

Turning the Keys to Healthy and Loving Family Relationships

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Happy and healthy family relationships grow from decisions to work through all the problems of life in a constructive and loving way.

Homes are more than houses of walls and beams. Homes are built with thoughtful caring concern where the family unit shares protection, support, sacrifice and love.

Careful planning turns a house into a home for the people who dwell there.

The following eight sessions represent parenting classes to help parents grow into strong, supportive and loving mentors for their children.

The materials provided may be used to guide discussion and considerations for a 50-60 minute session.

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Session 1. Skills of Listening and Communicating

“Communication is essential to the expression of love. Where there is love, there must be communication. Love inevitably expresses itself and moves out toward others. When communication breaks down, love is blocked.

Its energy will turn to resentment and hostility.” (*Herein is love*. Reuel Howe)

In many families, the key to communication cannot be found. The doors to meaningful sharing are locked. Communication is the process of sharing yourself both verbally and non-verbally in such a way that the other person can understand and accept what you are saying.

Listening, talking and understanding are all involved in communication. Constructive family communication is the result of a conscious decision deliberately made. Communication takes time, concern, and consideration.

The first duty of love is to listen. Hearing is passive; listening is active. Listening demands concentration...thinking with the other person. The following phrase is too often true; “You’re hearing me, but you aren’t listening to me.” (Paul Tillich)

“It is impossible to overestimate the immense need people have to be really listened to. A person feels affirmed when they are thoughtfully listened to.” (Paul Tournier)

Listening with both your ears and eyes is essential in communication, but listening doesn’t come easily. Most of us want to talk and tell our side of the story. We need to listen more and talk less.

Family communication often becomes filled with emotional needs and struggles for power. In messages involving feelings, psychologist Albert Mehrabian contends that non-verbal communication is the message that is heard.

Think about what you are communicating through your:

Words (7%)	Body language (55%) Eye contact, gestures Touching, facial expressions	tone of voice (38%)
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Misunderstandings and misinterpretations often occur.

There are actually six messages that can come through.

1. What you mean to say.
2. What you actually say.
3. What the other person hears .
4. What the other person thinks he hears.
5. What the other person says about what you said.
6. What you think the other person said about what you said.¹

Barriers to Communication

Lack of time	Self- centeredness
Bad timing	Lack of concern for others
Anger	Fear others won't care
Exaggeration	Insecurity
Poor choice of words	Fear others will disagree
Mixed messages	Words that hurt
Noise	Angry expressions
Hearing problems	Too busy
Unwillingness to listen to others	Arrogance

Words have power. Chose them carefully.

Words can hurt, injure, anger and alienate.

Or they can heal, help, comfort and soothe.

Encouragement

Catch family members doing good and say so!

¹ H. Norman Wright. Communication:Key to your Marriage. Gospel Light, 1978:17

Words that hurt
And discourage

What's the matter with you?
Why are you causing trouble?
Why don't you ever help?
You stupid idiot!
Can't you do one simple thing?
Is that the best you can do?

Words that heal
and encourage

That's great, I like that
I appreciate what you do around here.
Could you please help me with this?
I'm proud of you.
Thank you for helping.
You're coming along. Keep at it.

Instead of "YOU" Statements

(They place blame and create defensiveness.)

Why did you do that?

You are so careless! Stop running around.

use "I" Statements.

(They describe your feelings and create understanding.)

I'm confused. I don't understand what You're doing.

I'm afraid you're going to break something.

Avoid Buzz words and absolute terms.

Such words as 'always', 'never', and 'why didn't you' run up red flags.

- You **never** listen to me!
- You **always** interrupt me when I talk.
- **Why didn't you** finish that when you were supposed to?

Think of a thoughtful way to make a point.

- I feel left out when you don't include me in the conversation.
- When you finish your job we can play a game.
- When you interrupt me I lose track of what I'm saying.

Write it down.

The marriage weekend retreats called Marriage Encounter encourage writing thoughts and feelings about relationships and sharing them with your partner.

Writing helps to focus thoughts and crystallize feelings in a way that helps the writer and the receiver understand the problem better without being burdened with emotional expressions or gestures .

The Family Realm is Unique.

It is within the family realm that the qualities of God's Love are developed and shared. The family realm is the unique organization in which we become whole in our relationships.

Other organizations, including school, church, business or recreation, involve us only for a limited time with a focused involvement. We interact as a role person with role expectations.

It is within the family that we interact as a whole person with the emotions of a whole person. Many processes are occurring at once with a goal of permanent involvement and multidimensional caregiving. It is within the family that we grow as a person of ultimate value.

Impart Grace to Those who Hear. Speak the Truth in Love.

But speaking the truth in love, may you grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. Ephesians 4:15

Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another...

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God...Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice,

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:25-32.

Session 2. Solving Conflicts Constructively

Accepting Conflict ²

Conflict is natural. If people live together, they will experience conflict. God has made each of us different, and each family member has a God-given need to protect their uniqueness.

