



Wholesome Families

The following questions were asked of parent educators, day care staff and other stakeholders in “parenting” across North America:

Is there such a thing as wholesome families? If so, what does one look like and what advice would you give to parents looking to develop a wholesome family?

Here are the replies:

1	I'm not sure we want to go there.... wholesome is defined very differently by many!
2	<p>As for my take on wholesome families - it's right there in the word "whole" - as families/parents we need to embrace our whole human"ess" which includes the inevitability of conflict and difficult times and difficult feelings/emotions we are all bound to feel at one time or another. Wholesome families would accept this and learn ways to cope and manage such feelings and times. And in coping, it is not necessarily trying to immediately move to a "happy" state but to allow and acknowledge difficult feelings/times and then move on. This is healthy coping. (Of course, if one is unable to move out of difficulty after a few days then that would be reason for concern.)</p> <p>Families that allow for difficulty and accept it but are able to get back on track I would consider a part of wholesomeness:)</p>
3	<p>Perhaps that is what you were originally asking and I didn't get it the first time: what is a wholesome family and how would a family achieve it based on their personal definitions. While there is plenty of room for individual definitions, based on religious preferences, ethnicity, SES level, education, -- you name it -- there are some basics that I think are considered "wholesome" across cultures and lifestyles. One that comes to mind is not harming oneself or another person. That too can vary from family to family.</p> <p>Maybe you want to focus your article on why this is hard to answer and give some guidelines for families on how to identify their values and stick with them...</p>
4	<p>As a society we are struggling to define family. Defining "wholesome" could be challenging. Personally, I like Covey's terminology-- "Effective" families.</p>

5	<p>Eat at least one meal a day together. Participate in at least one activity a week where the whole family can participate. At least once a month there is a family game night with the TV and video off and a card or board game that all members 5 and over can enjoy is played by all. Parents help children choose appropriate activities and limit those activities so there is time for the family. Every family member has an important task that goes into making the household work. It may be as simple as making their own bed to doing dishes, mowing lawns, but everyone knows that they are a contributing member of the family. School has it's proper place in the family, but it is not the sole purpose of a child living in the family, rather it is something to be enjoyed. Every member of the family can read because as children they were read to. High education isn't a goal it is an expectation that everyone will attend schooling beyond high school. It is ok to give a member of the family a kidding and we can all take it and well as dish it out, but always with respect that it is only kidding. A wholesome family knows how to play together.</p>
6	<p>Of course there is a wholesome family. They are families where: every child feels valued for who they are. Where children and parents feel supported by other family members. Where disagreements are aired but no grudges kept. Where family members do things for each other and are there when you need them. Where family members acknowledge each others foibles and strengths and accept them. Where there is laughter and fun and people can laugh at themselves as well as each other. Where limits for children are consistent, reasonable and understood by the child if not always accepted. That's all I can think of. I look forward to the article.</p>
7	<p>We believe a wholesome family is one that cares about each other's needs. Made aware of foundational standards set forth by the parents. Although we are not endorsing any denomination, we feel that religion or respect for a higher entity advances a sense of security to family members and respect for others. In essence; harmony = wholesome.</p>
8	<p>My initial thoughts are that a wholesome family is a nurturing environment for all family members. In a wholesome family, people are respectful to both adults and children, support each other in achieving each individual's personal goals, nurture each other emotionally and physically, include a spiritual component where each member seeks their own personal relationship with God as well as worshiping and thanking God for the both the blessings and challenges they encounter each day.</p> <p>I think to develop a wholesome family, you need to communicate values and respect in all</p>

