

What Is a Highly Healthy Child?

Eight-year-old Daryl was an impressive young boy. I don't think I've ever met a person with a more positive mind-set. His attitude was always upbeat, his laugh infectious. I wish you could have seen his smile. It could light up even the darkest room. Daryl was loved by his family and had a deep faith in God. In short, he was incredibly healthy emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. He was more highly healthy than most of my patients, and more healthy than most people I had met.

Daryl's overall health was all the more impressive because of where I met him. He was visiting "Give Kids the World," a special village near Disney World where dying children and their families can escape the world of hospitals and medical treatments and enjoy a week of being lavished with hugs, smiles, and entertainment from their favorite Disney characters. Although Daryl was as bald as a cucumber and skin and bones from end-stage cancer, he was living life to the fullest. He greatly expanded my understanding of health. He demonstrated what it means to be healthy—not just disease and symptom free, but *whole* in the most important ways.

WHAT IS HEALTH?

Because I was trained in conventional medicine, I initially emphasized the physical side of health, especially the treatment of trauma and disease. If my patients were free from injury and disease, I considered them to be healthy.

But the longer I practiced medicine and the more I encountered individuals like Daryl, the more I realized there's more to being highly healthy than having a physically functioning body. All the evidence suggests that true health involves our entire beings, with all elements—physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual—functioning as God designed them to function if we are to be truly healthy.



Dose of Wisdom

When the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of well-being are singing in harmony, you're healthy. That doesn't mean there is no room for a dissonant chord, but that the music of life is pleasant to the ear.

Nick Zervanos, M.D., family physician

The well-being of highly healthy children depends on their inner life as well as their physical health. God wants to nourish and promote a healthy emotional, relational, and spiritual life because without it, our children simply will be less healthy than God designed them to be (Proverbs 17:22; Matthew 5:3–12; 6:33; 16:26; Luke 6:20–26; and 1 Corinthians 11:29–30 are just a few Bible passages that support this statement).

Let's turn now to explore what I call the “four wheels of health” and discover why each is so important in helping children achieve the highest possible degree of health.

UNDERSTANDING THE FOUR WHEELS OF HEALTH

In order to understand how to nurture our children's health, we need to understand a concept taught to me by Harold, who lived in a small cabin on a hill above the Nantahala River near Bryson City, North Carolina. Harold's true joy in life was refurbishing Model T Fords. To him, they were works of art. When I expressed an interest in learning more about these old cars, Harold invited me to his shop, where I gained a greater appreciation for his hobby.

Harold labored over body repairs and reupholstering seats, but he specialized in repairing wheels. He showed me how a weakness in just one or two spokes could cause a multispoked wheel to collapse and, potentially, cause a wreck. He explained that if a driver wanted a long, smooth ride, the wheels

needed to be as perfectly balanced as possible. An imbalance in even one wheel could put a strain on the engine, chassis, and other wheels. In short, it could goof up the whole car.

I began to think about the components of health in the way Harold viewed the components of a sturdy wheel: four wheels attached to a stable car (the four health “wheels” of a highly healthy person), with all wheels in balance (all aspects of a highly healthy child developed in balance). The four “wheels” of highly healthy children are

- **physical health**—the well-being of a child’s body;
- **emotional health**—the well-being of a child’s mental faculties and connection with his or her emotions;
- **relational health**—the well-being of a child’s associations with parents, family members, friends, and community; and
- **spiritual health**—the well-being of a child’s relationship with God

These four components of health were critical in the life of Jesus, even during childhood. According to the Bible, Jesus “grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” In other words, he grew mentally/emotionally, physically, spiritually, and relationally.

Parents who want to raise highly healthy children will work hard to keep the wheels of their health and those of their children in balance. So let’s consider the effect of each of the four wheels of health and explore the essential principles you can begin implementing to raise a highly healthy child.

The Physical Wheel

The simplest definition of maximum physical health is that the child’s body—all its chemicals, parts, and systems—is working as closely as possible to the way God designed it. In order for a child to be physically healthy, disease must be prevented whenever possible and treated as early as possible. When illness or disorder occurs, physical health involves learning to cope and adapt as needed. With good emotional, relational, and spiritual health, a child whose body lacks optimum physical “wholeness” can still be highly healthy.

Allow me to share a personal illustration. Our oldest child, Kate, was born with cerebral palsy. Most of her right brain and about one-half of her left brain died and dissolved while she was in the womb. Kate’s brain damage was such that it was as though she had had a stroke before she was born—resulting in the left side of her body being weaker and more spastic than the right side (although the right side, too, was affected). The brain damage dramatically

slowed her physical development. By the time she was a teenager, she had had many operations to straighten her limbs and eyes. She had worn braces and splints, casts and eye patches, and for a time she was in a wheelchair. At the age of twelve, she developed a severe seizure disorder. She spent time in an intensive care unit on a ventilator and nearly died.