Conflicts arise out of personal values, beliefs and needs. Conflict is something to be resolved, not something to be avoided. Unresolved conflicts are like weeds that spread rapidly and crowd out the flowers.

Conflict in families is an opportunity to recognize each other's needs and uniqueness and to celebrate differences. Conflict is an opportunity to grow closer together.

Fights	Anger	Resentment	Quarrels
Family members fight because they like each other,			
not because they don't.			

Each human being is programmed for survival.
When we feel that our God-given uniqueness is threatened,
We feel an impulse to attack the threat (or to run and flee).

Conflict in families leads to fear:
fear of being emotionally wounded,
fear of losing our loved ones,
fear of having our weaknesses exposed,
fear of not being heard,
fear of not being considered,
fear of not being respected.

When family members feel threatened,
we must create a sense of safety .

² Thomas A. Whiteman & Thomas G. Bartlette. *The Marriage Mender*. Navpress. 1996.

Ground Rules for Conflict³

Conflict resolution requires working together,
*listening, * sharing, *caring, and *fighting fairly

1. **Don't try to win.** Make it a win-win situation.
Look for a solution where everyone feels OK.
2. **Find a way to de-escalate.**
(Researchers have found that one negative comment requires
Five counteracting comments).

Agree on a time-out gesture which says, "I need a break". The
Person calling for time out is responsible for making a return
Appointment to finish the discussion.

3. **Look for the positive.**
Hurtful comments increase defensiveness.
4. **Use what works.**
5. **Stop doing what doesn't work.**
Avoid 'trigger' words (lazy, fat, careless, stupid).
6. **Keep the big picture in mind.**
Don't let molehills become mountains.
7. **It takes time.** Practice resolving minor issues.
Resolve to do better.

Healing requires that both parties recognize what has occurred
and work together to mend the damage.

³ Ibid. *The Marriage Mender*. Chapter 8.

Decide to Forgive.⁴ For resentment is negative. Resentment is poisonous.

Resentment diminishes and devours the self.

Be the first to forgive, To smile and to take the first step.

And you will see happiness bloom on the face of your human brother and sister

Be always the first. Do not wait for others to forgive.

For by forgiving, You become the master of fate,

The fashioner of life, the doer of miracles.

To forgive is the highest, most beautiful form of love.

In return you will receive untold peace and happiness.

Robert Muller

Forgiveness is a Process!

Forgiveness is the first step in achieving inner peace. Forgiveness is a decision to release someone from a debt. You no longer feel like that person owes you, and you decide that you will not try to even the score.⁵

Forgiveness...

takes a spirit of humility,

requires hard work,

needs time,

requires an open spirit,

involves a decision,

and is a process.

How to apologize

When you were the transgressor, an apology is appropriate. A apology must be followed by attitude and behavior changes which verify that the apology was sincere.

1. Confess honestly your wrongdoing and accept responsibility.
2. Offer no excuse and do not attempt to shift the blame.
3. Acknowledge the level of hurt and pain that you caused.
4. Verbalize your remorse and ask to be forgiven.
5. Demonstrate signs of repentance, such as changed attitudes and behaviors.

⁴ Dear Abby – Monday, February 13, 1995.

⁵ Ibid. *The Marriage Mender*. Chapter 10.

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled,
as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Colossians 3: 12-17

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved,
Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness
and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may
have against one another.

Forgive as the Lord forgives you. And over all these virtues put
on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of
one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and
admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms,
hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the
name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through
Him.

Session 3 - Managing Money

Finances, feelings and relationships.⁶

Money problems often cause anger and conflict in families.

- In a survey of newlyweds, money ranked 2 out of 14 areas of disagreement.
- Money problems rank among the top four reasons leading to divorce.
- The problems increase as the number of people in the family increases.

The way money is spent in families is related to feelings people have about what is expected. Family members struggle to obtain family money resources for their own activities and interests.

Family relationships require commitment, understanding, cooperation and concern for the feelings and welfare of all members of the family.

Problems develop when money decisions create distance and resentment.

Example 1. “No, I do not want to see your hang glider. Nor do I want to watch you hang gliding. That money was supposed to be used for a family vacation.”

Example 2. “What do you mean ‘sell that old hutch’. That hutch belonged to my great-grandmother. If you really loved me you’d know how much it means to me.”

In our materialistic culture we often find ourselves using people and loving things. The spirit of charity instructs us to love people and use things.

When a love of things becomes a higher priority than a love of each family member, relationships crumble and families often come apart.

⁶ Bernard E. Poduska. *For Love and Money*. Brooks/Cole Pub. 1993

Manage Your Money Wisely

Know what your income is and how much money is coming in. Spend less!
Learn the **difference** between what you **need** and what you **want**.

Consider your **present needs** and your **future needs**,
including a **home or apartment**;
life, health and disability **insurance** to protect loved ones;
and **retirement**.

