

STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY



RESOURCE GUIDE
FOR PARENTS

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“PRAY IN YOUR FAMILIES UNTO THE FATHER,
ALWAYS IN MY NAME,
THAT YOUR [FAMILIES] MAY BE BLESSED.”

3 NEPHI 18:21





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THE FAMILY

A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD

THE FIRST PRESIDENCY AND COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

WE, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

IN THE PREMORTAL REALM, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

WE DECLARE the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan.

HUSBAND AND **WIFE** have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. "Children are an heritage of the Lord" (Psalms 127:3). Parents have a

sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

THE FAMILY is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

WE WARN that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

WE CALL UPON responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

This proclamation was read by President Gordon B. Hinckley as part of his message at the General Relief Society Meeting held September 23, 1995, in Salt Lake City, Utah.

- **Balance.** You may speak as often as time allows as long as you give other group members an equal opportunity.
- **Patience and kindness.** As you learn and integrate new skills, be patient and kind to your spouse, your children, and yourself.
- **Encouragement.** Encourage other participants in the class, and encourage your spouse as you work together to strengthen your family.
- **Forgiveness.** Everyone makes mistakes, even after being taught new ways of doing things. Learn to forgive yourself and others.

You are invited to share your experiences in class, but you should not bring up sensitive personal matters that require individualized ecclesiastical or professional assistance. Be careful not to embarrass your spouse, children, or others. If you need individual help, consult with your bishop or branch president. You may also call LDS Family Services for a referral to a professional counselor.

Applying Doctrines and Principles

You will progress as you apply the principles you learn in this course. President Harold B. Lee observed, “We never really know anything of the teachings of the gospel until we have experienced the blessings that come from living each principle.”²

The more you practice new skills, the better you will be at applying them when appropriate situations arise. Continually seek to increase your understanding of gospel doctrines and principles about parenting children. The Lord will bless you in this righteous endeavor.

PROMISES TO PARENTS

As you learn the parenting principles and skills in this document, keep in mind the promises to families who hold regular family home evenings, family prayer, and scripture study.

Family Home Evening

When introducing the weekly home evening program in 1915, the First Presidency of the Church promised: “If the Saints obey this counsel, we promise that great blessings will result. Love at home and obedience to parents will increase. Faith will be developed in the hearts of the youth of Israel, and they will gain power to combat the evil influences and temptations which beset them.”³

Family Prayer

About the scriptural instruction from the Lord regarding family prayer, President James E. Faust of the First Presidency observed: “‘Pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed’ (3 Nephi 18:21). In our day, the Church urges us to have family prayer every night and every morning. . . . Miraculous things happen when families pray together.”⁴

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught the importance of family prayer: “I know of nothing that will ease family tensions, that in a subtle way will bring about the respect for parents which leads to obedience, that will affect the spirit of repentance which will largely erase the blight of broken homes, than will praying together, confessing weaknesses together before the Lord, and invoking the blessings of the Lord upon the home and those who dwell there.”⁵

Family Scripture Study

President Marion G. Romney of the First Presidency taught that great strength and blessings will come to those families that study the scriptures together: “I am persuaded by my own experience and that of my loved ones, as well as by the statements of the Prophet Joseph Smith, that one can get and keep closer to the Lord by reading the Book of Mormon than by reading any other book. Don’t be content with what someone else tells you about what is in it. Drink deeply from the divine fountain itself.

“I feel certain that if, in our homes, parents will read from the Book of Mormon prayerfully and regularly, both by themselves and with their children, the spirit of that great book will come to permeate our homes and all who dwell therein. The spirit of reverence will increase; mutual respect and consideration for each other will grow. The spirit of contention will depart. Parents will counsel their children in greater love and wisdom. Children will be more responsive and submissive to the counsel of their parents. Righteousness will increase. Faith, hope, and charity—the pure love of Christ—will abound in our homes and lives, bringing in their wake peace, joy, and happiness.”⁶

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 69.
2. *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 215.
3. “Editors’ Table: Home Evening,” *Improvement Era*, June 1915, 734.
4. In Conference Report, Apr. 2002, 69; or *Ensign*, May 2002, 60–61.
5. In Conference Report, Apr. 1963, 128; or *Improvement Era*, June 1963, 531.
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 1980, 90; or *Ensign*, May 1980, 67.



“PARENTS HAVE A SACRED DUTY TO REAR THEIR CHILDREN IN LOVE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS, . . . TO TEACH THEM TO LOVE AND SERVE ONE ANOTHER.”