Although Kate made it through many medical obstacles, she is still not “normal” physically. She has significant disabilities, and her condition is incurable. Nevertheless, she has learned to cope and adapt. Although she doesn’t eat as well as she might and could exercise a bit more, for the most part she cares for herself physically. Kate is up-to-date on her immunizations. She takes her medications, makes her doctor appointments, and does her own self-care. Her mom and I consider her physical wheel to be fairly healthy—not because her health is perfect but because it is reasonably balanced.

Given her physical challenges, it would be easy for Kate to become unhealthy. I’ve known patients with similar disabilities who were very unhealthy emotionally, relationally, or spiritually. They were miserable people. They became obese, and their physical health was terrible. So Kate’s physical health cannot be taken for granted. It takes a concerted effort on her part to maintain her physical wheel, and her physical health is strongly dependent on the constant work she does to keep her emotional, relational, and spiritual wheels in balance. If these three wheels were flattened, weak, or unbalanced, Kate couldn’t be nearly as healthy as she is physically.

The Emotional Wheel

Great emotional health is not the absence of emotional distress. Emotional health involves learning to cope with and then embrace the full spectrum of human emotions—positive and negative—we all face in life. Emotional health in children is greatly enhanced by the love, security, and well-defined boundaries of the parent-child relationship. On the foundation of our love, we parents must teach our children how to appropriately recognize and express the full range of human emotions. Four-year-old Samuel, the child of a friend, surprised me with the level of emotional health he demonstrated one day in our home.

Samuel’s little sister crawled over to where he was playing with a train set. She sat up and reached over to take one of the cars.

“Rachel, I wish you wouldn’t do that.” He glared at her.

She looked him in the face, then grabbed one of the train cars and pulled it into her lap.

We watched to see what Samuel would do.

He fumed for a moment. “Rachel,” he continued, “if you put the train back on the track, we can play together.”

I was quite amazed by this little boy’s maturity.

Then Rachel surprised us all. She took the little train car and banged it on her brother’s head!

He grimaced. Had he been my child, I would have bolted to his side to attempt to prevent the coming eruption. Samuel’s mom, however, sat and watched.

He looked up with tears forming in his eyes. Then he stood and walked to his mom. “Mommy, Rachel hit me on the head.”

“How did that make you feel?” she asked.

“I felt really, really, really angry, and my insides wanted to punch her.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“I knew it was wrong.”

She hugged him tightly. “Samuel I love you so much—no matter what decisions you make. But I’m so very proud of this decision. You and I will do something special together as soon as we get home.”

At his young age, Samuel was well on his way to being emotionally healthy. His response was not natural behavior; it was learned. His parents had taught him principles on which he now acted. He was fully aware of his feelings and made a conscious decision as to how he would respond.

The Relational Wheel

Great relational or social health can be defined as the state of maximum well-being in all of a child’s relationships—those with siblings, parents, relatives, friends, schoolmates, teachers, coaches, clergy, neighbors, and the broader community. Early on, relational health requires parents to involve their children in healthy relationships and protect them from toxic or dangerous relationships. As children mature, it involves teaching them how to exercise discernment in their relationships.

Although relational stress and discord are inevitable as children learn to interact with other people, it’s critical to our children’s well-being that we parents learn how to develop healthy relationships ourselves and that we be diligent in preventing or “treating” disordered relationships to which our children will be exposed (including our own). Our relationships do have a direct impact on our children for better or for worse. Marshall stands out as an example of how parental relationships affect the relational health of a child.

When my wife, Barb, and I lived in Bryson City, we taught the young boys' Sunday school class. One of the boys, Marshall, was a gifted athlete. He was full of spunk and energy. He was intellectually gifted and seemed to grasp spiritual truth. But he was a deeply wounded child. No one in Marshall's family had learned how to have healthy relationships, so the entire family was involved in toxic relationships. His father was an alcoholic who, we believe, abused Marshall in terrible ways. His oldest brother was a delinquent. His mom was physically weak and lived in constant pain—a pain she took out on her kids.

These extremely disordered relationships affected Marshall emotionally and flowed over into his relationships with others. It wasn't surprising that by the time we met Marshall, his interactions with other children were characterized by either anger or selfishness. While other children accepted correction, Marshall rebelled. While other children followed instructions, Marshall disobeyed. It was no wonder he was failing in school.

As concerned adults, Barb and I poured much time into Marshall. We tried to help him balance this unhealthy wheel. We knew that if we couldn't help him develop a strategy for balancing it, the road ahead most likely would be rough. And indeed it was. He eventually dropped out of school and became an alcoholic.

The Spiritual Wheel

Although not everyone shares my view, I'm convinced the spiritual wheel is the most crucial. Good physical, emotional, and relational health aren't enough. Spiritual well-being needs to be nurtured from an early age so it'll be a consistent priority of children who will become highly healthy adults.

