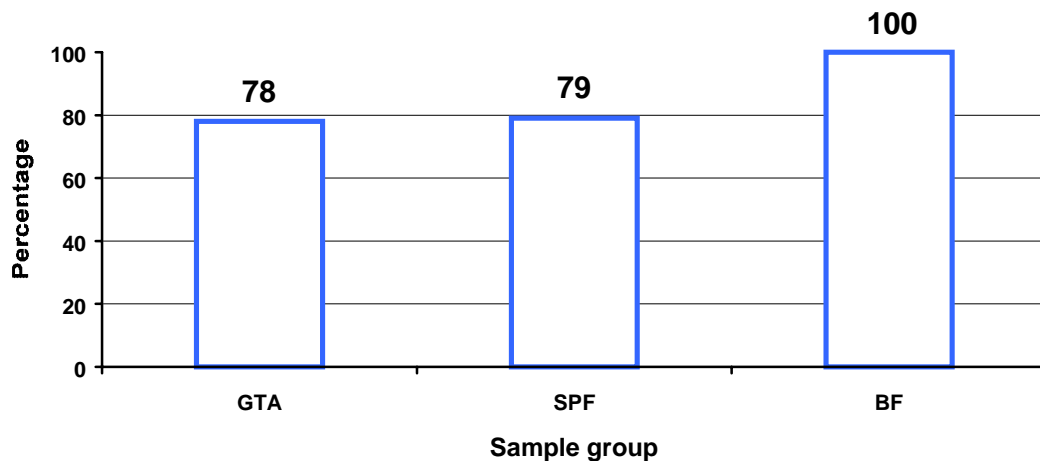


Figure 5.7 Rate of occurrence of Acceptance as a strength

Comparison between the samples:

This strength appeared to be particularly favourable in *Blended Families*, where family members have different family histories, traditions, and rituals.

5.3.7 Seventh Strength - Commitment

Definition:

Showing dedication and loyalty toward the family as a whole. Having a sense of duty and responsibility to ensure that all family members experience a sense of belonging. Viewing the well-being of the family as a first priority. Working together as a unit:

In our family unity, we draw again from our belief system that families are important and in order to achieve hopefully this unity, we have to work hard at understanding and learning, principles, ethics, and values. (Mother of nuclear family)

Each of us, whatever consciously or instinctively, has an enormous level of commitment. We believe in 'family first'. Whether the problems are physical, emotional, philosophical or merely domestic, we 'galvanise' and solve by action and discussion. We isolate the problem and never attack the person. (Father of nuclear family)

There is a real sense that we are a group of people meant to be together, because against all the odds, my husband and I have been with each other for nine years. This adds a security and comfort to our family - a real sense that we are safe and protected together. (Mother of nuclear family)

My husband and I have a very strong commitment to each other and our children. Commitment is to stand firm regardless of the situation and not to let the situation turn you away from your commitment to each other, whoever and whatever. (Mother of nuclear family)

Key words and expressions (in order of frequency):

- Commitment/commit**

‘We are committed to our family / to spending time together as a family / to the well-being of each other / to each other’s joy and happiness / to stay together / to be available to each other’

‘The commitment family members have for each other is demonstrated by always being there’

‘Our commitment to our family is one of doing it for the well-being of everyone concerned’

‘We have a high level of commitment / a strong commitment’
- Family**

‘We are committed to our family’

‘My husband and I are committed to raising our family’

‘We are committed to each other to look after the family’s interests’

‘Whatever the other spouse decides, we know it is always for the good of the whole family’
- Family comes first**

‘Family comes first so the commitment is total’

‘Sometimes in families we are tied up with our own ‘things’, but if there is a need, family comes first’

‘All members have their own job and friends, but always the family’s wants and needs come first’
- Unity/united**

‘We are a unit’

‘We are committed to our family and being a loving unit’

‘Our strength is that we always stand united and support each other in times of need’
- Work together**

‘We work as a family, do everything as a family’

‘The strengths of our family are our ability to work together and stay together’

‘We work hard on strengthening our relationships’

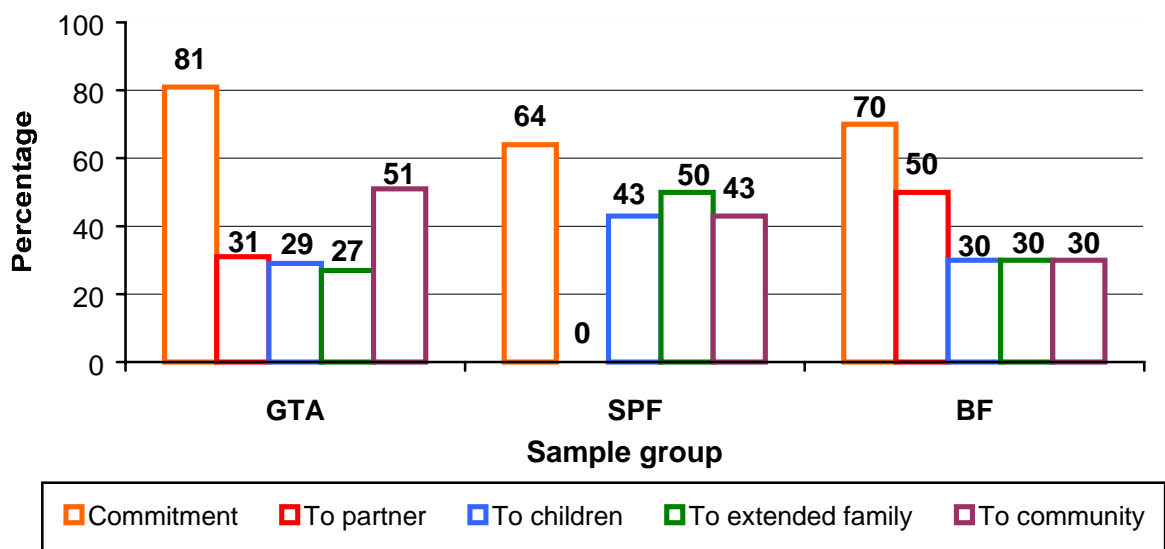


Figure 5.8 Rate of occurrence of *Commitment* and its sub-themes as strengths.

Comparison between samples:

Commitment has a higher rate of occurrence in the GTA sample compared to the other samples. As for the sub-themes, within each sample a different form of commitment seemed to carry more emphasis. With the GTA sample, it was *Commitment to the Community*.

In blended families, the partner relationship was emphasised. Some respondents in the BF sample pointed out that the partner relationship was often put to the test by the step-children and that it was important for the partners to form a united front.

We have learnt that the most important thing is for us to be together – the children in front, not between us. (Mother of blended family)

The *Commitment to the partner* is absent in the SPF sample. It is important to note here, that the commitment to the co-parent was not coded under this theme, but under the *Positive Co-Parenting* (see 5.4). The type of commitment that was emphasised in this sample group was *Commitment to Extended Family*. Sole parent families often rely on the support from their extended families, which could explain this emphasis.

5.3.7.1 Partner relationship (sub-theme of *Commitment*)

Definition:

Expressing loyalty toward the partners relationship. Some of the respondents viewed commitment as the core of the family unit that provides “a sound, nurturing environment” for their children. Others point out that this commitment involves a continual effort from both partners to maintain, nurture, and enhance the partner relationship:

My wife and I have a strong bond between us. This is borne of a sound friendship, mutual respect, interest in each other’s pursuits and work, and a determination to provide a sound nurturing environment for our children. (Father of nuclear family)

For C and me, there is of course the formal commitment of marriage and we have been married for 17 years. Partner commitment to me, though, is an ongoing process requiring constant renewal and reaffirmation. There are times where we sort of cruise in neutral, and don’t really acknowledge our commitment to each other as a couple But I think commitment is shown every time we weather a bad patch and we are both still here and still trying. (Mother of nuclear family)

We are solidly committed to a monogamous relationship. Importantly, our own relationship is not taken for granted – we have to work at it and if it did not reach the mark in terms of making us happy, etc. it will be questioned. Options looked at. (Father of nuclear family)

5.3.7.2 Children (sub-theme of *Commitment*)

Definition:

The parent(s) expressing commitment toward the child(ren) to provide a nurturing, supportive and stable environment:

My partner and I are committed to providing a strong support system for our children above all else. This is based on a solid trust of each other that neither would act on any other basis. (Father of nuclear family)

There were moments where I would have just walked away from the whole thing, but you can't do that because you're a parent, that is your responsibility. (Sole parent)

5.3.7.3 Extended Family (sub-theme of *Commitment*)

Definition:

Making a conscious effort to maintain the links with the extended family and acknowledging the value of these contacts for the whole family:

We retain strong links to our extended family. (Father of nuclear family)

My family also includes my own extended family and by marriage, G's extended family. I have a connected, loving, large extended family whose lives are important in our family's upbringing. (Father of nuclear family)

Every Sunday night we go to my husband's parents' place for dinner, which is always a good way to start the week! It's a ritual that we enjoy (not having to cook and clean up), and it gives the kids a great opportunity to have time with Nan and Pop! (Mother of nuclear family)

5.3.7.4 Community (sub-theme of *Commitment*)

Definition:

Being involved in community activities and placing importance on being a part of the community. The family shows their commitment by contributing to the community in whatever way they can.