“THE FAMILY: A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD”



as such, each has a divine nature and destiny." They also taught: "'Children are an heritage of the Lord' (Psalms 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens. . . . Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations."⁴

While environmental and biological factors may influence child development, each child of God has agency. Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve observed: "Of course our genes, circumstances, and environments matter very much, and they shape us significantly. Yet there remains an inner zone in which we are sovereign unless we abdicate. In this zone lies the essence of our individuality and our personal accountability."⁵

Differences in children may require a variety of responses in parents, so parents must be wise in how they respond to their children. President Brigham Young encouraged parents to "study their [children's] dispositions and their temperaments, and deal with them accordingly."⁶

THE AUTHORITATIVE APPROACH TO PARENTING

The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve gave nine divinely inspired principles to guide fathers and mothers in their parenting responsibilities: "Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities."⁷ These principles provide a foundation for parental influence that will help children return to live with Heavenly Father.

The greatest of these principles is love (see Matthew 22:36–40). The single most important thing you can do for your children is to love them in a Christlike manner. When your children feel and know of your love, they are more likely to listen to your teachings, follow your example, and accept discipline from you. Love should motivate and guide all your involvement with them. Listening without love will be perceived as disinterest. Discipline without love will be looked upon as unrighteous dominion. Teaching without love may fall on deaf ears. Family life without love will starve the spirits of children and lead to unhappiness and relationship problems.

The parenting principles taught in this course are consistent with the scriptures and closely resemble those of a parenting style called *authoritative*. This style differs greatly from approaches that are *authoritarian* (controlling, dictatorial, lacking in warmth and love) or *permissive* (little or no control, little guidance and teaching).

Authoritative parents have high expectations for their children, and they also show a high degree of warmth and responsiveness. They are loving and supportive. As they guide their children, they generally "encourage verbal give and take and share with their children the reasoning behind their policies. . . . They exert firm control at points of parent-child divergence but do not hem their children in with restrictions. . . . [They] guide their children's activities . . . and require them to . . . [help] with household tasks. They willingly confront their children in order to obtain conformity, state their values clearly, and expect their children to respect their norms." Children raised in this manner are more likely to be socially confident, friendly, self-disciplined, cooperative, and achievement oriented.⁸

THE POWER OF COVENANTS

You are not alone in your efforts to save your children. Heavenly Father has provided sacred covenants by which His children can receive blessings. When you enter the covenant of eternal marriage and abide by its terms, Heavenly Father promises you eternal life (see D&C 132:20). Brigham Young taught that children who are born in the marriage covenant become “legal heirs to the Kingdom and to all its blessings and promises.”⁹ Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Joseph Fielding Smith all taught that added blessings come to children whose parents are sealed in the temple marriage covenant. These blessings help children return to Heavenly Father, where they remain eternally bound to their righteous parents.¹⁰

MEASURING PARENTING SUCCESS

Some parents look for indicators of how well they are doing as parents. President Howard W. Hunter gave this direction: “A successful parent is one who has loved, one who has sacrificed, and one who has cared for, taught, and ministered to the needs of a child. If you have done all of these and your child is still wayward or troublesome or worldly, it could well be that you are, nevertheless, a successful parent. Perhaps there are children who have come into the world that would challenge any set of parents under any set of circumstances. Likewise, perhaps there are others who would bless the lives of, and be a joy to, almost any father or mother.”¹¹

PRACTICE

Review the nine parenting principles from the family proclamation, and identify one that you can work on to strengthen your family. Set goals that are identifiable and measurable. Once you have successfully implemented your plan, choose another principle to work on.

ADDITIONAL STUDY

Study the following, and consider how they apply to your family.

“The Family: A Proclamation to the World” D&C 121:41–44

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 69.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 74–75; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 54.
3. See Craig Hart and others, “Proclamation-Based Principles of Parenting and Supportive Scholarship,” in *Strengthening Our Families: An In-Depth Look at the Proclamation on the Family*, ed. David C. Dolahite (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2000), 101–3.
4. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
5. In Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 26; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 21.
6. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 207.
7. “The Family: A Proclamation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
8. Diana Baumrind, “Rearing Competent Children,” in *Child Development Today and Tomorrow*, ed. William Damon (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1989), 351–54; quotations from 353–54.
9. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 195.
10. See Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 110; *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 208; *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1954–56), 2:90.
11. In Conference Report, Oct. 1983, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, 65.



GRADUAL PROGRESS IS ESSENTIAL
TO HEALTHY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT.
AS A PARENT, YOU CAN HELP BY PROVIDING
A SECURE, NURTURING ENVIRONMENT.