Great spiritual health can be described as the state of a child's maximum well-being in a personal relationship with God the Creator. To be spiritually healthy, a child needs to be taught what a personal relationship with God is and to see other people model that kind of relationship. Then the child must choose to have this type of relationship with God. Finally, he or she must grow in this relationship over time—just as in any other relationship.

Even very young children need to learn about God's plan for them in terms of their physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual conditions. They must learn about their Creator's personal instruction and direction in their lives, and they must learn how to apply it in simple, practical ways.

One mother told me about taking a walk with her two-year-old daughter. They sat down for a rest, and the child looked up at the sky and said, "Ky. God make 'ky."

“Yes, God made the sky,” her mother replied.

The wind gently rustled nearby tree branches. The child said, “Trees. God make trees.”

“Yes, God made the trees,” her mother replied.

Just then a bird flew by. “Birdie. Grammie Rosie make birdies!”

“Oh!” her mother laughed. “Grammie Rosie makes lots of things for you that are soft and fluffy like birdies, but God makes the birdies, just like he makes the trees and sky.”

Making the nurturing of spiritual health a priority in everyday life is essential, especially because so many people view physical, emotional, relational, and even financial health as their top priorities. Children often receive this message from schoolmates, advertisements, movies, and their interactions with adults, but it’s *not* a view held by parents of highly healthy children. These parents echo Jesus’ perspective when he said the most important thing is to seek God’s kingdom and his righteousness, and that the material needs of food and clothing would then follow. These parents ask, as did Jesus, “What good will it be for a man [child] if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”

Does my emphasis on spiritual health mean that physical, emotional, and relational health aren’t important? Certainly not! All these aspects should be enjoyed and appreciated, nurtured and developed. Nevertheless, if the spiritual wheel receives less attention than the other three wheels, our children will not be highly healthy. Nor will they grow up to be highly healthy adults unless they develop this wheel on their own. Balance in all four health wheels is essential. Sadly, many people put the spare tire on the car and toss the spiritual wheel in the trunk!



Dose of Wisdom

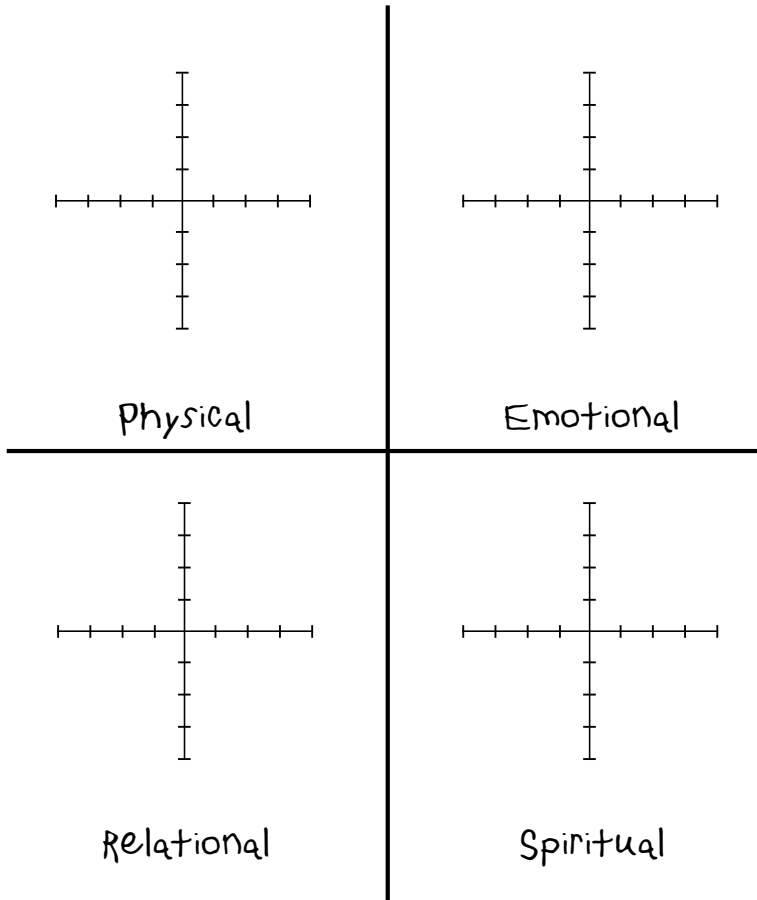
Man must be arched and buttressed from within; else the temple wavers to the dust.

Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius

ASSESSING YOUR CHILD’S HEALTH

I believe you want to help your child become as highly healthy as possible, so I’ll share an easy way to assess the four wheels of health for each of your children. I designed this measurement tool for children approximately ages

four to twelve. It's simple—and as such it will be only a crude representation of your child's overall health—but it will help you quickly develop a picture of your child's health balance, or lack thereof. Understanding these wheels is fairly simple, and using them to evaluate your child is fairly intuitive. So let's begin. On a separate sheet of paper, reproduce or copy this simple illustration:



Notice that each of the four health wheels has a hub and two sets of spokes. The hub is the central point around which the entire wheel turns, and it involves faith—not in the religious sense but in terms of the confidence that if you provide what your child needs to be healthy, he or she will most likely become healthier over time. The spokes represent the measure of health your child possesses in each of these areas. The longer the spoke, the better. In this exercise, you'll assess the length of each spoke of each wheel, which will show how smooth a ride your child will enjoy on the road to health.

Warning! *Don't* use this exercise to show your child where he or she comes up short. To do so could be highly damaging to your child. This tool is designed for your eyes only—to show where *you* need to improve in order to raise a healthier child. This measurement tool hasn't been scientifically verified. My guidance on measuring these spokes is based on both my experience and my review of the research literature.

As you read each description, mark the appropriate spoke to represent your evaluation of your child's health in this area. The more accurately you assess your child, the more helpful this tool will be. The hub is the zero point.

Physical Wheel

Hub = trust that your child's body will develop properly if nurtured

Vertical Spokes = activity and rest

Horizontal Spokes = nutrition/growth and immunizations

Activity

This spoke, the top one on the wheel, represents your child's average physical activity over the last two or three months.

- Full spoke: My child exercises (runs, walks, plays outside, or participates in sports or physical education) at least thirty minutes six or seven days a week.
- 3/4 spoke: My child exercises at least thirty minutes per day, four or five days a week.
- 1/2 spoke: My child exercises at least thirty minutes per day, three days a week.
- 1/4 spoke: My child exercises only one or two days a week or less than thirty minutes a day.
- No spoke: My child is a couch potato. He or she participates in no physical education at school and no sports activities.

Rest

On average, over the last two to three months, how would you assess your child's sleep and rest habits? Consider these factors for the bottom spoke:

1. My child goes to bed at a reasonable hour.

2. My child gets eight or more hours of restful sleep most nights of the week.
 3. My child usually wakes up refreshed.
 4. My child has time every day for play, rest, and recreation.
 5. My child enjoys one or more adequate, restful family vacations each year.
- Full spoke: My child achieves five of the above.
 - 3/4 spoke: My child achieves four of the above.
 - 1/2 spoke: My child achieves three of the above.
 - 1/4 spoke: My child achieves two of the above.
 - No spoke: My child achieves zero or one of the above.

Now let's turn our attention from the vertical spokes of the physical health wheel to its horizontal spokes.

Nutrition/Growth

The left-hand spoke represents your child's nutritional health and growth. Each component accounts for no more than one-half of the spoke.

First, let's assess the *nutrition* portion of the spoke. Consider these factors:

1. My child drinks plenty of water daily.
 2. My child eats at least two to four servings of fruits and three to five servings of vegetables daily.
 3. My child eats at least three nutritious meals per day.
 4. My child has minimal intake of caffeine and soft drinks.
 5. My child has minimal intake of saturated fats and highly processed foods.
 6. My child has fewer than two or three fast-food meals a month.
 7. My child is rarely exposed to secondhand smoke.
- 1/2 spoke: My child does six or seven of the above.
 - 1/4 spoke: My child does four or five of the above.
 - No spoke: My child does less than four of the above.

Now let's consider your child's *growth*. If your child is two years old or older, the most accurate assessment of healthy growth is the Body Mass Index (BMI). Ask your child's doctor for a BMI chart for children or use the chart on my website (www.highlyhealthy.net).

- 1/2 spoke: My child's BMI is normal.
- 1/4 spoke: My child's BMI is borderline.
- No spoke: My child's BMI is abnormally high or low.

Your final mark on this spoke should be the sum of the nutrition and growth marks.

Immunizations

Of all the preventive measures available to positively influence our children's physical health, this one may be the most essential. I'll discuss the importance of immunizations in chapter 3. To measure this spoke, determine how many recommended immunizations your child has received. You can find a list on my website (www.highlyhealthy.net).

- Full spoke: My child has received all recommended vaccines.
- 3/4 spoke: My child has received between 75 and 100 percent of the recommended vaccines.
- 1/2 spoke: My child has received between 50 and 75 percent of the recommended vaccines.
- 1/4 spoke: My child has received between 25 and 50 percent of the recommended vaccines.
- No spoke: My child has received less than 25 percent of the recommended vaccines.

Emotional Wheel

Hub = trust that your child's emotions will develop properly if nurtured

Vertical spokes = love/respect and affirmation/appreciation

Horizontal spokes = media/learning and boundaries

Love/Respect

Consider these factors for the top spoke of this wheel:

1. I frequently communicate to my child that I love him or her.
2. I enjoy reading and talking to my child in a warm and friendly voice.
3. I try to show interest and enthusiasm when my child is speaking. I pay attention when he or she talks to me—even if it means stopping what I'm doing.