We all enjoy varied places in the community, as members of sporting associations, community choirs, council committees, and playgroups. (Mother of nuclear family)

We care very much about the larger community and do the little we can to support our neighbourhood when possible. (Father of nuclear family)

We as a family contribute into the larger community by always being there for our neighbours, and as parents are able to reflect to our children, respect, integrity, compassion and truth in all matters and give them a sense of direction. With these traits the community can only benefit. Ultimately that is our role as parents. (Mother of nuclear family)

5.3.8 Overview of occurrence of themes between samples

In table 5.2, the strength themes are ordered within each sample group according to their rate of occurrence. It is interesting to note that *Communication* and *Sharing Activities* have the highest rate of occurrence in the GTA and SPF sample, and that these themes also have a high rate in the BF sample, but not as high as *Support*, *Affection* and *Acceptance*. Furthermore, *Togetherness* and *Commitment* rate third and fourth in the GTA sample, but are at the bottom of the list in the SPF and BF sample.

Table 5.2 Occurrence of themes per sample in order of frequency

GTA (55 cases)	%	SPF (14 cases)	%	BF (10 cases)	%
Communication	98	Communication	93	Support	100
Sharing Activities	91	Sharing Activities	93	Affection	100
Togetherness	89	Support	93	Acceptance	100
Affection	87	Affection	79	Communication	90
Commitment	81	Acceptance	79	Sharing Activities	80
Support	78	Togetherness	71	Togetherness	80
Acceptance	78	Commitment	64	Commitment	70

5.4 Focussed Theme Analysis

The *Focussed Theme Analysis* (FTA) involved an in-depth analysis of 14 text documents from sole parents and 10 text documents from mothers of blended families, with the aim of extracting recurring themes that were particular for that family type. Below follows a discussion of the strength themes extracted in this analysis for each sample group.

5.4.1 Sole Parent Themes

The analysis of the SPF text documents lead to the extraction of two strength themes and two ‘challenges’ specific for sole parents. The challenges will be discussed in the next paragraph (5.5).

5.4.1.1 Support from Extended Family and Friends

Definition:

Receiving support from primarily the extended family and in some instances from friends with the upbringing and daily care of the children. The support is often practical in that it entails taking care of the children so that Mum can go to work, have a break, or attend to emergencies. This strength is therefore also referred to as a coping strategy by 29% of the mothers:

The physical supports, like when I've got one sick and I need to take the other one to hospital. I know I can rely on my parents. And if they're not available I can rely on my sisters. And if they're not available I can usually rely on my friends. (Sole parent)

We maintain strong links with my parents (i.e., children's grandparents), siblings (i.e., children's cousins), aunts and uncles. Talking with these people gives me strength to deal with "the out-laws". (Sole parent)

5.4.1.2 Positive Co-Parenting

Definition:

Having positive co-parenting arrangements with either the children's natural father or another selected co-parent. If the arrangements are with the natural father then a part of this strength entails efforts to maintain a positive relationship with the former partner:

We have coped and become closer by not allowing animosity, bitterness, or resentment to creep into our lives, thus remaining good friends and hence good parents to our children, which is the most important thing we could have given our children. To put the past behind us and put our children 'first and foremost'. I sometimes wish other families could do this, as there would be a lot more happier children in this world if they did! (Sole parent)

J and [my] main commitment to each other is to co-operatively co-parent. (J is gay and we have never been in a relationship with each other). We don't support each other financially, but do provide emotional and practical support to each other to help each other parent. We co-operate around holidays and work commitments, listen to each other without blaming if things get hard. I can (and have) rung J at 2am to talk things through. (Sole parent)

5.4.1.3 The Job of Two

Definition:

The challenge of being 'Mum and Dad' to the children. Carrying all the parental responsibility and trying to cope on her own.

"The fact that there's only me. That I really don't get anyone to backup and support what I'm saying":

Sometimes you just want the other parent or another supporting adult to come in and say, "Listen to what your mother said". That the kids try to play off on wearing me down sometimes. (Sole parent)

It's difficult at times trying to be both parents, especially when you have not had immediate family or male role-models around, since the break-up of the family unit. (Sole parent)

5.4.1.4 Lack of Paternal Involvement

Definition:

The challenge of dealing with the lack of the involvement of the children's father, who has either completely withdrawn contact or whose contact is minimal:

The way he has treated his children has just been disgusting. He has just basically wiped them from his life. The two years he was in Bali he saw them for one week a year even, though he came back to Australia four times..... I've never stopped him from seeing the children and I've hassled him to see the children, and he just tells me that I should just get on with my life and let him do what he wants to do. (Sole parent)

A challenge has been] having my ex-husband move overseas permanently, leaving me to bring up four children on my own. Trying to cope with the everyday stresses of children with a father they can't see, to enjoy their achievements, etc., with two years between visits. (Sole parent)

5.4.2 Blended Family Themes

The analysis of the BF text documents led to the extraction of two strength themes.

5.4.2.1 Commitment to Stepfamily

Definition:

The commitment to the stepchildren as an extension of the partner commitment:

He has brought a lot of strength into my family because he has made the decision that he wants a family..... B. has not made a commitment to just me, but to my family, and it's a commitment he savours and enjoys. (Mother of blended family)

5.4.2.2 Time Bonds

Definition:

The recognition that it takes time to establish a new family and for the family bonds to strengthen:

It has taken us awhile to actually become a family..... Time has helped to make us all strong and understanding..... Our commitment has gotten a lot stronger over the years. (Mother of blended family)

I think our family will just get better the longer we are together. (Mother of blended family)

5.5 Challenges

In the survey and interviews, the participants were asked to tell stories about the challenges their family had faced and which areas may prove to be challenges in the future. Furthermore, in the participants' stories about their family's strengths, the participants often referred to a crisis to illustrate how the family had used particular strengths to overcome this crisis or how a crisis had fostered a family strength.

Twelve major challenges were identified for the GTA sample.

Table 5.3 Challenges of GTA sample

	<i>GTA Challenges</i>	<i>Rate of occurrence (%)</i>
1	Breakdown in communication	60
2	Parenting challenges: e.g., children’s behaviour problems and concerns of how to parent appropriately	55
3	Challenges within the family relationships	53
4	Coping with a transitional stage in the family life cycle, e.g., puberty, children leaving home, retirement, etc.	38
5	Coping with health problems within the family	36
6	Dealing with financial hardship , i.e., the lack of financial funds	33
7	Lack of time for family relationships due to life style	24
8	Employment pressures , e.g., retrenchment, shift work, job search	24
9	Dealing with grief after the loss of a significant other	18
10	Societal pressures : the pressures of being a family in today’s society	16
11	Lack of close, frequent contact with the extended family	13
12	Aged care : challenges of taking care of (grand)parents and dealing with the upcoming loss after their death	11
13	Miscellaneous: e.g., daily hassles, cultural differences between partners, problems in the extended family, social isolation	44

Likewise, Sole Parents identified 12 major challenges, which do not include the GTA challenges Employment Pressures or Aged Care, but include challenges specific for this family type, i.e., The Job of Two and the Lack of Paternal Involvement (see 5.4).

Table 5.4 Challenges for Sole Parent Families

	<i>SPF Challenges</i>	<i>Rate of occurrence (%)</i>
1	The job of two : the challenge of being ‘a Mum and a Dad’, to carry responsibility for all aspects of parenthood	50
2	Challenges within the family relationships	50
3	Breakdown in communication	43
4	Dealing with financial hardship , i.e., the lack of financial funds	43
5	The lack of paternal involvement : the challenge of the natural father withdrawing from his paternal responsibilities	29
6	Parenting challenges: e.g., children’s behaviour problems and concerns how to parent appropriately	23
7	Coping with health problems within the family	21
8	Coping with a transitional stage in the family life cycle, e.g., puberty, children leaving home, retirement, etc.	21
9	Societal pressures : the pressures of being a family in today’s society	14
10	Lack of close, frequent contact with the extended family	14
11	Dealing with grief after the loss of a significant other	7
12	Lack of time for family relationships due to life style	7
13	Miscellaneous: e.g., dealing with previous relationship/divorce, the stigma of sole parenthood	36

The identified *Parenting Problems*, in *Sole Parent* families, coincided somewhat with *Relationship Tension Between (Ex-) Family Members* (21%) and the '*Job Of Two*' (21%).

In *Blended Families*, the occurrence of *Relationship Tension between Family Members*, *Parenting Challenges* and the *Breakdown in Communication* was considerably higher than for the GTA or SPF sample.

Table 5.5 Challenges for the Blended Families

	<i>BF Challenges</i>	<i>Rate of occurrence (%)</i>
1	Challenges within the family relationships	90
2	Parenting challenges: e.g., children's behaviour problems and concerns how to parent appropriately	70
3	Break down in communication	70
4	Coping with health problems within the family	50
5	Coping with a transitional stage in the family life cycle, e.g., puberty, children leaving home, retirement, etc.	40
6	Dealing with financial hardship , i.e., the lack of financial funds	30
7	Dealing with grief after the loss of a significant other	30
8	Employment pressures , e.g., retrenchment, shift work, job search	20
9	Aged care : challenges of taking care of (grand)parents and dealing with the upcoming loss after their death	20
10	Lack of time for family relationships due to life style	10
11	Lack of close, frequent contact with the extended family	10
12	Miscellaneous: e.g., daily hassles, cultural differences between partners, problems in the extended family, dealing with previous relationship/divorce, etc.	80

The *Relationship Tension* that can exist between Stepfamily members coincides moderately with *Parenting Problems* (40%) and *Communication Problems* (30%).

