

FAMILY REUNION INSTITUTE'S

STICKY REUNION SITUATION

BECOMING A HEALTHIER FAMILY

February 2020

The Situation:

I'd really like our family members to get healthier. Too many of us are overweight/obese, not eating properly, and not doing any kind of exercise. Since you say reunions should be more than just a picnic, how can we introduce the idea of becoming a healthier family without offending family members. I'd really like our family members to get healthier.

The Fix:



**Suzanne
Vargus Holloman**

Thanks for your concern regarding your family's health! We often overlook self-care in our quest to take care of our families. Becoming more physically active and eating healthier is too often low on the list of priorities. And we live in a society that often encourages unhealthy choices rather than healthy ones. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), African Americans are more likely to die at earlier ages from all causes. The leading causes of death are heart disease, cancer, and strokes. Alarmingly, the CDC states that young African Americans from ages 18-34 are living with diseases that are more common at older ages such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke. They cite social factors that contribute to this which are: unemployment, living in poverty, no home ownership, inability to see a doctor, smoking, lack of activity, and obesity.

At the Family Reunion Institute, we know the power of family! The family can make a difference in the health of its members. The family reunion can be used to promote healthy behavior in a number of ways including workshops, exercise classes, and providing examples of healthy options in terms of the snacks and meals that are served. If you can, have a mini health fair at your next reunion. Ask family members that are health professionals to plan the health fair as well as participate in the fair itself. Invite students from local universities and medical schools to provide testing. If your reunion is large enough, you may be able to interest a local health system to organize the fair as well as provide medical staff.

Establish a "health partner" initiative. Family members would pair up and serve as health partners. The partners would support and encourage each other to stick to a healthier lifestyle. The good news is that with today's technology, partners don't need to live in the same area, they can be virtual partners. Studies show that social support and having someone that holds a person accountable to their goals increases the attainment of them.

The health focus at the reunion can be continued after the reunion via the family newsletter, website or Facebook page. To keep the focus on health between reunions, establish a health column in the newsletter, post health tips on the family Facebook page and/or website. Once you've implemented a health initiative with your family, please let us know how it is going!

The Fix:



Bilyy Vargus

This is a great question, at a time when we here at the Family Reunion Institute are putting more emphasis than ever on family health issues. And while there are many things you can do at the reunion to emphasize health, as specified in Suzanne's answer, you have to be very careful to do it in a way that does not offend anyone. People who suffer from obesity are already sensitive about their weight, and you have to make a concerted effort not to make them feel hounded or targeted in any way. In a setting where the entire family is gathered, you can give the statistics about obesity, and you can talk about developing healthy habits in a general way. You can have a workshop about it, too. But it has to be entirely voluntary as to who attends, and there cannot be any formal or even informal pressure put on any individual to take part. It's like when a family decides to do an intervention with someone who has any kind of problem or perceived problem: the family believes they are trying to help, but the subject will feel they are being attacked, and they will usually take offense and either become very angry or very defensive, refusing to talk about it. Either way, the desired result is not obtained, and relationships become strained. It's like anything else in life: lecturing doesn't work, shaming doesn't work. Nothing will change unless an individual wants to change. So, provide everyone with the knowledge, and of course, try to make sure you are consistent by serving healthy food at the reunion. But be careful not to offend or discourage.