4. I feel emotionally warm and affectionate toward my child and hug or hold him or her frequently.
 5. I consciously look for things to admire, respect, and appreciate about my child.
 6. I look for opportunities to find my child doing things correctly and well.
- A. I feel my love for my child is most frequently unconditional—that my love is not withheld based on behavior, performance, or looks. (Of course, it doesn't mean you always like the behavior, but it does mean you always love your child "in spite of . . .," even when you detest the behavior.)
 - B. I feel my love for my child is most frequently conditional—that my love is predicated on how my child behaves, performs, or looks (love "if . . ." or "because of . . .").
- Full spoke: I believe all six of the numbered factors above are true.
 - 3/4 spoke: I believe five of the numbered factors above are true.
 - 1/2 spoke: I believe four of the numbered factors above are true.
 - 1/4 spoke: I believe two or three of the numbered factors above are true.
 - No spoke: I believe zero or one of the numbered factors above apply to me and my child.
 - Add up to 1/2 spoke if A is true.
 - Subtract up to 1/2 spoke if B is true.

Why do I give so much credence to the type of love we choose to give our child? As we'll explore in chapter 10, a key foundation for a highly healthy child is unconditional love, which helps reduce a child's risk for immature anger, resentment, guilt, depression, anxiety, insecurity, and many other highly unhealthy factors. Unconditional love balances love with discipline, freedom with limits, and nurture with training. Such a relationship will be healthy, enjoyable, and affectionate for both of you—which leads to the other vertical spoke.

Affirmation/Appreciation

Consider the following factors for the bottom spoke:

1. I am my child's best cheerleader. I frequently praise my child and tell my child I appreciate what he or she has done and that I believe in him or her.

2. I hug my child frequently and often tell my child how much I appreciate him or her.
3. I thank my child for doing things without my asking, and I demonstrate my gratitude for the little things he or she does.
4. I desire to spend time with my child and enjoy being with him or her.
5. My child is comfortable coming to me when he or she is experiencing joy, satisfaction, guilt, shame, sadness, or a host of other emotions.
6. My child frequently talks with me and enjoys being with me. I try to listen to my child without preaching, judging, or criticizing. I listen to my child with the intent to just listen.
7. I understand my child's temperament, talents, and love language. I let my child know about the unique qualities, gifts, and talents I admire in him or her.
8. I know what my child is capable of achieving, and I help my child set goals based on what is appropriate for him or her as a unique individual.

- Full spoke: I believe eight of the above are true.
- 3/4 spoke: I believe six or seven of the above are true.
- 1/2 spoke: I believe four or five of the above are true.
- 1/4 spoke: I believe two or three of the above are true.
- No spoke: I believe zero or one of the above apply to me and my child.

Researchers call these two vertical spokes the “parental warmth” or “parental receptiveness” spokes. They deal with your expression of verbal and physical affection toward your child, as well as your praise and acceptance.

Now we'll turn from the vertical spokes of the emotional health wheel to its horizontal spokes.

Media/Learning

To come up with the measurement for this left-hand spoke, add the following two factors together.

The first half of the left-hand spoke is your child's exposure to media. One could make the argument that today's children are overstimulated. More often than not, too much media in children's lives—video games, computer games, and way too much television—assaults their senses, negatively affects their minds, and is detrimental to their emotions and body. Many media providers

are trying to influence our children in ways that most parents consider highly unhealthy. Highly healthy parents know how to set limits when it comes to media. Where does your child line up?

- 1/2 spoke: Our home is TV free or my child watches one hour or less a day, and the computer/Internet is only used in a public area of our home and for educational purposes. If my child watches TV, I routinely monitor what he or she watches. I monitor what my child does on the Internet.
- 1/4 spoke: My child is routinely exposed to two hours or less a day of media (television, videos, video games, and computer activities). Also, I sometimes monitor what my child watches on TV and does on the Internet.
- No spoke: My child is routinely exposed to two to four or more hours a day of media, or I never monitor what my child watches on TV and does on the Internet.
- Subtract up to 1/4 spoke if your child has a TV in his or her bedroom or unfettered Internet access in the bedroom.

The second half of this left-hand spoke is your child's enjoyment of learning and mental activity. Research shows that the brain, like a muscle, must be exercised in order to remain highly healthy. Just as physical activity helps a child's physiological structure stay healthy, stimulating mental activity benefits his or her brain. Activities such as reading, doing crossword puzzles, and even playing board games with family members have been linked with sharper minds throughout life. So how much does your child like to learn?

- 1/2 spoke: My child shows a moderate to high level of enjoyment for mental activities such as reading, ongoing education and learning, challenging mental tasks, good conversation, or board games with the family.
- 1/4 spoke: My child shows little enjoyment for mental activities and learning.
- No spoke: My child shows almost no enjoyment for mental activities and learning.