Is Money your master or your servant? 1.

Money may be your master if...

- * You **avoid discussing** finances with your partner.
- * Money is the subject of **family fights**
- * You **don't know** how much is **coming in**.
- * You **don't know** how much **you spend**.
- * Your bills are **bigger** than you **expect**.
- * You buy many items **on credit**.
- * You only make **minimum payment** on credit cards.
- * You often pay **bills late**.
- * You are spending carelessly on **things you don't need**.
- * You spend on things that are **harmful** to you.
- * You often **run out of money** before the end of the month.
- * You do **not save** money for future expenses.
- * You **suffer stress** related to money.

Plan ahead for those **expenses** that only come due **once or twice a year**.

Put money in **savings** during the year to **be prepared**:

* property taxes; Insurance; car registration; car insurance; tuition fees;
vacations; holiday celebrations; birthdays, etc.

1..Awake magazine. "Is Money Your Master or your servant". March 2009. Page 4

Money Maxims⁷

(Maxim: - a short saying that embodies an important truth.)

- * Money problems are usually behavior problems.
- * If you spend your money on something you value, you feel satisfied. If you spend money on something you do not value, you feel frustrated.
- * The values of an individual should never be equated with the person's net worth.
- * Be grateful for what you have. Enough is enough.
- * The best things in life are free.
- * Freedom from money problems more often results from spending less than earning more.
- * Plug the holes where money disappears without knowing where it went.
- * That person is the richest whose pleasures are the cheapest.
- * It is better to have love with no money than to have money with no love.
- * Waste not, want not

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Getting Out of Debt⁸

Accelerated Repayment: Pay off the principal as quickly as possible to reduce the interest that is accumulating. When extra money is added to regular payments the extra money goes to paying off the principal.

The Fold-down Plan: This plan involves paying off one debt and then using the amount you had been paying to that debt to pay off another debt (until all are paid.)

Ways to Lower Your Utility Bill!

The appliances that create heat or remove heat use the most watts. So use less of them. Use fans or ceiling fans instead of the air conditioner. Using fans with AC allows you to raise the temperature 5 degrees. Wash laundry in cold water. Dry your clothes on a clothesline in the sun. Wash dishes by hand. Pay your bills on time to avoid disconnect fees!

⁷ Bernard E. Poduska. *For Love and Money*. Brooks/Cole Pub. 1993..

⁸ Ibid.

Session 4 – Health and Wellness

Health and Wellness are the result of decisions to develop habits that will help our bodies, minds and spirits grow and prosper. Healthy bodies require:

Cleanliness, Exercise, Rest and Sleep, Good Nutrition

Cleanliness:

Keeping clean is the first line of defense against germs. **Bathing**, at least several times a week, helps to wash away germs and prevent them from spreading and causing illness. **Handwashing** is especially important. Research confirms that handwashing is an important behavior that determines who gets sick and who stays healthy. Handwashing should be a MUST:

- * before eating and cooking
- * after using the bathroom
- * after cleaning around the house
- * after touching animals, including family pets
- * before and after visiting or taking care of sick friends or relatives
- * after blowing one's nose, coughing, or sneezing
- * after being outside (playing, gardening, walking the dog)

The few seconds you spend at the sink will save you time in bed and trips to the doctor's office. Make frequent handwashing a habit.⁹

Tooth brushing is an important part of dental care. Medical research shows that brushing teeth (at least twice a day) can prevent cavities and gum disease. If teeth are not brushed correctly and frequently, saliva minerals cause tartar to develop and cause gum disease.

Clean the House

Organize your cleaning schedule to keep your home **fresh and sanitary**. Don't stress about the mess! **Learn how to keep it clean**, room by room. **Each morning** make beds, wipe bathroom counters (with anti-bacterial spray or bleach and water (50/50), wash breakfast dishes or empty the dishwasher, and do a load of

⁹ Kidshealth.org/PageManager.jsp?dn=Kid...

laundry. **Each evening** wash the dishes or load the dishwasher, wipe kitchen counters with spray (as above), take out trash, sweep or vacuum floors, and declutter with a basket (use a laundry basket to pick up things that are out of place, then put them away.)¹⁰

Cleaning Shortcuts from Heloise

- * Wipe up spills in the refrigerator as soon as you notice them. Toss anything that is beyond it's expiration date or is spoiled.
- * Toss junk mail out daily. Don't let it accumulate.
- * Clean children's plastic toys with a towel moistened with rubbing alcohol.
- * Presort laundry items into baskets. Clear the lint filter after each dryer load.
- * Dust and quick clean one room every day.

Exercise and Physical Fitness

Exercise is an important part of staying healthy. Watching TV, playing video games or sitting in a chair will not develop the stamina needed for good health!

Adults need at least 30 minutes a day of physical activity. Children need a lot of time to exercise and develop their muscles and bones.

