



10 Interactive Programs for Parents of Children Ages 8 to 12

Drs. Claudio and Pamela Consuegra





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Authors: Drs. Claudio and Pamela Consuegra Editor: Kathy Sowards Design: Liv Jacobson Layout: Christal Gregerson Project Manager: Christal Gregerson

Project Committee: Dr. Claudio Consuegra Dr. Pamela Consuegra Brad Forbes Wilma Kirk-Lee Karen Pearson

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Help! I'm a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World

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MEET THE AUTHORS

Drs. Claudio and Pamela Consuegra currently serve as the Family Ministry Directors for the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The North American Division territory includes the United States, Canada, Bermuda, and the Federated Islands of Micronesia.

Claudio was born in Colombia, South America, while Pamela grew up in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia. They have been married for thirty-two years.

Claudio has served as pastor in various conferences throughout the United States. He has also been a law-enforcement, hospital, and hospice chaplain, a marriage and family counselor, and conference departmental director and administrator. He holds a Doctor of Ministry degree in Family Ministries from Andrews University.



Pamela has a background in Adventist education, having served as a teacher, academy principal, and Superintendent of Schools. She holds a PhD in Leadership from Andrews University.

Claudio and Pamela have a rich background in the area of family ministries, having worked as a husband and wife ministry team throughout North America. They have served in numerous conferences, hosted a live call-in family show for LifeTalk radio, and authored numerous journal articles as well as several books.

They have two adult daughters. Diana, an English teacher at Takoma Adventist Academy, is married to Andrew, an F-18 aircraft mechanic for the Navy. Hadassah is a surgical resident physician in York, Pennsylvania, and is married to Greggory, who works as a speech and language pathologist.

Claudio and Pamela are passionate about building strong, healthy marriages and families for God's Kingdom. They believe strongly that this process begins in the home as parents partner with God on the most rewarding task in which they will ever participate—parenting!



DEDICATION PAGE





The second edition of this parenting series is dedicated with love to our mothers,

Cecilia Consuegra

and

Sadie June Napier.

We are thankful for Godly mothers who parented from their knees!



What if someone gave you a block of the finest marble with the task of creating a masterpiece that would be displayed in the most prominent place for the entire world to see? Unless you are a gifted sculptor, and hiring one is not an option, what would you do? And what if you were given only a few years to create this monument which will last a lifetime?

FOREWORD

Parenting is like that, except that instead of a block of hard, cold marble we are given the delicate life of a child for us to shape and mold so they can become lifetime disciples of Jesus Christ. And, yes, time with our children seems so short. The years pass by quickly and our babe in arms becomes a toddler and all too soon it was time for the first day of school and now, suddenly we find ourselves in the 'tween years—the years between a young child and a young adult. These years too shall pass by quickly. What an awesome task and responsibility! Where do you begin? When you face this momentous mission of building and molding a child of God, do you feel like screaming, "Help! I'm a parent?"

The good news is that the principles of parenting in scripture are timeless and still relevant to parents today. *Help! I'm a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World* is founded on those scriptural principles and aimed at parents with children ages eight to twelve. This resource is the second in a parenting series and was developed as a result of hundreds of responses to surveys conducted throughout the North American Division territory. Each chapter represents a response to the felt needs of parents raising children in today's world.

This resource may be utilized in a variety of ways including parents in their home, a large church group, prayer meeting, a Sabbath School class, a Home and School meeting, or a small group in your home, to name a few. Although you may view the accompanying DVD and read the selections in this book on your own, you will get the most out of this resource by using it in a small group setting. You will glean new ideas and thoughts as you discuss the concepts together with your group members and share your experiences, your challenges, and your successes with each other. In addition, the principles discussed are applicable to a variety of family make-ups including single parents, blended families, foster parents, divorced couples who are co-parenting, and grandparents raising their grandchildren.

The purpose of this resource is to inspire and encourage you, as parents, on your journey to be the disciple-makers of your children. You will be motivated to take up the exciting challenges and blessings of parenthood. We invite you to journey with us as we explore your God-given role of parenting. Most of all, we pray that you will constantly be reminded that you are not alone. God is waiting to coparent with you!

In the arms of our Heavenly Parent.

Drs. Claudio and Pamela Consuegra Family Ministries Directors for the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

I. COMPONENTS

This parenting resource consists of three main components:

- 1.Manual—"Help, I'm a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World" Manual
- **2.DVD Set**—This is a set of DVDs that contain a 30-minute segment that accompanies each of the chapters in the manual.
- **3.Website**—The website is a very important component of this resource. You will find additional resources posted on each topic. You will also be able to submit any unanswered questions that you may have, sign up for an e-newsletter, and follow a parenting blog. The website will be updated on a regular basis. Therefore, it is the place to go to keep this information current and relevant. The website is *www.HelpImAParent.org*

II. WAYS THIS RESOURCE MAY BE USED

So, what are the ways you can use this resource? There are three ways:

- 1.With a Group—It is recommended that you use this resource in a group setting. Perhaps you can do it in your church and invite all the parents in your congregation to join you. Or, perhaps you could invite all of your neighbors to your house to participate in this parenting enrichment program. It is a great way to meet felt needs as well as getting to know your neighbors better. You may choose to facilitate or a facilitator may be designated to lead in the group discussions and activities. You do not need to be an "expert" to lead out in this program. You only need to be open to group processes and be willing to let God lead you.
- **2.As a Couple**—You may proceed at your own pace and share your ideas with your partner. If there is an opportunity, invite at least one other couple to join you in the experience. You will all benefit by having varying views, experiences, and insights.
- **3.By Yourself**—Yes, it is possible to do this program by yourself. However, why not check around and invite at least one other person to join you.

III. SESSION FORMAT

- 1. The first session should follow this format:
 - a. Greet each participant as they arrive.
 - b. Have opening prayer as soon as all the participants have arrived.
 - c. Share a light meal together or a snack.
 - d.Have participants introduce themselves and tell you a little about their family. They only need to share as they are comfortable to do so.

e. Distribute the manuals.

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- f. Assign the participants the homework of reading over chapter one and be prepared to discuss it the next time you meet. Suggest that group members work through the activities and come prepared with any questions they may have at the next meeting. It is not expected that they will answer every discussion question, complete every activity, or understand every concept discussed. The group will work together next week; you only want them to become familiar with the material in the chapter beforehand.
- g. Announce the day and time for the next meeting where chapter one will be introduced. If you wish, you may let the group members help you decide. You want to be sure that it is a time they can all commit to. The dynamics of each group will be different so be as flexible as you can.
- h.End with prayer.
- i. You may want to check with each participant a day or so before the scheduled meeting. Remind them of the upcoming meeting.

Note: The purpose of this first get together is to get acquainted with each person, to start to build community, pass out the manuals, and give the assignment to read chapter one. You will not be discussing chapter one in this session. Rather, it is a meet and greet session.

2.Each successive session should follow the same format:

- a. Begin with prayer.
- b.Review scriptural principle.
- c. Go over the Icebreaker/Group Discussion Questions with the group.
- d.Together, watch the 30-minute companion DVD that goes with the chapter to be covered in that session.
- e. Lead out in the chapter discussion. Review each topic. Lead out in the group discussion questions and activities. The participants only need to share, as they are comfortable in doing so.
- f. If participants have any questions discuss them as a group.
- g.Remember to remind the participants at every meeting to visit the companion website for additional materials and resources.
- h. Assign the next chapter for group members to read.
- i. Announce the day and time for the next session.
- j. End with prayer.

Note: If you find that you need more than one session for each chapter that is fine. You make it work for your particular group needs. If needed, you may take several weeks or sessions for each chapter.

IV. KEY SECTIONS IN MANUAL

This manual is divided into ten chapters. Each chapter addresses a topic that was identified by you, as parents, as one of your biggest parenting challenges. You will find these elements included in each chapter of the manual:

- **1.Scriptural Principle**—Each of the ten chapters is guided by a spiritual principal that opens the chapter.
- **2.Icebreaker/Group Discussion**—The purpose of this activity is to encourage discussion of the scriptural principal for the chapter. This section will ask you to remember, review, and reflect on what the passage teaches.
- **3.Group Activity**—This section is activity-based. You will be asked to write responses to the question presented. In some cases you may do this as an entire group. In other instances you may be asked to do this individually and then share your responses with the entire group.
- **4.Group Discussion**—This section will either contain a question for the group's consideration or a statement on which to read and reflect. You are to process it together with your group members.
- **5.Sidebars**—Please take time to read all the sidebars. They each contain valuable information that adds to the current topic of discussion.
- **6. Try This at Home**—This section will challenge you to try certain activities at home. You do not have to attempt all of them at once. However, we do encourage you to select one idea and try it as you complete each chapter.
- **7.A Prayer You May Say**—This is a suggested prayer for you to pray. Of course, you may say one of your own.

Above all, enjoy the parenting journey. It is our prayer that as you learn together, find answers together, pray together, encourage each other, and grow together in the task of parenting you will be blessed and enriched.



1. 'TWEENS: CHANGES AND TRANSITIONS

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, NKJV).

ICEBREAKER-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. REMEMBER

- Think back of your own childhood when you were 8-12 years of age. What were your struggles?
- · Are the struggles of this age group different today from those you had?

2. REVIEW

• Review the Bible verse in our spiritual principle, how does it apply to parenting?

3. REFLECT

• Reflect on this special time in your child's life. In what ways can this time of transition be a positive blessing for you and for your child?

OVERVIEW

Ah, the "between" years. The term used to describe the time in life from 8 to 12 is better known as the 'tween years. From shyness to independence, from baby fat to puberty, this can be a wildly exciting and tumultuous time of life for you, as a parent, and for your 'tween.

It is a time of changes and transitions. There may be no other time in life when one will experience as many changes—physically and emotionally. It is hard for us, as parents, to keep up with the changes that seem to come as quickly as the sun rises and sets. Your little one is a babe in arms no more. Dependence on you has morphed into independence and, in many cases, a stubborn will. Your child's social circle has widened to include social acquaintances that have become very important in their life.

"For those of us who have decided to follow Christ as our only hope for gaining truth, purpose, direction, and eternal security, there is NO obligation that has greater significance than parenting. None." (Barna, 2007, p. 4).

It is interesting to note that as research began on this book, there was noticeably less information for these "sandwich years." Information was readily available for new parents and for parents of teenagers. This in between time, however, is not given the platform that it truly deserves.

So, where do you turn and how can you keep up? The smooth ride of parenting that you may have settled into from birth to age seven has just become bumpy and unpredictable. In this chapter we will look at the overall picture that is



emerging in these "tween years. Keep in mind that we will go in to specifics in subsequent chapters. In looking at the "big picture" we will consider the following topics:

- \cdot Transitions
- · From Dependence to Independence

TRANSITIONS

You are already beginning to realize how quickly time is passing you by in your parenting years. Just yesterday you were changing diapers and standing over your baby's crib watching them as they slept. You wish that you could make time stand still and savor the moments of childhood. Yet, if this happened you would miss out on the joys that each new stage in the development of your child brings. Each stage brings its own challenges but it also brings unique joys. Celebrate the transitions that these 'tween years bring. With God by your side you can say, "Bring it on!"

It is important to put things in perspective. While parenting may seem to take on a new role for you, try to imagine what is going on in the body and mind of your changing child. The transitions may not be easy for them and you need to be prepared to help support, educate, and guide them through the transitions.

Parenting preteens, or 'tweens, can be a challenge. Discipline, school, homework, time with family—everything is renegotiated as your child transitions from dependence to independence. Hormones kick in as puberty approaches, and the pressures of the peer group magnify significantly. The things that your child needs now, more than ever before, is to feel they have a secure nest as they launch themselves into the exciting but scary world. Children who feel disconnected from their parents lose their anchor and look for it in their peer group. Home needs to be a haven from the craziness of the world. It needs to be a place where your child always feels loved and welcome—a place where they look forward to coming at the end of every day.

The only way to provide a firm family foundation amidst all the transitions that come in these 'tween years is to maintain a strong bond with your child. In fact, much like the toddler years, parents are the ones who can help determine whether the 'tween years are turbulent or terrific. And, don't forget, a strong foundation now will also assist you as these 'tween years merge into the teen years.

How can you build a strong family foundation for your eight to twelve year old? What are some practical and positive ways that you can parent during this "'Tween Transition" time? Let's look at some practical applications to some potential problems.

TIPS FOR 'TWEEN TRANSITION TIME

1.Prayer, Family Worship, and Teaching Values. Remember that this is best done not by lecturing, but by asking questions. To get your child talking, become a brilliant and patient listener, empathizer, and question asker. It's also an opportunity to teach; don't be afraid to share real life examples of the consequences of bad decisions. These are available in the news every single day. Also, share stories about your own life to set a positive example. And, most of all, remember to have that daily family worship. Jesus should be

involved in every activity that you do as a family. The spiritual principles in the Bible should be taught and applied in the home. Make it real for the specific issues that your child is facing.

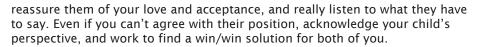
2.Stay Connected. Have dinner together as much as possible. Kids who have dinner with their parents do better in school, are less likely to use drugs or alcohol, are less likely to have sex while in high school, and are less likely to experience depression or anxiety. In their desire to expose their children to as many extracurricular experiences as possible, some parents stop by the nearest fast food place or call and place an order for food delivery, and then sit in front of the television eating that delivered meal. Sharing a home cooked meal around the table not only benefits the overall physical health of the family it also provides an unequaled opportunity for family conversation about daily activities, challenges, and successes. It allows for topics to be discussed with your children that otherwise would not happen.

In addition, spend some private time together every day with your child; many parents find that about fifteen minutes at bedtime can make a big difference. Car rides provide other opportunities to stay engaged in your child's life. Establish a rule of no iPods, smart phones, or other technological gadgets in the car so you can use that time to connect with your child. And of course, that rule applies to you also!

3. Recognize the Increasing Need for Independence. Be aware that as watch our children grow up before our eyes we tend to feel less powerful as parents and we often compensate by becoming overprotective. Instead of breathing down your child's neck, agree on and enforce specific standards. Set reasonable limits. For instance, no phone calls during dinner and after 9 p.m., no online chatting, or no television or other electronic gadgets until homework is finished etc. Make sure that all of you set are clear and be consistent with enforcing them.

4. Don't Underestimate Hormones. Your child's body is changing and they may be experiencing mood swings, distractibility, competitiveness, and preoccupation with the opposite sex. 'Tweens can even find themselves in a full-blown tantrum without understanding how it happened. During those times, kindly tell your preteen that you see how upset they are and you want to give them time to pull themselves together before you discuss it. Ask them if they want you to stay, or to leave the room to allow them time to calm down. Your preteen doesn't understand his or her moods any more than you do right now. Later, give them a big hug,

"As our tweens change, we change. The parenting process is a mutual give-and- take experience in which we raise our tweens and they raise us too. Through their experiences we learn more about being a faithful parent. As they change, and as we change, we can thank our Lord. lesus Christ. that He remains the same, loves us, forgives us, and sustains us through His body and blood as we experience those changes. He understands those changes because He experienced those changes too. He lived as a human and experienced human change so we would know the power of God's love and the strength of the promise of His forgiveness and righteousness" (Bucka, J. 2004, p. 22).



- **5.Be Aware of the Danger in Popular Culture.** Let's be honest with ourselves. Your young child is in a world filled with drug and alcohol use, depression and teen pregnancy. Yes, they want to fit in with their friends, but they count on their parents to keep them safe. They aren't ready for the attention they get when they wear revealing fashions. Their brain development is not ready for the movies and television shows they may wish to watch. They need you to enforce strict rules regarding technology, clothing, friend choices, etc. 'Tweens want and need your guidance, even if they are unwilling to admit it or express it.
- **6.Be Involved in Academics.** Make what's happening in their classroom your business as a parent. They need your help in developing time management skills, insuring that homework gets done and big projects are worked on over time, instead of the night before they are due. Maintain high expectations and insure that homework doesn't get neglected in favor of screen time and social time.
- **7.Help Establish Positive Health Habits.** Your child still needs at least nine hours of sleep every night, healthy food choices, and regular exercise. Instilling these habits can take real creativity on the part of parents, but they greatly reduce moodiness and you'll be happy they're well established when your child hits the teen years.
- 8.Be Aware of the Specific Needs of Girls and Boys. Girls will need your help handling media images of women, cultural expectations about attractiveness, the pressure to be sexy, her relationship with food, and her body. Remember that girls naturally fill out before they shoot up, and be careful not to impose society's insistence that only thin is attractive. Notice any issues she may have as her breasts begin to develop and curves start forming. Be aware of the research showing that most 'tween girls are very anxious about the bodily changes and portrayal from media of what beauty is. Girls particularly need their fathers to continue offering physical hugs and open admiration for what a beautiful daughter they have, in an atmosphere of total safety and appropriate boundaries.

Boys need help integrating their sense of connection, tenderness, and vulnerability—which are a part of all human relationships. It's normal for boys approaching their teen years to act cool, indifferent, and invulnerable with their peers, even when they're actually highly sensitive kids. A responsible, affectionate father or uncle can be a critical teacher as a 'tween boy learns how to be a godly man. And mom needs to keep warmly talking and listening with her son about his interests and experiences, while staying aware that he needs to see himself as competent and independent in solving his own problems.

If you are a single parent, don't despair. Just remember that it is important that your child has positive, Christian role models of both sexes in their life. In chapter 5 we will discuss in greater detail some of the physical changes that your 'tween child may experience.



GROUP ACTIVITY

Answer the following questions privately and then discuss your answers with the group

1.What transition have you seen in your child that you have welcomed and celebrated the most?

2. What change in your child has been the most challenging for you?

FROM DEPENDENCE TO INDEPENDENCE

Many parents of children in these 'tween years awake one morning and wonder what has happened to their sweet little child. Their compliant child has become defiant. Well, if you are shaking your head and agreeing with that statement, never fear. We assure you that your child is normal. They are growing from dependence on you into an independent young person who is ready to make some decisions of their own.

As your child grows he or she may show signs of sophisticated reasoning, another major milestone in your child's emotional development. As your child thinks more and more like an adult, it makes communicating with them a little easier, and a little harder.

The more your child understands, the easier it is to make your point and, hopefully, get it across to them. However, 'tweens are famous for trying to negotiate with their parents, or for finding inconsistencies in their parents' reasoning that they can use against them. Expect your 'tween to challenge you and your decisions from time to time. In other words, your child will begin to develop skills as a great debater!

Remember, your 'tween will often struggle with being dependent on you, the parent, while having a strong desire to be independent. They may also feel overwhelmed by the emotional and physical changes they are going through. At the same time, they may be facing a number of pressures—from friends to fit in and from parents and other adults to do well in school or activities like sports or part-time jobs. These years are important as your child asserts his or her individuality.

What can you do to help? Communicating your love for your child is the single most important thing you can do. Children decide how they feel about themselves in large part by how their parents react to them. For this reason, it's important

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for parents to help their children feel good about themselves. It is also important to communicate your values and to set expectations and limits, such as insisting on honesty, self-control, and respect for others, while still allowing them to have their own space and to make decisions according to their age and maturity.

It is far too easy for us, as parents, to focus on the faults and to fall in the habit of giving mostly negative feedback and criticism. Although children need feedback, they respond better to positive feedback. Be sure to praise appropriate behavior in order to help your child feel a sense of accomplishment, reinforce your family's values, and create a healthy sense of self esteem. Establishing a loving relationship from the start will help you and your child now, and later on through the teenage years. Remember this rule: Positive attention is better than negative attention. But, negative attention is better than no attention at all! In other words, be sure to give appropriate and specific positive feedback and affirmation to your child as it helps to avoid negative behavior.

GROUP ACTIVITY



Answer this question privately and then discuss the answer with your group. You may mark all the choices that apply.

What determines how well you are doing at the job of parenting? What is your "parenting yardstick"? From where do you get the standard for measuring your success as a parent?

- Society
- · Family of Origin
- · Spouse or Other Family Member
- Media
- · Church
- Bible

WRAP UP

If you find yourself on the "transition train" do not despair. It is a normal part of development. It need not be a time to dread. Instead, celebrate the growth that you see taking place. Marvel at the creative power of God. And, enjoy the view as you witness God working to bring about His desires and will in the life of your 'tween. And, just think, you have been given a front row seat!

The remainder of this manual will go into some of these specific transitions in greater depth. This chapter serves as an introduction to the challenges and joys that these specific years of parenting bring.

And, these words serve as a good reminder, "As our tweens change, we change. The parenting process is a mutual give-and-take experience in which we raise our



tweens and they raise us too. Through their experiences, we learn more about being a faithful parent. As they change, and as we change, we can thank our Lord, Jesus Christ, that He remains the same, loves us, forgives us, and sustains us through His body and blood as we experience those changes. He understands those changes because He experienced those changes too. He lived as a human and experienced human change so we would know the power of God's love and the strength of the promise of His forgiveness and righteousness" (Bucka, J. 2004, p. 22).

GROUP ACTIVITY

Discuss the statement below. How does it apply to the changes and transitions taking place in your child?

"The germination of the seed represents the beginning of spiritual life, and the development of the plant is a figure of the development of character. There can be no life without growth. The plant must either grow or die. As its growth is silent and imperceptible, but continuous, so is the growth of character. At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God's purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be constant advancement" (White, 1954, p. 162).

TRY THIS AT HOME

Here are some things to try at home this week:

- 1. Throughout this course we will encourage you to engage in a "Bible Promise Project." That will start with this first lesson. Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you, as a parent, about overcoming the challenges of parenting that specifically relate to the topic of this chapter. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place where you can see it throughout the day during the week. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don't throw them away at the week's end as these will become valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God! Keep them in a safe place because we will add to them each week. Make your own Bible Promise Box. Together, these promises will serve as valuable gems that will give you encouragement when the challenges of parenting may seem to overwhelm you. They remind you that you are not alone on your parenting journey. God walks beside you!
- 2. Find a prayer partner. Pray together daily for the parenting role God has placed you in. Pray for wisdom as you face these challenging years of 'tween transitions.
- 3.In addition to praying for wisdom for you, as a parent, pray for your child every day. Talk to God about the kind of person you want them to become. Instead of focusing on things like income or career, focus on the character qualities you want them to develop (honesty, passion for God, servant's heart etc.).



A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Lord, every day it seems as if my child is changing. That toddler is now a young child. I no longer need to change their diapers or get their bottle ready. This time of transitions is both exciting and a little frightening. Please walk with me every day. And, help me to teach my child to go through all of life's transitions with You in the lead. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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2. KINDLING THAT SPIRITUAL FIRE IN YOUR CHILD

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

"All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children" (Isaiah 54:13, NKJV).