5.5.1 Comparison between samples

Table 5.6 shows the top seven challenges for each sample. The challenges printed in italics only occur in that sample group as one of the top seven challenges.

Table 5.6 The top seven challenges per sample group

GTA (55 cases)	%	SPF (14 cases)	%	BF (10 cases)	%
Communication breakdown	60	<i>The Job of Two</i>	50	Relationship Dynamics	90
Parenting Challenges	55	Relationship Dynamics	50	Parenting Challenges	70
Relationship Dynamics	53	Communication breakdown	43	Communication breakdown	70
Life transition	38	Financial Hardship	43	Health	50
Health	36	<i>The lack of paternal involvement</i>	29	Life transition	40
Financial Hardship	33	Parenting Challenges	23	Financial Hardship	30
<i>Lack of time</i>	24	Health	21	<i>Grief</i>	30

5.6 Coping Strategies

To deal with the challenges of family life, the respondents referred to strategies they adopted which helped them to cope with the situation. Some of these coping strategies were also strengths. However, 30 to 50% of the respondents (see table 5.7) also referred to a life philosophy, which offers a perspective on and a constructive approach to the challenges of life. These life philosophies include views such as:

- ♦ a crisis is a phase in life that will pass,;
- ♦ crises are a part of life and a lesson to grow and learn from,;
- ♦ it is important to maintain a positive outlook and attitude,;
- ♦ it is important to confront the challenges face on and deal with them, rather than avoiding them. One respondent referred to this view as the no-nonsense approach; 'just deal with it, get on with it':

... we don't look upon a crisis as a bad thing, as it is in those times that it brings relationships closer together. (Mother of nuclear family)

... I decided this was going to be another opportunity to learn, grow, and become a better person..." (Mother of nuclear family)

The way we look at it is that your whole life is a challenge, it's what you make of it that's important. Because every day is a new day with new challenges. (Mother of blended family)

For me, crisis is not a term I use. Life just is. What happens, happens as part of life. You just work your way through it..... It's your attitude that makes you happy, not things. (Mother of blended family)

We just need to calm down, take a deep breath and relax, rethink the situation in a positive light - how and why is this going to make us better people in the future..... The key to NOT turning that moment into a real Bad memory, was that we kept a positive, opportunity based attitude on the experience. (Father of nuclear family)

Basically we just get on with life. Pros and cons are listed and positives looked for. (Mother of nuclear family)

You've got two choices, you can look at it and say, "Oh woe is me, isn't that a terrible thing" and be all hopeless and useless to yourself and everyone around you and go and jump off a cliff. Or you can say, "Oh well, it's happened, what am I going to pick out of it and what have I learnt and what are the strengths and weaknesses of it, are we still functioning? (Sole parent)

For me, it's important knowing that everything is a stage / process..... There's always a light at the end of the tunnel, but there's sometimes a train coming the other way. (Mother of nuclear family)

Table 5.7 Coping strategies

<i>Coping strategies</i>	<i>GTA</i> 55 cases	<i>SPF</i> 14 cases	<i>BF</i> 10 cases
Communication	67	64	60
* Humour		29	
Support	53	71	50
* External Support	26	36	30
Togetherness	42	43	50
Support from Extended Family & Friends		29	
Life Philosophy	31	29	50
Strengthening	44	50	80

The term 'Strengthening' on the bottom row of table 5.7 refers to the family's acknowledgement that crises strengthen the family bond. 46 to 80 % of the families indicated that they gain their strength from the challenges they faced as a family. It is

during these crises that families need to 'pull together' and support each other. Though the adversities may strain the relationships initially, it is in hindsight that the families acknowledge how the crisis has strengthened their bond.

In hindsight, this experience was a pivotal one for our family. We emerged stronger, calmer, happier, thankful for our remaining children and the love we share each day, together. (Mother of nuclear family)

... the children have learnt a lot from our 'tough times' and gained strengths from that, which I hope will carry them through any hurdles they may face in the future. (Sole parent)

We rally together in crisis. In our time together we have encountered several trying situations which have had the capability of tearing us apart, but which have in fact bonded us together..... Although our daughter and sister died, and a family under that much pressure could easily fall apart, we remained together. (Mother of nuclear family)

Looking back, it was a tough year but I think we share a cohesion, sense of teamwork, that we support whoever is down - it was a character building year. (Mother of nuclear family)

DISCUSSION

6.1 The Whole is Greater than the Sum of its Parts

Initially the *Building Family Strengths Project* (BFSP) and the *Family Strengths Theme Research* (FSTR) were conducted as two separate projects to obtain two relatively independent views of Australian family strengths, i.e. a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. In the course of the projects, it became clear that the findings of both studies can inform each other as both projects increased our understanding of the qualities Australian families perceived as family strengths. We consider this to be a case of ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’. In this chapter, the findings of the two projects are collapsed and discussed as a joint project.

6.2 The Australian Family Strengths Template

The *Australian Family Strengths Template* combines the qualities identified by both studies. This *Template* offers a framework from which a variety of community resources can be developed, e.g. family strength cards, curriculum material for schools, family therapy activities, and workshop material. The *Template* is founded on eight qualities: the seven strength themes extracted from the qualitative analysis (FSTR) and an eighth quality *Resilience*.

In Table 6.1, each quality is presented with six to ten key expressions. These key expressions are derived from the inventory and the language analysis of the FSTR. Inventory items were selected on the basis of their response percentages (see Table 3.2 for response percentages). If more than 98% of respondents agreed with the item, then that item was placed under the most appropriate quality. This selection procedure resulted in the implementation of 32 items from the inventory. Where necessary, the items were supplemented with key expressions from the language analysis, so that at least six expressions represented each quality.

Table 6.1 The Australian Family Strengths Template

	Quality & Key Expressions	<i>Source</i>
1	Communication	
a.	We like to be positive in our communication with each other	FSTR
b.	We listen to each other	Item 17
c.	We share jokes together (sub-theme humour)	Item 48
d.	We often laugh with each other (sub-theme humour)	Item 28
e.	We are honest with each other (sub-theme honesty)	Item 56
f.	We like to tell each other about our day	FSTR
g.	We talk openly with each other	FSTR/Item 15
2	Togetherness	
a.	We feel strongly connected to each other	Item 21
b.	We feel comfortable with each other	Item 8
c.	We like having a place we call home	Item 16
d.	We feel close to each other	Item 24
e.	We have a strong sense of belonging	Item 45
f.	It is easy to share our values and ideas with each other (sub-theme sharing values)	Item 64
g.	We share the same ethical and moral values (sub-theme sharing values)	FSTR
h.	Celebrating our birthdays and other family traditions together, gives us a sense of belonging.	FSTR
3	Sharing Activities	
a.	We enjoy the times we share together	Item 40
b.	We like to have fun together	Item 3
c.	We enjoy simple, inexpensive family activities	Item 14
d.	We have lots of good times together	Item 23
e.	We like to spend time together	FSTR
f.	We like to plan holidays with each other	FSTR
g.	We like to play games together	FSTR
4	Affection	
a.	We love one another	Item 10
b.	We like to be kind to each other	Item 26
c.	We really care for each other	Item 50
d.	We show our affection through hugs and kisses	FSTR
e.	We like to kiss or hug each other good night	FSTR
f.	To show our love, we like to do things for one another	FSTR

5	Support	
a.	We like to support each other	Item 69
b.	We enjoy helping each other	Item 12
c.	We are there for each other	FSTR
d.	We share the load and help one another out	FSTR
e.	We look out for each other	FSTR
f.	We like to give each other a chance to do new things	FSTR
6	Acceptance	
a.	We allow each other to be ourselves	Item 39
b.	We have a high regard for each other	Item 54
c.	We respect each other's point of view	Item 25
d.	We respect the roles each of us play in the family	Item 55
e.	We accept our individual differences	FSTR
f.	We give each other space and time out	FSTR
g.	We are able to forgive each other	Item 11
7	Commitment	
a.	There is a feeling of safety and security	Item 62
b.	We like keeping our promises to each other	Item 19
c.	We find it easy to trust each other	Item 47
d.	We are committed to our family	FSTR
e.	The family comes first	FSTR
f.	We maintain contact with our extended family (sub-theme commitment to extended family)	FSTR
g.	We are involved in community activities (sub-theme commitment to community)	FSTR
8	Resilience	
a.	We are able to face daily issues confidently	Item 68
b.	We make changes in our plans to meet changing circumstances	Item 75
c.	We have a hopeful attitude toward life	Item 30
d.	We discuss any major problems as a family (communication as a coping strategy)	FSTR
e.	We talk things through when we've had a conflict (communication as a coping strategy)	FSTR
f.	In hindsight, we have found that a crisis brings us closer together	FSTR
g.	We pull together in a crisis (togetherness as a coping strategy)	FSTR
h.	Our shared beliefs and values give us strength	FSTR
i.	We support each other in times of need (support as a coping strategy)	FSTR
j.	We grow stronger because we love each other	Item 73

6.3 The Project's Contribution to Family Strengths Research

The identified qualities in the *Australian Family Strengths Template* correspond conceptually with other models of family strengths. The terminology used to describe the strengths and the number of strengths identified varies among the conceptual models, depending on the researcher and the researcher's aims, but essentially the concepts remain fairly stable across cultures and family types (DeFrain, 1999; Wolcott, 1999). The identified strengths came therefore as no surprise and undoubtedly they

The eight qualities come as no surprise, their significance is in the fact that they were spoken and described by families rather than theorised by researchers

would not to other researchers or family health practitioners. When these strengths were presented to the field workers of the Family Action Centre, they commented that the research findings confirmed experiences and that they too had identified similar strengths when working with families.