	<p>of your daily interactions with family members and others you meet each day, make time to do things together, listen and learn from each other so that all family members grow cognitively, physically and emotionally. Problem solving should include brainstorming as many solutions as possible including everyone's input as applicable to the situation.</p> <p>Discipline of children should encourage them to be self-disciplined and should include natural consequences for misbehavior vs. time out or punishment. Many times the individual personalities in families make cause disagreements and differences of opinion.</p> <p>Being able to negotiate with family members about those differences and respecting different opinions creates skills for successfully negotiating with others throughout life.</p> <p>On a basic level I think it is important to ensure as many meals as possible are eaten together and that meal times are used to plan or review each family members day without the interruptions of phone or TV.</p> <p>Creating a loving environment comes first from loving yourself, then developing a loving relationship with a lifetime partner and then extending love to children and others.</p> <p>When challenging times hit, a loving nurturing family should provide a safe place for family members to be renewed and supported.</p>
9	<p>A family that respects one another and may disagree with a member of the family but that family member knows there is unconditional love for them.</p>
10	<p>What's wholesome? My family (husband excluded — too much work for him) sits down to meals together every chance we get. Now that the "kids" are grown we still try to be together. I've taught my daughters the values that are important to me: honesty, appreciation of all that God has given us (especially nature's gifts of animals, plants, the beauty of "wild world," a night sky, thunderstorms, etc), respect for people but also to speak up when someone abuses them or another verbally. I still think a meal with conversation about how your day went or what your plans are is most important to me. With the goofy schedules of our jobs and school there isn't really that much time anymore but we still have the meals together whenever we can. We do projects together, we do outings together. And usually some of their friends are included. They seem to like to come to our home.</p>
11	<p>Wholesome families must be defined in the context of a culture or subculture. In white middle-class America a wholesome family might look quite different from a wholesome family in Iraq or China or even a family living in poverty in one of North America's large cities.</p> <p>A wholesome family is nurturing and moral (according to their own cultural definition). Developing a wholesome family will require parents to be flexible, generous, tolerant and forgiving. They will be ethical, care for each other, be honest with each other, respect one another and strive to stay connected through their differences.</p>
12	<p>The descriptor you used for families, i.e., "wholesome", is somewhat</p>

	value-ladened -- it implies "good" -- I don't see these terms used in family research. Descriptors most often used by family researchers are "healthy", "strong", or "resilient".
13	Thanks for your inquiry regarding wholesome families, of which there are many. However, I must state that there are no "perfect" families. The term we use at Family Service is "strong" families.
14	<p>Hmmm...</p> <p>Wholesome generally implies a family with values that teaches compassion, consideration for others, mutual aid, self-worth and other social based coping tools through example. From the outside, these families seem to never have a problem, from the inside, the families have their share of challenges, but deal with the challenges in a constructive manner. The advice I would give would be different for the child vs. the adult. If one is a child in a dysfunctional family, the child must look beyond their nuclear family to develop a nurturing environment. If one is an adult in a dysfunctional family, the response will vary a bit with the role in the family. For the adult (and likely for the child), I don't believe I can summarize approaches in a few short lines.</p>
15	Thanks for your message. I can't spend a whole lot of time mulling this over, but I thought of a book we have in our library called Family Building, edited by Dr. George Rekers (1985, Regal Books). It's the result of research on what makes a family "strong." To me, these could probably contribute to what you're working on with "wholesome." It looks like real solid stuff.
16	<p>A whole some family in my opinion is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - responsive to their children in that they really listen to what the child/ren say/ body language and ask open ended questions to get to the root of what the child means or is thinking about - trusts - loves unconditionally - is accepting of differences and opinions - has expectations about how to live life well, learn, behave with others etc. - has consequences to misbehaviour that are not punitive - gives children time - reads to them or provides a way for someone to read to them - tries to expose them to culture - music, art, etc. <p>It does not matter if they have money or is a traditional family i.e. mom and dad. All that matters is that the family has the above attributes or is working on them.</p>
17	I happened to have grown up in foster care and began asking myself this question while still a pre-teen. At that time I envisioned a "family" as something idyllic and envied a few of my friends with what I perceived to be "wholesome" families. Interestingly, until I was 8 years old (the year my mother died), I thought mine was idyllic...I'll

get back to that.