UNDERSTANDING CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Some children develop problems because their parents have inappropriate and unreasonable expectations of them. Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of Twelve declared that “a tutoring God may require difficult things of His children” but He “would never command His children to do difficult things, except [He] first prepares the way (see 1 Nephi 3:7).”¹ Heavenly Father does not expect impossible things from His children; mortal parents should not expect the impossible from them either.

Is it possible that you expect too much or too little of your children?

What developmental information might help you rear your children successfully?

PACED PROGRESS

Scriptures suggest an orderly progression in life, including physical and spiritual development. John bore record that Jesus Christ “received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness” (D&C 93:13). Gradual progress is essential to healthy child development. As a parent, you can help by providing a secure, nurturing environment in which your children can learn and progress.

Readiness is a key concept to keep in mind as your children grow and develop. You will prevent many problems if you allow them to acquire skills at their own pace. Try to adapt to each child’s needs rather than to make the child adjust to your expectations.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

Social-emotional development may be seen as a series of stages that occur around certain ages. You will be more effective if you understand them. Do not be concerned if your children do not match these general descriptions exactly. Children have unique personalities and develop at different rates.²

Learning to Trust (Infancy)

When you recognize and lovingly respond to your newborn baby’s cues for hunger and distress, your baby learns to trust you and develops confidence that you will respond to his or her needs in the future. Your baby will form an attachment to you and will feel secure in his or her environment. Your love for the child will also grow.

When parents fail to respond to a child’s needs, the child feels insecure and anxious and has difficulty learning to trust others.



Developing Independence (Ages 1 to 3)

The term “terrible twos” is often used to characterize the vigorous exertions of children to be independent. (Independent behavior often does not begin until about age two.) At this time children begin to learn self-control, including bowel and bladder functioning, and how to cope with the world. In this stage, children learn to run, feed themselves, drink from a cup, pull toys, open doors, climb on furniture, and wash and dry hands. By age two, they are often quite rigid and demanding and have difficulty adapting or waiting for what they want. Most go through this stage no matter how they are raised.

You can help by being patient, by allowing your child to act independently within acceptable limits, and by giving choices (see session 8) as a way of preventing power struggles. Recognize that the phase is temporary but significant for your child. With help and understanding, your child can gain a sense of self-control that can lead to a lasting sense of self-respect and good will.

Organize your house so children can run and explore without hurting themselves or damaging anything. Enjoy them, spend time with them, teach them how to play with others, and read to them at bedtime. Be firm but loving when disciplining them. Saying “no” should not require an explanation. “Because I said so” is usually sufficient for children at this stage.

These early formative years are an ideal time to begin spiritual instruction because children are eager to learn.

Channeling Initiative (Ages 3 to 6)

During these years, children have a surplus of energy and try to learn and master tasks that will bring a sense of competence and connection to their world. Childhood fantasies are often exaggerated, involving themes of power and aggression, and may result in the child feeling bad. When positive outlets are unavailable, the child may feel powerless, unhappy, and anxious.

By age four, most children can hop, stand on one foot, ride a tricycle, kick a ball, and go up and down stairs unassisted. They begin to play cooperatively, ask many

questions, and engage in fantasy play. They sometimes break rules and defy parents but are often surprisingly responsive when given latitude.

By age six, most can ride a bike, tie their shoes, bounce and bat a ball, and count to 100. Many are emotional at this age, expressing variations of love and resentment. They tend to take center stage but lack a secure sense of who they are. They like to get their way. They can be rude and argumentative when told to do something.

You can help by being patient and loving, using firmness while allowing children to test themselves within clearly defined boundaries. Set up rules to provide structure for watching television, doing chores, completing homework, and going to bed.

Use choices and consequences for behavior problems. Spend time with children, read to them, and take an interest in their activities at home and school. Arrange time for them to explore, run outdoors, and play with others.

Learning to Be Industrious (Ages 6 to 12)

This stage begins when the child enters school and continues to the onset of puberty. The child feels pleasure and develops confidence through learning, getting good grades, and developing skills. The child enters the social culture and feels acceptable and productive when able to compare favorably with others. When the child does not compare favorably, he or she often feels inferior. The outcome of this phase is significant. Those who become industrious often greet life's challenges with optimism. Those who do not become industrious sometimes withdraw into self-defeating behavior patterns.

By age eight, children have a basic sense of right and wrong. They can usually write, and they often have a sense of humor. They are usually very active and social and have a best friend. They want to "take on the world."