ICEBREAKER-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. REMEMBER

- Remember when you were a young child. What were the things that turned your attention to spiritual matters?
- If you did not experience a positive spiritual influence as a child, what do you think would have made the difference?

2. REVIEW

 \cdot As you consider our spiritual principle for this chapter, what message do you glean from this verse?

3. REFLECT

- $\cdot\,$ Take a moment and reflect on the current spiritual situation in your home.
- · Do you think that your children have a spiritual fire within them?

OVERVIEW

Have you ever started a bon fire? What do you need to start a good fire?

Can you start a fire with wet, green, fresh wood? Possibly, but it takes a lot more work and effort. Can you start a fire out of ashes? Can you start a fire in the middle of a hurricane, or a thunderstorm, pouring rain, or with the wind blowing wildly?

I, Pamela, vividly remember my grandfather teaching me how to start a fire. You see, a wood stove heated my grandparent's home and all of my grandmothers delicious meals were made in her little wood stove as well. Therefore, gathering wood and learning how to build a good fire was a much needed skill when I went to their house for a visit.

First of all, we had to select the perfect wood. It could not be green and preferably not wet. Then we had to work together on grandpa's two-man saw to cut the wood. Next came stacking it in the wood bin. We also had to collect kindling—dry twigs and sticks to be used to accelerate the flames and help the wood logs catch on fire. No step could be skipped and each led to the culmination of a bright, hot fire burning in that old pot belly stove!

In the same way, if we want to kindle God's fire in our children, we need to have the right conditions and the right materials. So, what are those conditions in order to kindle a spiritual fire in our children? There are three important aspects

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that must not be overlooked:

- 1. Your own fire must be burning.
- 2. Your Actions must "match" your Words.
- 3. Your attitude (toward God, Bible truth, the church) will fuel or quench the fire in your child.

How do we ignite that spiritual spark in our children so that it burns brightly? How do we ensure that it does not go out? As we look at ways to kindle that spiritual fire in our children, we will consider the following topics:

- · Light Your Own Fire First
- Pray for Your Children
- · Family Worship
- · Church Attendance and Participation
- Ministry Opportunities

LIGHT YOUR OWN FIRE FIRST

Have you noticed a thread that runs throughout this entire parenting series? Christian parenting begins with your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He "Those who produce spiritual champions embrace parenting as their primary job in life" (Barna, 2007, p. 24).

wants to co-parent with you, but He will not force Himself into your home. You must daily invite Him in.

So, have you taken inventory lately? What is the status of your own fire? Is it hot or is it about to go out? If you are unsure, I can assure you that your 'tween knows. Your child will have no doubt as they watch you go about your day to day activities. They have a front row seat to observe you. And, if you try to start their fire when yours has gone out, they will not hesitate to let you know.

You cannot light a spiritual fire under your child if yours is not lit. The spark for their fire comes from your own. As stated above, your own fire must be burning, your actions must match your words, and your attitude will either fuel or quench that fire in your child. What are some practical steps that you can take to make sure your own fire burns so hot that there is no doubt in the mind of your child?

- **1.Have Personal Devotions**—Your child needs to witness you spending personal time with Jesus. Don't hide it. Make it known to them. Let them see you reading your Bible and on your knees in prayer.
- 2.Actions Speak Louder than Words—Parents must model the same behavior they want their child to emulate. If you say one thing, but do another—your words will not be heard! Aim to be consistent in word and action.
- **3.Speak in Positive Ways about Church and Church Leadership**—Never, ever, speak negatively about the church, the pastor, or church leaders. Why would your child want to go to a church that you criticize and are not excited about? If you criticize the music, point out mistakes others make, undermine the church leaders, or make fun of church members, your child will lose respect for the church, its members, and its leaders and will have no desire to be a part of it.



PERSONAL ACTIVITY



This activity is to do alone in prayerful reflection. Answer the following questions honestly about your own spiritual life.

- 1.On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the hottest) how hot does your own spiritual fire burn? Is it like a cold coal, a burning ember, or a raging fire? Why did you rate it the way you did?
- 2. How would your children rate your spirituality? Do they regularly see your faith put in to practice on a daily basis?

PRAY FOR YOUR CHILDREN

The Old Testament reveals that it was customary for fathers to bless their children. The Bible says that "Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home" (Genesis 31:55). Rebekah's brothers blessed her, saying to her, "Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies" (Genesis 24:60).

How many of us have stood over our children and blessed them? A praying parent is one of Satan's biggest obstacles when it comes to him targeting our children. That prayer covering is a powerful foe against his advances.

How can we pray for our children?

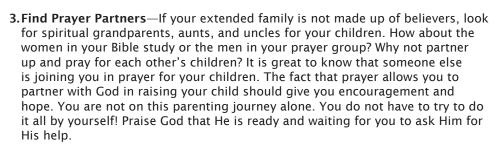
1.Be Specific—Be very specific as you pray for your children. As they grow and mature you can see traits that need the strengthening or curbing that the Holy Spirit provides. It may be beneficial for you to keep a prayer book to record areas that need prayer and to find encouragement when you look back on problems that are now behind you and see ways that God answered your prayers.

"The world begins influencing the values and beliefs of your children sooner than you think. You've got to join the fray when your children are very young" (Barna, 2007, p. 59).

2. Give Thanks—Not all prayers for our children should be "fix it" prayers to God. Take time to focus on the positive traits of character. Celebrate each child with the Lord. Praying with thanksgiving often gives you the perspective you need after a particularly hard day!

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"The key is not trying to do it all by ourselves all at once, but rather, turning to the expert parent of all time—our Father God—for help. Then, taking one step at a time, we must cover every detail of our child's life in prayer. There is great power in doing that, far beyond what most people imagine. In fact, don't ever underestimate the power of a praying parent" (Omartian, 2014, p. 16).

GROUP ACTIVITY

Read the statement below that is found in the book, *The Power of a Praying Parent*. Then, answer the questions that follow privately followed by a discussion with your group members:

"Whenever you pray for your child, do it as if you are interceding for his or her life—because that is exactly what you are doing. Remember, that while God has a perfect plan for our children's lives. Satan has a plan for them too. Satan's plan is to destroy them and he will use any means possible to do so. . . But he will not be able to use any of those things if his power has been dissipated by prayer. The Bible says, "How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?" (Matthew 12:29). In other words, we can't have any effect in the devil's territory unless we take dominion over him and forbid him any authority there. Thus, we can also forbid him access to our children's lives" (Omartian, 2014, p. 22).

1. Do you agree with these words? Why or why not?

2. Do you think that God and Satan BOTH have plans for your child's life?

3.Do you think that praying for our children can actually forbid Satan's access to them?

FAMILY WORSHIP

Family worship is easy to omit. In fact, on those days when too much seems to be crammed in to the family calendar, the first thing to go is usually family worship. After all, what does it matter if I skip it today? It's not really that important. Or, is it?

Fires must be cared for or they will burn out and die. The same is true of our spiritual fire. It needs daily attention. Why is it that we think that a trip to church once a week is enough?

- **1.Daily Family Worship**—One way you can attend to it is to practice daily family worship. Be consistent. Do not skip this. If something must be omitted, let it be something other than this. This time of daily family worship must be a sacred time in your family calendar every day.
- **2.Make it age-appropriate**—So, what types of worship are exciting and ones that your child can draw practical lessons from? It is not a good idea to read material that they cannot understand or relate to. If you want them to look forward to this time every day, then it needs to be exciting and fun for them. Children ages eight to twelve are active. Make your worship interactive (skits, puppet shows, nature walks, Bible games, Bible charades, etc.).
- **3.Worship is a Verb**—Parents must initiate family worship, but children may be part of the planning and preparation. Remember, you no longer have a toddler or baby. Your 'tween child is able to participate in the planning now. You can send them a powerful message that worship is a verb, it is not a spectator sport, and it is their offering to God.

Family worship can be one of the most anticipated times of the day. It can be fun. It can be a memory making time. It can be a family bonding time. Most of all, it can be a time of spiritual growth. Those moments in your day can be used to ignite that spiritual fire in you and in your child.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Does this really matter? After all, you can have worship at home or out in nature. Arguing with your 'tween on Sabbath morning about getting out of bed and what is appropriate to wear seems to defeat the purpose of the day.

What are some ways that you can help your child look forward to going to church every week? And, remember, we are not just talking about attendance here; you must add the element of participation.

1.Regular Attendance—Sabbath School and church attendance should not be optional. It needs to be seen as a regular family activity.

2.Attitude Check—This was already stated above,

but it bears repeating. Always be positive toward and about the church, its leadership, its doctrines, and its members. Speak in positive ways about the Sabbath and church all during the week. Talk about the friends you will see at church that you don't get to see any other day of the week.

"You can't pass on what you don't possess, so be sure you have a vibrant relationship with God. Pursue Him and practice good spiritual habits" (Barna, 2007, p. 114).





3.Participation for You and Your Child—If worship is really a verb, then you must show that by your participation first. That will lead to the next step which is getting your child involved.

Talk to the pastor about your child participating. If your child is shy about being up front, you can do it at first with them. As your child gains confidence they will be able to do things alone. Practice with them so they feel comfortable.

Here are some practical ideas to start with that will get you and your child involved:

- **a. Scripture Reading**—Break the scripture into small parts. Divide the parts up between you and your child.
- **b.Sentence Prayer**—You can pray with your child. Each of you can take a sentence or two. It need not be long.
- **c. Special Music**—If you have a musical family, participate in special music together.
- **d.Greeter**—Offer to be the greeter at the door. Stand with your child and greet all the attendees to church together.
- e. Hand out Church Bulletins—If your church has a weekly bulletin or program, stand together and hand them out.





Do this activity alone and then discuss your responses with the group.

- 1.List the names of each of your children, their ages, and the gifts/talents that you see in each of them.
- 2.Now, looking at their gifts/talents, what are some ways that you can encourage them to use those in active participation in your church? During group discussion, the group members can help you by giving additional ideas.
- 3.You have identified their gifts. You have suggested ways that they can use them in church participation. What will your next step be to move this in to action

MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

Service is a powerful tool to light that spiritual fire under your children. They are so willing to give and serve and are waiting for adults to give them opportunities. The truth is that it is us, as adults, who quench the desire that children naturally have to serve. We are too busy or too tired to put in the effort. Yes, it is true that engaging your 'tween in ministry opportunities take time. But, it is well worth any effort it takes. And, the payoff is huge.

One strong indicator that you are igniting that spiritual flame in your child is if you see faith integrated in the daily life of your child. In other words, faith becomes a life lived. It is displayed by serving others. As they absorb faith and spiritual principles in their life it is transferred into other dimensions of their life—such as serving others.

George Barna (2007) believes that the key to making that "servant mentality" stick is to have the entire family participate together in ministry opportunities on a regular basis. Notice that it cannot be once a year when you take a Thanksgiving basket to a needy family. Rather, serving must be a part of the family culture and must be regular and ongoing.

"Remember that your children were made in God's image, not yours; raise them that way" (Barna, 2007, p. 142).

When you think of all the benefits that being "service

minded" brings, the truth is that it really is more blessed to give. The giver is the one that benefits the most. In this case, consider the benefits to your family. You are up off the couch and being active. You are creating wonderful family memories every time you engage in service. Remember to involve your child in the beginning stages on each ministry opportunity. In doing that, you are teaching them organizational skills, research skills, the importance of planning, and preparing materials, etc. for each project.

Also, now that you have a child who has moved from toddler to being a pre-teen, you actually have many more options for service available to you. The possibilities are endless if you are willing to step out and explore. And, once your child discovers the joy that comes from serving, it will be hard to quench that fire. Here are just a few suggestions:

- Adopt a Grandparent—Nursing homes or retirement communities are filled with older people who have no biological family living nearby. Time spent in conversation, reading to them, walking with them, etc. offers great benefits to them and your child.
- **Babysitting Co-op**—If your church's educational buildings are vacant during the summer months, look into the possibility of establishing a babysitting co-op staffed with the members of your youth group. Arrange to have babysitting available (by appointment) for a few hours each day at the church and sign up the young people to sit one day a week or less depending on the size of the group.
- **Big Brothers/Big Sisters**—There are always younger children to whom your child can be a playmate and learn the importance of being a good role model.





• **Birthday Party for Jesus**—During the Christmas season, the youth group or your children could sponsor a "birthday party for Jesus" and invite all the children of the church or the neighborhood. Plan for it to include all the usual birthday activities like games, party hats, streamers, balloons, cake, ice-cream, etc. Each person invited is asked to bring a present for another child. All the

toys will be collected ad taken to an orphanage or to an agency that distributes toys to needy children. The children should pay for and buy the toys with their own funds. Remind them of the principle Jesus taught: When you give a gift to one of the least of these (like a poor child in an orphanage), you are giving that gift to me. (Matthew 25:34-40.)

"Lord, show me how to pray for this child. Help me to raise him Your way and may Your way be done in his life" (Omartian, 2014, p. 18).

- **Puppet Ministry**—It is great fun to make your own puppets out of discarded or old household items, write a play using your child's favorite Bible story, practicing, and then performing it for others. This is a great project to do during family worship time.
- Rake and Run—It is important to teach our children the joy of doing random acts of kindness. Rake a neighbor's yard and then disappear. It is an opportunity to teach that true joy comes from serving not from recognition.
- **Mission Trips**—There are many opportunities for mission both here at home and abroad if you just look for them. There are also many opportunities for younger children. Be sure to search for age appropriate mission trips.

The truth is that service opportunities exist all around us. The list above doesn't even begin to denote all the possibilities. Each community has different needs and different ways to make a positive difference. You can see them every day if you are open to looking for them. Try it!

When you get up in the morning, ask God to help you see the needs of those you will meet throughout the day. You may be surprised at what God reveals to you. But, be careful! When you see a need, you must respond to it and don't forget to involve your child. For family worship discuss this topic. Discuss the possibilities of serving as a family, chose a service project, and plan all the details of it together. Give each family member a different responsibility to carry out. Then, look at the face of your child as they experience the joy that serving others brings.

WRAP UP

As parents, we want our children to be spiritual champions! Our heart's desire is to have our children in heaven with us. After all, it is the one gift that God has given us on this earth that we can take with us to heaven. And, the lifetime that we have with them here on this earth is short compared to an eternity in heaven.

God has entrusted to us the treasure of our children. It is our responsibility as parents to introduce them to Jesus. We need to talk about Jesus when we get up, when we go to bed, in our coming, and in our going (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Our children need to see Jesus as a member of our family. They need to hear us talking ABOUT Him in our conversations throughout the day. They need to hear us talking TO Him about problems and our joys, large and small.



A fire cannot be maintained when attention is only given to it one day a week. It is the same with the spiritual fire that we want to burn in the hearts of our children. Going to church one day a week will not keep that fire lit. It may serve to ignite a flame, however, those flames will soon die if they do not receive care to keep them burning. That fire must be fueled on a daily ongoing basis if it is to remain a glowing, bright, and hot fire.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the following statement and discuss it with your group. Does it speak to the busyness of parents today? Are there things that need to change in order to make family worship a priority?

"Family worship should not be governed by circumstances. You are not to pray occasionally and, when you have a large day's work to do, neglect it. In thus doing you lead your children to look upon prayer as of no special consequence. Prayer means very much to the children of God, and thank offerings should come up before God morning and evening. Says the psalmist, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms." Fathers and mothers, however pressing your business, do not fail to gather your family around God's altar. Ask for the guardianship of holy angels in your home. Remember that your dear ones are exposed to temptations" (White, 1954, p. 520).

TRY THIS AT HOME

Here are some things to try at home this week:

1. Once again, this week we encourage you to add another verse to your "Parenting Bible Promise Project." Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you, as a parent, about the overcoming challenges of parenting that specifically relate to the topic of this chapter. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Place it where you can see it throughout the day. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members.

Don't throw them away at the week's end. Remember to add it to the other promises in your promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!

2.Why not adopt a "Monthly Mission Project" as a family? One service oriented project a month can be a blessing to your entire family as well as to the one whom you serve. And, in the process you will raise a child with a servant's heart. Don't be surprised if once a month is not enough for your child once they catch the "service fever."

"The battle for our children's lives is waged on our knees. When we don't pray it's like sitting on the sidelines and watching our children in a war zone getting shot at from every angle" (Omartian, 2014, pp. 20, 21).



- 3.Remember to take another look at the group activity you did for this lesson on engaging your child as an active participant in the church. What did you put as your next steps to be sure that happens?
- 4.When it comes to family worship, why not let your child plan it and lead out one night a week? You may offer guidance, but be sure to let them be the primary leader. Remember, if they plan it, it will be something that interests them and you are teaching them to be spiritual leaders. That's a lesson that will last a lifetime.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Lord, help me to kindle that spiritual fire in my child. I pray that my own fire will also burn brightly and in the reflection of those flames, may my child see You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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3. SCHOOL, STUDY SKILLS, AND HOMEWORK

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV).

ICEBREAKER-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. REMEMBER

- \cdot Go back to your childhood and think about your early elementary years.
- · How was school and academic excellence viewed?
- Are there some practical things that you implement today in your home, or are there some things you want to avoid?

2. REVIEW

 \cdot Review the scriptural principle for this chapter. What does it mean and how does it apply to parenting?

3. REFLECT

- Reflect on the current ways that school, homework, etc. happens in your home today.
- \cdot What is good about the existing practices?
- \cdot Are there things that need to change?

OVERVIEW

Our scripture for this chapter reminds us that Jesus Himself calls us His friends. We can still remember our girls' first day of school. Yes, tears were shed and it wasn't by them. That nest suddenly became empty for all those hours every day. It was hard as we spent those first school days wondering if they were eating their lunch, did they put their coat on for recess, were the other children being nice to them? Our toddler suddenly stood before us all dressed up in her school uniform with lunch box and backpack in hand.

Were we ready? NO! Was she ready? I sure hoped so! These "school years" set the stage for future interaction with peers, the development of strong study skills, personal responsibility for homework, etc. And, that just names a few.

So, the question becomes, how can you, as a Christian parent, make sure that all those hours spent in a classroom are in agreement with what you want your child to learn and the character you want them to develop? Do those hours reinforce the values that you are trying to instill at home?

The purpose of this chapter is to uncover ways that you can be sure that the

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hours in a classroom are pointing your child in the same direction as you do at home. We will consider the following:

- · Choice of School
- Parental Involvement
- · Practical Ways to be Involved
- Homework

GROUP DISCUSSION
Answer the following questions privately and then discuss your responses with your group members.
1.How important is the school your child attends in his/her character development?
2.Does the choice of schools matter? Why or why not?

CHOICE OF SCHOOL

Does school choice matter? Don't all schools teach the same thing? Well, if you are only concerned with the basics of reading, writing, and math you may be right. But, as they learn to read, does it matter to you what they are reading? As they open their science book, does it matter to you that evolution may be presented as a fact?

School choice is not only about good academics. Yes, an institution that delivers an education that includes a great curriculum, master teachers, and high test scores is important. But, remember, your young child is at a very impressionable age and they are absorbing lessons that are all around them. These lessons go much deeper than any score on a standardized test.

The average American child will attend school from 8 AM to 3 PM 180 days of the year. That means the average American child spends 1,260 hours per year in school. That does not even include the extracurricular activities that the school may offer that take place outside the regular school hours. That is indeed a significant amount of time. As a parent, you cannot afford to put your child on the school bus in the morning, wait for them to arrive in the afternoon, and not be engaged and involved with what goes on in between.

There are many decisions we have to make in our lifetime. Often, however, we spend more time, thought, and prayer making decisions that do not carry near

the same weight as the decision as to where to send our children to school. The true purpose of education "is to restore the image of our Maker in human beings—mentally, socially, spiritually and physically. This is an astounding task. Caught up in controversies over what should be taught, and how that learning should be measured, American society has no comprehension of the grand mission to transform every vital aspect of students' lives. No state board of education would ever attempt such a challenge" (Russell, 2014).

Here are some thoughts to consider when choosing a school for your child:

- 1. Are they being taught about the creator God at home and learning about evolution in the classroom?
- 2. Are all the books that they read at school the same ones that you would read to your child?
- 3.What will the peer group be like? Are the choices for friends ones with whom your child will have positive interactions? If you select a public school program, how will you provide positive spiritual relational opportunities for your child?
- 4. Will your child be the only one to bow their head and ask for a blessing, to give thanks for their lunch, or to pray and ask God to grant wisdom on a test?

There are many decisions we have to make in our lifetime. Often, however, we spend more time, thought, and prayer making decisions that do not carry near the same weight as the decision as to where to send our children to school. The true purpose of education "is to restore the image of our Maker in human beings-mentally, socially, spiritually and physically. This is an astounding task. Caught up in controversies over what should be taught, and how that learning should be measured, American society has no comprehension of the grand mission to transform every vital aspect of students' lives. No state board of education would ever attempt such a challenge" (Russell, 2014).

- 5.What values is your child being taught? Do they align with values being taught at home?
- 6. How important is it to you that prayer is a part of your child's daily activities? Does the fact that the teacher can or cannot stop and pray with your child matter?
- 7. Does it matter if the curriculum (science, reading, history, etc.) be taught using scriptural principles?

Education is not only about delivering knowledge. It is about life skills and learning how to make lifelong choices. As Christian parents, we want the choices that our children make to lead them to heaven. Choosing a school for your child really comes down to one question: Will the education complement what the children are being taught at home and at church? Or, will there be things that you must attempt to undo?

Reinforcement of the same spiritual truths at school that your child hears at home and church is a powerful weapon against Satan. In this case, you form a healthy triangle for the child—home, church, and school—all reaching for the same





ideals, all upholding the same values and spiritual truths. If one side of the triangle is absent, you have an unstable figure. Therefore, you cannot ignore the importance of choosing the right school for your child.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Answer the following questions privately and then discuss your responses with the group.

1.When school is in session, more of your child's awake-time of the day is spent in the classroom then at home. On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the highest priority) how would you rate the importance of the school in the development of your child? Why?

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects. The most effective forms of parent involvement are those which engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities at home.

According to research from the Michigan Department of Education (2002):

- 1.86% of the general public believes that support from parents is the most important way to improve the schools.
- 2.Lack of parental involvement is the biggest problem facing public schools.
- 3.Decades of research show that when parents are involved students have:
 - Higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates
 - · Better school attendance
 - Increased motivation
 - Better self-esteem
 - Lower rates of suspension
 - Decreased use of drugs and alcohol
 - Fewer instances of violent behavior
- 4. Family participation in education was twice as predictive of students' academic success as family socioeconomic status. Some of the more intensive programs had effects that were 10 times greater than other factors.

