

CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALTHY MARRIAGES*

KEY CONCEPTS AND ASSUMPTIONS

- Healthy marriages are not perfect marriages. A couple's marriage may be healthy to varying degrees and go through ups and downs over time.
- The ingredients of a healthy marriage can be learned. If a couple is willing and motivated, they can learn how to build and maintain a healthy marriage.
- Healthy marriage refers to the relationship between two people. However, each individual will bring personal strengths or challenges to the relationship that make having a healthy marriage easier or harder.
- A couple's individual circumstances, cultural background, resources, etc. will influence the way they perceive and experience marriage. All these things should be taken into consideration when assessing whether a marriage is healthy or not.

CHARACTERISTICS

- 1. Commitment** Spouses take a long-term view of the relationship; they intend to hang in there when the going gets tough; they are dedicated to making the marriage work which means they sometimes make personal sacrifices for the good of the relationship. They also are committed to any children they have from their own or previous relationships.
- 2. Fidelity** Spouses are faithful to each other and honor their commitments.
- 3. Acceptance of one another** Spouses accept each other for who they are. When one person tries to get the other to change, he or she is usually met with resistance.
- 4. Trust** Spouses trust each other. Each person acts in ways that 1) show they trust their spouse and, 2) show that they are trustworthy.
- 5. Intimacy, love and affection** Spouses express feelings of love, caring and deep connection with one another. They also act in ways that enable their spouse to feel cared for and appreciated, for example by spending time together, showing physical affection (including sexual intimacy), saying sweet things, giving gifts, etc.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALTHY MARRIAGES *Continued*

- 6. Shared activities and friendship** Spouses have positive interactions and do enjoyable things together on a regular basis.
- 7. Communication** Spouses are honest with each other; they say what's on their mind rather than hold things in; and they really listen to each other.
- 8. Conflict resolution** Conflict is normal and happens in all relationships. However, if there is too much criticizing, demanding, name-calling, holding grudges and similar negativity—the relationship will suffer. Although this is not always true, men and women tend to have different styles of interacting and handling conflict. Women raise concerns and problems far more often than men do – and sometimes they raise concerns in a somewhat harsh or confrontational manner. Men are more likely to avoid conflict and downplay the strong emotions that they feel inside. In healthy marriages, couples listen to each other carefully especially when there is a conflict. They also avoid negative thinking patterns, such as thinking the worst about their spouse or jumping to negative conclusions. They use problem solving, talk about past conflicts, acknowledge mistakes, apologize, forgive and learn from their mistakes.
- 9. Lack of violence** When there are high levels of conflict or violence in a marriage, it is not healthy. In addition, high levels of conflict or violence of any type has a negative impact on children.
- 10. Satisfaction with the relationship** Overall, spouses are satisfied with the marriage although levels of satisfaction typically go up and down at different points in the relationship.

* The content for this resource comes from K. Moore, S. Jekielek, J. Bronte-Tinkew, L. Guzman, S. Ryan, and Z. Redd. *What is "Healthy Marriage"? Defining the Concept.* (Sept. 2004). **Child Trends Research Brief**, Pub. # 2004-16.