Now to what I think about the "wholesome" family. First...it is not about what that family "looks" like... or its financial status...or its educational level. The wholesome family, simply put, meets the needs of its members emotionally, physically, and cognitively as much as possible. In doing this they are neither so tightly dependent on each other that individuals can't flourish...nor so separate that any one of them can't be "needy". I also believe strongly (and I think there is evidence to back up the belief to make it "knowledge") that when a "family" nourishes children in their infancy, that "wholesomeness" lingers as part of the make up of the child (and even the family), even when the family dynamics change. Given what we know about early brain development, it would seem to be crucial to teach "how to's" regarding the nourishing of children as a practicality for ensuring family wholesomeness.

I am also convinced that it isn't an absence of problems that makes a family "wholesome". Rather, it is the access the family has, and/or the ability of the family to use resources, and their availability.

It would also be important to recognize that culture may determine how we define "wholesomeness" of a family to some extent. My definition of "wholesome" could conflict (hopefully not prejudicially) with another family's. For example...I would include a world view standing point and exposure as crucial to teach children about other people and their place in the world; someone else would see "wholesomeness" in the context of a certain religion, perhaps, and adhering to those precepts.

Back to the beginning...I am one of only a third (an old statistic but I suspect it still holds) of children who grow up in foster care who do not end up in institutions of some kind (mental, prisons, etc.). I'm often asked why I survived, even succeeded (a matter of opinion and with my share of "quirks":-) I usually point to my first 8 years surrounded by family, extended family, and spending hours a day on the bed with my ill mother. They say I learned to read as I learned to talk due to those hours. What I realize now, is that I had a list of what contributes to the well-being of children: I learned the value of reading/education; I had the support of adults and a rich assortment of cousins and friends of all ages; I was taught I could do and or be anything; I was taught that I had a responsibility to others and to myself. When looking at lists of what people need to make it in a middle class society (not the only valid one by a long shot, but the one we have to live in)...I had all except money during the time (I think)

	<p>that matters most...the early years. I built muscle...so to speak...for when things fell apart. The upshot of all this is that the cycle was broken....my children and theirs (I now have grandchildren from ages 19 to 2 years old) have families that would be considered "wholesome"....not without problems, but nourishing, supporting, and encouraging.</p>
18	<p>Just off the top of my head - I would have to say a "wholesome" family involves; integrity, honesty, consistency, communication, and a strong belief system. If I gave advice it would be to practice and be open minded to the fact that things change over time and you have to be willing to adapt and that the above listed are not dynamic but do not change. Sound corny? Just had a minute</p>
19	<p>I do think that there is such a thing as "wholesome families". I don't think that wholesome means perfect or "goody-goody", but I think that it means that the members of the family care about one another and spend time together and don't just cohabitate.</p> <p>I sometimes feel as though children don't have time to be children and that they are growing up faster than ever. I believe a wholesome family is a family where the members love and respect one another. I think in a wholesome family there is at least one parent/grandparent/relative who is the leader of the family (as opposed to some families I have seen where the child seems to be the leader). If there are two parents, the parents have a loving and healthy relationship and are able to demonstrate that to their children with their kind actions and words. The parents or caregiver is responsible for teaching their children to take responsibility for their actions and to treat others as they would like to be treated. Through the parents the child learns to be a productive member of society and because of the parenting and support that they have had in their lives, can grow to have healthy relationships when they are older and hopefully will continue the pattern with their own children.</p> <p>As a parent I try to maintain what I think is a wholesome family. I am divorced and I have worked very hard to create a loving, supportive group for my son to spend time with. I know where he is at all times, I don't allow him to roam the neighborhood and play with just anyone. I guess I may be a little overprotective, but I want him to know that I care about him, where he is and who he spends his time with. I share my values and beliefs with him and we attend church regularly where our beliefs at home can be reinforced at church. I make sure he spends time with others who have normal, healthy relationships because I am not currently married and I want him to see how the dynamics of relationships work. It doesn't mean that everyone gets along all of the time and life is wonderful all of the time, but it does mean that you know you have people who care about you and</p>