The average American child will attend school from 8 AM to 3 PM 180 days of the year. That means the average American child spends 1,260 hours per year in school. That does not even include the extracurricular activities that the school may offer that take place outside the regular school hours. That is indeed a significant amount of time. As a parent, you cannot afford to put your child on the school bus in the morning, wait for them to arrive in the afternoon, and not be engaged and involved with what goes on in between.

- 5. The more intensely parents are involved, the more beneficial the achievement effects.
- 6. The more parents participate in schooling, in a sustained way, at every level—in advocacy, decision-making and oversight roles, as fund-raisers and boosters, as volunteers and para-professionals, and as home teachers—the better for student achievement.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO BE INVOLVED

Families whose children are doing well in school exhibit the following characteristics:

- **1.Establish a daily family routine**—Provide time and a quiet place to study, assign responsibility for household chores, be firm about bedtime, and be consistent about sitting down at the table to have uninterrupted time for family meals together.
- **2.Monitor out-of-school activities**—Set limits on all screen time (television, computer, electronic games, etc.), check up on children when you are not with them, arrange for after-school activities and make certain there is supervised care.

Lack of parental involvement is the biggest problem facing public schools. Family participation in education was twice as predictive of students' academic success as family socioeconomic status (Michigan Department of Education, 2002).

- **3.Model the value of learning, self-discipline, and hard work**—Communicate through questioning and conversation and demonstrate that achievement comes from working hard.
- **4. Express high, but realistic expectations for achievement**—Set goals and standards that are appropriate for your child's age and maturity. Recognize and encourage the development of their God-given gifts and talents. Celebrate and affirm successes.
- **5.Encourage children's development/progress in school**—Maintain a warm and supportive home, show interest in your child's progress at school, help with homework, discuss with them the value of a good education and possible career options, and stay in touch with their teachers and school staff on a regular basis.
- 6.Encourage reading, writing, and discussions among family members— Read to your child and listen to them as they read to you. The development of literacy skills is an important predictor in the academic success of your child and reading is the key!

HOMEWORK

It would be incomplete to discuss academic choices and school involvement without addressing homework. It is a word that most parents dread because it accompanies mind images of battling with your child to do their homework. Some parents dread the bell that marks the end of the school day because they know that the battle to get their homework done will soon be on at home.



GROUP DISCUSSION



Reflect on this question. Each group member is asked to spend some quiet time considering their response. This question demands an honest answer. Think about it carefully before you respond. Then, discuss it as a group.

Which is more important to you as a parent? Select A or B:

- a. To have your child at the top of his/her class academically and outperform all of the other children?
- b.To have your child be the most caring/loving child in his/her classroom?

Explain your answer. Does the one you chose matter? Where would you place character and academic achievement in your list of priorities for your child? What would your child say you value more as a parent?

Perhaps all of us have been to school science fairs and seen elaborate displays and research that was obviously not the work of a third or fourth grader. Rather, it was the parents who tirelessly worked hours to make sure that their child had the best science exhibit, worthy of that first place ribbon. That blue ribbon was not a reward for the child's hard work, but rather, it truly belonged to mom or dad. One reason for this "over involvement" by the parents is because it is so much easier to just do the assignment yourself than it is to argue with your child to do it. Regardless of the reason, the fact remains that the child learned that they could be rewarded for no effort at all on their part and that mom or dad would come to their rescue and put forth the effort on their behalf.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Answer the following questions privately and then share your responses with the group.

1. Describe the homework routine in your home. Be specific.

2.Is it working? Why or Why not? Are changes needed? If so, be specific.

Tasks are easiest to accomplish when tied to specific routines. By establishing daily routines for homework completion, you will not only make homework go more smoothly, but you will also be fostering a sense of order your child can apply in later life, including college and work. So, what are some homework

routines that you can establish in your home to tackle those assignments and teach your child to be responsible? (This list was adapted from Dawson, 2014).

- 1. Find a location in the house where homework will be done every day. The right location will depend on your child and the culture of your family. Some children do best at a desk in their bedroom. It is a quiet location, away from the hubbub of family noise. Other children become too distracted by the things they keep in their bedroom and do better at a place removed from those distractions, like the dining room table. Some children need to work by themselves. Others need to have parents nearby to help keep them on task and to answer questions when problems arise. Ask your child where the best place is to work. Both you and your child need to discuss pros and cons of different settings to arrive at a mutually agreed upon location. If, however, your child is not accomplishing the task in their room, you need to overrule their desire and select a location where you can easily oversee the progress.
- 2. Stock the homework center with supplies. Once you and your child have identified a location, fix it up as a home office/homework center. Make sure there is a clear workspace large enough to set out all the materials necessary for completing assignments. Outfit the homework center with the kinds of supplies your child is most likely to need, such as pencils, pens, colored markers, rulers, scissors, a dictionary and thesaurus, graph paper, construction paper, glue and cellophane tape, lined paper, a calculator, spell checker, and, depending on the age and needs of your child, a computer or laptop. If the homework center is in a place that will be used for other things (such as the dining room table), then your child can keep the supplies in a portable crate or bin. If possible, the homework center should include a bulletin board that can hold a monthly calendar on which your child can keep track of long-term assignments. Allowing your child to help in decorating the homework center can help them feel at home there, but you should be careful that it does not become too cluttered with distracting materials. The point here is that you need to make sure they are supplied with all the necessary materials. Otherwise, it is too easy for them to wander around the house seeking what they need, thus wasting valuable time.
- 3. Establish a regular homework time. Your child should get in the habit of doing homework at the same time every day. The time may vary depending on the individual child. Some children need a break right after school to get some exercise and have a snack. Others need to start homework while they are still in a school mode (i.e., right after school when there is still some momentum left from getting through the day). In general, it may be best to get homework done either before dinner or as early in the evening as the child can tolerate. The later it gets, the more tired the child becomes and the more slowly the homework gets done.
- 4. **Before your child starts working, review the homework together.** The homework session should begin with your sitting down with your child and drawing up a homework schedule. You should review all the assignments and make sure your child understands them and has all the necessary materials. This step will save time later and also provide your child with a sense of accountability and direction.

Just remember, you are there to answer questions and offer assistance. You are not there to do it all for them.

5. **Parent and teacher must have regular ongoing communication.** There is a critical component to all of the above. Attempting to do all four of the steps above without this one is a moot point. The bottom line is that there must be ongoing regular communication between parent and teacher.

Make sure that your child has a small notebook or a daily homework planner to keep track of assignments. It is important for them to know that you will look at the notebook every day after school so they must keep it up to date. Notes to and from the teacher may also be kept here. This is an added incentive because your child knows that parents and teacher are on the same page and are communicating with each other. Your child needs to have no doubt that you are communicating with the teacher, both of you are on the same page, both of you have the same goals, both of you care about their success, and both of you are working together to help them develop their gifts to their maximum potential.

6. **The Parenting Team.** In too many homes the responsibility for homework seems to fall on the shoulders of only one parent. And, then when it is time for parent/teacher conferences, that same parent is usually the one that attends. A team effort, with both parents working together to help assure the academic success of the child is of the greatest benefit to the child. The parents are showing the child that they are united in their efforts and share in the common goals of their teachers and school staff. The child gets the message that they will not be able to manipulate one against the other. Education is the strongest when it is a team effort.

Homework need not be a dreaded time of day. It is another bonding opportunity for you and your child. To help your child develop their gifts and talents is one of the most rewarding things you will ever accomplish. And, helping them to be responsible and put forth their best efforts now in middle school are skills that they will carry with them throughout their life.

Whether you adopt the homework routine suggested above or one of your own, it is important that you are consistent. If a child knows what the expectations are and that they will not change from day-to-day, it will create a better environment. You must be clear, consistent, and committed to enforcing your homework and study plan. There needs to be no wavering, no changing, no excuses, no debating, and no arguing!

WRAP UP

These early school years are so important. They are the foundation for future learning. Don't underestimate the importance of this time in your child's life. Get involved and stay involved.

Pray about the school your child is currently in. Are changes needed? Do you have the assurance that the school your child is currently in is reinforcing everything you teach at home? Are you happy with the peer group they are surrounded with on a daily basis? The choice that you make now is one of the most important ones you will ever make. Do not make a mistake of underestimating the value of this choice. Playing a role in the development of your child's gifts and talents is a sacred responsibility. Helping your child learn responsibility and work to the best of their ability is something that God has entrusted to you. Investing in your child's education today is an eternal investment!

GROUP DISCUSSION



Discuss the following statement in your group. Do you think it is important today? What are some practical ways to implement these ideas?

"We are to talk the love of God in our homes; we are to teach it in our schools. The principles of the Word of God are to be brought into the home and school life. If parents fully understood their duty of submission to the Lord's revealed will, they would be wise counselors in our school and in educational matters; for their experience in home training would teach them how to guard against the temptations that come to children and youth. Teachers and parents would thus become laborers together with God in the work of educating the youth for heaven" (White, 1954, p. 321).

TRY THIS AT HOME

Here are some things to try at home this week:

- 1.During this week we again encourage you to add another verse to your "Parenting Bible Promise Project." Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you, as a parent, about the overcoming challenges of parenting that specifically relate to the topic of this chapter. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Place it where you can see it throughout the day. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don't throw them away at the week's end. Remember to add it to the other promises in your promise box as these are valuable reminders that you are coparenting with God!
- 2.Set up an appointment with your child's teacher. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses in your child. With the teacher, come up with a plan as to how you can support and help with your child's academic growth. And, when you get home don't forget to affirm your child with the strengths that the teacher mentioned. It's far too easy to forget the positives and focus on the negatives.
- 3.If you have not already done so, set up a designated homework/study center in your home. It needs to be area where you can supervise and be free from distractions such as the television. Make sure that it is stocked with supplies such as pencils, pens, colored pencils, drawing paper, lined paper, scissors, ruler, etc. If space is a consideration, you may want to place all of the supplies in a large storage container that can be brought out every day and then stored afterwards. Having a designated, well stocked area will help your child develop those all-important study skills.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Lord, even though my child may just be beginning his academic journey, I know that the skills he learns now will carry him throughout his entire life. Help me to instill in my child the importance of always doing their best so that he can use his best for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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4. FRIENDS, PEER PRESSURE AND BULLYING

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

"The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray" (Proverbs 12:26, NKJV).

ICEBREAKER-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. REMEMBER

- · Think back on your childhood.
- · Did you have positive friends in your life?
- $\cdot\,$ Did you have peer relationships that would not be characterized as positive?

2. REVIEW

• As you review the Bible verse for this chapter, what are the principles and how do they apply to this topic?

3. REFLECT

- $\cdot\,$ Reflect on the relationships with those outside of the family circle that your child has.
- · Are they all positive?
- · How important is it to surround your children with positive influences and relationships?
- $\cdot\,$ Can your child also learn important lessons from negative experiences? Explain.

OVERVIEW

As your child ventures out of the four walls of your home, into school, around the neighborhood, and to other social events, you will have to address new topics of concern. Who are they talking to? Will they chose friends that you would have selected for them? What are their friends trying to convince them to do? Can they stand up to peer pressure? And, how will they handle the school yard or neighborhood bully?

During the 'tween years the significance of their peers takes on a whole new dynamic. When your 'tween was an infant, it was you, the parent, who provided for their every need. You were the only significant person that really mattered. Now, their world has widened. Their "significant others" have grown to include many outside of the family circle.

"Participate in the selection of your children's friends. Those peers have a dramatic influence on your children" (Barna, 2007, p. 78). Peer pressure is certainly alive and well with your eight to twelve year old child. Do not underestimate the role that it plays, because research indicates that peer pressure influences behavior at a younger age than previously thought. In a recent study, researchers at the University of Southern California expected to find that pressure from peers to engage in negative behavior would peak in high school. Instead, they discovered that pressure to engage in negative behavior was actually greater in middle school than in high school (Jacobson, 2014).

Peer pressure is not always a bad thing. In fact, the influence of peers can be a very positive motivating factor. The challenge for us, as parents, is to help our children choose positive friends. However, that is easier said than done at times. After all, can we actually choose another's friends for them? How can we help to assure that the peer pressure is positive and not negative?

In this chapter we will consider the following topics:

- · Choosing Positive Friends
- Peer Pressure
- Bullying

CHOOSING POSITIVE FRIENDS

Does your 'tween make friends easily? Or is something holding them back? Because of the different personalities of your children, they may make friends in different ways. Probably the two best-known personality types are extroverts and introverts. It is important that we understand is the difference between extroverts and introverts. Extroverts draw their energy by being with people and are more likely to associate the rush of a feel-good brain chemical with the environment

they are in at the time. They tend to make friends very easily and, more than likely, have lots of them wherever they go. Introverts, on the other hand, get their energy in solitude, by themselves and tend to be overwhelmed by too much stimulation or too many people. Introverts probably have very few friends, but enjoy a much closer relationship with them.

As a parent, we need not worry if our child, who may be an introvert, does not have a lot of friends, but Peer pressure to engage in negative behavior was found to be greater in middle school than in high school (Jacobson, 2014).

chooses to spend time alone most of the time. Don't push them toward having more friends as that can prove to be a futile attempt, a frustrating venture, and may only drive them further inside themselves. In the same way, trying to force an extroverted child to spend less time with others may only cause them to bottle up a lot of energy inside that may explode in the form of angry outbursts, often in inappropriate ways or places.

By the time a child enters middle school, friendship problems may begin to present themselves in new ways. Below are a few simple strategies that will help you guide your 'tween through these difficult social years. The goal is for your child to make good friends that share the same values and will be a positive influence on them. At the same time, your child needs to learn what it means to be a good friend.



1.Teach that Everyone has Value in the Eyes of God—Social groupings are just a part of life. Some people call them cliques, others call them pods, but whatever you call them, it's important to teach your child that everyone is valued in the eyes of God. Make sure your 'tween understands that they don't have to belong to a certain clique to be happy. Encourage them to make friends with others who share their interests, who are positive, and who share their values. Friends don't have to come from just one social group, in fact, they shouldn't. Teach your child that character is more important in the selection of friends than the clothes they wear. Exposing your child to diversity will enrich their life and teach them an important lesson of how God looks not at the outward appearance, but at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

2. Encourage Healthy, Positive Friendships-Take

the time to point out what makes a good friend, as well as how to be a good friend to someone else. Be sure your 'tween understands that gossiping about a friend isn't very friendly, and that maintaining friendships require a little work. Point out what you like about their friends. You could say, "I like how your friends call you when you're sick to see how you're doing" or "I like it when your friends offer to help you clean your room after a sleepover."

Help your 'tween foster friendships by including them occasionally in family activities, or inviting them over for family game night. Also, be sure your 'tween understands that there's no substitu "During this time, you need to remember how important you are in your child's world. While outside influences are becoming more a factor, the greatest influence in a child's life is still her family" (Ezzo & Bucknam, 2000, p. 207)

your 'tween understands that there's no substitute for one-on-one time together, and that texting and emailing friends isn't the same as spending time with them in person.

- **3. Help Your Child Be a Good Friend**—'Tweens don't always understand that their behaviors and the way they present themselves may be turning potential friends away. Discuss how their attitude and even appearance may be sending the wrong message. Ask your 'tween if they are approachable to others. Do they smile and greet others first when they see them? What does their body language tell other people? Do they look peers in the eye or keep their gaze towards the floor? Do they show respect for other people's opinions and talents, or resent them for being different or for having abilities or talents they don't?
- **4.Don't Push Popularity**—You may have wanted to be in the "in" crowd when you were young, but didn't quite make it. Having a popular child should never be your goal as a parent. Be careful that you don't push your 'tween to join a certain group of friends, or take part in certain activities because you think they will be happier that way. Allow your child to discover activities that agree with their personal gifts and interests, and to choose friends who provide a positive influence. If you push them to prioritize their friends by popularity, you will regret it later on.
- **5.Expect Drama**—Children can be moody, angry, and difficult at times during these years of rapid transitions. All of these emotions can interfere with

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friendships. Expect some friendships to be volatile from time to time. When they are, be there to help your 'tween deal with the emotions that will come. Remember to use family worship time to pray about any relationship challenges with your child and role-play to help them develop problem solving skills. You may even want to help them understand the problem from their friend's point of view.

- **6.Be a Good Listener**—Listen to your child everyday as they talk about their friends. Attentive listening will provide you with a lot of information about their friends, their behavior, and any challenges that are occurring. And, remember to encourage them to talk to God. He's the best listener of all.
- 7.When Things Go Bad—Help your child if you think they are involved in a toxic friendship. A real friend will give them confidence and boost their self-esteem. If a friend turns out to be a "frenemy," to your child, help them focus on other friendships as much as possible. If the friendship ends, keep them active so that they do not dwell on the lost friendship too much. It's a hard lesson to learn but it is the reality of life. Explain to your child that sometimes friendships don't last, but that there are always good friendships waiting to be discovered. It is better for your child to learn these lessons when you are beside them offering support, encouragement, unconditional love, and prayers.
- 8. When Friends Fail—As a parent, you want your child to enjoy healthy friendships, but you also want them to have a mind of their own. Teach your child that sometimes friends can disagree, or have different interests, beliefs, or tastes in clothing, music, and hobbies. Encourage your child to seek God's will for their life, and give them the confidence to say "no" to a friend who is trying to lead them down the wrong path. Assure them that even if their earthly friends fail or disappoint them, you are there. But, most important, God is with them and will never forsake them. He is their "Forever Friend"!

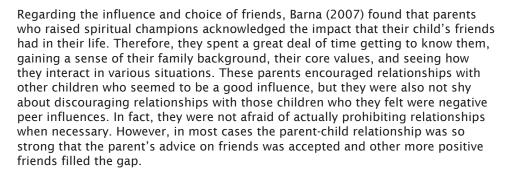
GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the statement by George Barna below and discuss the questions that follow with your group.

George Barna (2007) reminds us as parents that it is NOT our job to be a parent to our child's friends. However, it is our job to be closely involved in the lives of our children, to know their friends well, and to not be shy about sharing our own values and beliefs in an appropriate manner.

- 1.Do you agree with the above statement? Why or why not?
- 2. Are there times when you have tried to "parent" your child's friend? If so, share an example.
- 3.When it comes to your 8-12 year old child, who do you think should have the greater power of choice in regards to their friends—them or you? Why?



PEER PRESSURE

Recent statistics reveal that pressures once reserved for the teenage crowd have now filtered all the way down to some primary-school classrooms. Children age eight to twelve are now showing the same symptoms of stress and poor selfesteem that used to be reserved for older teens (Sonna, 2014).

Yes, it is true. Peer group influences affect children much earlier than researchers have suspected. This is not just an adolescent issue. Peer group pressure begins in elementary schools, as early as age nine. Even at this earlier age, children show moral independence and will stand up to the group. But, it is also a setting where the seeds of group prejudices can develop if not checked (Killen, 2013). It is important to teach our child that every person is valued by God and no one should be looked down upon or ridiculed. Every one matters to God.

The peer groups in elementary school can aid children's development by providing positive friendships, relationships, and social support. But, what if the peer interactions are not positive? The downsides can be negative peer influences on a young child who is not prepared to handle them.

How can parents help children resist negative peer pressure? First, look for signs that peer pressure is becoming a problem. These can include changes in attitude, withdrawal from parents and family activities, sudden materialism, or intense interest in "taboo" behaviors or possessions. In other words, if your 8-year-old begins begging for a cell phone or a trendier backpack as soon as school resumes in the fall, it's probably not a coincidence or a passing phase. Instead, they are most likely responding to social influences and a desire to fit in. Yes, that's peer pressure.

This is where we, as parents, come in. Children need help and guidance from parents when they face conflicts between loyalty to their peer group and doing what is right. They may be struggling to do the right thing and still stay on good terms with friends in the group, but they do not know how to do both. If a child shows discomfort and anxiety about spending time with friends or going to school, this may signal conflicts in their peer group relationships.

What might your involvement in peer related issues look like? What do you need to be mindful of? In order to have influence over the peers in your child's life, you need to develop a strong bond with them. You need to send them the message that everything that concerns their life is important to you.



THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

1. Utilize Family Worship as a Teaching Tool

Children love role play. Why not use relationship scenarios and have your child act out their response. Someone else in the family can play the peer role and your child can play themselves. Discuss and critique your child's response as a family. This game may become a reality tomorrow. Here are just a few role play options:

- Play the part of a peer and try and convince them to cheat on a school project
- $\cdot\,$ Try to convince them that it's ok to steal a candy bar from a classmates lunch

2. Good Communication

Keep the lines of communication open with your child. Do not dismiss what they may tell you as insignificant or unimportant. If it is important to them, It should also be to you. They may, at times, tell you things they have heard or seen that may surprise you. Don't act shocked or angry because that will cause them to stop sharing such information with you. Instead, invite them to share more information, their opinions and feelings, their concerns and fears, their joys and what brings them satisfaction. Affirm them and thank them for their willingness to share with you and assure them that they are always welcome to come to you to talk. Remind them that while you may not always agree with them, you love them unconditionally.

3.Be Involved

Make it your business to know what is going on in your child's life and who they are spending time with. If you are picking up signals that there may be undue pressure from peers, set up an appointment and talk with your child's teacher.

4. Compliant Child or a Self-Assured One?

Would you rather have a very compliant child or a self-assured child? What parent is not happy and pleased to have a quiet, obedient child? No parent wants to spend his or her days in a constant battle with their children. As a result, parents sometimes spend a lot of time trying to bend their children's will, leading them to break the child's spirit. A compliant child may be a joy to parent, but he or she may also be more easily willing to conform to the group and give in to peer pressure. A more self-confident child, though more challenging to parents, may also be strong enough to stand on his or her own two feet in the face of pressure or opposition from peers and others. What we need is to encourage the "strong-willed" child to use that strength of character to make the best decisions while with their parents or when away from them.

5.Do not wait!

You don't want to wait until it's too late to talk with your child about positive vs. negative peer pressure. It's important to prepare them for things they may encounter now or in the future. Preparation of these events will allow them to know what's coming and thus, make them feel more comfortable about making the right decision.



GROUP DISCUSSION



Yes, these 'tween years bring a rising importance of peers in your child's life. The significant others in their life may be expanding. But, where do you rate as a parent? Read and discuss the statement below with your group members. Do you agree with it? Do you think you still have a greater influence in your child's life than his/her friends do?

"During this time, you need to remember how important you are in your child's world. While outside influences are becoming more a factor, the greatest influence in a child's life is still her family" (Ezzo & Bucknam, 2000, p. 207).

BULLYING

Not all friendships are positive. Unfortunately, a bully may be lurking in the classroom, on the playground, or in your neighborhood. Most kids have reported being teased in a playful, friendly, and non-threatening way. However, teasing has the potential to become serious when it's hurtful, abrasive, abusive, and constant. This type of constant teasing may be referred to as bullying. As parents, we don't even want to imagine our children becoming the target of a bully, or worse yet, being a bully. But, unfortunately, it happens . . . and a lot more often than you think.