- * People who live active lives **feel better** and **live longer**.
- * Exercise helps you maintain a **healthy weight**.
- * Exercise can delay or **prevent some diseases** such as diabetes, some cancers and heart problems.

Find the right exercise for you and your family. If it's something you enjoy, you are more likely to stay motivated (sports, walking, jogging, swimming, biking, etc.)

Sleeping and Rest

Getting a good nights sleep is **essential to good health**. Not getting enough sleep causes mental, emotional and physical fatigue. Sleep deprivation can lead to irritability, an impaired immune system, symptoms similar to ADHD, and decreased reaction time. Children need more sleep in order to develop and function properly.

¹⁰ www.organizeforfree.com/2012/05/09/free-house-cleaning-printout/

- * A newborn requires up to 18 hours a day.
- * A child one year old requires 14-18 hours
- * A child two to five years old requires 11-15 hours
- * A child six years through adolescence requires 9-11 hours
- * Adults require 7-8 hours.

Good Nutrition

Good food habits are the foundation for a healthy body. Serve a variety of foods to insure that your family receives the nutrients needed to keep your bodies healthy. When it's snack time, **give your family nutritious snacks** such as : fruit or fruit juices, vegetables, cheese, crackers, or meat slices.

Eat food from each food group daily for a well balanced diet.

Milk Group – 2-3 servings. Milk, yogurt and cheese are high in protein, calcium, and important vitamins and minerals needed to build strong bones and teeth.

Meat Group – 2-3 servings. Meat, poultry, fish and eggs provide protein, B vitamins, and minerals essential to develop muscles, bones, and blood vessels.

Fruits and Vegetables – 5+ servings. These foods give you vitamins, minerals, and fiber with few calories. Vitamin C helps resist infection and heal wounds, and Vitamin A helps to keep the digestive tract healthy.

Bread and Cereal Group – 6-11 servings. These are high in B vitamins, iron and fiber to help the body obtain energy from food, use oxygen and metabolize.

Fat, Oils and Sweets Group – Servings from this group should be limited.

Unhealthy habits important to break

* **Smoking** - Half a million Americans die each year from smoking- related health conditions. Smoking decreases lung capacity for healthy exercise.

* **Being a worry wart** - If you have a problem, try to solve it. If it can't be solved, forget it. Worrying won't help.

* **Overtime work** - Overworked Americans have doubled in the last 20 years. Quality time for yourself and your family is important for healthy relationships.

* **Alcohol and drugs** – They deaden the ability to think and decide clearly.

Healthy and wholesome sexuality

We have been blessed with an abundance of simple pleasures: sunshine and sunsets, brilliant flowers and cool water on a hot day. Sexual relationships, however, are complex pleasures because they involve the life of another person in a holistic way: physical, mental, spiritual and emotional. Above all, sexual behaviors produce new life. Faith affirms that life is a sacred gift from God.

More than 65 million people in the USA have an incurable sexually transmitted infection (STI). Many STI's result in tubal pregnancies and infertility, cancer, or severe damage to body organs. Be aware of the consequences if you fail to limit your sexual partners to one mutually monogamous healthy relationship. Protect your sexual health.

Preventive Care reduces illness

While we are the first line of defense in protecting our health and the health of our families, community health clinics and family physicians are essential in helping us protect our health and wellness. **Annual visits to our doctor** provide preventive care through **immunizations** and **screening** of cholesterol, blood pressure, weight, and hearing, vision and breast exams.

Keep a file and records for each family member of dates of immunization, major illnesses and surgeries and the names of doctors who helped with each concern for future reference.

Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God

Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love;
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!...
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Psalms 51:1-2,7,10-12

Session 5 – Good Nutrition

Good nutrition is the foundation for a healthy body. Making good food choices enables you to build a healthy lifestyle so your family can grow and thrive.

Serving a variety of foods insures that your family receives the nutrients needed to keep bodies healthy. Think about what and how much good goes on your plate. Over the day, include foods from all food groups: vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean protein foods.

The United States Department of Agriculture Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion has developed a website with excellent resources for making good food choices - www.ChooseMyPlate.gov. They have numerous tip sheets that can be downloaded to put on the refrigerator to remind you of good nutrition.

Choose MyPLate - 10 tips to a great plate¹¹

Making food choices for a healthy lifestyle can be as simple as using these tips.

- 1. Balance calories:** Find out how many calories YOU need for a day as a first step in managing your weight. Go to www.ChooseMyPlate.gov. to find your calorie level. Being physically active helps you balance calories.
- 2. Enjoy your food, but eat less:** Take the time to fully enjoy your food as you eat it. Eating too fast or when your attention is elsewhere may lead to eating too many calories.
- 3. Avoid oversized portions:** Use a smaller plate, bowl, and glass. Portion out foods before you eat. When eating out, choose a smaller size option, share a dish, or take home part of your meal.

¹¹ www.ChooseMyPlate.gov. DG Tip Sheet No. 1. United State Department of Agriculture.