Boundaries

Reducing the media your child is exposed to and setting appropriate expectations and limits compose what researchers call "parental demandingness." When balanced with parental warmth (the love spokes), a child is more likely to be highly healthy. Too much of one or too little of the other leads to reduced levels of health.

“Parental demandingness” (discipline, expectations, and coaching) is the extent to which a child’s parents expect responsible behavior from their child and maintain what the researchers call a “hands-on attitude.” This includes consistently setting and enforcing rules or limits on your child. Rules for children, however, must be clear, reasonable, developmentally appropriate, fair and just, mutually agreed upon, and flexible—emphasizing what to do rather than just what not to do.

Measure this spoke based on how many of the following boundaries you consistently impose:

1. I routinely know where my child is after school and on weekends.
2. I expect to be and am told the truth by my child about where he or she is really going.
3. I am aware of my child’s academic performance and visit with his or her teachers from time to time.
4. I eat dinner with my child at least five times a week.
5. I eat breakfast with my child at least five times a week.
6. I assign my child regular chores.
7. I turn off the TV during dinner and rarely eat in front of the TV.
8. There is an adult present whenever my child returns from school.

- Full spoke: I believe all eight of the above are true.
- 3/4 spoke: I believe six or seven of the above are true.
- 1/2 spoke: I believe four or five of the above are true.
- 1/4 spoke: I believe two or three of the above are true.
- No spoke: I believe zero or one of the above applies to me and my child.

Relational Wheel

Hub = trust in and nurturing healthy relationships with others and self

Vertical Spokes = relationship with parents and family relationships

Horizontal Spokes = connectedness and performance in school/
extracurricular activities

Relationship with Parents

Of all the characteristics of highly healthy parents, other than loving your children unconditionally, the most important is the quantity of time you sacrificially give to your child. Your relationship with your child is critical to his

or her self-concept and ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships. A crucial measure of your relationship is the amount of time you spend with your child. Use these factors to mark the top spoke of this wheel:

- Full spoke: Both my spouse and I spend more than thirty minutes each day with our child(ren).
- 3/4 spoke: Either my spouse or I spend more than thirty minutes each day with our child(ren); the other spends between two and three hours each week with our child(ren).
- 1/2 spoke: Both my spouse and I spend between two and three hours each week with our child(ren).
- 1/4 spoke: Both my spouse and I spend some time but less than two hours weekly with our child(ren).
- No spoke: Neither my spouse nor I spend any significant time with our child(ren).

Family Relationships

The relationship between a child's parents, as I'll show later, is a critical factor in the life of a highly healthy child. What is the quality of family relationships around your child? Use these factors to mark the bottom spoke of this wheel:

For married, biological parents who live together

- Full spoke: My spouse and I have a great marriage.
- 3/4 spoke: My spouse and I have a moderately good marriage.
- 1/2 spoke: My spouse and I have a marriage fair in quality.
- 1/4 spoke: My spouse and I have a marriage of poor quality.

For married parents of adopted children who live together

- 3/4 spoke: My spouse and I have a great marriage.
- 1/2 spoke: My spouse and I have a moderately good marriage.
- 1/4 spoke: My spouse and I have a marriage fair in quality
- No spoke: My spouse and I have a marriage of poor quality.

For single parents

- Full spoke: I spend more than thirty minutes each day with my child. I also involve positive, significant role models of the opposite gender (of the single parent) in my child's life three hours or more each week.

- 3/4 spoke: I spend more than thirty minutes each day with my child. I also involve positive, significant role models of the opposite gender (of the single parent) in my child's life at least one hour each week.
- 1/2 spoke: I spend at least thirty minutes each day with my child. I have not yet provided positive, significant role models of the opposite gender (of the single parent) for my child.
- 1/4 spoke: I spend less than thirty minutes each day with my child. I have not yet provided positive, significant role models of the opposite gender (of the single parent) for my child.
- No spoke: I spend less than two hours each week with my child. I have not yet provided positive, significant role models of the opposite gender (of the single parent) for my child.

For parents in blended families

- Full spoke: My relationship with my spouse and my stepchildren is great, and we have five or more years under our belts.
- 3/4 spoke: My relationship with my spouse and my stepchildren is great, and we have less than five years under our belts.
- 1/2 spoke: My relationship with my spouse and my stepchildren is only moderately good.
- 1/4 spoke: My relationship with my spouse and my stepchildren is fair to poor.
- No spoke: My child and I are in a blended family, but I am not married.

Now we'll take into account the horizontal spokes of the relational wheel.

Connectedness

A child's connectedness to his or her parents and friends is foundational to his or her relational as well as emotional health (since relational and emotional health are intricately interwoven). Connectedness in the parent-child relationship begins with affirmation, blameless (unconditional) love, and boundaries, which we've already measured as part of the emotional wheel. Children with healthy levels of connectedness not only have strong relationships with good friends or playmates; they also exhibit a willingness to interact constructively with others, a can-do attitude, a willingness to tackle new adventures, a sense of optimism, and an ability to make friends comfortably.