A bully can change your child's normal daily life into a bad nightmare. Daily activities like going outside to play, getting on the school bus, or eating lunch can become feared events. Like most things, prevention is the best policy. The time to start teaching your child how to deal with a bully is before they encounter one.

LIFELONG SKILLS FOR KIDS TO COPE WITH BULLIES (O'DONNELL, 2014) 1.Eye Contact

Your child should look the person in the eye when responding to bullying behavior.

2. Tone of Voice

Practice different tones of voice with your child and show them the difference between a strong, assertive voice and one that is too soft or too harsh. Your child will be less likely to be targeted by a bully if they don't come off as passive.

3.Facial Expression

Your child's face should reflect their message. They want to look serious and confident but not mean.

4."I" Statement

Teach your child how to use "I" statements to effectively communicate what they are feeling and to clearly ask the bully to stop the offensive behavior. When you say "I feel bad when you...," another person can't say "no you don't feel that way." Good "I" statements to use are: "I felt _____ when you _____." or "Next time, I need you to _____."



5. Practice

Role-play with your child. You take on the role of bully and behave in a mean or rude manner, or try to get them to do something they know is wrong. Let your child practice using their "I" statements in an assertive, confident manner. During family worship would be a great time to do this.

6.Walk away, powerfully

Walking away, changing seats, and taking different routes are all valid techniques to deal with a bully, especially after your child has expressed themselves confidently and asked the bully to stop. Show them how to stand tall and walk away with an air of confidence.

7. Find Allies

Teach your kids to find "allies" in situations where they are experiencing bullying or intense teasing. Often, kids will not bully or tease another group, so finding "allies" to be with may provide a safety buffer. Allies do not have to be close friends, just other kids that they can sit with, eat with, or play with from time to time.

8.Speak Up

If your child has continuously said "stop" and the bully continues to harass them, then your child will also want to speak up to a teacher or another school administrator after a bullying incident. Using the same skills as used with the bully, your child should stand up straight and appear calm and confident while clearly explaining the situation to school officials.

WHAT IF YOUR CHILD IS THE BULLY?

What would you do if your child's school calls you and tells you that your child is bullying other children? How would you feel if other parents are complaining to you that your child is bullying their child? How do you react if you notice that your child is constantly getting into fights? You may need to take a deep breath and admit that your child has a problem.

Many parents will be in denial and assume the position of denial or feel that others are the ones being mean to their child. It takes courage on your part and an openness to realize that your child has a problem and that they need help. You may think there is no problem, or that your child is just teasing other children just a little, or you may rationalize that it's natural for children to fight with one another. It is important that you take all accusations of bullying seriously. What may seem natural to you may be very harmful and hurtful to other children.

"A strong parental presence has a protective effect against peer pressure." Research revealed that "middle-school-age children without adult supervision were more swayed by peer pressure to engage in antisocial behavior. In other words, when children were appropriately supervised by adults and when adults were actively involved in their lives, both at a physical and emotional level, they were less susceptible to peer pressure" (Jacobson, 2014).

As soon as you accept the fact that your child may be the bully, sit down and have a conversation with him or her. Tell them that the school or other parents have reported their aggressive behavior and assure them that you love them no matter what. You also need to let them know that their behavior has to change, that you support the school's punishment (if any was applied), and that you will not tolerate this behavior.

You, also, need to explain to your child that bullying, whether it's physical or verbal, causes pain to others. Let them know that name-calling, teasing, hitting, pushing, starting or spreading rumors are wrong and not acceptable behavior. Young children, and 'tweens, need to be told that hurting another child is not acceptable.

At the same time, let your child know that you will help them to change the behavior and correct the situation. Ask them to share their thoughts, their opinion, and their feelings about what they understand concerning their behavior and then ask them how they think their bullying could stop. What do they think has to change in order for them to change?

After you have thoroughly discussed this with your child, make an appointment to meet with their teacher. Listen to the teacher's perspective without being judgmental. Let the teacher know that you are willing to work with the school to help stop your child from bullying. It's important to tell the teacher if there are any family problems that you might be experiencing. Maybe your family is experiencing stress related to work, finances, or illness which may be causing your child to act out his or feelings in inappropriate ways. Or they may be witnessing abuse in the home. In this case, you need to seek help for your family situation, whatever that may be, as it may be the root of your child's bullying, but also because it may be harming them as well.

The same skills that are used to prevent bullying are actually lifelong skills that work in a multitude of situations. As you work on these skills with your child, you'll begin to notice a boost of confidence and self-awareness in your child.

Combatting bullying is a scriptural principle. Jesus placed a high value on you, as parents, and on your children. He does not want others to demean or hurt His beloved children. It is our job to make sure our children understand that they are loved and valued and no one has the right to hurt them. In the same manner, He wants us to value and respect all human beings. He gave His life for all of us and did not discriminate for whom He died.

WRAP UP

Your eight to twelve year old is now developing skills that will assist them in selecting friends, standing up to peer pressure, and dealing with bullying. These relational skills will be carried with them throughout their lifetime and will have a significant impact on their future.

As a parent, you can have a great impact on the acquisition of these skills. You can make a difference. You can help them with the tools they need to be successful in the area of relationships.

A strong parental presence has a protective effect against peer pressure. Research revealed that middle-school-age children without adult supervision were more swayed by peer pressure to engage in antisocial behavior. In other words, when children were appropriately supervised by adults and when adults were actively involved in their lives, both at a physical and emotional level, they were less susceptible to peer pressure (Jacobson, 2014). Remember, you are the parent.



And, the more you can instill in your child the value of choosing friends wisely, the greater this will positively impact them in the teenage years that are right around the corner.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the statement below and discuss it with your group. How does it apply to the principles learned in this chapter?

"Teach them that they are not to be swayed by others, that they are not to yield to wrong influences, but to influence others for good, to ennoble and elevate those with whom they associate. Teach them that if they connect themselves with God, they will have strength from Him to resist the fiercest temptations" (White, 1954, p. 407).

TRY THIS AT HOME

Here are some things to try at home this week:

- 1.Again this week we encourage you to add another verse to your "Parenting Bible Promise Project." Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you, as a parent, about the overcoming challenges of parenting that specifically relate to the topic of this chapter. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Place it where you can see it throughout the day. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don't throw them away at the week's end. Remember to add it to the other promises in your promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!
- 2.One of the best ways to teach your child how to handle a bully is to allow them to practice in a place where it is safe—your home. Why not plan to play a game of charades for your family devotional time. Use this topic as your theme. Allow family members to each take turns being a good friend and being a bully. Have your child play both parts and afterwards, discuss each scenario that played out.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Lord, the relationships that my child has are so important. They can make a difference for good as well as for bad. Please help me to lead my child to make positive choices in friends. Give them the strength and courage to stand against their peers when their peers stand against You. Help them to see that their value was decided on at the cross and is not dependent on what their peers may say or think about them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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5. PUBERTY AND PURITY

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

"Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12, NKJV).

ICEBREAKER-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. REMEMBER

- · Think back on your childhood.
- $\cdot\,$ How and when did you learn about sex?
- · From whom did you learn about sex?

2. REVIEW

• As you consider the Bible verses of our spiritual principle, what does it say to you in regard to the topic of sexuality and purity?

3. REFLECT

- $\cdot\,$ Reflect on the questions that your child may be asking you.
- · Are you responding honestly and in age appropriate vocabulary?
- · How important is it to teach our children to keep themselves "pure"?

OVERVIEW

While these 'tween years are marked by numerous transitions the hormonal change is perhaps one of the most obvious of all. You can see these changes happening right before your eyes. It is hard to hide the fact that your "baby" is no more.

In the first edition of this series, we addressed the notion that teaching your child bout sexuality actually begins at birth. In other words, this should not be the first time you have approached the subject of sexuality with your child. In the early years you utilized "age appropriate" topics and therefore, helped your child understand the differences between male and female bodies. You did this by using the appropriate names for the parts of the body and you created an atmosphere in your home where your child knows that they can talk to you about any questions they may have on sexuality. However, now it is time to take this conversation about sexuality to the next step.

One sure sign that it is time to have "the talk" with your child is when you notice a change in their sexual awareness. Your son and your daughters now view the opposite sex in ways they did not before. All of a sudden the opposite sex is attractive to them. Your child now needs no prodding to pay closer attention to personal hygiene, dress, and hairstyle. Their changing hormones are all the drive they need. Yes, parents, you need to talk to your child about sex. Even young children today are learning more information faster and earlier than ever before, so fast and so early that it's scary. And without some good teaching on this subject they are in for a difficult time in their lives. If you aren't talking to your kids about sex then you may be the only one who isn't. They're hearing about it on TV, in music, at school, from friends, and through advertisements of every kind. But parents find this one of the most difficult subjects to address with their kids.

There are three reasons parents don't talk to their kids about sex. First, they're too embarrassed. Second, they don't know how. And third, they're too embarrassed. Did you catch that? Embarrassment about the subject of sex all too often prevents parents from having that important conversation with their child. Another reason may be due to the fact that their own parents were not open about this topic and did not share the important principles of sexuality and purity with them. So, openness about sexuality in the home was never modeled. Whatever the hesitation, it is your responsibility as parents to guide this discussion. Remember, you want to be sure the information your child receives is in accordance with God's design for sexuality.

In this chapter we will consider the following topics:

- Puberty
- · Healthy Body Image
- · Having that "Sex Talk"
- · Purity
- · Safeguarding against Pornography and Sexual Abuse

PUBERTY

Here's a newsflash: puberty is normal! It is a normal phase of development when a child's body is transitioning in to an adult. While we would like to keep them little, time marches on and suddenly we look at them one day and see a young man or a young woman standing before us. This time of transition can be challenging for both parent and child. And, it is our job as parents to help guide our children through this stage.

Yes, we are reminded that this book is for parents with children ages eight to twelve. Keep in mind that today's children go through puberty at an earlier age. Thus, there is indeed a need to address this topic in this book. The truth is that there's no magic age at which puberty begins. It is different for each child.

But, where do you start? You may have wished that you had signed up for that Puberty 101 class in college. Perhaps this is not even a topic that you are comfortable addressing. But, like it or not, puberty will happen and you will need to help guide your child through the transitions that define it.

One of the costliest mistakes parents make is to have "the sex talk" and leave out the conversation about purity. Having that "sex talk" is not iust about "the birds and bees." As stated previously, one of your most important roles as a parent is to instill God's plan for sex in your pre-adolescent child. They are not too young to understand that sex was created by God, it is holy, and it is reserved for marriage

The truth is that this time of life in your child should not be the first time you have addressed sexuality. It really is a lifetime



conversation and should have started long before now. But, perhaps that has not been the case and now you find your child at the doorway of puberty and you fear you can no longer delay the conversation. Don't despair. Remember, our bodies and sexuality is a gift from God and not something to be ashamed of.

Puberty is the time between childhood and adulthood when girls and boys mature physically and sexually. It is the period when a girl is becoming a woman and a boy is becoming a man. Puberty is marked by changes such as breast development and menstruation in girls and facial hair growth and ejaculation in boys.

Some parents wait until their child asks questions. What if your child is shy, or doesn't ask questions? And what if some of the typical changes happen before you get to talk to them? Your child may become confused or frightened. Try to talk with your child before any signs of puberty develop so that they don't come as a surprise. If your child knows what to expect ahead of time, the changes that come with puberty will seem natural and be easier to deal with. There will then be no embarrassment to ask any questions or express concerns they may have:

SPECIAL NOTE TO SINGLE PARENTS WHO HAVE CHILDREN OF THE OPPOSITE SEX

Is it OK for you to talk with your child about puberty and other sexual topics if they are of the opposite sex?

Yes. This is a great way to show your child that it's normal for adults to be knowledgeable about the bodies of both women and men. It is an opportunity to talk about the Creator God and the differences He made between men and women. Remember, if they are not able to have their questions answered by you they will go elsewhere. Create an environment where your son or daughter looks to you, as their parent, as their primary source of information.

At the same time, children may also ask questions of another trusted adult. If your child has older siblings or other family members, they may talk to them about their questions, too. Ultimately, our children benefit from learning different points of view, and from the closeness formed by talking openly about sexual health issues and having their questions answered. But, remember, they should always feel like you are the first stop.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES WHEN TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT PUBERTY

1.Be Honest

It is important that you give your child truthful and accurate information. Puberty can be a scary time for a child if they do not understand what is happening to them. Remember, you do not have to be an expert and know the answer to every question they may ask. You just need to have a listening ear,



be honest, and help them find the answers to the questions/concerns they may have. It is perfectly acceptable to research together and find the answers. You are still controlling the discussion and making sure all of the information is presented in a manner pleasing to God.

Take for instance a young girl who has overheard a conversation about a traffic accident where someone bled to death. Shortly thereafter she experiences her first menstrual period and it frightens her terribly. For one thing, blood should not be coming out of her vagina. Secondly, she may think, am I going to bleed to death like the person in that car accident? In the same way, a young boy who may experience nocturnal emissions may be confused as to what happened. In the morning he may wonder what is happening to him and why his pajamas are wet? All of these new experiences can be very confusing and frightening for a child who has not received the proper information beforehand. However, they are a part of life and your child needs you to be honest and willing to talk about their changing body.

2. Make it Age Appropriate

Consider the age of your child. The details and specifics that you give in response to their questions may vary depending on their age and maturity level. Give information in a way they are able to understand it. There are plenty of books at the library or online materials to help you. Just check them out yourself before sharing them with your child to be sure it meets your standards.

3.Educate Yourself and Try to Stay One Step Ahead

Perhaps your own mother or father did not talk openly about these issues in your home when you were going through this phase. You may not have a model to follow. Never fear! You may want to go to the library to secure some age appropriate books that can assist you. It also helps to think ahead of time about the questions and what message you want to express. For example, a common topic that comes up with children is the difference between boys and girls or men and women. There are some things you cannot plan on. But, there are other topics that you know ahead of time that will need an explanation.

The book, Human Sexuality, by Ron and Karen Flowers is a good resource book for you, as parents. It lists the types of questions and concerns that children have at each stage of development (see additional resources at the end of this chapter). It helps you be ready and prepared for each stage of development before it sneaks up on you.

4. Don't Be Shocked

Open lines of communication are so important. You will close the door if you look shocked or embarrassed. You will send the message that you are uncomfortable with the topic and don't want to discuss it. This is not what you want to happen. Children, by nature, are very curious. They have a child like curiosity that elicits question upon question. Welcome and embrace that curiosity. Be glad that they came to you.

Talking about their changing bodies during puberty may be uncomfortable at first, but it will get easier in time. Being open to these discussions can be challenging. It's common for parents and/or kids to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable when talking to one another, especially in the beginning. Expressing those feelings can help relieve the tension. You might try saying, "it's totally normal that this feels awkward, but I love you and care about you so we need to talk about important things like this." In time and with practice, it will get easier. The key is to keep the conversation open and ongoing.

HEALTHY BODY IMAGE

A major part of this transitional time is self-awareness. It can be especially be hard on your daughter. As your 'tween becomes more aware of herself and the world around her she may become self-conscious about her appearance, her clothes, and just about everything else. During the 'tween years girls often compare themselves with their peers, and with the images they see in magazines, on television, and in the movies. Unfortunately, many girls believe that they aren't as talented, pretty, smart, or likable as other girls.

This is not to say that this time of transition is any easier for boys. They are also aware of their friends who are growing facial hair, their voices changing and getting deeper, and the fact that they are growing taller. Some boys may also experience a certain amount of sexual confusion and it is important that you assure them of their masculinity.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD HAVE A HEALTHY BODY IMAGE

1.Watch what you say and do—Your children really do pay attention to what you say and do. If you are always complaining about your weight or feel pressure to change your body shape, your children may learn that these are important concerns. If you are attracted to new "miracle" diets, they may learn that restrictive dieting is better than making healthy lifestyle choices. If you tell your daughter that she would be prettier if she lost weight, she will learn that the goals of weight loss are to be attractive and accepted by others.

- 2. Avoid negative statements on weight, body size, or shape—Negative critical statements do more harm than good. Pointing out that a person is too short, too fat, doesn't look good in the clothes they're wearing, needs to do something about their weight, etc., teaches children to be critical of others and it also makes them self-conscious. After all, if you are talking about others, whose to say that others are not talking about them?
- **3.Practice good health habits**—Practice good health habits as a family that include healthy eating and exercise. Notice that the emphasis here is on overall good health and the entire family participates together in applying these habits. The goal should not be to have the perfect body rather it should be to have good health.

Our children need to hear that their value is not based on a specific body type, hair color, or logo on their shirt. Rather, their value is based on the price that Jesus paid for them on Calvary. They need to be reminded this often. They are so valuable that Jesus died for them and no price tag can be put on that.

4.Screening screen time—Remember that media is a powerful influencer regarding healthy body image. Even with limiting screen time they will have some exposure to negative media. Discuss this openly with your child (You will find more information on this on the chapter by the same title in this book).

Help! I'm a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World



5.Keep the lines of communication open—Verbalize to your child that they are a child of God and that they are loved unconditionally by Him and by you. Make sure that they feel comfortable in coming to you to discuss any insecurity they may have.

Our children need to hear that their value is not based on a specific body type, hair color, or logo on their shirt. Rather, their value is based on the price that Jesus paid for them on Calvary. They need to be reminded this often. They are so valuable that Jesus died for them and no price tag can be put on that.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Read the following statement and then discuss the questions that follow with your group.

Media would have our children believe that they must look like a "Barbie" or some other fashion model. They must weigh a certain amount, be a certain height, or even wear a specific bra size in order to be accepted. The image that the world has set for our young ladies to live up to is harsh

1.What specific ways have you seen that society today perpetuates an unhealthy body image, especially for girls?

2. What ways have you used to counteract this message?

HAVING THAT "SEX TALK"

It is very common for us to get this question, "How early should we start talking to our kids about sex?" Recognizing that children are at different stages of

maturity, it's important to discuss sex and related issues in a way that's appropriate for a child's age and development from the time they are born. Parents set an open atmosphere on this subject with their kids by talking about differences between boys and girls, privacy, and God's design for families. This open dialogue answers a child's question only as far as they need to know but shows your child that they can talk to you, their parent, about these issues and the differences are part of God's design.

If you aren't talking to your kids about sex then you may be the only one who isn't.

As children move into the elementary years it's good to talk more about biology and the growth of a baby inside of a mother and that God designed the process of pregnancy and birth. By preadolescence it's important to talk about intercourse, privacy, the biology of pregnancy, and the God-given gift of sex within the confines of a marriage relationship. It's also important to talk to kids about how to relate to the opposite sex. Differences are fun but need to be handled carefully.

Since this book in the series addresses parents of children age eight to twelve, it is time to have some pretty frank and open discussions about sexuality with your child. They need to hear accurate information and they need to hear it from you! It is also important to keep in mind that "the sex talk" is not defined by one conversation. Rather, it is best defined by consistent and ongoing communication between you and your child. It is an atmosphere that you create that gives the child a freedom to ask questions knowing that you will respond with honesty and openness to their natural inquiry.

Talking with your child about sex is not needed because there is a lack of information. In fact, the opposite is true. Information abounds on this topic. Whether you like it or not, your child will learn about sex. Some parents feel embarrassed to speak frankly to their children about sexual intimacy. However, we can assure you that the world is not embarrassed. Children who do not have the benefit of proper teaching about sexuality from their parents in the home will develop their attitudes about it from friends, books, television, and movies. These sources rarely teach correct principles about sexual morality; they espouse a permissiveness that our children will assume is correct unless we teach and show them

"Talking to kids about sex has never been easy. And today, it's more complicated than ever and more critical than ever. Our children are exposed (in every sense of the word) to more sex from more sources than ever before" (Eyre, 1998, p. 9).

otherwise. It is important, therefore, that we impress upon our children's minds and hearts the beautiful and eternal nature of their sexuality.

By you, as a parent, taking the initiative, you are guiding the discussion. You are adding the morals and values that are important to you as a family. You are building up a powerful defense to what they will be exposed to in other circles. They will learn about sex. The question really is—who do you want to teach them about it?

So, what are the areas we should talk about? Although the material you cover is partly determined by the child's age and interest, here are some basic guidelines you want to consider as you talk with your children.

- God's Design for Sex—Most importantly, discuss God's design and plan for marriage, sex, and family. It's important for children of all ages to realize that living within God's guidelines for sexual purity produces the healthiest and strongest marriage relationships and avoids many emotional problems that come with sexual promiscuity.
- **Teach Respect for Opposite Sex**—Talk about social relationships between boys and girls. You want to encourage healthy dialogue between boys and girls within proper boundaries. The reality is that girls and boys think and act differently and that makes for some interesting interactions. That's not only okay; it's good. However, sometimes the interactions turn into flirting and experimentation. Privacy, sexual jokes, teasing, and touching games are part of the social interaction you'll need to discuss. Be careful about your own teasing in the area of relationships. Young people can become quite sensitive and self-conscious. You'll want to be honoring and affirming as you talk about this sensitive subject. Boys and girls need to understand what it means to treat the opposite sex with respect.

Help! I'm a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World

• Answer Their Questions—If you do not answer their questions, they will go elsewhere. You want them to come to you. So, be honest with your responses. As they grow and mature, their questions will become more specific and therefore will involve a more detailed answer.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the opinion statement below and discuss it with your group.

"... the sex talk is best done father to son and mother to daughter" (Ezzo & Bucknam, 2000, p. 197).

Why do you think the author's recommend that fathers talk to sons and mothers talk to daughters? Do you agree? Explain.

Look again at our note to single parents above? The ideal may not always be the reality in every home. So, how can a father feel comfortable discussing this with his daughter? Or, how can a mother feel comfortable answering her son's questions? What are some viable options in the single parent home?

Now that you have the guidelines, let's get specific. Let's look at some practical ways to have those all-important conversations about the gift of human sexuality

TALKING TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT THE GIFT OF HUMAN SEXUALITY (ADAPTED FROM BOHLI, 2014)

- **1.Pray for wisdom**—God has entrusted you with your children and says that you are the best person to teach them about sexuality. Pray for your children to make good choices, and pray for wisdom to know how to present this important topic to them and how to guide them to make appropriate choices.
- 2. Find a good resource—Regardless of your background, it is helpful to have a book or resource to assist you and provide some basic images to aid your discussion with your children. Check at your local Christian book center for resources. You will also find some listed on our parenting website which supplements this resource. But, be sure to read any resource first before you share it with your child.
- **3.Don't wait**—Do not wait for the teenage years to have these discussions. Hopefully you started at birth by teaching appropriate names for the body parts, the differences between boys and girls, and other age appropriate topics as your child grew. However, if you have waited---wait no longer! You want to be the one to direct this conversation. If you do not, someone else will!
- **4.Relax**—It is normal for your children to have sexual curiosity. It is our job as parents to help form them into healthy young men and women by providing

the appropriate information. Some parents feel so overwhelmed, anxious, or embarrassed that they do nothing, and have no conversations. Doing or saying nothing could prove to be a worse path than just doing your very best.