4. Foods to eat more often: Eat more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and fat-free or 1% milk and dairy products. These foods have the nutrients you need for health – including potassium, calcium, vitamin D, and fiber.

5. Make half your plate fruits and vegetables: Choose red, orange, and dark-green vegetables including tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and broccoli, along with other vegetables for your meals. Add fruit to meals as a main dish, side dish or dessert.

6. Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk: They have the same amount of calcium and other essential nutrients as whole milk, but fewer calories and less saturated fat.

7. Make half your grains whole grains: To eat more whole grains, substitute a whole-grain product for a refined product – such as eating whole-wheat bread instead of white bread or brown rice instead of white rice.

8. Foods to eat less often: Cut back on foods high in solid fats, added sugars, and salt. They include cakes, cookies, ice cream, candies, sweetened drinks, pizza, and fatty meats such as ribs, sausages, bacon, and hot dogs. Use these foods as occasional treats, not everyday foods.

9. Compare sodium in foods: Use the Nutrition Facts label to choose lower sodium versions of foods, especially in soup, bread, and frozen meals. Select canned foods labeled ‘low sodium’, ‘reduced sodium’, or ‘no salt added’.

10. Drink water instead of sugary drinks: Cut calories by drinking water or unsweetened beverages. Soda, energy drinks, and sports drinks are a major source of added sugar, and calories, in American diets.

Put a rainbow of fruits and vegetables on your plate.

A variety of vitamins and minerals are essential for good health.¹²

	functions	Sources
Vitamin A	Good vision and reproduction Boosts immune system	Orange fruits/vegetables Dark green leafy vegetables
Vitamin B1, B2,B6, B12, Biotin Niacin, folic acid, Pantothenic acid,	Making energy for body needs Making red blood cells which carry oxygen	Whole grains, fish, seafood, eggs, poultry, meats, leafy green vegetables, Dairy products, beans
Vitamin C	Helps body resist and Fight infection,	Citrus fruits, cantaloupe, Strawberries, broccoli
Vitamin D	Helps to absorb calcium to Make strong bones and teeth.	Sunlight, fortified milk, Fish, egg yolks, liver
Vitamin E	Protects the heart, skin and Nervous system	Whole grains, nuts, leafy green vegetables,
Vitamin K	Clots blood to stop bleeding In wounds	Dairy products, broccoli, leafy, green vegetables
Calcium	Grows bones and teeth	Dairy products, broccoli, turnip and mustard greens
Potassium	Blood pressure, nerves, Muscle contractions	Milk, bananas, orange juice, Some cereals
Proteins	Muscle development Food digestion	Eggs, milk, meat, fish, beans, peas

¹² Kidshealth.org/PageManager.Jsp?dn=Kid...

Carl E. Coppock. Lose the Diet and Lose the Weight. Tate Pub. 2012.

Count Your Calories and Watch Your Weight

Food labels printed on grocery packages provide valuable information to help plan healthy eating habits. With your doctor's help determine the number of calories needed each day for you and each family member to maintain a healthy body weight. Food labels show calories as a percentage of a 2,000 calorie-a-day diet (the recommended number of calories for a 5'10" man to maintain a weight of 170 lbs.) Most women and children will require fewer calories, while some men may require more to maintain a healthy weight. Check the serving size of the calories listed on the label.

Being **overweight or obese** has become the norm in the United States. These conditions cause **serious health concerns**, including cardiovascular disease, some cancers, and type 2 diabetes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have defined overweight and obesity by using body weight and height to calculate a value called the **body mass index (BMI)**. A chart to help you determine your healthy weight using the BMI can be located on the internet.

If you need to lose weight it is necessary to develop a program that combines an increase in physical activity with a determined decrease in calorie intake.

Focus on Fruits

Most fruits are low in fat, sodium and calories. Keep a bowl of whole fruits on the table or in the refrigerator for snacking. Buy fresh fruits in season when they are less expensive. Be a good role model. Set a good example for children by eating fruits every day with meals or as snacks.

Keep Mealtime Pleasant

The Fruit of the Spirit is:

Love, Joy, Peace, Patience,

Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness and Self Control.

Against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:22

Session 6. Parenting Your Children

“Being a good parent today is a real challenge. Here are some **tips to help you create a loving relationship with your kids and still set and enforce the limits they need.** ¹³

- * When children misbehave, let them know that you dislike what they did and not who they are.
- * Rewarding good behavior is more effective than punishing misbehavior.
- * Try to ‘catch’ your children being good. Be generous with your praise.
- * Punishment should be used to help teach children about the consequences of their behavior. ..Never punish in anger.
- * Setting a good example is the best way to teach your children how you want them to behave.
- * Physical punishment teaches a child that hitting is okay.
- * Words hurt. If you tell children they are stupid or lazy they will grow up believing that .
- * Make it a habit to spend time together. For example, make bedtime into story time and read together.”

Communication is More Than Words¹⁴

There are five important goals in communicating with your children.