Add the following two factors to measure the left-hand spoke:

Connectedness with friends or playmates

- 1/2 spoke: My child has terrific relationships and plays well with others.
- 1/4 spoke: My child has fair to moderately good relationships with his or her friends or sometimes doesn't play well with others.
- No spoke: My child either has poor, negative relationships with his or her friends, or my child usually doesn't play well with others.

Attitudes

1. My child displays a can-do attitude.
 2. My child displays a willingness to tackle new adventures.
 3. My child displays a sense of optimism.
 4. My child displays an ability to make friends comfortably.
- 1/2 spoke: My child displays four of the above factors.
 - 1/4 spoke: My child displays two or three of the above factors.
 - No spoke: My child displays zero or one of the above factors.

Performance in School/Extracurricular Activities

Rate this spoke by the meaningfulness of your child's "work"—how he or she is doing in school. Given individual talents, how much is he or she achieving? How is your child doing in extracurricular activities? Does your child participate in at least one healthy activity—a club, sport, or church activity—that gives him or her satisfaction? For this spoke add the "Performance in School" and "Extracurricular Activities" scores together.

Performance in school

Given my child's gifts, temperament, and talents—

- 1/2 spoke: My child is performing as competently as he or she can.
- 1/4 spoke: My child is performing with some competence but not as competently as he or she can.
- No spoke: My child isn't performing nearly as competently as he or she can.

Extracurricular activities

- 1/2 spoke: My child participates in at least two healthy activities—club, sport, or church activity—that gives him or her satisfaction.
- 1/4 spoke: My child has one healthy activity—a club, sport, or church activity—that gives him or her satisfaction.
- No spoke: My child is not involved in healthy extracurricular activities.

Spiritual Wheel

Hub = trust in and nurturing a healthy relationship with God

Vertical Spokes = personal relationship with God and prayer

Horizontal Spokes = spiritual instruction and spiritual activity

Personal Relationship with God

I define true, positive spirituality in terms of a personal relationship with God resulting in an internal change that yields love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. However, these traits can take years to develop and are not at all natural to children—even if they have a close relationship with God. As I'll discuss in chapter 8, the greater the depth of a child's spiritual health, the more likely the child is to be physically, emotionally, and relationally healthy. This can be difficult to assess, especially in young children, but it's worth it to give it your best shot.

- Full spoke: My child believes in God and shows evidence of an extremely close relationship with God.
- 3/4 spoke: My child believes in God and shows evidence of a moderately good relationship with God.
- 1/2 spoke: My child believes in God and shows evidence of some relationship with God.
- 1/4 spoke: My child believes in God but doesn't seem to have a personal relationship with God.
- No spoke: My child has no relationship with and no belief in God.

Prayer

In its simplest form, prayer is an intimate conversation between your child and his or her Creator. Prayer can occur anywhere and anytime. It doesn't require a church or synagogue, a particular place or position. Prayer can be as simple as thanking God for the good things that happen each day. How often does your child pray?

- Full spoke: My child prays every day.
- 3/4 spoke: My child prays only a few days each week.
- 1/2 spoke: My child prays only a few times each month.
- 1/4 spoke: My child prays only on special holidays or before family meals.
- No spoke: My child never prays or prays only during a crisis.

Spiritual Instruction

The foundation for spiritual health is most effectively laid during childhood and must include spiritual instruction. Activities such as family Bible reading, Sunday school classes, confirmation classes, vacation Bible school, church camp, and the like all play a role in spiritual instruction. Add the “daily or weekly” and the “annual” scores together for this spoke.

Your child’s *daily or weekly* religious instruction accounts for up to half a spoke.

- 1/2 spoke: My child participates in two or more activities such as attending a faith community; joining in our family’s Scripture reading; and attending Sunday school classes each week.
- 1/4 spoke: My child participates in only one activity such as attending a faith community; joining in our family’s Scripture reading; and attending Sunday school classes each month.
- No spoke: My child participates in no religious instruction venues.

For the other component, evaluate *annual* religious instruction.

- 1/2 spoke: My child participates in two of the following or similar activities each year: church camp, vacation Bible school, or a church play.
- 1/4 spoke: My child participates in one of the following or similar activities each year: church camp, vacation Bible school, or a church play.
- No spoke: My child participates in no annual religious instruction.

Spiritual Activity

For up to half of this spoke, evaluate your child’s daily or weekly *involvement in a faith community*.

- 1/2 spoke: My child and I are involved at least weekly in a healthy, positive spiritual community in which we receive supportive guidance and practice accountability.
- 1/4 spoke: My child and I are involved less than weekly but at least monthly in a healthy, positive spiritual community in which we receive supportive guidance and practice accountability, or we are involved in a spiritual community but it’s somewhat unhealthy and offers only some supportive guidance and accountability.