- **5.Stay positive**—Remember that human sexuality is a beautiful gift from God; a most precious gift that we should be protecting and saving for our spouse. It is not dirty, gross, or bad. Pay attention to your language and how you describe this beautiful gift. Focus on the rewards of living a sexually pure life and keeping yourself sexually pure until marriage.
- **6.Share your stories**—Many parents are not sure how to start conversations about human sexuality. Talk to your children about how you and your spouse met, how you fell in love, your marriage, your honeymoon, how you discovered you were pregnant, and the story of their delivery. These stories can lead into more important discussions about dating, true love, how babies are created, the miracle of life, etc.
- 7.Teach what is important—Like it or not, topics about sexuality are being taught or discussed in secular venues, but are not always discussed between the most important people—between parent and child. It is up to you to make sure they understand the truth and beauty of human sexuality as God designed it. Discuss issues that are age appropriate. As they grow and mature your conversations will be more specific.
- 8.Set a good example—If a movie, song, joke, magazine, or website is inappropriate for your child, then it is inappropriate for you too. Sexual messages that society promotes are all over and come in many forms. Take the time to discuss why it is unacceptable. Remember the rule, "When you see it, say something!"

It is important to remind yourself that you can guide the conversation and you can influence your child's thoughts and values around sexuality. Pray for wisdom and God will provide the words and resources you need to approach these topics. Your child will learn from somewhere and it's best if it is from you. You can make sure the lessons are grounded in spiritual principles.

PURITY

One of the costliest mistakes parents make is to have "the sex talk" and leave out the conversation about purity. Having that "sex talk" is not just about "the birds and bees." As stated previously, one of your most important roles as a parent is to instill God's plan for sex in your pre-adolescent child. They are not too young to understand that sex was created by God, it is holy, and it is reserved for marriage.

Once again, it is a grave mistake to wait until the teen years to have that "sex talk" or a discussion on purity. It may be too late by then. If the lines of communication are not opened up long before that, your teenager will certainly not want to engage in the conversation. These lessons actually start from birth with age appropriate conversations on parts of the body, associations with the opposite sex, and God's plan for marriage.



PRACTICAL WAYS TO TEACH PURITY (ADAPTED FROM BOHLI, K., 2014)

- 1.Purity begins in the mind—We need to guard what goes into our children's minds through their eyes and ears. The battle for purity is fought in our minds, and what we are taking into our brains. What's in our brains is what we allow in through our senses. Images and words will be in our minds from what we see and hear. Be aware of what your kids are watching on TV, what they are doing on the internet, and what they are reading. Set safeguards and boundaries, and give lots of instruction in this area.
- **2.Look for unplanned teachable moments**—Your children will be bombarded with issues of sexuality from a very early age. They sneak in to everyday life and you need to be on the lookout for them. Use each of those moments as you see them to have discussions with your child. For example, when you see a commercial or something else on television, in a magazine, or even on a billboard that is inappropriate, discuss it with your children immediately. Explain how it did not treat our body or another person with respect and dignity. Teaching human sexuality is a series of hundreds of small conversations over many years...not just one "talk.".

SAFEGUARDING AGAINST PORNOGRAPHY AND SEXUAL ABUSE

Keeping our children safe seems like a full time job. Danger seems to be lurking around every corner.

1. Safeguarding against Pornography—If you decide to purchase an electronic device to bring into your house, then you need to be responsible for learning how to use the device and how to protect your family from it being a free connection to the internet. Nearly every video game system, portable gaming device, computer, mp3 player, cell phone, and tablet now has the ability to surf the internet. If it has a screen, assume that your child can use it to view pornography.

Even very young children are being exposed to impure images over the internet. And, remember, they do not have to go looking for it over the internet. It will find them! In fact, some startling research reveals that boys as young as eight years old are already addicted to pornography (Donovan & Abraham, 2012). Pornography is finding our little ones and reaching their eyes in our own homes and under our own noses. Screening your child's screen time is more important now than ever before.

2. Safeguarding against Sexual Abuse—About one in five children fall victim to some type of sexual violence. It is important to teach children what appropriate touch is. Even very small children can be taught "The Underwear Rule." What is The Underwear Rule? It's simple: a child should not be touched by others on parts of the body usually covered by their underwear. And, they should not touch others in those areas. It also helps explain to children that their body belongs to them, that there are good and bad secrets and good and bad touches (Council of Europe, 2014).

As painful as the topic may be, it is also important to point out that sexual abuse is perpetuated by those we may know and trust as well as by strangers. That is why it is so important that your child know they can talk to you and that you will believe them and take appropriate action. No child is too young to be a victim of sexual abuse.



Parents, the battle is real. It will take time and effort to teach your children, and monitor the messages society throws their way, but protecting their purity is worth it! You may want to check out our website to look for additional resources to assist you in protecting your child from exposure to pornography, safeguarding them from sexual abuse, and for more ideas as to how to teach them the important principles of sexuality and purity.

WRAP UP

Open and honest conversations in family life both individually and together require that a parent feel comfortable with the dialogue. This takes work, but it's worth it in the end.

What can you do to overcome embarrassment with discussions about sex? You can do several things to prepare yourself to adequately parent your children in the area of sexuality and purity. First, talk to the Lord about your own sexual experiences. If you've sinned in this area, ask forgiveness and deal with it before God. Second, thank the Lord for your own sexuality. Acknowledge God in this important area of your life and you'll experience tremendous relief from anxiety and embarrassment.

Imagine your unmarried daughter pregnant at 17 or your unmarried son fathering a child. You will want to do everything you can now to prevent that. Recognizing that your children are in danger in our sex-crazed society will fuel your desire to overcome any personal issues and allow you to be proactive in this area with your kids.

Perhaps one of the most important things to keep in mind is that you are educating your child today to help ensure their purity tomorrow. If you do not educate your children in the matters of sexuality and purity, someone else will do it for you. That alone should be all the motivation you need!

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the statement below and discuss it with your group members. How does this statement, written many years ago, apply to parenting today? How is this statement relevant to the topic of puberty and purity?

"Teach them that they must practice temperance, purity in thought and heart and act, that they belong to God because they have been bought with a price, even the precious blood of His dear Son" (White, 1954, p. 116)

TRY THIS AT HOME

Here are some things to try at home this week:

1. This week we again encourage you to add another verse to your "Parenting Bible Promise Project." Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you, as a parent, about the overcoming challenges of parenting that specifically relate to the topic of this chapter. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Place it where you can see it

throughout the day. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don't throw them away at the week's end. Remember to add it to the other promises in your promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!

2. Take your child for a special "Purity Weekend" get-a-way. Spend some quality time together discussing some of the issues covered in this chapter. Fathers can take their sons and mothers their daughters. However, if you are a single parent and have a child of the opposite gender—don't despair. Pray for wisdom and go ahead and plan for the weekend together. God will partner with you to make it a memory-making weekend as you talk about God's plan for purity in their life.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Lord, the pressures of my child today are so strong. Please help me to show them that true beauty comes from within. May they always keep themselves sexually pure until the day that you join them with a God-given spouse. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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6. COMMUNICATION

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4, NKJV).

ICEBREAKER-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. REMEMBER

- Take a trip down memory lane and remember how things were communicated in your family home when you were a child.
- · Discuss it with your group.

2. REVIEW

- Read the scriptural principle again. What qualities would characterize a home where this was applied?
- $\cdot\,$ Also, discuss how it applies to communication in the family, specifically between parent and child.

3. REFLECT

- · Reflect and discuss your current communication in your home today.
- $\cdot\,$ What one word would describe the communication style practiced in your home?

OVERVIEW

Communication was easy with your pre-school child. In fact, there may have been those moments that you longed for them to be quiet. However, your child is not unique if you have find that communication does not flow as freely when they enter the transition years. Recent research reveals that "fewer than half of all sixth graders describe their family communication as positive" (Markham, 2014). What would your kids say? How would they describe the communication that exists between you and them? How would you describe it?

Most 'tweens report that there are things about which they can't talk with their parents, either because their parents won't listen, won't understand, or will overreact. But, believe it or not, there are parents whose kids who talk to them, and even seek their advice. This chapter will help you establish good communication and be one of those parents.

Your ability to parent depends on knowing what's happening in your child's life, and being able to influence them. And that derives directly from the depth of communication you share. Deep communication is only possible if you find ways to talk about the hard stuff, so that your 'tween feels comfortable sharing any topics with you.



Good communication with your child means that you are willing and available to talk about anything and everything, all the time. Yes, it is an investment in time, but one that you will never regret.

In this chapter we will consider the following topics:

- · Why does it Matter?
- \cdot Guidelines in Keeping the Communication Lines Open
- · Communicating by Reacting or Responding
- Practical Tips to Implement

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Now that your pre-school child is transitioning into a 'tween the conversations seem to be dwindling. And, perhaps, when conversation does occur it seems more like an exchange of "pleasantries, rather than communicating about substantive issues. Does it matter? What difference does it make?

Parenting has so much to do with modeling. Your children will carry the same communication skills that are practiced in your home throughout their entire lifetime. It is a skill that they will practice every day of their life and one that will help determine their success in life.

Individuals who are good communicators show respect for other people. They are not too timid and they're not too pushy. They know that their feelings and ideas matter. They're confident. Giving your child the gift of good communication skills will help them to make friends more easily. They will learn to communicate in a way that respects other people's needs as well as their own. They tend to be better at working out conflicts and disagreements. Teaching your child to communicate in a respectful manner increases the probability that they get respect in return.

GUIDELINES IN KEEPING THE COMMUNICATION LINES OPEN

Creating respect between you and your child means that the lines of communication must be open. You may think that creating an environment for great conversation with your 'tween is not easy. You want to shape their lives with powerful, life-changing truths while they are wondering how long you will take because they are missing their favorite show on television.

So how do you set the stage for good communication? Here are a few guidelines for setting the stage to open, honest, and enriching conversations with your child. (Adapted from Benton, 2014.)

- **1.Be patient and be prayerful**. Communication with a pre-teen is not always easy. It takes time and patience. Most of all, it takes prayer. Pray that God will tell you when to speak up and when to be silent.
- 2.Silence can be golden. Sometimes, we, as parents, get nervous when we ask our child a question and the room goes quiet. But sometimes it's best to let the silence linger. This does a few things: First, it shows you actually want a discussion and you aren't just lecturing. It, also, gives your child a moment to think and reflect on a response. Give them the time they need. Don't force a conversation if they need time to think. Give them some time to think about

their response. Then come together again and resume the conversation.

3.Ask open-ended questions. It's appropriate every now and then to pose a question that has a definitive right or wrong answer. But, if you really want to get conversation going with your child, opinion questions are more effective at opening the doors. Family worship times are great opportunities to have some very thoughtful conversations with your child. For example, you can ask, "Why do you think the blind man did what he did when he was healed?" You will get great insights in to the heart of your child by asking thoughtful questions like this. The tendency of tweens not to share much makes it easy for parents to lose track of them in the shuffle of a busy family schedule, especially if more talkative, demanding siblings usurp the conversation. "Set aside a few minutes each day to be alone with your tween. Spend the time talking a little and listening a lot" (Sonna, 2003).

4.Affirm participation. When a 'tween chimes in with a thought, don't criticize their remarks.

Nothing quiets a child faster than a critical leader. Make a point to also use affirming nonverbal communication. Even if you do not agree, be careful with your response. Continual criticism leads to a breakdown in communication between parent and child and perhaps, even to silence. Remember, if you want your child to be respectful to you, you must also be respectful to them.

- **5.Involve everyone**. Sometimes it's helpful to have an "everyone answers" question. These can range from basic opinion questions to funny discussion starters. Go around the room and have everyone respond, even if it's with a short answer. This breaks the ice for everyone and makes each person more likely to answer deeper questions later. You can do this around the dinner table, in the car, or at family worship.
- **6.Balance the conversation**. Each family member approaches discussions differently. You may need to prod the quiet child by asking, "What do you think?" Don't dominate the conversation. Recognize that your child will reveal something about themselves in every conversation. Why are they shy? What makes them have a story for everything? Do they have a low self-image? Are they seeking attention? Look for meanings and deeper feelings.
- **7.Don't trump everything**. When talking with your 'tween, you'll undoubtedly know more about what you're discussing than they do. Ask follow-up questions. Sometimes, asking them the right questions will help them work through the situation and look at things differently. Give your child room to discover truth independently. When they work through it themselves, things tend to "stick" much better. And, if you can help them think it was "their idea," you have just created a win-win situation!

If you stop and evaluate the above guidelines, you will notice that keeping the lines of communication open have much more to do with listening than about speaking. Your child needs to feel like you have a listening ear and are an open receptive parent. No, that does not mean that we have to agree with everything they tell us. It does mean that we are willing to let God guide us as to when we should speak and when we should remain quiet and listen. We address the issues



with our children after we have taken them to God, our Heavenly Parent, and seek His wisdom to guide us as earthly parents.

COMMUNICATING BY REACTING OR RESPONDING

As parents, we desire that every communication we have with our child would be described as positive. However, parenting, by its very nature, means that we will have to address and discuss the negative issues that arise. Even those negative issues, however, can have a positive outcome that may be determined by the way in which we address them. Will you, as a parent, react or respond to these situations? Is there a difference and if so, what difference does it make?

The valuable difference between reacting and responding is explained by Smith (2013) in her journal article, "Talking With Tweens: How to Communicate Without Losing Your Cool." How does she define the difference? She explains that "a reaction is a quick, not-so well-thought-out act of anger or aggression." On the other hand, "a response offers more contemplation; it is non-threatening, even calm, and it allows for assertiveness without aggression. A reaction provokes and sets off more reactions; this can perpetuate a cycle of threats. A response starts a discussion, a courageous conversation—even a debate—that can lead to resolution instead of rage and resentment. Reaction is about power; response is about respect."

"Reacting and responding begin from the same starting point: an emotional trigger. In terms of parenting, this trigger often may come from something our child says or does. . . There are countless situations that can trigger you. It is what happens next—your reaction or your response though that makes a difference." Whether you react or respond, and how, is a powerful determiner as to how the rest of the conversation may go.

"The typical American family registers less than fifteen minutes of direct parentchild conversation each day" (Barna, 2007, p. 34).

Let's be honest. We do not always respond as

we should. There are situations in which we just react and afterward we are not proud or happy with how we handled the situation. We all, at one time or another have done it. In parenting, "some situations trigger a lot of fear, anger or inadequacy," and we react.

Here are a few suggestions that may help us respond more often than we react.

First of all, "consider what your child needs from you. I guarantee it is not feeling guilt or shame. Also, what is it that you need? Perhaps you need more boundaries, appreciation, ground rules. Now, consider how you want this situation to be resolved? My guess is it usually isn't with doors slamming and punishments being tossed around like a hacky sack."

Responding may mean that there will be consequences or that stricter boundaries need to be set. It always means that you are calm, clear, and consistent. It also means that there has been a respectful exchange of ideas and thoughts between you and your child. It means that both of you have had equal opportunity to be heard. And, in the process of communicating, responding means that respect for each other has not been compromised. "Talk WITH—not AT—your child. Children—especially tweens and teens—shut down when they feel you are lecturing them. Give them permission to speak—not scream—whatever is on their mind. This shows them that even though you may be upset, you still value what they have to say. This also gives great buy-in on any consequences you may need to choose."

Once again, responding instead of reacting help to assure that the conversation has been balanced by a give and take of ideas, while still maintaining the Godgiven role that you have as a parent. You child needs to be clear that there are certain things that are not optional, certain behaviors that will not be tolerated, and expectations that you have as a parent are non-wavering and clear (read more about this in the chapter on Rules and Rebellion).

Smith concludes by saying, "We cannot control what happens in our lives. Whether it is with cars, careers, kids, and more, things are not always going to go according to our plan. We do, however, always have command over our choices."

We can choose to respond instead of react. And, in so doing, we will help to assure that those lines of communication with our child are kept open.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Answer the following questions privately and then discuss the answers in your group.

1.Do you think that it makes a difference in responding or in reacting as you communicate with your child? Why or why not? Explain the difference as you understand it.

2. Give an example of when you reacted.

3.Now, take the same situation and discuss how you could have responded instead.

PRACTICAL TIPS TO IMPLEMENT

Life is busy and good communication involves an investment of time. So, what are some doable things that you can practice to enhance communication with your child? This list includes practical ways to have good communication with your 'tween. (Adapted from Markham, 2014.)

1. Notice the little conversation openers your kids offer, and drop everything to respond. It can be difficult to tear yourself away from what you're doing to focus on a child's question, but how you respond to his overture is crucial in building closeness. To him, it's an indication of whether he can count on you to

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talk when he needs you. It is also much more important than any conversation you try to initiate, like when you try to get him to tell you what happened at school today. Children who feel that other things are more important to their parents often look elsewhere when they're emotionally needy; that's our loss, as much as theirs.

- 2. Ask nonjudgmental questions that require real answers. "What was the best thing about school today?" Use open-ended questions that will require more than a one word response. This will get you a lot further than "How was school today?" Questions that begin with "Why" often make kids defensive; "Why did you wear that?" won't work nearly as well as "What do you think most of the kids will be wearing on the field trip?
- **3. Don't jump in with solutions and advice**. Your child needs a chance to vent, and he can't hear advice until he does. Then he needs a chance to figure out his own solutions, which is how he develops confidence and competence. If you jump in with solutions, you make him feel incompetent. But when we can reflect feelings and then help them brainstorm solutions, children find us more useful to talk to. And, they're more likely to seek us out when they have problems.
- **4. Make sure you connect with each of your children every single day**. This is important even if it is for a brief amount of time. When they're toddlers we call it floor-time; with nine year olds you might snuggle on the couch while you chat about anything from their day at school to plans for the coming weekend. With 'tweens you might try developing a daily ritual, like sharing a hot drink every night before bed while the two of you catch up. Don't expect your son or daughter to invite closeness or volunteer vulnerable emotions at each interaction, or when you expect it. But if you set up enough regular opportunities to be together, it will happen.
- **5. Build "special time" with each child into your routine**. Maybe Dad and daughter can go to brunch once a month, or play basketball together once a week. Maybe Mom and son get to catch up on his life during the drives to swim team. Kids often wait for these routine times with their parents to bring up something that's bothering them.
- 6. If you make an overture and are greeted with something hurtful—distain, sarcasm, or blankness—try not to respond with anger. Instead, show your vulnerability and hurt. Say "Ouch!" and turn away (before you give in to the temptation to lash out.) Your son or daughter will almost certainly feel badly about having hurt you, especially since you haven't aroused their anger by attacking back. Remind yourself that the slight was probably unintentional and that being close to your child is your priority.
- **7. Stay available**. Most children don't keep an agenda and bring things up at a scheduled meeting. And nothing makes them clam up faster than pressing them to talk. They talk when something is up for them, particularly if you've proven yourself to be a good listener.

Never waste a simple task like folding laundry together. Simply being in the same room can create the opportunity for interaction. If you're cooking dinner and she's doing her nails or her homework, for instance, there's often an opening. Of course, if one of you is hunched over the computer, the interaction

is likely to be more limited. Find ways to be in proximity where you're both potentially available, without it seeming like a demand.

Stating your availability is helpful with 'tweens. "I'll be in the kitchen making dinner if you want me" or "I have to run to the grocery store, but don't hesitate to call my cell phone if you need me." But the most important part of staying available is a state of mind. Your child will sense your emotional availability.

- 8. Use indirect communication. Kids often open up and talk more when they are in the car, on a walk in the park, or playing with you on the basketball court. Remember that these are great times to get kids talking. Your child knows you're there, of course, but often is more willing to talk than if you were speaking directly or throwing questions at them.
- **9. Listen more than you speak.** This is, of course, the single the most important part of having good communication with your 'tween. Don't talk, listen. Reflect back what they're saying so they know you understand, and then be quiet so they can talk more. If they don't keep talking, you can ask another question, but keep your tone companionable, not interrogatory.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Answer the following questions alone and then discuss your responses with your group members.

- 1. Describe the communication (from your point of view) in your home in as few words as possible.
- 2.Now, how do you think your child would describe the communication in your home?

3. What is the best thing about communication in your home?

4. What is the one thing you wish you could change about the communication in your home?

5.What are some practical steps you can take today to start that process?

WRAP UP

Good communication is one of the most important skills you will ever teach your child. The ability to communicate impacts every facet of their life. Once again, it is a skill that you model—for good or for bad. How you communicate in the home with all of the family members is the first lesson they have in the area of communication.

What is your child learning? Are they learning to listen as much as they are learning to talk? Are they learning good conflict resolution skills? Are they learning that good communication involves listening and talking, giving and receiving? Do they find in you a good place to go to talk about their successes as well as their failures?

Remember, those teenage years are just around the corner. You are setting the stage now for communication that will or will not happen then. You will not always agree or approve of everything your child communicates to you; however, you can always lend a listening ear, show unconditional love, and all the while—whispering a prayer!

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the statement below and discuss it with your group. How may it be applied to this topic of communication?

"Show respect for your children, and do not allow them to speak one disrespectful word to you." (White, 1954, p. 98).

TRY THIS AT HOME

Here are some things to try at home this week:

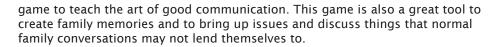
 Again this week we encourage you to add another verse to your "Parenting Bible Promise Project." Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you, as a parent, about the overcoming challenges of parenting that specifically relate to the topic of this chapter. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home. Place it where you can see it throughout the day.

SET ASIDE REGULAR FACE TIME

"Take your tween out for breakfast or invite him along to walk the dog, just the two of you. Don't push an agenda, but do let your child lead the conversation, even if he just wants to chatter . . . You never know where the conversation might lead. And, even if it goes nowhere, you are spending quality time together building a relationship while chalking up points for listening" (Tilsner, 2012).

Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don't throw them away at the week's end—add it to the other promises in your promise box. These are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!

2.Purchase a game called the "Ungame." It is available online. There are no winners and no losers in the game. Everyone is a winner and it is a great family



A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Lord, my child is growing and transforming into an independent little person. Help me to mold that character and not break it. Help me to communicate clearly and consistently of my unconditional love to them. When my child disappoints me, help me to respond and communicate in love as You would. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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7. RULES AND REBELLION

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

"God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; But the rebellious dwell in a dry land" (Psalm 68:6, NKJV).

ICEBREAKER-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. REMEMBER

- · Think back on your childhood.
- $\cdot\,$ Did you have any boundaries set for you during these middle years? What were they?
- · How were they enforced?

