

THANKSGIVING TRIBUTE TO FAMILIES

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Thanksgiving is the quintessential family get-together event, so I thought it apropos to share my thoughts on what makes good families tick.

As a sociologist who has taught college classes on the family, and as one who has written extensively on the subject, it is my considered judgment that strong families are not built on luck or happenstance: it takes work. Moreover, the right prescriptions must be honored by all family members.

Let's begin with structure. The right structure matters. Despite what some pundits assert, there is a gold standard, and that is the two-parent family. While there are good one-parent families, and bad two-parent families, in most cases one-parent families are a breeding ground for failure. Children raised in these families are less likely to do well in school and more likely to get into trouble; this is especially true of boys.

In my book, [*War on Virtue: How the Ruling Class is Killing the American Dream*](#), I point out that Asians, Jews, Mormons and Nigerians are the most successful demographic groups in the country, as measured by academic achievement and income. All four are known for their intact families.

It should also be said that two parents of the same sex are no substitute for two parents of the opposite sex. Boys and girls need role models they can identify with. They have different needs, some of which are best served by an adult of their same sex. They develop differently and require the tutoring that only a father and a mother can provide.

Selflessness is also important. It is a key to true love. Parents, in particular, have to be able to exercise self-giving, putting the interests of their children first. True love is conditioned on doing something for others, which, in turn means making sacrifices. That requires selflessness. Otherwise, expressions of love amount to nothing more than rhetorical flourishes.

Spending time together as a family is a third ingredient. Family dinners, while not always possible, should be the norm, not the exception. This means, among other things, limiting time on social media. It is a sad sight to see family members at home, or in a restaurant, sitting around staring at their phones instead of engaging each other in conversation.

Religion is critical to building good families. There is plenty of evidence that shows that the practice of religion has a positive effect on children and on society. Children who attend religious services are building social capital, a key to success.

A fifth element is the inculcation of virtue. In my research, I found that self-discipline, personal responsibility and perseverance were the most vital of the virtues that account for success in school and in the workplace. Unfortunately, our ruling class is warring against these virtues.

Duty must be stressed. Throughout most of history, families stayed together more out of reciprocal obligations than love. "Honor thy father and thy mother" is suggestive of this verity.

A seventh attribute is providing family members with affection and recognition, two human characteristics that are universal. Every human being, of all ages, needs them both, and when they are absent, trouble follows.

Children should be given responsibilities before awarded rights. Today, it is just the opposite. A child who does not

act responsibly will not only fail in life, he is likely to eviscerate the rights of others.

Accountability is a ninth factor. Children must be held accountable for their behavior, and not cuddled when they act out. Similarly, they should be held accountable for their homework, without which they are not likely to do well in school.

Finally, strong families are built on respect for authority. Parents should be friendly with their children, but never their friends. Children need to respect authority, beginning with their parents. Teachers, the clergy, the police, and other adult authority figures, also need to be respected.

There are so many challenges these days making it hard to build strong families. Being aware of them, and being prepared to deal with them, is the first step to overcoming them.