

## APPENDIX F

# Healthy Marriages

Parenting can be rewarding, but it also can be a difficult and demanding responsibility. Particularly with all of the demands facing busy families, it perhaps is not surprising that children tend to thrive best in two parent households, providing that it is not a high-conflict marriage. There are numerous factors that can impact a healthy marriage, but those factors should be assessed differently for different populations. For instance, the challenges and concerns of couples with a partner away on a military deployment or because of incarceration are different than those of a couple living together. In addition, it is important to recognize that couples do not either have a healthy marriage or not—healthy marriages exist in varying degrees along a continuum. The quality of the marriage and the contentment of each person involved are likely to vary over time.<sup>1</sup>

There is a growing consensus that it is not just marriage in and of itself that matters, but healthy marriage.<sup>2</sup> There are 10 components instrumental in building a healthy marriage, based on decades of research on marriage and the perspectives of researchers working in the field.

1. Commitment of the couple—taking a long-term perspective toward the relationship, being willing to persevere when difficulties arise, and committing to caring for the other person.
2. Satisfaction—being contented and happy with various aspects of and with the marriage overall.
3. Communication—involving just not the sheer volume of communication in the marriage, but also the quality and nature of it.
4. Conflict resolution—having the ability to address and resolve conflict that can otherwise undermine the relationship.
5. Lack of domestic violence—experiencing conflict is a normal part of marriage, but physical assaults and psychological abuse are markers of an unhealthy marriage.
6. Fidelity—being faithful to one's spouse is an important component and many relationships do not survive this betrayal of trust.
7. Interaction and time together—having positive interactions and enjoying time together is as important as the amount of time spent together.

<sup>1</sup> McLanahan, S., & Sandefur, G. (1994); Amato, P. R. (2000); Coleman, M., et al. (2000); Amato, P. R., et al. (1995); Jekielek, S. M. (1998).

<sup>2</sup> Horn, W. F. (2003, September).

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8. Intimacy and emotional support—experiencing feelings of trust, caring, and love, as well as physical affection, represent important dimensions of a healthy marriage.
  9. Commitment to children—being committed to the development and well-being of all children born to or adopted by either spouse is an important element for couples with children.
  10. Duration and legal marital status—remaining married, as long as it is not characterized by violence or high conflict, contributes to the stability of the children and family.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Straus, M. A. (1992). Sociological research and social policy: The case of family violence. *Sociological Forum*, 7(2), 211–238; Straus, M. A., & Gelles, R. J. (1990). *Physical violence in American families: Risk factors and adaptations to violence in 8,145 families*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers; Smock, P. J., & Manning, W. D. (2003). *The conceptualization and measurement of relationship quality: Insights from a qualitative study of cohabiting young adults*. Unpublished memo commissioned by Child Trends. Washington, DC; Amato, P. R., et al. (1995).