1. The first goal is to communicate **“I love you”**. No one can do this like a parent. Children understand that we love them when we use more kind words than criticism, when we give them pats, smiles, and hugs and treat them with respect.
2. We need to communicate **“You can talk to me and I will listen.”** They understand this when we listen to their feelings without disapproval.

¹³ Texas Coalition for the Prevention of Child Abuse, 11940 Jollyville Rd., #395N, Austin, TX. 78759

¹⁴ Gibson, Elaine. “Communication is more than words.” Bryan-College Station Eagle. October 21, 1990.

3. A third communication goal is **“You are strong. I believe in your abilities.”** When we encourage and support their efforts and celebrate their successes, even the small ones, they learn to have faith in their ability.
4. We need to communicate **“You are responsible.”** Children must learn to recognize the connection between their actions and their consequences. Protecting a children from their mistakes will not build character.
5. We need to communicate, **“I, your parent, am the boss. I care too much for you to allow you to misbehave. I will set limits and I expect you to listen to me.”** Children will test the limits, but when they know where the limits are, they feel safe and secure.

Teach your children to manage money.

Teach them how to separate needs from wants, how to **save**, how to **invest**, and how to **share with others**. Allow them to manage money through an allowance or money earned from small jobs. Give them guidelines and allow them to make decisions.

Teach them to share. Encourage them to share with others and set aside money regularly to honor God. Be a good example.

Talk to your children about alcohol and drugs .¹⁵

Make sure children **understand the dangers** and problems of alcohol and other drug use.

Learn to really **listen**. Keep the lines of communication open.

Help children **develop strong values**. This will give them the courage to make decisions based on facts rather than pressure.

Be a **good role model**. Children are aware of their parent’s habits.

Help children deal with **peer pressure**. They may need skills to resist pressure from their friends.

Set **firm rules about drinking** and other drug use. Family rules should be clear and consistent.

¹⁵ Brochure: Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Marriage or Living Together – Does it Really Matter?

Living arrangements have changed dramatically. In 1970 1 million people lived together outside of marriage. By 2000 this number increased to 11 million. Some have no intention to get married. Others see living together as a trial marriage.

However, children are born into these arrangements. Having a child is a lifetime commitment to support and care for this person throughout his or her life. Children deserve and need the love and support of both of their parents.

In planning for the well-being of children and family, it is important to consider all the information that will support a healthy lifestyle. Conclusions from social science overwhelmingly show that a commitment to marriage:¹⁶

- * increases the likelihood that both fathers and mothers have good relationship with their children.
- * reduces poverty and material hardship for women and children.
- * is associated with lower rates of alcohol and substance abuse.
- * is associated with better health and lower rates of injury, illness, and disability.
- * reduces the risk of delinquent and criminal behavior, especially for boys.
- * reduces the risk of child abuse.
- * increases the ability of children to do well in school.

Including Dad in Parenting: Fathers are important too.¹⁷

With 40% of children now born out of wedlock, many men are failing to experience the important role of fatherhood and many children are growing up without a father for support, nurture and protection. An effective father supports and cares for his children's mother.

Fatherhood is the most important role for men because it helps them become prosocial. Our schools, churches and community centers need to provide learning opportunities to help young men become responsible fathers for their families.

¹⁶ Institute for American Values. *Why Marriage Matters, Second Edition: Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences*. New York, NY: 2005:10-11.

¹⁷ Blankenhorn, David. *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem*. Harper. 1995:5.

Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality¹⁸

Healthy sexuality is about encouraging wholesome relationships and attitudes. The popular culture teaches that sex is about selfish desires. We want our children to have God-honoring attitudes about human sexuality. We should start conversations when our children are young.

For 3-5 year olds the theme is God created boys and girls and moms and dads and God wants us to honor Him with our bodies. We need to bring up personal safety issues and what is proper and inappropriate touch from others.

Ages 6-9 is a stage when kids are curious. Answer their question “Where do babies come from?” Introduce basic anatomy and how God is a part of families.

The Purity Code is the important message for **ages 10-13** with the message that our bodies are gifts from God to be used in obedience to Him. Address guy/girl relationships, pornography, cultural influences, peer pressure, modesty and flirting.

For **ages 14-18** conversations take place on dating, setting standards, sexual abuse, how far is too far, respecting sexuality, drugs, alcohol, partying and **sexual integrity decisions**. No conversation should be off limits for parents.

Raising Your Kids to Love the Lord¹⁹

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6.

“We can model true faith and continually pray that God will transform their hearts... The most powerful word is prayer... Praying with your children and for them. Praying in times of crisis and moments of celebration. Praying for no reason at all other than to thank God for His Goodness. Letting them hear you pray. Teaching them by example.” Get in the habit of telling them Bible stories at bedtime. Let that motivate you to learn the Bible along with them. Your young children will ponder the power of God as they fall asleep.

¹⁸ Burns, Jim. *Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality*. Bethany House. 2008.