Nevertheless, the *Family Strengths Research Project* does offer an important contribution to family strengths research. First of all, this type of research has never been conducted in Australia. The cultural context of contemporary Australian families and the language they use to describe their strengths was a fundamental consideration in both studies. In defining the *Australian Family Strengths Template* a conscious effort was made to apply the language used by the participating families.

Above all, the main strength of this project lies in the family stories, which were analysed in the *Family Strengths Theme Research*.

The richness of the qualitative data differentiates this project from other studies and offers more than just another list of family strengths.

Although, the eight qualities come as no surprise, their significance is in the fact that they were spoken and described by families rather than theorised by researchers. The richness of the qualitative data differentiates this project from other studies and offers more than just another list of family strengths. The stories the families shared in the surveys and interviews add another dimension to the meaning of family strength. They enrich our understanding of how strong families actually adapt to stressful circumstances, how they employ some strengths as coping strategies, how important

communication skills are to strong Australian families, how these families talk about spirituality, what differences there might be between family types, and what exactly strengthens the Australian family. These points will be discussed in more detail below.

6.3.1 What strengthens a family?

Wolcott (1999) states that the research into family strengths offers descriptions of characteristics, qualities, and outcomes, but they “do not explain why it is that some (...) families are able to create a stable, nurturing and satisfying family environment, or cope with changing circumstances with resilience while others fail to thrive” (p.26). The findings of the qualitative analysis provide possible explanations.

Half of the families in the GTA sample (46%) and SPF sample (50%), and the majority of the BF sample (80%) indicated that they became aware of their strength from the challenges they faced as a family. It is during these crises that families need to 'pull together' and support each other. Though the adversities may strain the relationships initially, it is in hindsight that the families acknowledge how the crisis has strengthened their bond.

It is in hindsight that the families acknowledge how the crisis has strengthened their bond

In hindsight, this experience was a pivotal one for our family. We emerged stronger, calmer, happier, thankful for our remaining children and the love we share each day, together. (Mother of Nuclear Family)

In our time together we have encountered several trying situations which have had the capability of tearing us apart, but which have in fact bonded us together. (Mother of Nuclear Family)

But why is it that some families fall apart when faced with adversities and others are strengthened? Where do these families get their resilience? The respondents indicated in various ways that sharing a value system strengthens their family and helps them cope with adversities and challenges. The shared values of the family members may be expressed through their religion and/or through their ethical and moral belief system.

Sharing a value system strengthens their family

We share our beliefs and this adds to our family strength. (Father of Nuclear Family)

I think sharing the same beliefs, based on a choice, rather than having things pushed onto you, strengthens a family enormously. To be able, during good and bad times, to put beliefs into practice, e.g. thanking God whatever is happening

and being aware of the bigger picture - instead of resorting to 'what ifs' or 'whose fault it is' that lead to bitterness, regret, etc. - is incredibly positive. (Mother of Nuclear Family)

... about 7 years ago when my husband and I both made commitments to God (Jesus). We had decided that up until then we didn't really have a good foundation to raise our family. (...) Most of all (our beliefs) give us all hope, purpose, meaning to life, direction and boundaries to live within. (Mother of Nuclear Family)

Although we have faced many battles we have stood strong in our morals, values and have developed integrity and character ... (Father of Nuclear Family)

What is always at the core is our belief in Christ and his message of love is the most important thing in the world. (...) It's important to us as a family because it gives us an unshakeable identity and a knowledge of what we can expect from each other regardless of the circumstances. (Mother of Nuclear Family)

Sharing similar values not only gives the families the resilience to face challenges, it also bonds the family together.

I would describe our belief systems as spiritual in nature - ethically sound, full of compassion for those who are marginalised, strong sense of social justice, etc. This above all has been a congealing factor in our family. (Mother of Nuclear Family)

The respondents' stories seem to indicate that having a common value system induces a sense of togetherness or belonging. This sense of togetherness gives the family the resilience to deal with changing circumstances and life transitions. Furthermore, most families in the study had rituals to reinforce this sense of belonging and to emphasise their family values. Some of the rituals they mentioned were having set meals together, having a special family evening on a regular basis, celebrating birthdays and Christmas according to family traditions, and expressing affection at set times (such as bedtime and with farewells and greetings).

Some of the parents in this study explained how they passed on their values, which they consider essential to their children. As the quotes below illustrate, they either did this through communication or role modeling.

We are concerned with the drugs, alcohol and other negative influences that would face every parent. We hope with a lot of open discussions, our children know what these negative elements can do to a person's moral, spiritual, social, ethical fibre. (Mother of Nuclear Family)

We talk a lot about respect, kindness, acceptance, understanding, tolerance and because we do try to treat each other with these values, I think by example the children absorb them. We talk as well about how special and unique they each are, and how this is true of others. I believe firmly that spiritual and ethical values are not taught through preaching, rhetoric, or adherence to any one doctrine, but through actions. (Mother of Nuclear Family)

Family values are very definite. First, caring about others is really important and my children seem to have always had that value. It wasn't something I had to teach them with words. They just knew. I've always felt that the way to teach children is to model or be an example then trust that they would figure it out. (Mother of a Blended Family)

In the *Template*, several key expressions represent the above mentioned link between shared values, togetherness, and resilience.

- 2f It is easy to share our values and ideas with each other (shared values)
- 2g We share the same ethical and moral values (shared values)
- 2h Celebrating our birthdays and other family traditions together gives us a sense of belonging.
- 4e We like to kiss or hug each other good night (ritualised affection)
- 8f In hindsight, we have found that a crisis brings us closer together
- 8h Our shared beliefs and values give us strength

6.3.2 The Three Faces of Communication

The importance of communication to the participants of the FSTR was expressed on three levels. First of all, it was described as a strength and it had the highest rate of occurrence compared to the other strengths. It could therefore be proposed that open, honest and frequent communication is an essential quality of a strong family. Secondly, the majority of the participants referred to communication as valuable coping strategy to deal with challenge. They found it helpful to talk the situation through with the other family members. Interestingly though, communication breakdown was identified as a major challenge by most families.

Communication was the only quality that had such high rate of occurrence as a strength, a coping strategy and a challenge. Evidently, the participants of this study regard communication as a valuable quality that strengthens the family and contributes to their resilience, but also requires effort to maintain.

Communication as a valuable quality that strengthens the family and contributes to their resilience, but also requires effort to maintain

In the *Template*, *Communication* is one of the qualities and is also represented as a coping strategy under the quality *Resilience* with the key expressions 8d (We discuss any major problems as a family) and 8e (We talk things through when we've had a conflict).

6.3.3 The Challenges Families Face

It became apparent from the participants' stories that regardless of the family type or the strength of the family, every family faces challenges (see 5.5). Several families wrote about the challenges they faced to illustrate their strengths. Despite the family type, the participants considered communication breakdown (see 6.3.2), parenting and relationship dynamics as the three major challenges.

Regardless of the family type or the strength of the family, every family faces challenges.

To cope with the challenges they faced, the participants referred to the qualities they had also identified as strengths, i.e. *Communication*, *Support*, and *Togetherness* (see 5.6). Additionally, several families emphasised the importance of having a positive, constructive attitude towards challenges and to view challenges as a normal part of life and as passages in time. Some families were able to recognise the strengthening quality of crises, in that it brought the family members closer together. It is proposed that all these coping strategies strengthen the family's resilience. These coping strategies and attitudes towards challenges are represented in the *Template* under the quality *Resilience*.

6.3.4 How Australian Families Talk About Spirituality

Although some families referred to their spirituality explicitly - generally with reference to a religious denomination - most families were more inclined to write about their ethical and moral belief systems. Their beliefs included virtues such as honesty, tolerance, acceptance, respect, kindness, forgiveness, loyalty, and non-violence. The virtue acceptance was often emphasised, not only as accepting other people's beliefs and values, but also giving individual members of the family the space to discover their own personal beliefs. Not surprising, most

...families gain strength from sharing the same values, whether they were spiritual, ethical or normal. It gave them a sense of belonging and a resilience to deal with challenges.

beliefs. Not surprisingly, most families regarded *family life* as an important value to maintain, as is illustrated by key expression 7e ‘The family comes first’ in the *Template*.

As has been discussed in 6.3.1, families gain strength from sharing the same values, whether they were spiritual, ethical or moral. It gave them a sense of belonging and a resilience to deal with challenges.

Based on the above observation, it was decided to include general expressions about belief systems in the *Template* rather than specific spiritual expressions. The following key expressions represent this decision.

- 1e We are honest with each other
- 2f It is easy to share our values and ideas with each other (shared values)
- 2g We share the same ethical and moral values (shared values)
- 6c We respect each other’s point of view
- 6g We are able to forgive each other
- 7d We are committed to our family
- 7e The family comes first
- 8h Our shared beliefs and values give us strength

6.3.5 Sole Parent Families

In comparison to the GTA sample and blended families, sole parent families place more emphasis on support and extended family. This emphasis is expressed in various ways. First of all, the strength *Support* was mentioned by 93% of the sole parents. While *Communication* had the highest rate of occurrence as a coping strategy in the other samples, *Support* surpassed *Communication* in the SPF sample. Furthermore, in the *Focussed Theme Analysis* an additional support theme was extracted from the sole parents’ stories, i.e. *Support from Extended Family and Friends*. The importance of extended family was also expressed in the high rate of occurrence of the sub-theme *Commitment to Extended Family* (50% of the sole parents referred to this strength). Finally, if the sole parent had a positive arrangement with the co-parent, then she was more likely to receive support from the co-parent with the parenting of the child(ren).

