

Healthy Marriage Tip Of the Month

Issue 20 Tips to Help You Strengthen Your Marriage

Breaking the Chain of Negative Family Influences

It is such a blessing to be raised in a strong, healthy family, where parents are supportive of and faithful to each other and provide for the physical and emotional needs of their children. Unfortunately, many people are not blessed with such a home and may struggle with the effects of negative family influences, including: addiction, abuse, violence, illness, neglect, poverty and crime.

Fortunately, these negative family patterns are not always passed from one generation to the next. Not everyone who has been abused becomes abusive. Not everyone with divorced parents will get divorced. Many who come from dysfunctional homes are able to end the chain of negative family influences in their own lives and in the lives of their children.

People who overcome these negative family influences are called "transitional people," meaning that they make transitions in their own lives to benefit their family lines. How does this occur? What can you do to break away from a negative family influence?

Most transitional people are in an ongoing process throughout their lives. This process includes:

- 1 Questioning your circumstances. How can I escape this negative habit? How can I create something different for myself? How can I reject a negative family lifestyle that caused me harm and could potentially harm my family?
- 2 Becoming aware of changes you need to make. You will never escape a negative family influence if you don't acknowledge what changes you must make to escape it. Maybe you have hobbies or friends that encourage your negative behavior, or maybe there are certain situations that make you particularly vulnerable.
- 3 Developing a sincere desire to make things different. After you've acknowledged the changes that need to be made, you must make the decision to change them. It might be hard to leave friends or quit hobbies, but it will bless your life and the lives of your family members if you are willing to make the change.
- 4 Devising specific strategies and plans for change. A desire to change isn't enough if you aren't willing to act upon it. You need to plan on ways to protect yourself and to lead your

life in a different direction. This usually requires conscious, sustained effort to change hurtful family patterns of interaction.

5 Believing that you can make a change. You don't need to be a victim anymore. You can make a difference in your life and the lives of future generations. You can do it if you will believe in yourself.

6 Receiving help from others. You don't have to do it alone. Friends, family members, ecclesiastical leaders, teachers, mentors and others will be happy to offer encouragement and support. Find a support group that you can turn to whenever things get tough. If professional help is needed, don't be afraid to seek it.

7 Learning to forgive. This is a challenging part of the process because the person you must forgive probably caused you a great deal of pain. However, you can't move on with your life if you are harboring resentment. This doesn't mean you must form a relationship with the harmful family member, but it does mean you can't continue to blame them for your decisions. Despite their negative influence, you are your own person and are responsible for the choices you make.

8 Helping others with similar experiences. Look beyond your own needs, and reach out in love and service to those around you. Helping others will help you realize how far you have come and will keep you focused on the things you still need to change.

9 Moving on after any backsliding or relapse. You may slip up and fall back into a negative behavior, but this doesn't mean you have failed. Learn from your mistake, and resolve to try again. Remember, change is a process that will never end. As long as you are committed to change, these slip-ups are just small roadblocks along your path to a brighter future.

10 If you have the courage to move through this difficult process of breaking the chain of negative family influences, you can create new patterns of healthy family life that will bless generations to come.