2. REVIEW

• Review the Bible verse for this chapter. What are the spiritual principles contained therein?

3. REFLECT

- $\cdot\,$ Reflect on the rules that you have in your home?
- · Are they clear and consistently enforced?
- \cdot Have you seen a change in your child from compliance to rebellion? Explain

OVERVIEW

Childhood involves numerous transitions and changes. Part of the 'tween transition involves your child becoming more independent. Like it or not, your child is becoming less dependent on you as the years go by. After all, isn't that what we really want? We want our children to be more independent, to grow up to be responsible adults who make responsible decisions on their own. These can be very trying years because as that independence broadens so does a certain amount of rebellion, defiance, discontent, and restlessness. Emotions can run high during these transition years. And, those terrible mood swings can be a common occurrence.

The transition from child to teenager brings a minefield of challenges. Most parents complain today that their children seem to be teenagers at only 8-10 years of age. Why so early? Are we seeing a toddler transition to a teenager right before our eyes?

According to Roy (2010), "Doctors say it is the cause of early puberty. Parents of 'tweens can be just as confused about what is happening to their children, as the tweens themselves are. Where has my sweet happy child disappeared to? Why does my child reject everything I say? Why is he so argumentative or defiant?" Is puberty starting earlier than ever before? What can possibly account for this?



Research suggests that the start of adolescence has lowered considerably in terms of age. Our children have their hormones going crazy at an earlier age. It seems that our children are growing up faster than before. Peer pressure, competition, and increased exposure to media, television, and internet from a very young age could all be contributing factors to this earlier onset of puberty and all the issues that it brings. In essence, this earlier onset of puberty today, mixed with changing hormones, can lead to a compliant child being transformed into a rebellious 'tween overnight. As a result, today's parents may find themselves facing a situation in their child's middle years that their parents may not have faced with them until they hit the teenage years.

This chapter truly is a second part to the previous chapter that dealt with communication. Establishing positive communication is a precursor to the issues discussed here as they will assist you in setting rules and dealing with rebellion. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to help parents navigate through the minefield of rules and rebellion. In so doing, we will consider the following topics:

- · Unconditional Love
- · Guidelines to Remember When Setting Limits and Boundaries
- · Dealing with Rebellion

GROUP DISCUSSION



Do you agree with the author's statement above that the age of adolescence seems to be lower for today's children and that this earlier onset of puberty leads to rebellion? Back your opinion up with specific examples.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Why address unconditional love in a chapter entitled "Rules and Rebellion"? Remember the story of the prodigal son in the Bible (Luke 15)? The parable reveals the unconditional love of a father towards his son. His love was not based on what his son did or did not do. Rather, the father's love was unconditional and ever-lastin.

GROUP ACTIVITY



Read the story of the prodigal son together as a group (Luke 15). Together, answer the following question about the passage.

What are the lessons that you think the story of the prodigal son teaches us as parents? List three take-a-ways for parents from this Biblical story.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Have you ever stopped for a moment to think about the thoughts that may have been swirling in that wayward son's mind? How did he know that it was "safe" to go back home? How did he know that his father would welcome him with open arms?

Perhaps the foundation was set in early childhood. Even as a young child he was taught to never question his father's love. The son knew that he could always depend on it and though he may have disappointed his father may times, he was constantly assured of his love. He was willing to take the risk of going back home because he already knew that his father loved him unconditionally. If this had not been instilled in the son from an early age, the story of the prodigal son would not have had a homecoming at the end!

Our children may break our hearts by the decisions they make. They may disappoint us and we may shed many tears over the choices they make. But, they should never doubt the fact that we love them. When you must deal with your child's misbehavior, rebellion, poor choices, and consequences, never miss the opportunity to assure them of your unconditional love. Teaching your children that lesson now may have lasting results in the future.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Answer these questions individually and then discuss them as a group.

1. Think about the last time you had to discipline your child. What happened? How did you respond to their misbehavior? Do you think your child felt that you loved them? Why or why not?

2.What can you do to assure your child that you love them? Even after they have disappointed you?

GUIDELINES TO REMEMBER WHEN SETTING LIMITS AND BOUNDARIES

As parents we ultimately want our children to be held accountable for their actions. We want them to take responsibility for the choices they make. We want them to maximize the gifts and talents that God has given them. We want them to grow to be responsible adults who love God and contribute to their communities. In order for that to happen, all of these lessons need to be taught in childhood. And, that requires setting limits and boundaries now.



It is your job as a parent to set clear and consistent boundaries for your child. Boundaries keep them safe and guide them through the journey into adulthood. Your child can learn to stay within the boundaries and yet, establish greater independence. As an example to us, God gave us Ten Commandments in order to provide us with boundaries and guidance to protect us and our relationship with Him and with others.

"What is the secret to successful parenting? Demonstrate the maximum amount of love with the right balance of independence and control" (Habenicht, 2014, p. 22).

What are some guiding principles you need to keep in mind as you establish the rules in your home?

- 1.Clarity & Consistency—Establish clear limits and boundaries such as getting homework done, bed time, etc. Your child should have no doubts as to where the line is drawn.
- **2.Consequences**—Define the consequences of unacceptable behavior—make sure your child understands the consequences and then stick to them. If you are not willing to enforce the consequence then do not set the limit! Do not utter empty threats or delay in enforcing the rules that you have set. What this also means is that you must be careful of the rules you set in the first place. For example, "You cannot go anywhere for one month" may also mean that you are also restricting yourself due to the fact that your child must be supervised. And, what about church, school functions, or doctor appointments? Children can be very literal so measure your words carefully. Be specific and if you are not going to follow through then don't make the rule!
- **3.Is it Negotiable?**—Your child is developing into a great debater? However, limits should not be up for debate. They are non-negotiable, particularly if you took the time to explain them to your child beforehand.
- 4.Safety First—Your child should understand that the limits you have set are there to keep him or her safe. It keeps them safe spiritually as well as emotionally and physically.
- 5.Limits = Love—While your child may not agree with some of the limits you set, they should always know that the limits placed on them are a sign of love, rather than control. Your unconditional love should be expressed over and over again.
- **6.Make it Your Business**—Monitor your child's behavior—what he or she says and does, where he or she goes and with whom, and when to expect him or her home IS your business as a parent.
- **7.Redefine Limits with Maturity**—Redefine your limits of control over your child's life as he or she starts to think and act more mature. Otherwise you risk some major problems in your relationship. Your eight year old may need different limits than your twelve year old. As the limits change, be sure to let your child know before an issue emerges. The limits may indeed change to be age appropriate as your child matures and exhibits responsibility. Once again, however, you must be very clear as to where the lines are drawn and what the consequences will be if the lines are crossed.

8. Modeling—Monitor your own behavior—what you say, what you do, and what you believe. Your behavior will make a huge difference in the choices your child makes. Keep in mind that children this age still learn most by example. They are bound to imitate what they see parents do. The best way to have children do what you want is to demonstrate it. Yes, your mother was right when she said, "You mut practice what you preach."

Notice that we discussed the guidelines of setting limits and boundaries before we talked about dealing with rebellion. That is because clear limits and boundaries create the foundation stone when it comes to dealing with rebellion. There must be consistency and your child needs to have no doubts about what is and what is not acceptable behavior. Those boundaries need to be drawn and cannot be moved from day to day. Lack of consistency and changing boundaries only confuse your child. This confusion can result in rebellion and serve to fuel feelings of anger.

DEALING WITH REBELLION

Rebellion! Oh why can't they just obey? I wonder if God the Father has the same thoughts about us. How many times have we rebelled against God? How many times have we been disobedient? Yet, God deals with us in a forgiving and loving manner. He has set the model for us as we deal with our rebellious children. Dealing with rebellion is never easy; however, it will be somewhat easier to manage if you have been faithful to the guidelines above.

Children seem to be born with great skills in debate. They love to argue. Chances are that you have found yourself in the middle of a debate or power struggle with your child in some form or another.

TIPS TO ADDRESS POWER STRUGGLES WITH YOUR CHILD:

1.Create Daily Routines and Expectations

Children thrive on routines and need to know what is expected of them. If this has been established then there is nothing to discuss.

2. Pick your Battles

Not every little thing is worth going to the mat on, especially if you have a child who loves to argue and engage in power struggles.

3. Do Not Argue with your Child

Remember, you are the parent! Do not argue with your child. Send a clear message that the topic is not optional. It is not up for debate. So, why "Pick your fights. Not everything merits a confrontation" (Barna, 2007, p. 78).

engage in one? Walk away from a power struggle. Power struggles can't happen if you do not engage in them.

4.Be Consistent and Clear

Be consistent. Mean what you say and say what you mean. One of the most important principles of discipline is consistency. The rules cannot change each day.

The next time a power struggle sneaks up on you remember it is like playing a game of tug-of-war with your child. If there is no resistance, then there is no struggle. So, when you find yourself in one of these struggles, simply let go of the





rope, wait for a while, and then try to approach things from a different angle. Just as in the game if one person drops the rope the game is over.

Yes, there will be times when that defiance wins out. Your child will rebel and the question is one of how will you respond to open defiant behavior. One of the greatest lessons you will ever teach your child is that there are consequences to every decision they make. Along with the freedom to make choices comes consequences. The important lesson is that the consequence is a result of a decision THEY made. It is not something that you are punishing them with. They made the decision and therefore, they reap the consequence of that decision.

There are two different types of consequence that may be given for misbehavior—logical or natural. Both are beneficial, but what is the difference

LOGICAL VS. NATURAL CONSEQUENCES

1.Logical consequences for 'tweens need to make sense and be connected to the misbehavior. For example, if you send your child to their bedroom alone for the evening because they failed to turn in their homework, this consequence may not be the best choice and may not result in the desired outcome, which in this case is responsibility to get assignments done and turned in on time. Logical consequence is connecting the consequence directly to the behavior in a way that will change

"When children ask for an explanation of your decisions or reasoning, give it to them. They deserve it, and it becomes a teaching moment for you" (Barna, 2007, p. 97).

the behavior. In this example a logical consequence may be that they will need to come home from school, sit at a common place where you can observe them, complete the assignment, and give you a signed note from the teacher stating that all work is up to date. Once again, this is not to be considered punishment. They made the decision to not turn in their homework and therefore, the consequence comes with that choice. The important point here is to remember that whatever the consequence you set, it must result in a turn-a-round and produce the desired outcome.

2.Natural consequences can also be a great teaching tool at this age. Allow your child to face the natural consequences of his behavior. For example, there may be an early Sunday morning activity but your child is disobedient and does not settle down and go to bed on time on Saturday night. Do not bother waking them up in the morning. Allow them to set their own alarm and get up on time. The natural consequence of being overtired may be enough to force them to think twice about staying up late next time. Another example may be with a child who never comes when called. So, plan a fun family surprise (such as ice cream sundaes or another fun treat). When they do not come when called, they naturally miss out on the fun. Don't give in! There is no need for lectures, discussions, or debates. The natural consequence has been felt. They made the choice, they get the consequence. You did not even have to give them any consequence. The consequence naturally results from their decision.

Unfortunately, there will be moments of rebellion in your child. Those moments need not give you undue despair. We have all made mistakes and our children will, too. Those times need to be used as teaching moments to change the outcome the next time they are faced with the same decision.



GROUP ACTIVITY

Logical and Natural Consequences—Answer these questions on your own and then discuss your responses with your group.

- 1. Give an example of a logical consequence. Be very specific with the behavior and desired outcome.
- 2 Give an example of misbehavior and the natural consequences that may result. Once again, be very specific.

"Teaching our children how to self-manage their own behavior will ensure success in many avenues of their life. Especially as they face the challenges that come with the territory of moving through their developmental stages. Empowering our children to proactively become accountable for their behavior, and ultimately their life, is paramount to our job as a parent. If we can help them to embrace accountability, our role as parents will perhaps become easier and more enjoyable because our kids will be moving toward independence" (Sorkin, 2014).

WRAP UP

It is important to always remember that setting age appropriate limits equals love. You set the limits and adhere to them because of the role that God has given you

as a parent and because of the great love you have for your child. Setting limits is synonymous with parental love!

At the same time, there are consequences to the decisions we make. A part of dealing with rules and rebellion against those rules is the understanding that there are consequences. Teaching our children to understand that every choice they make will have an accompanying consequence is a critical lesson. "Your responsibility is to be obedient to God in raising your children; you must leave the outcomes up to Him" (Barna, 2007, p. 25).

As parents, we cannot always deliver our children from painful consequences. It is the "tough love" of parenting that we do not like. However, it is one of life's lessons that is valuable. As they grow to maturity the decisions they make will have even greater consequences. So, teach them this lesson while they are still young and while the consequences are mild compared to later in life.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the statement below and discuss with your group ways that this speaks to the topic for this chapter? What do you think the word "wise" means here?

"Wise rules and regulations must be made and enforced, that the beauty of the home life may not be spoiled" (White, 1954, p. 97).

TRY THIS AT HOME

Here are some things to try at home this week:

- 1. Once again, this week we encourage you to add another verse to your "Parenting Bible Promise Project." Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you, as a parent, about the overcoming challenges of parenting that specifically relate to the topic of this chapter. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Place it where you can see it throughout the day. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don't throw them away at the week's end. Remember to add it to the other promises in your promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!
- 2. Have a family worship on the theme of "Cause and Effect in Nature." (For example, adequate rain vs. a drought, pollution's effect on environment, deforestation on animal life, etc.) Making sure children understand cause and effect will also lead to an understanding of rules, rebellion, and consequences. Cause and effect in nature also helps them understand the natural consequences that come about as a result of choices.
- 3.You may also want to do a family worship and use stories from the Bible to discuss cause and effect. Chose a story that your children are familiar with. For example, you could use Noah and the Flood, Jonah, Eve eating the Forbidden Fruit etc.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Lord, there are days that my home seems like a battlefield. Please help me navigate the minefield that Satan has planted. Help me show my child unconditional love while still maintaining clear boundaries. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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8. SCREENING SCREEN TIME

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

"I will set nothing wicked before my eyes. . ." (Psalm 101:3, NKJV).

ICEBREAKER-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. REMEMBER

- · What technological "gadgets" were available when you were a child?
- \cdot Were they monitored in any way by your parents?

2. REVIEW

- \cdot As you consider the spiritual principle for this week, how does it apply to "screen time"?
- · Does applying this involve a conscious effort?

3. REFLECT

 \cdot Take a moment and reflect on all of the gadgets in your home today and the ways they are being used.

OVERVIEW

Technology is one of the biggest blessings of our day. Your child can have regular interaction with grandparents and other family members even if they live a continent away. Valuable and limitless information is only a click away. And, business transactions such as depositing a check, paying bills or even shopping online can save us lots of time and money.

However, these blessings also come with a heavy price tag. In addition to being a blessing, technology has also been a curse. It is a way that Satan has used to invade our homes and our lives and in too many cases, destroy our families. Our children are inundated with technology. It continues to evolve in ways that we could never have imagined. And, it's here to stay.

The truth is that most parents have to make more of an effort to keep pace with technology than their child does. It is second nature to our children. For us, it's a world that has emerged. For them, it's the world that they were born into. How many of us have purchased a new technological gadget (television, cell phone, DVD player, iPad, etc.) and have had to ask our child to help us learn how to use it? OK, we will be the first to admit it; we are personally guilty as charged!

Because technology is a big part of our child's world, it needs to be a part of ours too. We need to embrace the positive and address the negative implications. In this chapter we will consider the following topics:

- · Media's Influence on 'Tweens-Does it Matter?
- · 'Tween Power
- Practical Ways of Screening Screen Time





Note: The term "screen" in this chapter is meant to be inclusive of all technology that has a screen (television, cell phones, hand-held electronic games, MP3 players, video games, computers, etc.).

MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON 'TWEENS-DOES IT MATTER?

"What harm does it do? At least my child is at home instead of out on the streets with their friends." Does this sound familiar? Perhaps it hits home as an argument that you have used yourself. The truth of the matter is that one of the worst enemies your child will ever face is readily available to them in almost every home.

Notice how one researcher compares the dangers our children face today to life almost 200 years ago, "The web has been likened to the Wild West, with no one in charge, outlaws lurking around every bend, and massive freedom to roam and run into trouble. More than a new region, it's a new reality, here to stay" (Kastner & Wyatt, 2009, p. 147).

In just a few years the number of available gadgets as well as those who own them has increased exponentially. "When it comes to technology, you don't stand a chance against your kids. Born into a digital world, tweens have unprecedented access to devices and gadgets" (Moses, 2013). The study goes on to reveal the following: "The web has been likened to the Wild West, with no one in charge, outlaws lurking around every bend, and massive freedom to roam and run into trouble. More than a new region, it's a new reality, here to stay" (Kastner & Wyatt, 2009, p. 147).

- · Texting is now the preferred way of communicating.
- · Over 50 percent of all 'tweens have their own cell phone.
- \cdot Over a third of children 8-12 years of age own their own iPad or other tablet.
- · Over 50 percent of 'tweens report that their most visited website is YouTube.
- Television viewing is now taking second place to viewing programs via the internet.

The facts do not stop there. Some of the statistics regarding our 'tween's usage of social media are even more startling. These statistics alone will make you get on your knees and pray for wisdom as to how to manage this onslaught in the lives of our children. Look at these statistics recently released by Reuters (Palmer, 2013).

- Most U.S. 'tweens have at least one social media account and many go online without any supervision from their parents.
- Facebook is the most popular platform among 'tweens. Although the site says users must be at least 13 years old to log on, 85 percent of 'tweens said they have an account and a similar number admit they use it every day.
- The threats to children concerning unsupervised use of the Internet are well known and range from identity theft, cyberbullying, and sharing photos and videos to pornography and sexual predators.
- Despite the dangers, 82 percent of preteens say they think social media sites are very safe, or somewhat safe, and 79 percent of parents agree.

- Nearly half of youngsters also report sharing personal information online such as their email address, and 28 percent have revealed the school they attend.
- Many parents are also unaware of the time their children spend online. The poll showed 52 percent of youngsters spending five or more hours a day online, but most parents think they spend only one to two hours.

"Identify the media regimen you will allow for your children. Limits must be set and enforced, or your kids' media diet will expand according to the time available" (Barna, 2007, p. 78).

 Children are also skilled in hiding their online activity from their parents. More than half of 'tweens, 58 percent, say they know how to keep their online use a secret and a quarter admitted they had cleared or hidden what they have done online.

Children are freely admitting that they have the ability to hide the truth from their parents. Far too many parents are being blindsided and are not aware of the true picture that is emerging right under their own noses.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Look at this powerful statement below. Then discuss the question that follows with your group.

"Given what we know about a.) sexually developing adolescents and preadolescents and b.) the Internet itself, it is impossible to rank unrestricted access to the World Wide Web in a category with watching television or freely roaming the neighborhood. This is more like sending your adolescent male to spend the night in an adult movie theater because you trust him not to look up from his Bible, or allowing your daughter to grow marijuana in her room because she likes the bud as decoration" (Moore, 2012).

Do you agree with the author that unrestricted access to the internet has the same negative effect as other things that we would never consider allowing? Explain.

'TWEEN POWER

Media does parents no favors when it comes to these very impressionable years of childhood. In fact, it is perhaps a parent's greatest enemy. According to Jennifer O'Donnell (2014), 'tweens today have an enormous spending power in the United States and are targeted by marketers for their money. It was the 'tween market that made stars such as Hannah Montana, the Jonas Brothers, and Harry Potter household names. Many parenting experts believe today's 'tweens are growing up too fast, and are exposed to unhealthy doses of violence, sex, drugs, and other behaviors through television, video games, online games, and books."

Again, advertisers and marketing experts will tell you that they can indeed use media to influence your child. It is no secret. It is a target they shoot at because this age group has "buying power." No, it may not be that they have the monetary means themselves, but they do have the ability to influence their parents. And, this is what the marketers are counting on.

This trend towards consumerism targeting our young children is a frightening one. The message they send to your child is that their value is based on what brand of shoes they are wearing, the label that is on their jeans, the purse that is on their arm, the way they look etc. "We have to see the bigger picture of God's priorities and raise our children in light of His standards, not ours or society's" (Barna, 2007, p. 7).

Actually, we can't be too hard on the companies that market these products. After all, we must admit that they are succeeding at their job. Unfortunately, the ones at fault are us parents. Are we doing a better job of parenting than these companies are doing at marketing? The power actually belongs to us, as parents, as we co-parent with God. Yes, they are succeeding in their role, but are we succeeding in our God-given role of parenting?

GROUP ACTIVITY

Group Activity

Read this statement and respond to the questions below. Then share your responses with the group.

"Dubbed 'pester power' marketers try to get kids to nag their parents to buy them stuff. Studies show a correlation between advertising and family conflict; the average young person said that they have to ask nine times before their parents let them have what they want. This nagging pays off: Fifty-five percent of kids surveyed said they are usually successful in getting their parents to give in" (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003, pp. 437-456).

1. Do you agree with the statement above? Explain

2. When was the last time you gave in and purchased something for your child that they saw advertised on TV, social media, magazine etc.? What was it?

3.What are some strategies parents can use to avoid giving in? (Perhaps, you have used this strategy successfully in the past.)

PRACTICAL WAYS OF SCREENING SCREEN TIME

It certainly seemed easier to monitor screen time when your child was younger. Now, however, you are dealing with an independent minded child. Their awareness of possibilities has increased as has their skill level. In fact, even at this young age, their skill level has probably exceeded yours in many ways when it comes to technology. Getting a handle on the ever changing world of media seems, at times, to be a lost cause.

According to licensed marriage and family therapist Cynthia M. Gill (2013) the four things that kids need most are: to connect; to feel capable; to feel like they're contributing; and the ability to handle life's inevitable ups and downs. None of these goals is really attained by screen time. For instance, too much tech time robs kids of everything from making eye contact to expressing themselves verbally.

Most important, screen time is robbing you of valuable time that you have to introduce your child to Jesus. Just consider the difference it would make if you used this time for that purpose—wander outdoors in nature to learn about God as Creator, play Bible games as a family, or participate in a service project. The options are endless when you take the time to consider how the many hours in front of screens could better be utilized to fulfill God's calling to you, as a parent.