	<p>support you no matter where your path in life leads you.</p> <p>In a time where people's schedules are busier than ever and we live in the age of the soccer mom and cyberspace, I believe that as a society we have to hold on to the notion of a wholesome family, otherwise it seems pretty hopeless.</p>
20	<p>Do I believe there is such a thing as a wholesome family? I believe there are healthy families. I don't believe in perfect. The myth of perfect puts a great deal of pressure on families to live up to something that doesn't really exist. The best advice that I could give to parents is to listen and observe. Speak with interest - not just to control, and speak positively. The word wholesome makes me think of the perfect TV families. The unrealistic scripted lives of actors. I think that all real families have positive and negative moments. All real families like real people sometimes react badly to some situations. I would tell parents to gather themselves together when they fall down and move on. I have often told my children I was sorry for a harsh word given or a situation misunderstood. I try to give respect to get respect. There isn't one formula for perfect parenting.</p>
21	<p>Sure there are wholesome families. These families have several components. Allow me to make a short, non-comprehensive list:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wholesome families possess strong theological, social, and moral values/traditions; 2. The majority of wholesome families have a husband and wife who are passionate about being life-long lovers and friends; 3. Wholesome families learn together about each other, life, the world around them and what is happening globally; 4. Wholesome families comfort each other's emotional wounds; 5. Wholesome families focus on training children for responsible life choices and adult interaction; 6. Wholesome families have fun together while avoiding events and entertainment that oppose family values; 7. Wholesome families use at least one meal per day as an opportunity to interact with one another and off-load stuff that is emotionally disturbing; 8. Wholesome families spend some time each day praying together; 9. Wholesome families value the opinions of one another and never put down the family member who expressed an opinion; 10. Wholesome families have a love for one another that sustains them even when life hurls something ugly at their family; 11. Wholesome family members learn to apologize and ask forgiveness; 12. Wholesome families engage in touching the lives of others for good.
22	<p>Your query about what makes a wholesome family was forwarded to me. It's a tough one, but remember what Hillel responded when asked to explain the Torah standing on one foot? His answer to that tough one, so surprising and profound in its simplicity: Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you.... follows here: respect each for the other, doing mitzvot,</p>

	disallowing loshen hora, understanding and honoring Torah. All the rest flows from that.
23	The first thing that popped in my mind is--positive, open communication, especially frequently finding ways that say "I love you."
24	<p>A wholesome family strives to understand, and then to meet the needs of all its members. A crucial step is understanding the needs of the most vulnerable members of the family. Parents (preferably before they have a child) must have reliable, honest information about the needs of children -- from infancy through the teen years.</p> <p>Recently, two doctors renowned for their clinical practices, their teaching, writing and researching, produced a book in which they lay out the "experiences and types of nurturing to which every child has a right." In the introduction to "The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn and Flourish" (Perseus Books 2000) pediatrician T.Berry Brazelton, M.D. and child psychiatrist Stanley I. Greenspan, M.D. explain, "...by spelling out these needs, it becomes clear that at present our society is failing many of its families and small children. As physicians deeply committed to the well being of children, we can no longer stand by with the complacency that silence implies." On child care, they state: "We do not recommend full-time day care, 30 or more hours of care by nonparents, for infants and toddlers if the parents are able to provide high-quality care themselves and if the parents have reasonable options." The doctors urge parents to put aside their assumptions and learn about the ongoing, nurturing care children require.</p> <p>For over two decades the nonprofit organization Family and Home Network has been advocating for parents and children concerning their critical need for generous amounts of time together, and for mothers and fathers who forgo or cut back on paid employment. FAHN provides parent-to-parent support, education and networking, and strives to empower all parents to preserve and improve the opportunity to spend more time nurturing their children from birth through the teen years. FAHN calls on local, state and federal governments to enact fair family policies, changing those policies established in recent decades which favor families who use paid child care over those families in which a parent or family member provides unpaid care for the children.</p>
25	I am sorry that I can't be of help to you on this, but I really have no idea how to answer your questions.
26	<p>I'm not sure I think that labels like "wholesome" actually help parents--any time you make a label like that, some people are bound to feel that the label doesn't fit them.</p> <p>I guess my bottom line is that every family can move forward from whatever</p>