¹⁹ Stone, Dave. *Raising Your Kids to Love the Lord*. Thomas Nelson Co. 2012.

Session 7. Family Traditions

Bloom where you are planted!

Shared quality time is the soil out of which good families grow. Loving relationships in family require time and commitment.

The support **stem of the family flower** is a love of God, prayer, devotions and worship. The **leaves and petals** of the flower are the sharing times together: Birthdays, Celebrations, Holidays, Vacations, Picnics, Anniversaries, Recreation, Rituals, Traditions, Reunions, Hospitality, Mealtime, and Eating-out together.

Loving relationships require time²⁰

It is essential that family members reserve time for one another if loving relationships are to be nourished.

It takes time to get acquainted with the thoughts and feelings of other members in the family.

The greatest destroyers of loving family relationships are over commitment and time pressures.

Being over committed with too many irons stresses feelings of caring and concern for one another.

Most families do not spend much time together listening to each other.

Most families do not spend much time together.

**Each family would benefit
from a weekly time together
spent on and in quality projects/events/times
that enrich deepen and bring joy to family living.**

²⁰ Nutt, Grady. *Family Time: A Revolutionary Old Idea*. 1976.

Family Tradition – This Is the Way We Always Do It!²¹

Parents know that having established ways of doing things helps to simplify things. Children want to know what to expect. They enjoy repetition and like to look forward to the same story again and again, the same food, the same video.

Kids and adults like family traditions that develop a sense of togetherness and a sense of family relationship and meaning.

Special traditions may include:

- Reading a storybook before bedtime.
- Making pizza every Saturday night.
- Having a prayer before each meal.
- Remembering birthdays with a cake and a song.

Special activities can make holidays important for the family, such as:

- Having the extended family gather on Thanksgiving for a shared meal.
- Gathering with family and friends to make Tamales at Christmastime, or
- Having hot chocolate and popcorn as you decorate the tree together.

A good tradition should include simple activities that focus on the value of the people involved. Include children in the planning. They may have ideas about special things they want to celebrate together.

A good tradition should be enjoyed. This takes planning in advance to consider what is needed to make it to happen in a positive way.

Taking photos or keeping scrapbooks of special family occasions can preserve shared memories of family celebrations. Traditions make family life richer because of celebrating family experiences together.

What traditions are important to your family?

²¹ Suk, Letitia. "This is the Way We Always Do It". Focus on the Family. Nov. 2002:9.

The Magic of the Family Meal²²

The statistics are clear: kids who dine with their parents are healthier, happier and better students, which is why a dying tradition is coming back.

There is something about a shared meal, not just at holidays, but on a regular basis that anchors a family together. This is a time when the family members share wisdom and expectations, confess and forgive, and form relationships with each other.

Eating a meal together teaches children to be a part of a group and a member of their culture. When eating together is started young, it becomes a habit and a discipline that provides structure and good eating habits.

Keeping mealtime as pleasant as possible can be a challenge but developing positive habits early leads to a healthier life.

Studies show that the more often families eat together the less likely kids are to smoke, drink, do drugs, get depressed, fall into destructive behaviors, and the more likely they are to do well in school, delay having sex, eat their vegetables and carry on a conversation.

While it may be difficult if parents are working and children are shuttling between school activities and TV shows, it's worth some inconvenience or compromise to make eating meals together a priority.

Including children in the meal preparation by setting the table, helping prepare some foods, and helping to clear off the table can give them a sense of importance in the family.

Mealtime should be a time when the TV and other distracting electronic gadgets are turned off .

Beginning the meal with a blessing of thanksgiving can help children and the whole family grow together in appreciation for God's care and for each other.

²² Gibbs, Nancy. "The Magic of the Family Meal." *Time*. June 12, 2006:51-54.

Family Reunions – Fun and Games and Memories of the Grand Old Times²³

Keeping in touch with far-flung members of a family requires planning family reunions so children and parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins can come together to share the important activities in their lives.

Family reunions are a time for **meals together**, playing **games together**, sharing **memories of good times** and **passing on family traditions** that are special.

A reunion can consist of an afternoon picnic, a weekend retreat, or a week camping together in a park. Family reunions become events to look forward to.

Tips for organizing a successful family gathering;

- * **Plan ahead.** Set the date, even a year ahead, for families who have to travel.
- * **Share the work.** A lot of planning is required. Cook cooperatively.
- * **Take it easy.** Plan time to do nothing and share each other's company.
- * **Keep a record.** Take lots of pictures and keep a scrapbook of events.

What Family Records Should You Keep?

It's important to have a record-keeping system that allows you to quickly put your hand on documents you might need. Organize them into file folders.

Personal and family records: Social security cards, Addresses and Phone numbers ;

Birth and marriage certificates; School diplomas; Report cards; Family photographs.

Property documents: Deed of house, condo, car ownership; Receipts of payments made on

House, car or other purchases; Warranties of purchases

Financial Records: Investment records; including IRA's, 401(k) accounts, savings accounts,

Credit card records, loan papers.