Sole parent families place more emphasis on support and extended family

In summary, sole parent families who consider themselves as a strong family gain their strength foremost from the support they receive from their extended family and friends.

This support increases their resilience to deal with the challenges specific for this family type, i.e. ‘the Job of Two’ and ‘the Lack of Paternal Involvement’ (see 5.4.1), and the challenges faced by any family.

6.3.6 Blended Families

Unfortunately only ten blended families participated in the surveys or interviews of the FSRP. The results can therefore only be viewed as an indication as to which qualities are important strength for blended families.

The prime challenge for blended families was the relationship dynamics between the family members and especially between the stepfamily members. To face these

Commitment to the partner relationship and the stepfamily plays a pivotal role

challenges, it seemed that the commitment to the partner relationship and the stepfamily plays a pivotal role. Furthermore, the strength *Acceptance* had a 100% rate of occurrence, which could indicate the importance of this strength when dealing with the

integration of two sets of family values and experiences. The stories also revealed the importance of building up a history as a family unit which in time will induce togetherness and a sense of belonging.

6.4 Looking to the Future

The *Australia Family Strengths Template* provides a platform from which many ideas for community resources can gain their essence and direction. The knowledge gained by the Family Action Centre (FAC) through the *Family Strengths Research Project* provides material to develop resources, programs and workshops that will assist families to nurture, support and strengthen their relationships, and will help them become active members of the community. The FAC proposes that the *Australian Family Strengths Template* provides the Centre with a guide to conduct the following projects once funding is secured.

6.4.1 Family Strengths Kit

The Family Action Centre will seek funding to enable the Centre to develop a *Family Strengths Kit*. The kit would include a Family Strengths board game, cards, activity

sheets and video. This kit would enhance capacity building in families in the following manner.

- Highlighting the strengths of the individual families based on the premise that all families have strengths.
- Conveying positive messages that challenges are a normal part of family life and enhance closeness and togetherness
- Assisting families to recognise that they have the capacity to develop their own solutions and build resilience.
- Highlighting the importance of asking for support from extended family, friends and/or community services when dealing with a crisis that is beyond the family's capability
- Promoting the concept and practicalities of prevention by increasing their problem solving skills and assisting them to use their strengths as coping strategies.

6.4.2 Family Strengthening Workshops

The FAC sees the potential for developing family strengthening workshops for marginalised families or at risk families. The aim would be to assist these families to recognise their strengths and to use these strengths as coping strategies. The workshop would involve the whole family and the activities and exercises would be centered around the eight qualities of the *Template*. This project would also implement a pre-group and a post-group test based on the Australian Inventory of Family Strengths to measure any progress and to evaluate the effectiveness of the workshops.

6.4.3 Fathers' Perceptions of Family Strengths Research

The purpose of this project would be to delineate what father's perceptions are of family strengths, and to analyse the language they use to describe those family strengths and the important facets of family functioning. This study would involve the analysis of existing inventories and surveys collected from men during the Family Strengths Research Project (216 inventories and 80 surveys), and the recruitment of men under represented in the current sample, such as blue collar workers, unemployed men, and aboriginal men. Part of this project would be to develop appropriate methodology strategies sensitive to these social subgroups. For example, to use interviews rather than open-question surveys, which require confidence in writing skills.

This project could improve our communications with fathers and increase our understanding on how to engage fathers in community programs.

6.4.4 Family Strength in Indigenous Cultures

The FAC and Umuliko Centre for Indigenous Higher Education, University of Newcastle, are interested in a joint project which will develop an inventory of strengths for indigenous families and to provide post-graduate training for indigenous researchers (2 year project).

6.4.5 Strengths Distribution Project

Most family strength research, including this research project, has been based on material provided by self-identified *strong* families. However, not every family considers themselves as strong. Based on the premise that every family has strengths, whether they perceive themselves as strong or not, this project would investigate whether the strengths identified by strong families occur in a randomly selected sample of families representative of the Australian population. Can the average Australian family identify with the strengths defined by strong families and researchers, regardless of their perception of their own family strength? What is the normal distribution of family strengths in a representative sample of the Australian population? To provide answers to these questions, the *Australian Family Strengths Template* could be used to devise measurements of family strengths for the general public. This project would increase our understanding of how the family's perception of itself is related to the recognition of their own strengths and their resilience to cope with challenging circumstances.

6.4.6 Strong Families and Strong Communities: a Reciprocal Relationship?

The purpose of this project is to determine whether there is a relationship between strong families and communities with strong social capital, and vice versa. This project would investigate questions such as what type of community provides an environment for building strong families; do strong families have more skills to participate and benefit from strong communities; do strong communities have similar strengths as strong families, etc?

6.4.7 Other possible projects

- A book on strong Australian families featuring exemplary families from all walks of life and a diverse range of ethnic/cultural groups, generously illustrated with photographs and family stories.
- Development of educational programs, curriculum, and strategies for teaching and learning about family strengths for use in all levels of primary and secondary education, primary education institutions, family support agencies, religious institutions and other social organisations.
- A media campaign on the qualities of strong families including radio, television interviews and stories.

6.5 Conclusion

The *Australian Family Strengths Template* provides many opportunities for the development of community resources and sensitive family policy. Listening to what families have to say about their strengths is vital if we are to be effective in our endeavours to create environments in which families can flourish. By using the language of families, which gives us insight into their reality, better communication strategies can be developed to assist families in strengthening their relationships.

GLOSSARY

Abbreviations:

BF	Blended Family
BFSP	Building Family Strengths Project
FAC	Family Action Centre
FSRP	Family Strengths Research Project
FSTR	Family Strengths Theme Research
FTA	Focussed Theme Analysis
GTA	General Theme Analysis
SPF	Sole Parent Family

Definitions:

Blended Family

A family household consisting of an adult couple and children. When a sole parent repartners and shares the care of the children with the new partner, a stepfamily is formed. When a child is born to the new couple relationship, the resulting family is generally referred to as a blended family (ABS, 1997). However in this report, Blended Family refers to both stepfamily and blended family formation.

Nuclear Family

A family household consisting of an adult couple and their child(ren). The couple are the natural or adopted parents of their child(ren). This family type is also referred to as an intact family by the ABS (ABS, 1997).

Sole Parent Family

A family household consisting of one adult and her / his child(ren). The adult is the natural or adopted parent of his / her child(ren).

Strength or Family strength

Those relationship patterns, interpersonal skills and competencies, and social and psychological characteristics which create a sense of positive family identity, promote satisfying and fulfilling interaction among family members, encourage development of the potential of the family group and individual family members, and contribute to the family's ability to deal effectively with stress and crisis. (Stinnett, Chesser, & DeFrain, 1979)

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- DeFrain, John. (1999) Strong families around the world. *Family Matters*. Winter 1999, Issue No. 53, pp. 6-13. Australian Institute of Family Studies.
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Family Strengths Project

Australian Family Strengths Inventory

- This inventory is about your understanding of the strengths of your family.
- Each item on the following pages begins with 'In our family'...
- Please tick the number, which best describes how you feel. Please try to answer every item. If the item doesn't really apply to your family, tick the 'Doesn't Apply' option.
- Please return surveys in the reply-paid envelope to Sharon Hitchcock at the Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle.

**Thank you,
Sharon**

The University requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, if an independent person is preferred, to the University's Human Research Ethics Officer, Research Branch, The Chancellery, University of Newcastle, Callaghan NSW 2308, telephone (02) 4921 6333.

Code Ref. ____ _

In our family ...

	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
1. We like to give each other a chance to do new things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
2. We have a number of common interests.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
3. We like to have fun together.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
4. We like to share our feelings with each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
5. A crisis has helped us to grow closer together.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
6. Responsibilities are shared fairly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
7. We feel a strong connection with the land.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
8. We feel comfortable with each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
9. We enjoy hearing our grandparents' stories about the past.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
10. We love one another.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
11. We are able to forgive each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
12. We enjoy helping each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
13. It is easy to cue into each other's feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
14. We enjoy simple, inexpensive family activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
15. We like talking openly with each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9

In our family ...

	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
16. We like having a place we call 'home'.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
17. We listen to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
18. We find solutions to our problems when we talk about them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
19. We like keeping our promises to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
20. We like to show affection to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
21. We feel strongly connected to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
22. Hanging out together builds strong relationships.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
23. We have lots of good times together.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
24. We feel close to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
25. We respect each other's point of view.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
26. We like to be kind to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
27. Talking through issues is important to us.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
28. We often laugh with each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
29. We try to change the things we can.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9

In our family ...

	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
30. We have a hopeful attitude towards life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
31. Everyone gets their say in making decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
32. We like to hug each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
33. Our home feels like a sanctuary for all of us.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
34. Individuals are allowed to make their own choices.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
35. Observing family rituals and customs is important to us.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
36. We enjoy being thoughtful of each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
37. We give each other a chance to explain ourselves.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
38. Our communication is effective.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
39. We allow each other to be ourselves.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
40. We enjoy the times we share together.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
41. Life in our family is satisfying to us.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
42. We wait for each other without complaining.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9

In our family ...