	<p>position they find themselves in. And every family deserves support and good information to make that forward movement possible. Movement toward showing love more fully, toward being pleased with their children, toward integrating play and one-on-one time with each child into their lives, and movement toward allowing each child to have feelings about small and large things that happen in their lives, movement toward setting limits with respect, and movement toward replacing any crutches that members of the family use to numb out bad feelings with close relationships and support.</p> <p>Movement toward love and understanding, toward leadership of the family, and toward tolerating how people feel, but setting limits on what they are permitted to do about those feelings are what we try to help parents achieve.</p>
27	<p>Thank you for this task today. Self-reflection is so therapeutic!</p> <p>Wholesome:</p> <p>If your definition of wholesome is healthy.....</p> <p>What is a wholesome family? I don't think wholesome is a word we can use in 2003 to describe families. Life is so complex that the many illusions of a family still exist when they shouldn't.</p> <p>However, a 2003 version of the wholesome family (in my humble opinion) would look like this. A family who is happy, a family who is making ends meet, a family who respects one another, a family who genuinely appreciate each other and the gifts that each member (no matter how small or large) bring to one another's life.</p> <p>My advice would be - follow through on your commitments to your family. Whether it is following thru on a consequence, or not buying an unaffordable luxury. You will be happier and more content.</p> <p>Never forget the sheer joy that having a loving family can bring to you. Never forget to "Not sweat the small stuff", and always choose your battles. Never forget that your children are small so such a very short time - enjoy every second that you have them. Never forget to read and learn. Never forget having a family is a joy not a task.</p> <p>I love being a mother and the partner of a loving husband, and can only wish the same happiness for everyone.</p>
28	<p>Absolutely there is such a thing as a "wholesome" family. I see more and more parents actively cultivating a family life that is emotionally healthy for all involved. The parents in a wholesome family, in my view, strive to</p>

	<p>shelter their children when possible. I don't mean shelter the children in a negative sense whereas the kids will not develop the tools necessary to deal with the "real" world. This is a very positive sheltering in which parents explain situations as needed on the child's level and attempt to protect the kids from negative situations before they are ready to deal with them.</p> <p>Wholesome families spend quite a bit of time together building a strong family base. For parents wanting to develop a wholesome family, I suggest making a concerted effort to slow down at least two days a week and spend quiet time with the children; lie on the grass and watch the clouds move, play catch, ride bikes, read books. When you spend quiet time with kids you can really connect with them and form a very strong bond.</p>
29	<p>Unfortunately don't have a lot of time to answer but it is an interesting question. I read "wholesome" to mean "healthy" and "family" to mean "adults and children". To develop a wholesome family you need a loving, nurturing adult(s) sharing life experiences in a constructive, supportive, and non-judgmental way with the children in their care. The end result will be more loving nurturing adults to continue the cycle.</p>
30	<p>The parents respect each other and respect their children; the children respect each other, and respect their parents.</p> <p>Of course, I'd cut out 98 percent of all TV and video games . . . but that's one of the things that I'm convinced is destroying family life, not to mention causing a lot of other problems. Of course, the time spent in front of a screen must be replaced with other things--including lying on your back looking at the clouds, or the stars.</p>
31	<p>The main things I would stress are parents who spend time with their children and give them lots of attention. Those who model how to do things, setting good examples for their children, provide a stable, wholesome atmosphere. Good communication between family members is crucial. Parents in wholesome families have good values and teach these to their children. They take time for frequent family times and outings. These can be simple things such as taking walks or bike rides together. Time together means more than spending money on things. What is most important is lots of love, affection, and respect for each other.</p> <p>Parents in wholesome families provide "roots" for their children, and then give them "wings" to grow and learn independence.</p> <p>We must always keep in mind that different cultures may have different values, so family values can differ from one family to another.</p> <p>Also, there are many variations these days as to what a family is comprised of - two parent or single parent families, grandparents with custody of their grandchildren, foster parents, adoptive parents, etc. Any of these can be wholesome families.</p>
32	<p>To me a wholesome family is one in which all members of the family are</p>