So, be honest, is too much screen time preempting the more valuable activities in your family? Here are some practical tips that you may want to consider:

- **1.Make it a Family Affair**—Before you set any rules you must be willing to live by them also. If your child sees you constantly on your cell phone, on your iPad, or sitting in front of the television, it will be difficult to convince them that the boundaries you set are healthy. After all, if it is not good for your child, it's not good for you either.
- **2.Set Boundaries**—Decide on appropriate boundaries. For example, ban all screen time during family meals. Set limits not only on what your child may do, watch, etc. Also set limits on the amount of screen time they can have.
- **3.Monitor Use**—Make sure that you and your child are following through and abiding by the boundaries that have been set. Boundaries are useless if there is no monitoring and supervision to be sure they are not crossed.
- **4. Strategic Placement of Screens**—Are your screens all over the house? Does your child have a television in their own room? A computer? A video game? It is hard to monitor usage when the availability of gadgets is spread out over your home.
- **5.Put Controls in Place**—Since we, as parents, can use all of the protection we can get, put in to place some controls such as internet filtering software that will block pornography or other sites that you deem to be off limits. In the same manner, you can install parental controls on your television.

"Our most recent surveys show that the typical preteen child devotes an average of more than forty hours per week to ingesting media content" (Barna, 2007, p. 71).

6.Cell Phone Safety—Many parents provide their young child with a cell phone for "safety" reasons

and so that they may have easy access to them when they are not in their care or presence. After all, many children are involved in extracurricular activities and it does make it easier to maintain communication with them. It provides



for peace of mind and it can indeed be a "safety" tool. However, if that same cell phone has internet access then you may have negated any type of "safety net" that you intended. If you must, consider a phone that has no internet capabilities or, at the very least, put an internet filter on the phone to block unacceptable sites and content. Remember, pornography and other inappropriate content and forms of communication find your child through the internet without them necessarily even looking for it.

"More than half of tweens, 58 percent, say they know how to keep their online use a secret from their parents and a quarter admitted they had cleared or hidden what they have done online" (Palmer, 2013).

Putting the above guidelines into practice requires

strategic planning. The activity below will help you think about and better define the "screen time" boundaries that you have in your home. Remember, your boundaries must be clear and enforcement must be consistent. The boundary line must be set and cannot be moved from day to day. Once you have defined them, make sure that all of the adults in your home are willing to enforce them, and then set up a family meeting and communicate the boundaries, answer any questions, and make sure the consequences for not abiding by the rules are understood by all of the family members.

WRAP UP

Keep in mind that even if your child can run circles around you in regards to technology, parents still need to set appropriate boundaries, monitor use, and be positive role models. Our lack of knowledge is no excuse for failing to put in to place strategies that will protect our children and keep them from Satan's infiltration in our homes via the screen.

Trying to keep up with technology, specifically what our children are exposed to can be daunting; and yet, we must be vigilant. The more we educate ourselves the better we will be able to do everything within our power to protect our children against Satan's attempts to reach them through the various screens.

Make this an urgent matter of prayer. Ask God for wisdom as you deal with a world that your grandparents never dreamed about. Yes, you are navigating through unchartered territory. But, there is good news. You are not alone. God is by your side. Remember, he called you to parent your child. And, when He calls, He will also enable!.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the statement below and discuss the question that follows with your group.

"... can parents be too careful in presenting precept and example before those watchful little eyes and sharp senses? " (White, 1954, p. 486).

Do you think parents can be "too careful"? Relate your responses specifically to the topic of screen time.



INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY (ONE PER HOUSEHOLD)

Does your child know what the exact limitations or boundaries are in regards to screen time? Use this worksheet to define those boundaries and then make sure you communicate them to your child. It may be a perfect agenda item for a family meeting. Make sure that all adults in your home are in agreement and willing to enforce the boundaries that are set.

1. How much TV can your child watch a day?

- 2.What content in regards to shows/movies are allowed? What is not allowed?
- 3.If TV is allowed and if you have more than one child, how do you help them decide what to watch so there are no fights between your children? In other words, who has control of the remote?
- 4. What are the family rules for email, phone use, or text messages? Be specific with time limits and who they can email, call, or text.
- 5.What are the rules around the amount and content of Internet sites? (Surfing the web, Facebook, etc.) Does your computer have parental controls that restrict inappropriate sites?
- 6.What limits are there on video games, electronic games, or online games? Time limits? Content?

TRY THIS AT HOME

Here are some things to try at home this week:

1.Again this week we encourage you to add another verse to your "Parenting Bible Promise Project." Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you, as a parent, about the overcoming challenges of parenting that specifically relate to the topic of this chapter. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Place it where you can see it throughout the day. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And,

Help! I'm a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World



remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don't throw them away at the week's end. Remember to add it to the other promises in your promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!

2.Plan a family meeting to go over the worksheet that you worked on in this chapter. Make sure that all family members understand the expectations. Allow time for discussion and for questions to be asked. If revisions are decided in the family meeting then make sure that any changes to the document are written down accordingly?

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Lord, technology is advancing at the speed of lightening. My child is able to keep up better than I am. Satan is using these gadgets to rob us of valuable family time. More important, he is using these gadgets to rob us of time with You. Please help me and give me wisdom as I try monitoring screen time. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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9. HEALTHY HABITS

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, NKJV).

ICEBREAKER-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. REMEMBER

· Think about your childhood. What healthy habits were instilled in you?

2. REVIEW

• As you consider the Bible verses of our spiritual principle, how does it apply to helping our children develop healthy habits?

3. REFLECT

- \cdot Reflect on the health habits that exist in your home.
- \cdot Which ones should you encourage and maintain?
- · Which non-healthy habits need deleting? What needs to be added?

OVERVIEW

Let's be honest. Living healthy demands extra time and, in some cases, extra money. It is too tempting to stop by the fast food drive-thru, pick up supper on the way home from a busy work day, and sit in the front of the television and consume it. The less effort you have to expend-the more appealing it is!

"With childhood obesity becoming an epidemic in the United States, it should come as no surprise that many children are unhealthier than those in their parents' generation, and according to preliminary new research presented at the

American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions, that's exactly the case. Researchers from the University of South Australia's School of Health Science found that kids today cannot run as fast or as far as their parents could at the same age. In fact, the study showed that children today are approximately 15 percent less fit than previous generations.

'Exercise used to be a given,'Dr. VandeKappelle said. Kids would play outside and gym class was mandatory. Now, many schools are focusing more on academics within the classroom and cutting back on areas such as gym class. And at home, screen time has increased. When you add up a sedentary lifestyle and an unhealthy diet, you get an increase in obesity. "If your tween fills up on empty or less-than-desirable calories, she won't have room for healthier foods. Don't feel you are being mean by setting limits, even though most other parents don't. Your child may not like your decisions, but she will understand your intent and will be able to make good decisions when she's grown" (Sonna, 2014) Reversing this trend is difficult because as children get older, changing habits gets significantly more difficult, which is why families need to make a concerted effort to instill healthy habits in their children when they are young" (Khan, 2013).

One need not look far to see that study after study and researcher after researcher all come to the same conclusion—the overall health of our children is in decline. What are the issues and what can we do to make sure our children are instilled with values that help them make better lifestyle choices—now and in the future?

In this chapter we will consider the following topics:

- · Healthy Self Esteem
- Food
- Exercise
- Sleep/Rest
- \cdot Cause/Effect

HEALTHY SENSE OF SELF

As we consider the various aspects that go into parenting a healthy 'tween, perhaps the greatest consideration needs to go towards ways to build a positive sense of self. All of the other aspects of health may depend on this one. "Researchers . . . found that kids today cannot run as fast or as far as their parents could at the same age." In fact, the study showed that children today are approximately "15 percent less fit than their parent's generation" (Khan, 2013).

"Self-esteem is the way we feel about ourselves, and

having plenty of the positive sort is essential for good mental health. With high self-esteem, it's easier to make and keep friends, to solve problems or find help to do so if necessary, to gain respect for ourselves and in turn get respect from others, and to generally behave in a socially acceptable way. Low self-esteem, on the other hand, makes it harder to mix socially, to deal with failure or new experiences, can lead to feelings of inadequacy or being unloved, and makes us vulnerable to more serious emotional disorders" (Netmums .com, 2014).

So, what are some things we can do to ensure that our child has a healthy sense of self? And, what are some of the things that we should avoid.

PRACTICAL THINGS TO DO AND TO AVOID IN BUILDING A 'TWEENS SELF ESTEEM: (EDUCATION.COM, 2014).

1. Focus on Behavior, Not the Child

What to Do: Tell your child that you will always love and accept them, even if you disagree with their behavior.

What to Avoid: Do not confuse your child's misbehavior with his person. Even if you do not love the choices or the actions, you love the child.

2.Words: Wisdom or Discouragement?

What to Do: Listen to your child. Support their concerns and ideas. Believe in your child, and they will more likely to develop a healthy sense of self.

What to Avoid: Never call your child names. Negative words can really stick with kids and bring down their self-esteem.

3.Compliments and Comments that Count

What to Do: The best compliments are honest, sincere, and specific. Rather than vaguely saying, "Great work!" say, "I like how hard you worked to finish your math project by the due date."

What to Avoid: Do not deliver compliments with a critical edge. Underhanded comments of criticism can undo your good intentions. Does this conversation sound familiar? "You did a nice job cleaning your room, but it looks like you forgot to clean out your closet." "Remember, there is a strong genetic component to weight gain. For instance, if a child has one parent who is obese, that child has a 50% chance of also being obese" (Mclloy, 2010).

4. Your Developing Child: Explore or Mold?

What to Do: Provide your child experiences to explore, develop, and learn about their individuality and unique interests. Be your child's number one cheerleader.

What to Avoid: Do not shape or try to mold your child into who you want them to become. They may resist and have a lower self-esteem. Remember, it is not what YOU want them to be that matters. It is what God has planned for them that is paramount.

5. Love: Unconditional or with Strings Attached?

What to Do: Tell and show your child that you love them. Spend time with them. Express over and over again that your love is unconditional, just like the love of God. Take time to remind them of God's love to them and of His forgiveness.

What to Avoid: Do not wait until your child achieves a new success to show your love. Children need to know that you will always love them no matter what they do. Your love should not be based on their achievements.

6. Unique and Incomparable

What to Do: Recognize your child's unique strengths and weaknesses. Remember to love your child just the way they are.

What to Avoid: Never compare your child to their peers or siblings. This can make them feel not good enough or like they can never measure up. They need to develop into the unique person that God created and not try to be like someone else.

7. Growing Competence

What to Do: Empower your child to do things that they can do safely. Encourage them to assist with chores, washing their clothes, and helping to prepare meals.

What to Avoid: Do not complete tasks your child can do. Even if you can do it better and faster, it is more of a learning experience and confidence booster for your child to help out.

8. Balance Risks with Growing

What to Do: Allow your child to work through their own problems. Let them know you are available but allow then to develop confidence out of independent problem-solving.

Help! I'm a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World



What to Avoid: Do not rescue your child from difficult situations. Working through the experience on their own will give them a chance to grow. Growing pains can't happen if you don't let them. The little lessons they learn during these middle years may help prevent them from making bigger mistakes with bigger consequences during the teenage years that will follow.

9.Be a Positive Role Model

What to Do: Model confidence, problem-solving skills, and positive self-esteem. Lead by example and your child will follow.

What to Avoid: Be careful to not tell your child to act one way without living it yourself. Your actions teach more than your words.

10.Boundaries and Choices

What to Do: If you tell your child a rule, make sure that you enforce it. When you give them a choice about certain matters, accept and respect their decisions. This will help foster mutual respect and understanding.

What to Avoid: Avoid giving your child a choice if it is not optional.

When it comes to helping your child develop a healthy self-esteem, the bottom line is this, like us, our 'tweens will often make mistakes and won't always succeed in all areas. How we talk to them has a huge impact on how they view themselves. When they make a mistake, it's vital not to continue to harp on it or remind them of their failures as this will inevitably result in feelings of failure. Instead, it is our role as parents to help our 'tweens view failure as part of life, and something to learn from rather than something that diminishes them. If they get the idea that failure is to be avoided, they will become risk-averse and fail to grow. We also need to stay calm and non-judgmental in the face of their mistakes, while ensuring that learning comes out of falling down. The key is to help them understand that they can get back up.

'TWEENS AND FOOD CHOICES

Limiting your 'tween to healthful food choices is challenging at best. Busy family schedules, TV commercials, cafeteria lunches, and fast-food restaurants conspire against us.

Research shows that 'tweens are wearing their food choices on their waistlines, setting themselves up to be overweight as adults and suffer major health problems. One in three girls between the ages of nine and 13 are overweight or obese. Weight is indeed a very sensitive issue during these middle years; however, health experts are warning parents that this sensitive issue can no longer be ignored.

It is during these early and middle school years that our children are faced with making their own choices in regards to what to eat and how much. "If they are overweight now, most, but not all, will often go on to be overweight when they are adults and they could develop diabetes, heart disease and even cancer. It's really important that we understand what is influencing their choices so we can help them to be healthy, and set them on the right path" (Sikora, 2009.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO TEACHING HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES:

1. Model, Model, Model

Practice what you preach. You cannot be preaching about unhealthy choices and still have a secret stash of candy bars or that container of chocolate ice cream hidden in the back of the freezer. Your child notices inconsistencies between what you say and what you do.

2.Where you Shop Matters

When purchasing groceries shop around the perimeter of the store. Think about the layout of your grocery store. That's where the healthy food can be found (fruits, vegetables, whole grains). When possible, try to avoid shopping in the aisles because that's where you will find things such as chips and candy.

3.Try Something New

Allow your child to pick out one new fruit or vegetable to try at least once a month. This is a way to introduce them to new healthy food choices. Remember, you are limiting their choice to healthy foods only. Also, are you guilty of preparing the same dishes in the same way week after week? Why not try at least one new healthy recipe a week? Let your child help you in not only picking one new recipe out but also in the preparation of it. There is a better chance that they will try it and like it if they are involved in the process.

4. Just Say No!

One of the easiest and yet hardest things to do is to just say, "No". If it is not in the house then it is not an option. Parents, you still buy the groceries for your child who is eight to twelve years of age. You may not be able to control the tv ads, the options at school, or what their friends may offer them, but you still control the food options that are in your own house.

5.Plan, Shop for, and Make Healthy Meals and Snacks Together

Make it a true family affair. Before you go grocery shopping plan out a special meal or healthy snack with your child. There are so many free online resources that there is no limit to possibilities. Search recipes together. Go shopping together. And, spend time in the kitchen as a family. This provides for a great bonding opportunity and quality family time. Making a grocery list, planning how much to buy, and looking at recipes involve math and reading skills too. Who knew that math and reading could be so much fun! Exercise and eating healthy will affect your child's tomorrow. The habits they learn now will be carried into adulthood. Perhaps one of the best gifts we can give our children is to instill in them the importance of taking care of their bodies.

6. Drink Water

When it comes to making healthy food choices, perhaps one of the most important things you can do as a parent is to teach your child to drink lots of water. Make it fun. Keep a chart on the refrigerator for each family member to record the number of glasses of water they drink each day. Reward the winning family member. A fun family outing may be to go shopping with the intent of letting each family member pick out his or her own refillable water bottle.



7.Lighten up!

Yes, there may be certain times when you, as a parent, will need to consider lightening up. Perhaps it is the celebration of a birthday with a classmate over cake and ice cream. Or, perhaps it is a weekend dessert at home. Treats, sweets, and desserts are not off limits. They just need to be limited in quantity and frequency and not seen as a regular part of their daily diet.

Remember, helping your child make healthy food choices begins with good communication. "Because I said so," is not a good reason. Teach your child the principles behind their choices. After all, learning to make these choices now will affect them for a lifetime. You will learn more about the importance of teaching this in the cause/effect section below.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Answer the following questions alone and then discuss your responses with the group.

1. Look over the list of seven practical ways to teaching healthy food choices above. Which one do you do the best in your home? Share with the group what you do.

2. Which of the seven is your weakest? Why? How can you improve?

3. If you could add a number 8 to the list above what would it be? What are some other ways you can think of to help your child eat healthy?

EXERCISE? GET UP OFF OF THAT COUCH

Does your child seem more interested in engaging with their technological gadgets then in playing a ball game or racing around in the park? Too much screen time and not enough outdoor time is taking a toll on today's children. In fact, many parents report that it is actually easier to get their child to eat healthy than it is to get them to exercise.

According to the Center for Disease Control, one-third of all children and teens are either overweight or obese (Matzek, 2014). Also, if one parent is obese, there's a 50 percent chance that their children will also be obese, according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (Huffington Post, 2012). Wow! Those are some tough words to swallow. Your level of physical activity (or inactivity) will be mirrored by your child. When exercise is a regular part of the family's activities, everyone wins. So, what are some practical ways that you can motivate your child to get up off that couch or away from the computer screen and get active?

PRACTICAL STEPS TO MOTIVATE YOUR CHILD TO GET UP AND GET MOVING

1.It's a Family Affair

Be consistent, schedule it, and make it a family affair. Children like routines. It is something they can count on. So, when it comes to exercise, make them expect it as a daily part of their routine. Also, notice that this step states "Family Affair." That's right! You need to keep this activity appointment as a family. It will never work if you send your child to exercise while you sit on the couch.

2. "Activities" are Preferred over Conventional Exercise

Children prefer activities over exercise. For example, they're more likely to take a bike ride than jog around a track. Riding a bike

a blke ride than jog around a track. Riding a blke does not seem to belong in the same category as exercise to an eight or nine year old. Riding a bike is fun and the mere mention of the word "exercise" denotes negative feelings. So, it may make a difference if your child is eight or twelve. What activity does your child find to be fun? What do they enjoy? The bottom line is to make it fun for them. Talk to them. How about a family game of kickball, baseball, shooting hoops, jumping rope, or a game of hide and seek? Your child is not going to be motivated by something they do not enjoy. Exercise can be fun!

3. Invite a Friend Along

Children have an additional motivation to exercise if their friends are joining them. Yes, your child is motivated by their peers as well as by you. Find a family with children the same age as yours and plan an outing together. In this way, you can encourage positive friendships with peers and If your child is more interested in engaging with their technological gadgets then in playing a ball game or racing around in the park they are not alone. Too much screen time and not enough outdoor time is taking a toll on today's children. Many parents report that it is actually easier to get their child to eat healthy than it is to get them to put down those electronic gadgets and exercise.

exercise at the same time. When your child is having fun with a peer it will not even seem like exercise to them.

4. Track Progress

We are all motivated by goals, targets, competition, and progress-tracking. Make it a family game with all members participating. Track exercise and reward the winner. There are numerous gadgets on the market and apps that will help you do that.

5. Limit Screen Time

If screen time is an option, they will probably choose that. So, you must set strict boundaries and be consistent with enforcing them. Try to keep the time consistent each day. One option may be that your child earns screen time each day based on their exercise time.

6.Be Spontaneous

It is amazing how many opportunities in our daily life create opportunities for exercise. Yet, all too often, we opt for the easy way out. For example, when you go shopping, do not go for the parking spot closest to the door. Instead, park at the farther end of the lot and walk. Skip the elevator and take the stairs. Walk the dog together. If you look for them, there are small everyday tweaks that will get you and your child moving. They are exercising without even knowing it!

So, does it matter? The benefits of exercise include the following:

- · Helps children achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.
- · Maintains strong, healthy muscles, bones, and joints.
- · Aids in the development of important interpersonal skills.
- · Improves the quantity and quality of sleep.
- · Promotes improved school attendance and enhances academic performance.
- · Helps develop healthier self-esteem and self-image.
- Prevents or delays the development of many chronic diseases (e.g., heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and hypertension).
- Reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression and promotes a better overall mood.
- Improves motor coordination and enhances the development of various motor performance skills.

Exercise will affect your child's tomorrow. The habits they learn now will be carried into adulthood. Perhaps one of the best gifts we can give our children is to instill in them the importance of taking care of their bodies.

IT'S TOO EARLY TO GO TO BED!

Sleep is no less important that healthy eating and exercise. Yet, it may be something that parents are not giving a high priority. However, if your child is like most children this age, sleep is not a priority for them. There is too much to see and do for them to go to bed. Schedules, homework, sleepovers, television, and computer time are usually the culprits.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends school-age children get 10—11 hours of sleep each night (AASM, 2014). Is your child reaching this recommendation in regards to the number of hours they sleep each night? Here are some things to try at home.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Here are some real challenges/scenarios and real questions that parents have asked. Discuss these with your group to see what solutions you can come up with.

- 1.1 live in the inner city. It is not safe for my child to go out and play to get exercise. Times have changed. My parents used to send me out. But now, times have changed and it's no longer safe. What choices do I have to be sure my child gets adequate fresh air and exercise?
- 2.1 live in an apartment building and therefore, have no yard. There is nowhere to play close to my building. How can I be sure my child gets exercise?
- 3.1 am a single parent. After work I have dinner to prepare and laundry to do. I do not want to send my child out alone to play. It is easier to watch them and be assured that they are safe when they are sitting in the living room, even if it is in front of the television. What difference does it make?

BEST PRACTICES FOR FAMILIES TO ESTABLISH BETTER SLEEP PATTERNS: 1. Take it to Jesus

Perhaps one of the most important things you can do to encourage a good night's rest is to have evening worship and prayer time. It should be a relaxing and enjoyable family time. It helps you and your child wind down after a busy day. It also helps them learn to take their stresses and problems to Jesus instead of to bed with them.

2. Other Evening Routines

Establish other evening routines that prepare your child to relax and rest. A warm bath and clean pajamas is relaxing. Preparing school lunches, getting back packs ready and laying out clothes for the next morning will also save you time and stress in the morning.

3.No Screen Time Before Bed

Make all screen time off limits at least one hour before bedtime. Electronics are a stimulant. And, make sure that all electronics are removed from your child's bedroom and are not accessible.

4. Regular Bed and Wake Times

Establish regular times to go to bed, to wake up, and try to keep them as regular as possible.



5.No Food After Supper

Sleep is better when the stomach is not full. It is especially important to avoid caffeinated drinks or sugary foods. If your child must snack, then make it things like carrot sticks, celery and peanut better, or a few nuts.

Sleeping well increases a child's attention span and allows him to be physically relaxed and mentally alert. We all need sleep to keep us healthy, happy, and doing our best! Parents are responsible for their child's sleep habits so it is important to start healthy ones early; it is much easier to instill good habits than correct bad ones.

TEACHING 'TWEENS CAUSE AND EFFECT IN REGARDS TO MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES

Typically, children ages eight to twelve are more concerned with today than with tomorrow. Yet, it is our job as parents to teach them that the health choices they make today will have a lasting impact on their lives in the future.

Make your child into a little scientist and have them respond to your cause-effect questions, especially in the area of making healthy choices.

- What would be the result if I let you stay up all night on a school night? How would you do on your test tomorrow? Would you jump out of bed as soon as the alarm sounded?
- What would be the result if I came home from work every day and immediately went to the couch and did not move until bedtime? Who would cook dinner? How would the grass and lawn eventually look? How would that impact me physically?
- What would be the result if all we had in our cabinets were chocolate bars, chips, and soda? How long do you think it would take to affect you? What if you did not have water to drink? Are there countries in the world that have a challenge providing clean water to the community? What are the results?