	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
43. We enjoy our family discussions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
44. We can work together to solve very difficult family problems.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
45. We have a strong sense of belonging.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
46. We are happy as a family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
47. We find it easy to trust each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
48. We share jokes together.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
49. A crisis helps make our relationships strong.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
50. We really care for each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
51. Putdowns are rare.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
52. We like to do things for each other that make us feel good about ourselves.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
53. We have reasonable expectations of each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
54. We have a high regard for each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
55. We respect the roles each of us play in the family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9

In our family ...

	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
56. We are honest with each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
57. We value each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
58. Sarcasm is not generally used.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
59. We enjoy looking at our family history.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
60. We find it easy to make plans and then to carry them out.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
61. We feel strong connections with our ancestors.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
62. There is a feeling of safety and security.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
63. We feel connected with nature and the world around us.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
64. It is easy to share our values and ideas with each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
65. There is a sense of peace.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
66. We often say, 'She'll be right, Mate'.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
67. We enjoy sharing our memories with each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
68. We are able to face daily issues confidently.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
69. We like to support each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9

In our family ...

	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
70. Our friends are there when we need them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
71. A crisis makes us stick closer together.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
72. We always find something good comes from a crisis.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
73. We grow stronger because we love each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
74. We believe love is a powerful force that keeps us together.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
75. We can make changes in our plans to meet changing circumstances.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
76. We benefit in many ways from our belief in a higher being.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
77. We have the courage to take risks that will improve things for our family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
78. We look at challenges as opportunities for growth.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
79. We feel it is important to accept the things we cannot change.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9

In our family ...

	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
80. Our personal religious and moral beliefs are compatible with each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
81. All things considered we are a strong family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
82. We give each other enough time to complete necessary tasks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
83. We enjoy having unplanned, spontaneous activities together.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
84. We have strong spiritual connections that enhance our well-being.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9
85. We accept that each of us has different ways of doing things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	9

American Family Strengths Inventory

*A Teaching Tool for Generating Discussion on the Qualities that Make a Family Strong**

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Research in the U.S. and around the world has found that strong families have a wide variety of qualities which contribute to the family members' sense of personal worth and feelings of satisfaction in their relationships with each other. A first step in developing the strengths of one's family is to assess those areas in which the family is doing well, and those areas in which family members would like to grow further.

The qualities of strong families in America can be broken down into six general categories, as outlined in the following pages. Put an "S" for Strength beside the qualities you feel your family has achieved, and a "G" beside those qualities which are an area of potential Growth. If the particular characteristic does not apply to your family or is not a characteristic important to you, put an "NA" for Not Applicable.

By doing this exercise, family members will be able to identify those areas they would like to work on together to improve, and those areas of strength which will serve as the foundation for their growth and positive change together.

This American Family Strength Inventory has been validated through research with more than 17,000 family members in the U.S. and 26 other countries around the world. These studies of family strengths have been conducted by Nick Stinnett, John DeFrain, and their colleagues since 1974.

For more information about this research, see:

- Defrain, J. (1999). *Strong families around the world. Family Matters: Australian Institute of Family Studies*, 53 (Winter), 6-13.
- Olson, D.H. & DeFrain, J. (2000). *Marriage and the family: Diversity and strengths*, 3rd ed. Mountain View, California: Mayfield.
- Stinnett, N., & DeFrain, J. (1985). *Secrets of strong families*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Not to be used without the expressed permission of the researchers.

American Family Strengths Inventory

Sharing Life Together

In Our Family

- ↓ We have a number of common interests.
- ↓ We like to have fun together.
- ↓ We feel comfortable with each other.
- ↓ We like to give each other a chance to do new things.
- ↓ We enjoy hearing our grandparents' stories about the past.
- ↓ We enjoy simple, inexpensive family activities.
- ↓ We like to have a place we call 'home'.
- ↓ We feel strongly connected to each other.
- ↓ Hanging out together builds strong relationships.
- ↓ We have lots of good times together.
- ↓ We often laugh with each other.
- ↓ Observing family rituals and customs is important to us.
- ↓ We enjoy sharing our memories with each other.
- ↓ We enjoy having unplanned, spontaneous activities together.
- ↓ **All things considered, we have adequate time for each other, and we enjoy the time we share together.**

Caring For Each Other

In Our Family....

- ↓ We appreciate each other, and let each other know this.
- ↓ We enjoy helping each other.
- ↓ We like keeping our promises to each other.
- ↓ We like to show affection to each other.
- ↓ We feel close to each other.
- ↓ We like to be kind to each other.
- ↓ We like to hug each other.
- ↓ We enjoy being thoughtful of each other.
- ↓ We wait for each other without complaining.
- ↓ We give each other enough time to complete necessary tasks.
- ↓ We are able to forgive each other.
- ↓ We grow stronger because we love each other.
- ↓ **All things considered, we have appreciation and affection for each other.**

American Family Strengths Inventory (DeFrain and Stinnett)

Communicating Effectively with Each Other

In Our Family...

- ↓ We like to share our feelings with each other.
- ↓ It is easy to cue into each other's feelings.
- ↓ We like talking openly with each other.
- ↓ We listen to each other.
- ↓ We respect each other's point of view.
- ↓ Talking through issues is important to us.
- ↓ We give each other a chance to explain ourselves.
- ↓ We enjoy our family discussions.
- ↓ We share jokes together.
- ↓ Putdowns are rare.
- ↓ Sarcasm is not generally used.
- ↓ **All things considered, our communication is effective.**

Valuing Each Other

In Our Family...

- ↓ Responsibilities are shared fairly.
- ↓ Everyone gets a say in making decisions.
- ↓ Individuals are allowed to make their own choices.
- ↓ We find it easy to trust each other.
- ↓ We like to do things for each other that makes us feel good about ourselves.
- ↓ We have reasonable expectations of each other.
- ↓ We allow each other to be ourselves.
- ↓ We have a high regard for each other.
- ↓ We respect the roles each of us plays in the family.
- ↓ We find it easy to be honest with each other.
- ↓ We accept that each of us has different ways of doing things.
- ↓ We build each other's self-esteem.
- ↓ **All things considered, we value each other and are committed to our well-being as a family.**

American Family Strengths Inventory (DeFrain and Stinnett)

Connecting Spiritually for a Sense of Well-being

- ↓ We feel a strong connection with the land.
- ↓ We have a hopeful attitude towards life.
- ↓ Our home feels like a sanctuary for all of us.
- ↓ We have a strong sense of belonging.
- ↓ We enjoy learning about our family history.
- ↓ We feel strong connections with our ancestors.
- ↓ There is a feeling of safety and security.
- ↓ We feel connected with nature and the world around us.
- ↓ There is a sense of peace among us.
- ↓ We believe love is a powerful force that keeps us together.
- ↓ We benefit in many ways from our belief in a higher being.
- ↓ It is easy to share our spiritual values and beliefs with each other.
- ↓ Our personal religious beliefs are compatible with each other.
- ↓ **All things considered, we have strong spiritual connections that enhance our well-being.**

Growing Together Through Challenges

In Our Family...

- ↓ A crisis has helped us to grow closer together.
- ↓ It is easy to find solutions to our problems when we talk about them.
- ↓ It is always important to change the things we can.
- ↓ We can work together to solve very difficult family problems.
- ↓ A crisis helps make our relationships strong.
- ↓ We try not to worry too much, because things usually work out okay.
- ↓ We are able to face daily issues confidently.
- ↓ We like to support each other.
- ↓ Our friends are there when we need them.
- ↓ A crisis makes us stick closer together.
- ↓ We always find something good comes from a crisis.
- ↓ We find it easy to make changes in our plans to meet changing circumstances.
- ↓ We have the courage to take risks that will improve things for our family.
- ↓ We feel it is important to accept the things we cannot change.
- ↓ **All things considered, we look at challenges as opportunities for growth.**

American Family Strengths Inventory (DeFrain and Stinnett)

Global Measures of the Family's Strengths

- ↓ We love one another.
- ↓ Life in our family is satisfying to us.
- ↓ We are happy as a family.
- ↓ **All things considered, we are a strong family.**

March 20, 2000

11. What do you call your job? _____

12. What kind of work do you do on your job?

13. If you are presently living with a spouse or other adult who contributes to your support, please describe the educational level of that person:

14. What does this person call her or his job? _____

15. The kind of work done on the job?

16. Approximate yearly gross household income: Less than \$20,000
(Please tick) \$20,000 - \$40,000
\$40,000 - \$60,000
Over \$60,000

17. If you are a parent the number and age of children. ____ (Number)
____ years ____ years
____ years ____ years
____ years ____ years

18. From the statements listed below select the one which best describes your understanding of a family. Please give your own understanding if these statements are not suitable.

____ 'The basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their own or adopted children.'

____ 'People who are united by the ties of marriage, blood or adoption and have a commitment to each other's well-being.'

____ 'People who feel strongly connected by common threads, who share life experiences, and have a concern for each other's well being.'

____ 'People who live together and who are committed to each other, share values and life circumstances.'

My understanding of a family is _____



Australian Family Strengths Project

An Invitation to Australian Families

Would you like to give your understanding of what makes a strong, happy Australian family?

Who can be involved?

Family members who belong to a strong or happy Australian family.

How can you be involved?

By volunteering to complete a survey on family strengths.