	<p>secure, content and well stimulated. It's a cohesive unit in which there is mutual respect - where yelling is at a minimum with a maximum of hugging. A wholesome family is supportive of each other, and solves problems with intellect rather than violence. These are ideals that are important to my family.</p>
33	<p>My opinion is...yes, I think there are wholesome families. To me, a wholesome family is one where the children respect their parents, parents are great role models for their children. The family displays the same morals, values and beliefs with open lines of communication, family bonding (structure). Ideally, it is a learning process where the family grows together in life with sharing, caring, encouragement, and discipline.</p>
34	<p>Developing a wholesome family would encompass many realms. There is in fact, such a thing as a wholesome family. The disagreements would come into play on how it would be defined. Some would say a wholesome family is an involved family. A wholesome family could be a very motivated family, in areas such as feeling that parents can truly make a difference in the lives of their children, knowing that their time is greatly appreciated, and participating in family training and guidance sessions. A wholesome family knows its strengths and weaknesses. By knowing these, this family can delegate chores, decisions, and other jobs to the stronger members in those areas. A wholesome family is flexible and cohesive. Balance is also a crucial part of the family structure. This day in time a wholesome family does not necessarily have to be the traditional mold, but a unit who cares for and nurtures one another.</p>
35	<p>A WHOLESOME FAMILY IS COMMUNICATION AND RESPECT and love for each person in the family unit. be it with two parents or as often the case the single parent family unit</p> <p>We are raised to believe idealistically, two parents who love each other, are happy and have children ARE the prerequisites to being a wholesome family. But, this is not always the case. One in two marriages end in divorce and “the previous wholesome family” becomes a governmental statistic.</p> <p>I am proud to say many single moms and dads, who I have met through Parents Without Partners, have taught me otherwise. Being a single parent, raising child(ren), with the wisdom to focus on the needs of their child is a very wholesome family unit. These single parents struggle day in day out to generate income to support the “family”. They come home to their children with a whole list of tasks they must complete in order to take proper care of their children, be it physically and emotionally. This to me is the reality of the “wholesome family” of the 21st century.</p> <p>Our children, we really only have them for eighteen years of their lives. In those years, we are to prepare them for life. We nurture them from birth on. We show them by example, how to handle everyday life, both the good and the bad, and the realities. We protect them,</p>

	<p>feed them, and clothe them .. and most importantly love them. From the time they get up we teach them ethics, morals and the golden rule. We in essence are “parenting them”.</p> <p>In Parents Without Partners we show, by example, that it is “okay” to part of a single parent’s families, by exposing our children to other healthy single parent families. Our children learn acceptance, tolerance and understanding of their custodial parent. They find out that though life has sent them a “curve”, they have a parent who loves and nurtures them, and puts their needs first. What could be more wholesome?</p>
36	<p>Like many words, wholesome and family have changed and morphed as each generation rides the pop culture wave over them. What used to be typified by a Leave It To Beaver image, is no longer feasible, viable or realistic in terms of the new Millennium. Kids are smarter, more savvy, more mature at an earlier age. Families are no longer tight "units". In fact, the Mom-Dad-Son-Daughter family unit is quickly becoming the exception, not the norm. Families are now comprised of single parents, steps, grandparents, caregivers, guardians, etc.</p> <p>Defining wholesome family in light of the world around us: A wholesome family is one in which there is unconditional love, consequences for actions, a solid faith system being practiced, openness, honesty, respect (earned by all, not given simply because you are older) and generosity. A family in which the children are being raised to appreciate, not fear, the differences in all people. Where parenting is done with reason and sanity, not physical punishment and fear. A wholesome family embraces life, shares joy and sadness and reaches out to help those less fortunate.</p> <p>I look at "wholesome" in terms of the "life" of the people in the family. Are they happy? Are they fulfilled? Are they respectful? Are they engaged in life? Are they open? Wholesome is not defined by "The Osmonds" as in decades past.</p>