Teaching cause and effect is an everyday challenge to you, as a parent. Look for those teachable moments to discuss the relationship between the choices made today on their lives they will live tomorrow. After all, these types of discussions will carry over into many other choices your child makes.

WRAP UP

Busyness is one of the biggest obstacles to incorporating healthy family habits. It is quicker to stop by a fast food place, go to the drive-thru, and pick up dinner than it is to come home after a busy day at work and prepare a healthy meal. It is easier to plop on the sofa and relax than it is to get up off that couch and go outside and exercise. And, what about the cost of healthy eating? The truth is that soda can often be purchased cheaper than a bottle of water. Junk food is less expensive than fruits and vegetables.

Yes, exercise and healthy eating have a cost associated with them. But, think about the pay-off! The rewards far outweigh the cost. On the other hand, poor health habits and choices that may seem cheaper today may end up being more costly in the future with the obvious consequences of health care costs associated with things like obesity and other diseases. The truth is that there is no price that you can put on good health.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Discuss the statement below with your group. What are some practical ways that you can teach your children the "cause to effect" principle in regards to healthy habits?

"Teach your children to study from cause to effect; show them that if they violate the laws of their being, they must pay the penalty by suffering disease. If in your effort you can see no special improvement, be not discouraged; patiently instruct, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. . . . Press on until the victory is gained. Continue to teach your children in regard to their own bodies, and how to take care of them. Recklessness in regard to bodily health tends to recklessness in moral character" (White, 1954, p. 104).

TRY THIS AT HOME

Here are some things to try at home this week:

- 1. This week we again encourage you to add another verse to your "Parenting Bible Promise Project." Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you, as a parent, about the overcoming challenges of parenting that specifically relate to the topic of this chapter. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Place it where you can see it throughout the day. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don't throw them away at the week's end. Remember to add it to the other promises in your promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!
- 2.Pick one healthy change and try it for a few weeks with your family, then gradually add additional new healthy steps over time. Tiny tweaks in health can result in BIG changes.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Lord, with all of the busyness of today, it is far easier to be unhealthy. Being healthy takes focused thought and energy. Help me to realize that healthy habits will have a positive result on all other aspects of family life. Give me wisdom as I seek to instill healthy habits in my family. Help me to lead my family in a healthier lifestyle that will take care of our bodies that You created and that are Your temple. In Jesus' name, Amen.



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10. MAKING MEMORIES

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

"I will make Your name to be remembered in all generations; Therefore the people shall praise You forever and ever" (Psalm 45:17, NKJV).

ICEBREAKER-GROUP DISCUSSION



1. REMEMBER

- Do you recall a time as a child, youth, or adult when you thought you could do something on your own but couldn't? Who helped you?
- Do you recall a very useful piece of parenting advice that has helped you since you received it? What was it?

2. REVIEW

• Chapter 19 of Proverbs includes a series of instructional sayings. Make a list of the principles for parents found in this chapter. Are there any other teachings you find practical for you and your personal experience?

3. REFLECT

• Do you have "counselors," that is, people you trust for counsel and advice? If not, what steps do you need to take to surround yourself with trusted counselors?

OVERVIEW

A family had tried unsuccessfully for years to save enough money to replace their ancient bathroom fixtures with new modern sleek ones. But each year as skiing time rolled around, the bathroom money went for a family skiing trip.

The children are now grown. The son recently wrote to his parents. He talked about the annual skiing trips and the wonderful memories he had of them. His father chuckled as he read the letter. He said to his wife, "Honey, I'm glad we spent the bathroom money for those skiing trips. I can't imagine our son writing home and saying, 'I sure do remember our wonderful bathroom fixtures.'" Our children are with us such a short period of time. What have you done with them lately to build some beautiful memories?

The dictionary defines traditions as "memories, customs, habits, and information handed down from one generation to another over the years, that become timehonored practices." Making memories and creating traditions is a priceless gift to give to your children.

As we look at ways to create positive memories with our children, we will consider the following topics:

- · Why it Matters
- · Practical Ideas to Create Positive Memories



WHY IT MATTERS

Does it really matter? Why is it important to invest in memory building? Let's start with three reasons:

1. Traditions Bring Families Together

• Traditions often are unexpected. Establishing traditions begins with and is the responsibility of the parents. Traditions often begin as magical, miraculous moments. Many events which become lasting traditions are unexpected. We call them "magical, miraculous moments."

One year when our oldest daughter was young, for her birthday we created a treasure hunt of sorts. We bought a few small things (sugar-free chewing gum, a small toy, an apple, etc.), and we hid them throughout the house. Under each item we placed a clue so that she would find the next item. The final item was her birthday gift. We all had fun together going from place to place, finding the different objects. We did that for several years, something she looked forward to. But in her teen years we thought she probably was getting too old and would not care to do that anymore, so we didn't do it. We simply presented her with her birthday present. We could see the dismay and disappointment in her face, so we asked her what was the matter. Almost with tears in her eyes she told us she had been looking forward to the treasure hunt. That simple activity became a tradition of sorts, one that we all still remember as part of her growing years.

• Traditions are often unplanned. They emerge on their own. These moments emerge as families talk with one another, play together, and have decided to love one another in complete acceptance. Traditions will establish themselves if you simply allow yourself to be a part of your family. When you least expect it, a tradition will emerge with a great memory on its heels.

Traditions are usually small in monetary value—but PRICELESS in the emotional value they carry

We are not sure when or how, but in our home we started a food tradition. Every Friday evening we would make and eat Mexican tostadas. We continued that tradition through all the growing years of all our daughters. The first Friday evening our oldest daughter was in a boarding school (Adventist Academy), she called us crying because they didn't have Mexican tostadas for dinner. The food, and the family tradition that goes with it, was very entrenched in her life. But it was not a tradition we planned to begin; it simply developed naturally. One simple meal led to another and soon, it was a family tradition.

2.Traditions Create Positive Memories Which Provide Encouragement and Stability

Traditions are memories of memories. The memories which accompany our traditions can have a powerful impact. As recorded in Psalm 137:1, while the children of Israel were in captivity what was their response regarding their memories?

"By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion" (Psalms 137:1 NRSV).

Traditions are usually small in monetary value—but PRICELESS in the emotional value they carry!

3. Traditions are Cherished and Passed along to Future Generations In the play, "Fiddler On The Roof," at his daughter's wedding, Tevye, (the father) sings a song to his daughter on her wedding day which echoes

traditions and memories that move from one generation to another:

"Is this the little girl I carried? Is this the little boy at play? I don't remember growing older, when did they? Sunrise, sunset, sunrise, sunset, quickly fly the 'years. One season following another, laden with happiness and tears. — SUNRISE, SUNSET"

His words are all about tradition and the sweet memories they bring. Another memorable song from the musical is entitled "Tradition!" A portion of its lyrics include the following words.

"Tradition? The papa, tradition.. .the mama, tradition... the son and the daughter, tradition... a family? Tradition, Tradition, Tradition!"

Think about all of the things that you do today, big or small, that are the result of a memory as a child that you carried with you into your adult life and practice. Perhaps your own childhood memories have become traditions in your home now with your children!

GROUP ACTIVITY

(for family worship at home)

This is an activity for you to do at home with the involvement of every family member. You can plan on sharing your experience with your group members at your next meeting. This is a great activity to do at a family worship this next week.

1. Give each family member a piece of drawing paper.

- 2. Provide a supply of drawing pencils, crayons, and/or markers.
- 3.Ask each member to individually draw a picture that illustrates their favorite family memory.
- 4. Allow plenty of time for this task. Do not rush.
- 5.After every member is finished allow time for each to share their drawing and tell why they chose that memory as a favorite.



PRACTICAL IDEAS TO CREATE POSITIVE MEMORIES

Perhaps you are already doing many things to build some positive memories that will last a lifetime. But, there is always room for improvement. Maybe you can try something new. Here are some practical ideas to build positive memories and traditions:

1. Family Night—Choose one night a week dedicated to family together time. It might include dinner at home or at a favorite restaurant. Allow your children to help make the decision as to what you will do. Turn off the television. Talk, laugh, and play together. Engage in activities that encourage communication with one another. Family night must be a commitment that is honored. Allow nothing to come before it. Remember, on family night the television, iPad, computers, cell phones, and video games are not allowed to be in the room! This night is about quality time together.

We recommend that you play games that are not competitive in nature so a great night of fun does not lead anyone to feel like they have lost or others to gloat that they have won. The "Ungame" is a great game to encourage the sharing of thoughts, feelings, and ideas (available on Amazon). It is one of the best games ever created to teach the art of communication, particularly in learning to listen to each other. You may also put a puzzle together (make sure it is age appropriate), or engage in other games that involve all members of the family and have no losers.

Plan on a simple family meal. It does not have to be a major gourmet production every time. The important thing is that you are spending time together as a family. Time together is more important than the menu. Sometimes a simple meal with pop-corn, soup, sandwiches, or ordering a pizza may be all you need. While you could occasionally watch a family movie, don't make it a practice unless you spend time talking about it afterwards. Simply watching movies does not provide for the interaction that creates and builds memories.

- **2.Date Night**—This is as much for the children as it is for you as a parent. You are modeling a behavior. There are a number of ways that a date night can take place.
 - Date with your Spouse—One of the most important traditions in any family is an established date night for Mom and Dad. It creates a positive picture for the children as they see their parents choose one night a week to be alone together and to focus on their love for each other. Early in our marriage we could only afford to make our own sandwiches and take them to the park to eat or go on a quiet drive, but the goal was intimacy, not extravagance. Parenting demands a great deal of our time so this time with your spouse should not be focused on errands. Rather, it is time to exchange ideas, express feelings, share concerns, and pray together. Remember, the best gift you can give to your children is that of a good marriage.
 - **Time Alone**—If you are a single parent, take some time every week alone to recharge your battery. It does not have to be a long time but even short times away can be a blessing and can renew your energy. Do not feel guilty about taking time for yourself. This will help you be a better parent.

• Father/Daughter or Mother/Son Date—It is also important for parents to take their children out on dates. Fathers should take their daughters and moms should take their sons. If you have more than one child, only take one at a time. A simple, age appropriate date is all that is needed. The important thing is to spend one on one time with your child in communication. Dads, you are modeling how a young man should one day treat your daughter. Pull her chair out for her and open the car door for her. Moms, you are showing your little boy how he should treat his future wife. Be mindful of words used and the common courtesies. This simple date will have lessons that your little ones will take with them into future life as a husband/father and wife/mother.

None of these dates or time away need be expensive. The key is to be intentional about taking time to care for yourself, to care for your marriage, and to spend quality time with your child.

GROUP ACTIVITY Answer the following questions alone and then discuss your responses as a group.

1.If you are married, why do you think it is important to spend time alone as a couple? If you are a single parent, why do you think it is important to spend some time alone?

- 2.What are some of the things that get in the way and stop this from happening?
- 3.What can you do to make sure that time as a couple and time alone happen? If you cannot come up with some viable options, perhaps your group members can help you fill this in.

3. Birthdays—Everyone in the family should feel special on their birthday Always remember that no one likes to have their birthday forgotten! It doesn't cost much money to celebrate that day with great importance and fanfare. The birthday person might get breakfast in bed to begin their day. Be creative. It is a special day loaded with opportunities to make family memories.

Take advantage of modern technology—send them a text message early in the morning, post your feelings on Facebook, send them an eCard. Gifts are

Help! I'm a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World





a way to express your love as well. It is not the cost of the gift that matters as much as the meaning you give it and the time you spend choosing something appropriate for their age and interests.

Ever since our younger daughter began to show an interest for the medical profession, we would search for birthday gifts, through the years, that encouraged her to continue to move in the direction of her dreams. One year we bought her a toy doctor's kit complete with a stethoscope, syringe, and tongue depressor. Today she is a physician and a surgeon in training.

Each of our daughters asked for a birthday meal of their choice. Our oldest daughter preferred strawberry, while our youngest daughter chose chocolate. What that meant was that mom usually baked a cake, or bought ice cream of those flavors for their birthday. As mentioned earlier, we also had a treasure hunt for our oldest daughter. Regardless of where they were living at the time, we always made contact with them, and if possible, we made arrangements to be with them during their birthday as well.

4.Mealtime—What's the most powerful place in your home? The dining room table! Turn off the television and eat together. Do not allow a day to go by without sitting down as a family and eating around the dinner table. The conversation can be electric, hilarious, and invigorating. Some of the family greatest memories may be from those dinner-table conversations.

Do not rob yourselves as a family of this important memory-making opportunity by eating on a plate while watching the television. Sit down as a family and enjoy a meal together with no outside distractions.

Not only are meal times important memorybuilders, but they are also powerful tools to help and even save your children. Much research has shown that your child may be 35% less likely to engage in disordered eating, 24% more likely to eat healthier foods and 12% less likely to be overweight. Kids who ate dinner with their families at least five times per week were the least likely to

FAMILY MEALTIME

Do not rob yourselves as a family of this important memory-making opportunity by eating on a plate while watching the television. Sit down as a family at the table and enjoy a meal together with no outside distractions.

take drugs, feel depressed, or get into trouble (Hammons & Fiese, 2011).

The key of the research is that the family needs to share family meals at least five times per week. At the same time, forcing everybody to enjoy every single meal together seven days a week may not be realistic and may actually be detrimental as it may be too controlling. Make each meal a positive, memorable time together.

5.Your Faith—Spiritual traditions play an important part in the family. Saying grace before meals is one way for a family to connect with each other every day. Daily Scripture reading and prayer times will create wonderful memories. Worshiping together can enhance communication among family members. In addition to attending church together, make it a point for your family to attend special events in your church such as candlelight services, special performances, or special Christmas or Easter services each year. Even attending

weddings or funerals can be powerful memory making events and can build faith.

Your children will carry these memories and traditions with them into their future families. Do not be so hurried that you neglect prayer before a meal or the evening family devotional.

As always, make sure to make family devotional time age appropriate. Younger children need a lot more activities, shorter time, and a lot less reading. As they get older, you can include more stories, sometimes videos, or other activities. Try to make this time not about you, but about your children.

6.Family Vacations—Circle the date on the calendar, get the camera ready, and don't let anything get in the way! Loads of great memories are created from time spent with your family on vacation.

The goal of a good, tradition-building vacation is not how much money you spend or how many miles you log but how much fun you have in the process! Some of our most enjoyable and memorable things we ever did as a family were taking road trips.

A much anticipated family vacation happened a few years ago. We had been saving flying miles on

YOUR FAITH

Spiritual traditions play an important part in the family traditions. Saying grace before meals is one way for a family to connect with each other every day. Daily Scripture reading and prayer times will create wonderful memories. Worshiping together can enhance communication among family members. Your children will carry these memories and traditions with them into their future families. Do not be so hurried that you neglect prayer before a meal or the evening family devotional. Your faith is an important memory that your child will carry throughout their lifetime

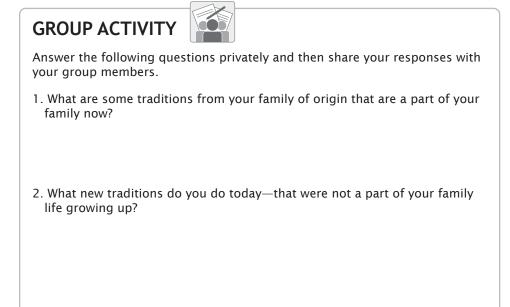
one of our credit cards for years until we finally had enough for four tickets to Spain. We had also saved enough vacation days so that we were able to spend three weeks traveling throughout southern Spain, Portugal, and Gibraltar. Even today, those several years later, we still talk about that trip and sometimes we even sit down to go over all the pictures we took. But not all vacations have to be to a faraway land. Those one-day excursions can be more fun than a day spent at any amusement park. Vacation together and make positive memories and traditions.

Be very careful and guard these dates in your calendar. There are far too many families that never take vacation. Do not let this be something you regret later on not doing. Then it will be too late.

7.Holidays—Holidays are perfect for establishing traditions and making memories. They're the "mother lode" of opportunities. Everyone needs to belong somewhere. Even hardened gang members claim the reason they joined a gang was because they needed to belong. Perhaps the greatest benefit of traditions for your family is to provide members with a way to connect and identify with their family, to be a part of something greater than themselves. Traditions and the accompanying positive memories provide them with hope for tomorrow's memories. Holidays are different around the world and every family celebrates them differently. For me (Claudio), growing up in Colombia, South America, the centerpiece of Christmas was the Christmas manger or crèche, and the presents were distributed on the evening of December 24. For me (Pamela), growing up in Virginia, in the United States, the centerpiece of Christmas was the Christmas tree, and the presents were distributed on the morning of December 25.

National holidays are also great opportunities for families to build memories together. Maybe you can go to a parade, or to a patriotic concert, or maybe to a national museum which may be open during the holidays.

The above suggestions are only a start. Use your imagination. You have already created some great memories that your child will carry with them always. In fact, look at every day as another opportunity to create a positive memory for you and for your child



WRAP UP

Every family celebrates and builds memories in their own unique way. What are your traditions? What are some of your best memories? The point is to establish those positive family memories and traditions. You may live in many different homes. You may move from place to place. Your children grow up. And, yes, we may even lose some of our family members in death until Jesus returns to take us to heaven. But, meanwhile, we have our memories of times spent together as a family. Nothing is as sacred as helping our children create those positive memories and experiences that will point them to Jesus and lead them to heaven!

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the statement below. It speaks of God's handiwork in nature? How can we apply this to creating positive memories with our children?

"Wherever we turn, we hear the voice of God and behold His handiwork. From the solemn roll of the deep-toned thunder and old ocean's ceaseless roar, to the glad songs that make the forests vocal with melody, nature's ten thousand voices speak His praise. In earth and sea and sky, with their marvelous tint and color, varying in gorgeous contrast or blended in harmony, we behold His glory. The everlasting hills tell of His power. The trees that wave their green banners in the sunlight, and the flowers in their delicate beauty, point to their Creator. The living green that carpets the brown earth tells of God's care for the humblest of His creatures. The caves of the sea and the depths of the earth reveal His treasures. He who placed the pearls in the ocean and the amethyst and chrysolite among the rocks is a lover of the beautiful. The sun rising in the heavens is a representative of Him who is the life and light of all that He has made. All the brightness and beauty that adorn the earth and light up the heavens speak of God" (White, 1954, p. 53).

TRY THIS AT HOME

Here are some things to try at home this week:

- 1.We encourage you to add another verse to your "Parenting Bible Promise Project" this week. Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you, as a parent, about the overcoming challenges of parenting that specifically relate to the topic of this chapter. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Place it where you can see it throughout the day. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. Don't throw them away at the week's end. Remember to add it to the other promises in your promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God! And, even though this may be the last chapter in this manual, you can continue the habit of claiming one Bible promises a week as you face the challenges of parenting. That box filled with promises will be a precious reminder that God walks beside you. Whenever you feel overwhelmed, take the box out and read the cards over and claim the promises one by one.
- 2.If you have not yet done so, plan for a date with your child in the next week! Start making memories.
- 3.Make a family scrap book dedicated to "Favorite Family Memories." Let all members of the family contribute to the pages in the scrap book. It can include a combination of photographs, drawings, ticket stubs etc. This memory-filled book can occupy a special place in your home and can grow over the years as memories are added to it. In fact, as the years pass you may find that volumes are added to your collection of memories.



A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

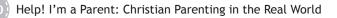
Dear Lord, in the busyness of parenting please help me to stop and take the time to build positive memories with my children. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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HELP! I'M A PARENT WEBSITE HELP! I'M A PARENT FACEBOOK PAGE Visit our parenting website to Like us on our Facebook submit questions, find additional page: "Help! I'm a Parent" resources, follow a blog, sign up for a free parenting e-newsletter, New materials are posted and more: www.HelpImAParent.org on a regular basis.



A FINAL WORD FROM THE AUTHORS

We have come to the end of this guide but certainly not to an end of your parenting journey. It has been our desire that this series of parenting guides would grow with your child and would travel with you on your parenting journey. Each book is written to be specific to the challenges that children of that defined age brings and is written based on the needs expressed by parents who have children of the corresponding age.

In the first edition of the series "Help! I'm a Parent: Christian parenting in the Real World," we concentrated on parenting children ages birth to seven years of age, the foundational ages in the life of a child.

We conducted a second survey in North America and parents, again, told us what they needed to know to guide their children through the pre-teen transitional years—children ages eight to twelve. This is the book that you now hold in your hands.

There is still yet another edition that will follow this one. It will focus on the teenage years—ages thirteen to eighteen. Please keep an eye out for its release.

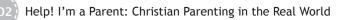
If you don't have the first installment of this series, you may obtain it at www.adventsource.org. Remember you can also receive daily encouragement by visiting our Facebook page and group, "Help, I'm a Parent." We also post additional resources and information on our website, www.helpimaparent.org. Visit it regularly to continue to receive up to date research, information, and resources.

Parenting is a great adventure and a wonderful journey. It can also be scary, frustrating, and discouraging at times. What a joy and privilege we have been given, to be God's stewards of His and our children's lives! At the same time, what an awesome responsibility! We can have the assurance that we're not alone in this lifelong task. . . God is with us, besides us, all along the way. Commit yourself and your children to Him, and remember that "the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6, NET)

May God continue to bless you and guide you until He completes His work of shaping you and your children into full disciples of Jesus Christ.

Yours because of Him,

Drs. Claudio and Pamela Consuegra



What if someone gave you a block of the finest marble with the task of creating a masterpiece that would be displayed for the entire world to see?

Parenting is like that, except that instead of a block of marble we are given the delicate life of a child to shape and mold so they can become lifetime disciples of Jesus Christ. What an awesome task and responsibility! Where do you begin? When you face this momentous mission of building and molding a child of God, do you feel like screaming, "Help! I'm a parent"?

The good news is that the principles of parenting in Scripture are timeless and still relevant to parents today. *Help! I'm a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World* is founded on those principles and aimed at parents with children ages eight to 12. It covers topics including homework, peer pressure and bullying, puberty and purity, screening screen time, healthy habits, spiritual growth, and more.

This resource can be utilized in a variety of settings including parents in their home, a large church group, prayer meeting, a Sabbath School class, a Home and School meeting, or a small group. In addition, the principles discussed are applicable to a variety of family make-ups including single parents, blended families, foster parents, divorced couples who are co-parenting, and grandparents raising their grandchildren.

Journey with authors Pamela and Claudio Consuegra as they explore the Godgiven role of parenting. You will be motivated to take up this exciting challenge and experience the blessings of parenthood.

Advent Source

» For more parenting resources visit *www.HelpImAParent.org*.



Adventist *Family* Ministries