To obtain your free information kit:

Contact: The Family Action Centre on 02 49216858 or
FAX: 02 49216934
Email: family@newcastle.edu.au

Please Include: Your name, address and a contact number.

Australian Family Strengths Project

Wanted: Men

Would you like to give your views on what makes a strong, happy Australian family?

Who can be involved?

Family Members who belong to a strong, Australian Family.
In particular we are interested in the views of men, and boys aged 12 years and over.

How can you be involved?

By volunteering to complete a survey on family strengths.
To receive a survey package on 'Family strengths':

Contact: The Family Action Centre on 02 49216858 or
FAX: 02 49216934
Email: family@newcastle.edu.au



*Media campaign – Responses to our Publicity Strategies***Phase I****Newspapers**

Mt Druitt – St Mary's Standard (5/5)
 Campus Review (14/6)
 Mirror – Foster (Victoria regional)
 (29/9)
 Murray Pioneer – Renmark (South Australia)
 (1/10)
 Shepparton News (29/9)
 Courier Mail, Queensland
 Lake Times – Shellharbour (NSW regional)
 (13/10)
 Euroa Gazette (Victoria regional) (5/10)
 Southern Times Messenger (South Australia)
 (6/10)
 News Review Messenger (South Australia)
 (6/10)
 Goondiwindi Argus (29/9)
 Bairnsdale Advertiser (Victoria) (24/9)
 Wimmera Mail Times – Horsham (Victoria)
 (24/9)
 Newcastle Herald and Post – 8 stories and
 articles.

Radio Interviews

ABC Sydney - Life Matters (22/6)
 2NUR-FM (29/6)
 2NC (8/6)
 2HD (12/7)
 2NUR-FM (15/10)
 ABC Bendigo Morning radio show ,
 (11/10)
 SBS Interview aired on the Turkish,
 Dutch and Urdu (Pakistan) programs.
 2BN Newcastle 2 interviews with John
 Clarke
 2KY in Sydney with Gareth McCraig on
 the 'Breakfast Show'
 2NM Muswellbrook -James Calton show
 ABC Radio Newcastle
 2NC and ABC Radio – Canberra (x 2)
 ABC Radio Alice Springs
 ABC Radio Broken Hill

Magazines

Mother & Baby – November/December, 1999
Family Matters – Winter, 1999
 Family Circle – December, 1999

Television

Several news items by NBN Television,
 Newcastle

Phase II**Radio Interviews**

2UE
 2EC
 ABC – Toowoombah
 ABC - Tamworth
 ABC – East Coast
 ABC – Bathurst
 ABC – Victoria (Rural)
 ABC – Orange
 2BBB - Belligen

Explanation of Inventory Items

Global items to test the strength of the family (4)

Items: 10, 41, 46, 81

- We love one another.
- Life in our family is satisfying to us.
- We are happy as a family.
- All things considered we are a strong family.

Categories

Sharing life together:

Items: 1, 3, 3, 8, 9, 14, 16, 21, 22, 23, 28, 35, 67, 83 (14)

Global Category Item 40: We enjoy the time we share together.

Caring for each other:

Items: 11, 12, 19, 20, 24, 26, 32, 36, 42, 73, 82 (11)

Global Category Item 50: We really care for each other.

Communicating effectively with each other:

Items: 4, 13, 15, 17, 25, 27, 38, 43, 48, 51, 58 (11)

Global Category Item 38: Our communication is effective.

Valuing each other:

Items: 6, 31, 34, 39, 47, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 85 (11)

Global Category Item 57: We value each other.

Connecting spiritually for well-being:

Items: 7, 30, 33, 45, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 74, 76, 80 (14)

Global Category Item 84: We have strong spiritual connections that enhance our well-being.

Growing together through challenges:

Items: 5, 18, 29, 44, 49, 66, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 75, 77, 79 (14)

Global Category Item 78: We look at challenges as opportunities for growth.

INVENTORY RESPONSE PERCENTAGES – Per Likert Scale Option

Global Items

	Item	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
10	We love one another.	81.20	16.90	1.80				0.20
41	Life in our family is satisfying to us.	54.40	37.10	8.10	0.20			0.20
46	We are happy as a family.	66.10	26.20	7.50	0.20			
81	All things considered we are a strong family.	68.60	26.50	5.00				

Global Category Items

	Item	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
38	Our communication is effective.	26.50	46.70	22.40	2.80	1.20	0.30	
40	We enjoy the times we share together.	58.80	34.70	6.30	0.20			
50	We really care for each other.	68.90	26.70	3.50	0.30	0.20	0.20	0.20
57	We value each other.	58.70	36.30	4.50		0.30		0.20
78	We look at challenges as opportunities for growth.	34.40	40.90	20.10	3.20	0.50	0.20	0.70
84	We have strong spiritual connections that enhance our well-being.	33.60	20.80	19.80	9.30	5.20	2.20	9.10

Sharing Life Together

	Item	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
1	We like to give each other a chance to do new things.	46.80	43.10	9.50	0.20			0.50
2	We have a number of common interests	35.40	46.40	14.90	2.60	0.50	0.20	
3	We like to have fun together.	59.20	32.10	8.30	0.30	0.20		
8	We feel comfortable with each other.	59.40	32.60	7.50	0.50			
9	We enjoy hearing our grandparents' stories about the past.	34.90	35.30	14.50	2.20	0.70	1.00	11.50
14	We enjoy simple, inexpensive family activities.	54.60	34.10	9.40	1.00	0.20		0.70
16	We like having a place we call 'home'.	81.10	16.30	2.20	0.20		0.20	0.20
21	We feel strongly connected to each other.	60.00	31.20	8.30	0.30	0.20		
22	Hanging out together builds strong relationships.	48.10	35.10	12.30	2.70	0.50	0.20	1.20
23	We have lots of good times together.	52.60	35.20	10.90	1.20	0.20		
28	We often laugh with each other.	56.80	33.90	7.50	1.50	0.20	0.20	
35	Observing family rituals and customs is important to us.	31.90	33.40	22.50	5.70	1.30	0.50	4.70
67	We enjoy sharing our memories with each other.	42.10	40.00	14.90	2.00		0.30	0.70
83	We enjoy having unplanned, spontaneous activities together.	41.90	38.60	15.50	2.30	0.30	0.20	1.20

Caring For Each Other

	Item	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
11	We are able to forgive each other.	61.20	30.70	7.40		0.20		0.50
12	We enjoy helping each other.	48.30	39.30	10.70	1.70			
19	We like keeping our promises to each other.	45.40	42.90	10.40	0.30		0.20	0.80
20	We like to show affection to each other.	52.20	31.30	13.30	2.30	0.70		0.20
24	We feel close to each other.	58.80	34.10	6.00	1.20			
26	We like to be kind to each other.	53.00	37.90	8.30	0.70	0.20		
32	We like to hug each other.	46.90	30.60	14.50	5.50	1.50	0.20	0.80
36	We enjoy being thoughtful of each other.	40.40	44.70	12.80	2.00		0.20	
42	We wait for each other without complaining.	11.30	36.20	36.30	12.20	1.70	1.70	0.70
73	We grow stronger because we love each other.	53.50	34.00	11.70	0.50			0.30
82	We give each other enough time to complete necessary tasks.	26.10	51.80	17.20	2.70	0.30	0.30	1.50

Communicating Effectively With Each Other

	Item	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
4	We like to share our feelings with each other.	33.10	40.30	20.80	4.30	1.30	0.20	
13	It is easy to cue into each other's feelings.	26.70	40.90	27.60	4.20	0.70		
15	We like talking openly with each other.	37.40	39.50	19.20	3.10	0.50	0.20	0.20
17	We listen to each other.	36.70	49.00	13.10	1.00	0.20		
25	We respect each other's point of view.	42.80	42.60	13.30	1.00		0.30	
27	Talking through issues is important to us.	44.80	38.30	13.90	2.00	0.50	0.20	0.30
37	We give each other a chance to explain ourselves.	33.90	46.80	16.00	2.50	0.30	0.30	0.20
43	We enjoy our family discussions.	32.40	47.60	16.70	1.70	0.70	0.30	0.70
48	We share jokes together.	62.80	31.40	5.00	0.70		0.20	
51	Putdowns are rare.	29.10	35.80	24.30	6.50	2.20	1.30	0.70
58	Sarcasm is not generally used.	23.80	34.00	24.50	9.30	4.20	3.70	0.50

Valuing Each Other

	Item	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
6	Responsibilities are shared fairly.	20.30	39.00	28.30	7.60	3.00	0.70	1.20
31	Everyone gets their say in making decisions.	28.40	44.50	21.80	3.00	1.00	0.50	0.80
34	Individuals are allowed to make their own choices.	33.50	43.50	19.70	2.50	0.50		0.30
39	We allow each other to be ourselves.	44.40	41.90	13.30	0.50			
47	We find it easy to trust each other.	57.10	31.80	9.00	1.50		0.30	0.20
52	We like to do things for each other that make us feel good about ourselves.	37.00	43.70	13.90	3.20	0.70	0.50	1.00
53	We have reasonable expectations of each other.	32.80	52.70	12.00	1.20	0.70	0.20	0.50
54	We have a high regard for each other.	53.40	38.70	7.20	0.70			
55	We respect the roles each of us play in the family.	46.00	44.50	8.00	0.80	0.20	0.20	0.30
56	We are honest with each other.	40.70	47.50	11.00	0.20	0.50	0.20	
85	We accept that each of us has different ways of doing things.	39.30	45.80	11.80	2.20	0.50	0.50	