- No spoke: My child and I are not involved in a spiritual community at all, or we are involved in a spiritual community but it's very unhealthy and offers no supportive guidance and accountability.

The other half of this spoke focuses on *giving* to others.

- 1/2 spoke: My child gives away time, treasure, or talent at least monthly by participating in at least one of the following or similar activities: volunteering at a soup kitchen, helping a neighbor, cleaning up along a roadside, or giving money to a church or charity.
- 1/4 spoke: My child gives away time, treasure, or talent once each year by participating in at least one of the following or similar activities: volunteering at a soup kitchen, helping a neighbor, cleaning up along a roadside, or giving money to a church or charity.
- No spoke: My child does not give away time, treasure, or talent by serving others.

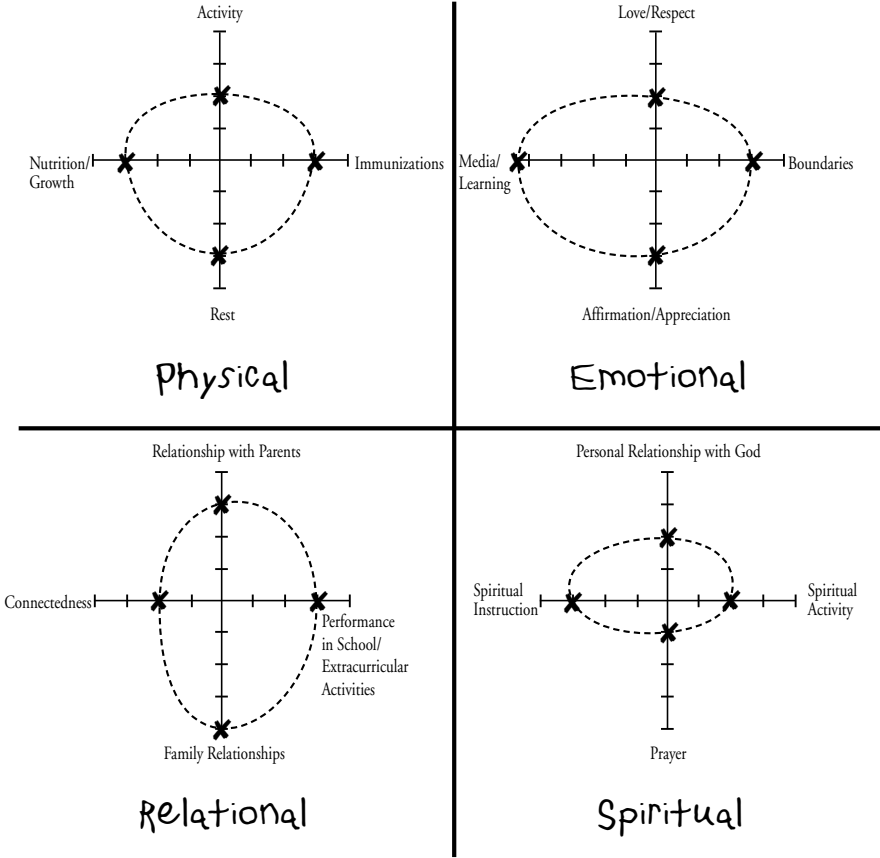
The Whole Picture

Now that you've marked the estimated length of the spokes on your child's four wheels of health, complete the picture by drawing a wheel from the end of each spoke. Are your child's wheels round, or are they flat in spots? If there are any severely wobbly wheels, he or she is less than highly healthy. Could he or she make it on a set of wheels like you see below from a child I know?

Now is the time to begin lengthening the short spokes of your child's wheels of health. If you take the principles in this book to heart and apply them, you'll see different spokes lengthen as you make decisions a parent who intends to raise a highly healthy child would make.

It's fine to identify the flattest wheel or the most broken spokes. To find the flattest wheel, assign a point count to each spoke of each wheel:

- Full spoke = 4 points
- 3/4 spoke = 3 point
- 1/2 spoke = 2 points
- 1/4 spoke = 1 points
- No spoke = 0 points



A perfectly round, fully inflated wheel will have 16 points (4 points for each spoke). In this illustration, the physical wheel has 11 points, the emotional wheel 12 points, the relational wheel 12 points, and the spiritual wheel 8 points. As you can see, this child's spiritual wheel is the least healthy

So the spiritual wheel may be the first one these parents would address. If there were equally weakened wheels, I'd urge parents to choose the wheel they think would be the easiest to fix and turn to that area of the book.

Another option is to deal with the shortest spokes. Look again at the illustration, and you'll see that the bottom spoke on the spiritual wheel is the shortest of all of this child's spokes. If your child has more than one spoke that is equally short, choose the one you consider the easiest to address and read the section in this book that deals with that wheel of health.

Whether you do something now about your child's flattened wheel(s) or short spoke(s) or read on and get an overview, this chapter can serve as a reference as you look at ways to equip your child to live a highly healthy life.