Medical and Health Records: Immunizations; Doctors' names and numbers; Dates of

Illnesses and surgeries; Medicines used

Tax Records: Copy of tax reports submitted; Copy of checks written over (at least) 3 years.

Love is patient, is kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not rude, does not delight in evil, is not easily angered, is not proud, is not self-seeking, keeps no record of wrongs, rejoices with the truth... I Corinthians 13:4-6

²³ Cegielski, Jennifer. "A Grand Old Time". Martha Stewart's Living. June 2011:116-125.

Session 8. Attitudes of Gratitude in Love²⁴

Creating More Joy in Your Relationships

Develop an Asset Focus:

...the more you look at what's right instead of what's wrong,
Change actually occurs. Impasses break up,
New insights arise, and
The energy begins to move in a positive direction.
Conversely, when you focus on what's wrong, you dig yourself into a bigger hole.

A Positive Attitude

The dynamic that keeps families happy is a positive attitude. Negative thoughts and feelings (which all families have) are kept from overwhelming the positive ones.

A Culture of Problems

We are trained in our culture to focus on problems: what is wrong, what needs to be corrected. We develop a negative mind set.

However, "When one generates mental negativity, one starts suffering; Whenever one is free from negativity, one enjoys peace and harmony." S.N.Goenka

Gratitude

Gratitude is a matter of putting our attention on what is right in our lives, and what is right about the people we live with. The more we do it, the happier in love and life we will be.

You Can Choose What to Pay Attention To

To fall in love – focus on everything wonderful about the person.
To fall out of love – pay attention to their flaws (we all have them).
We can choose to notice a person's good qualities (we all have them).

²⁴ Ryan, M. J.. *Attitudes of Gratitude in Love – Creating More Joy in your Relationships*. New York: MJF Books 2002.

Taming Our Expectations

“An expectation, as they say, is a resentment waiting to happen.” Jon Carroll
“Ah, expectations! They do have a way of forming, but nothing is better at killing a sense of appreciation. That’s because...they quickly launch us into resentment when our expectations go unmet. When we cling too tightly to our expectations of how it should be, we can easily overlook what is marvelous about what is.”²⁵

Receptivity is Key

“Gratitude is a feeling that is created when we become aware of what we are receiving. We may have been receiving it all along, but it is only when we become aware of what we have that we experience a sense of thankfulness...

Receptivity is an attitude that we choose – to allow life to enter us, move us, transform us. It is enhanced by practices – for instance, of consciously taking in the world around you through your eyes, ears, and body - and by taking time.

It’s hard to be receptive when you are going ninety miles an hour. “²⁶

Make a Gratitude Laundry List

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.” Robert Browning

In family ‘fights’ it’s easy to remember everything remotely related - to build a case of how terrible the person is. We keep lists!

It’s embarrassing to admit that we don’t keep an equivalent Gratitude List. But if we can keep a list of negatives, we can also keep a positive one on hand. “Make your list long and engrave it somewhere. Then when times are tough and you’ve lost your perspective, you can bring it out and make a case for why it’s worth going on.”²⁷

We are often guilty of treating the persons we love worse than we would a random stranger. Don’t forget to say “Please” and “Thank you” at home.

²⁵ Ryan, M.J. *Attitudes of Gratitude in Love – Creating more Joy in your Relationships*. NY: MJF Books. 2002:69-70

²⁶ Ibid. : 84.

²⁷ Ibid: 132

Children Learn What They Live

Dorothy Law Nolte

If a child lives with criticism
He learns to condemn.

If a child lives with hostility,
He learns to fight.

If a child lives with ridicule,
He learns to be shy.

If a child lives with shame,
He learns to feel guilty.

If a child lives with tolerance,
He learns to be patient.

If a child lives with encouragement,
He learns to have confidence.

If a child lives with praise,
He learns to appreciate.

If a child lives with fairness,
He learns justice.

If a child lives with security,
He learns to have faith.

If a child lives with approval,
He learns to like himself.

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,
He learns to find love in the world.

Consider how this poem can be adapted to apply to all the family.

People Learn What They Live

If people live with criticism, they learn to condemn....

If people live with acceptance and friendship, they learn to find love.

THANKS, Lovable, Livable, Laughable Lines²⁸

A happy person is not a person in a certain set of circumstances, but rather a person with a certain set of attitudes.

The best things you can give children, next to good habits, are good manners.

Our business in life is not to see through one another, it is to see one another through.

One of the most difficult things to give away is kindness – It is usually returned.

The most powerful single thing you can do to have influence over others is to smile at them.

No one stands as straight as when he stoops to help someone.

Thanksgiving comes but once a year, but reasons to give thanks are always here.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your heart and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things....

And the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:4-9

²⁸ Kapla, Marcia & David. **THANKS, Lovable, Livable, Laughable Line.** 1989.