Connecting Spiritually For Well-being

	Item	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
7	We feel a strong connection with the land.	20.60	23.00	29.20	8.90	7.90	2.30	8.10
30	We have a hopeful attitude towards life.	50.30	39.60	9.00	0.70		0.20	0.20
33	Our home feels like a sanctuary for all of us.	56.90	30.90	9.80	1.80		0.20	0.30
45	We have a strong sense of belonging.	60.20	32.40	6.00	1.20			0.20
59	We enjoy looking at our family history.	32.00	34.70	21.60	8.00	1.30	0.30	2.20
60	We find it easy to make plans and then to carry them out.	21.90	43.80	24.70	8.00	1.30	0.20	0.20
61	We feel strong connections with our ancestors.	18.80	22.40	32.20	14.80	6.80	1.30	3.70
62	There is a feeling of safety and security.	60.00	34.20	4.80	0.80		0.20	
63	We feel connected with nature and the world around us.	24.30	36.90	26.90	6.00	2.70	0.50	2.80
64	It is easy to share our values and ideas with each other.	38.70	45.00	14.70	1.30		0.20	0.20
65	There is a sense of peace.	38.40	39.90	17.80	2.80	0.30	0.20	0.50
74	We believe love is a powerful force that keeps us together.	54.40	28.50	14.70	1.70	0.30		0.30
76	We benefit in many ways from our beliefs in a higher being.	37.70	17.80	16.60	6.50	5.00	6.20	10.20
80	Our personal religious and moral beliefs are compatible with each other.	42.20	30.80	15.50	3.50	1.80	0.80	5.20

Growing Together Through Challenges

	Item	Definitely Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree	Doesn't Apply
5	A crisis has helped us to grow closer together.	37.00	27.30	17.60	3.00	2.70	1.20	11.40
18	We find solutions to our problems when we talk about them.	35.00	46.30	16.40	1.50	0.50		0.30
29	We try to change things we can.	31.60	49.40	15.10	1.70	0.70		1.50
44	We can work together to solve very difficult family problems.	37.70	42.60	14.20	2.70			2.80
49	A crisis helps make our relationships stronger.	37.50	33.60	15.60	3.20	0.70	0.30	9.20
66	We often say, 'She'll be right, Mate'.	13.80	24.00	22.70	12.00	11.50	7.70	8.30
68	We are able to face daily issues confidently.	36.80	47.00	14.90	0.80		0.30	0.20
69	We like to support each other.	55.30	37.90	6.10	0.30	0.20	0.20	
70	Our friends are there when we need them.	30.80	41.40	22.60	3.00	1.20	0.20	0.80
71	A crisis makes us stick closer together.	40.50	34.90	13.90	2.20	0.80	0.50	7.20
72	We always find something good comes from a crisis.	24.70	32.90	25.80	6.90	1.30	0.70	7.70
75	We can make changes in our plans to meet changing circumstances.	39.30	50.10	9.50	0.50		0.20	0.50
77	We have the courage to take risks that will improve things for our family.	29.40	40.00	23.20	4.50	0.70	0.20	2.00
79	We feel it is important to accept the things we cannot change.	31.70	41.00	21.30	3.20	1.30	0.80	0.70

Factor Analysis Results

The factor analysis is based on 80 items and 4 factors. Five items (26, 41, 46, 54, and 81) were excluded from the analysis due to the fact that they loaded on more than one factor. Missing values were excluded pairwise. The four factors explained 43.4% of the variance.

The letters preceding the item number indicate the category under which the item fell.

S = Sharing Life Together

C = Caring for Each Other

V = Valuing Each Other

E = Communicating Effectively with Each Other

W = Connecting Spiritually for Well-being

G = Growing Together Through Challenges

GF = Global item

If a 'G' precedes the letter then this item is a global category item of that category.

The extracted factors could carry the following titles.

Factor 1 Togetherness

Factor 2 Respectful Communication

Factor 3 Shared values

Factor 4 A Sense of Belonging or Place

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

<i>Item</i>	<i>Item statement</i>	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
C24	We feel close to each other.	.742	.316	.152	.112
S21	We feel strongly connected to each other.	.705	.220	.176	.129
GF10	We love one another	.3685	.103	.172	
S8	We feel comfortable with each other.	.667	.290		
C20	We like to show affection to each other.	.664	.267	.169	.127
S3	We like to have fun together.	.660		.151	.294
S23	We have lots of good times together.	.653	.210	.255	.215
GS40	We enjoy the times we share together.	.642	.337	.308	
C32	We like to hug each other.	.618	.208	.180	.156
S28	We often laugh with each other.	.594	.304	.253	
S22	Hanging out together builds strong relationships.	.591	.211	.174	.224
W45	We have a strong sense of belonging.	.588	.298	.366	
GC50	We really care for each other.	.575	.331	.312	
E4	We like to share our feelings with each other.	.567	.329		.360
E48	We share jokes together.	.558	.214	.394	
E15	We like talking openly with each other.	.552	.376		.269
C73	We grow stronger because we love each other.	.512	.289	.495	
C11	We are able to forgive each other.	.507	.367	.116	
GV57	We value each other.	.485	.462	.275	
S14	We enjoy simple, inexpensive family activities.	.459	.234	.185	.299
W33	Our home feels like a sanctuary for all of us.	.453	.213	.266	.161
W62	There is a feeling of safety and security.	.408	.354	.398	
S83	We enjoy having unplanned, spontaneous activities together.	.361	.159	.297	.105
S16	We like having a place we call 'home'.	.322		.172	.123
E37	We give each other a chance to explain ourselves.	.356	.670	.108	.125
V31	Everyone gets their say in making decisions.	.148	.636		.195

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V55	We respect the roles each of us play in the family.	.261	.625	.232	
E51	Putdowns are rare.	.183	.623		
V53	We have reasonable expectations of each other.	.240	.589	.172	.116
C42	We wait for each other without complaining.	.135	.588		.203
E25	We respect each other's point of view.	.383	.576		.214
G44	We can work together to solve very difficult family problems.	.307	.567	.233	.109
V85	We accept that each of us has different ways of doing things.	.113	.559	.312	
C19	We like keeping our promises to each other.	.332	.559	.104	.139
E43	We enjoy our family discussions.	.325	.540	.145	.217
GE38	Our communication is effective.	.421	.536		.125
G69	We like to support each other.	.469	.534	.322	
V34	Individuals are allowed to make their own choices.	.133	.532		.142
E17	We listen to each other.	.468	.530		
V39	We allow each other to be ourselves.	.371	.529	.180	
C36	We enjoy being thoughtful of each other.	.455	.528	.234	.131
V56	We are honest with each other.	.365	.527	.174	
C82	We give each other enough time to complete necessary tasks.	.128	.523	.325	
G18	We find solutions to our problems when we talk about them.	.342	.519		.154
W64	It is easy to share our values and ideas with each other.	.479	.511	.277	.150
C12	We enjoy helping each other.	.418	.507		.172
W65	There is a sense of peace.	.349	.502	.374	.106
V47	We find it easy to trust each other.	.466	.501	.152	
E27	Talking through issues is important to us.	.432	.501		.177
W60	We find it easy to make plans and then to carry them out.	.149	.471	.251	.226
E58	Sarcasm is not generally used.		.470	.148	.177
G75	We can make changes in our plans to meet changing circumstances.	.222	.467	.454	
E13	It is easy to cue into each other's feelings.	.398	.449		.267
G68	We are able to face daily issues confidently.	.243	.439	.312	.160
W30	We have a hopeful attitude towards life.	.204	.391	.290	.167
V52	We like to do things for each other that make us feel good about ourselves.	.315	.384	.320	
G79	We feel it is important to accept the things we cannot change.		.383	.364	.128
G29	We try to change the things we can.	.319	.334	.180	.189
GW84	We have strong spiritual connections that enhance our well-being.	.204		.621	.162
G72	We always find something good comes from a crisis.		.280	.609	.185
W76	We benefit in many ways from our belief in a higher being.	.128		.564	
G71	A crisis makes us stick closer together.	.171	.349	.519	
GG78	We look at challenges as opportunities for growth.		.335	.507	.202
W74	We believe love is a powerful force that keeps us together.	.429	.137	.502	.118

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G49	A crisis helps make our relationships strong.	.207	.261	.474	.192
G77	We have the courage to take risks that will improve things for our family.	.142	.280	.455	.123
S35	Observing family rituals and customs is important to us.	.154		.439	.220
S67	We enjoy sharing our memories with each other.	.294	.221	.396	.292
W80	Our personal religious and moral beliefs are compatible with each other.	.243		.360	.106
G70	Our friends are there when we need them.		.228	.343	.198
G2	We have a number of common interests.	.226	.151	.335	.285
W7	We feel a strong connection with the land.			.139	.635
W61	We feel strong connections with our ancestors.			.351	.556
S2	We have a number of common interests.	.380	.172		.505
W63	We feel connected with nature and the world around us.		.103	.345	.490
S9	We enjoy hearing our grandparents' stories about the past.		.174	.112	.476
W59	We enjoy looking at our family history.	.154	.117	.328	.457
G66	We often say, 'She'll be right, Mate'.		.150	.198	.378
V6	Responsibilities are shared fairly.	.141	.309		.359
S1	We like to give each other a chance to do new things.	.245	.281		.338