By age 10, preadolescence begins. These children tend to be calm, compliant, and easy to get along with. They are often social, cooperative, and industrious and helpful at home. They value their parents and the opinions of their friends. They enjoy group activities at church and school. By age 12, many girls begin puberty. Overall, these children get along well at home and school, but many experience emotional and behavioral roller coasters, bouncing from childhood to adolescence and back again, being responsible and irresponsible, testing rules and depending on them. Appearance becomes important. Friendships may change abruptly.

You can help your children foster an interest in achievement when you take an interest in their activities and give recognition for jobs well done. Join with them in projects and activities, and help them succeed. Take time to listen, to help them solve problems, and to teach them how to resolve conflicts. Attend the events in which they participate. Involve them in establishing family rules, expectations, limits, and consequences. Give them increasing work responsibilities. Limit television watching. Get to know their friends, and encourage them to invite their friends to your home. Do not criticize their friends.

Seeking Independence and a Sense of Identity (Ages 12 to 18)

With the onset of puberty, children's bodies change rapidly. Sexual feelings surface. These children want to become equal to and independent from others, particularly their parents.

By age 14, most children are insecure about themselves, their bodies, and their acceptability. They tend to be idealistic, impulsive, and intense, wanting everything

now. They are often self-centered, moody, and argumentative, having more conflict with their parents, whom they see as old-fashioned. Many don't like to be seen with their parents in public.

By age 16, most girls have gone through puberty, and many boys are well on their way. They tend to be more secure in their identity but are still sorting through values and beliefs, seeking a clearer sense of self. They are sensitive to social norms and peer groups. They may still continue to test rules and question authority.

Parents sometimes feel threatened as their teens strive for independence. Instead of feeling threatened, try to feel grateful for your teenagers' desire to become self-reliant. Relinquish control gradually, allowing your teenagers progressively to manage their lives. Use limits and consequences when behavior is unacceptable. Encourage your children to think for themselves. Make an effort to accept their traits without becoming defensive or rejecting. Remain calm and consistent when confronted with their emotional intensity.

Be available to listen and help when your children are willing to talk, offering suggestions to help them regulate their lives. Pay attention to sadness and depression they might experience. Listen to their struggles and challenges. Teach them ways to deal with peer pressure. Don't be offended if they do not want to be around you. Expect compliance with family rules. Choose battles wisely, and impose consequences when needed. Don't expect perfection.

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve taught: "In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters . . . accepted [God's] plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life."³ For most people, this progress includes the stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. As parents, you can help your children through these stages, preparing them for the challenges of life. Realistic expectations and paced progress should be guiding principles in this process. Get to know your children, and treasure them as unique individuals. Show them the love that Father in Heaven extends to all of us.

PRACTICE

Review the developmental principles and determine how you can apply them to help your children reach their potential. Consider age-appropriate activities such as reading stories, playing with them, showing interest in what they do, providing learning opportunities, working with them, and establishing boundaries. Take advantage of teaching moments.

ADDITIONAL STUDY

Study these scriptures, and consider how they apply to your family.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Mosiah 4:27

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Oct. 1999, 6; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 7.
2. Some information in this section is adapted from Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963), 247–63; Frances L. Ilg, and others, *Child Behavior* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 12–46; and Louise Bates Ames, and others, *Your Ten-to-Fourteen-Year-Old* (New York: Dell, 1988), 21–180, 318–23.
3. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.



WORDS AND BEHAVIOR HAVE THE POWER TO HURT
OR TO HELP, TO INFLICT PAIN AND SUFFERING OR
TO SOOTHE PAINFUL FEELINGS, TO PROVOKE DOUBT
AND FEAR OR TO INSTILL FAITH AND COURAGE.



nature. The phrase, 'born again,' has a deeper significance than many people attach to it."² As you follow the teachings of Christ, you will overcome any ineffective or harmful communication practices you might have.

As you acquire godly attributes over time, you can manage feelings and behavior better. You will be more apt to respond appropriately when children are disrespectful and unruly, and in your interactions with your children you will show love.

IMPROVING FAMILY COMMUNICATION

Communication problems develop over time. It is often difficult to determine when problems began and who started them, and it usually does more harm than good to place blame. Here are some principles for improving communication:

Return Good for Evil

An effective way to break destructive patterns of communication is to follow Jesus's example of returning good for evil. Speak in an even tone of voice when being yelled at; talk respectfully if your child is disrespectful; be reasonable even when your child is unreasonable; lovingly provide consequences when your child violates family rules (see session 9).

Look for the Good in Your Children

Pay attention to your children, particularly when they behave appropriately. Attention is a powerful reinforcer. If you listen and talk with them during the good times, you will encourage healthy behavior. Your children will likely repeat the behaviors that capture your attention.

Ignore obnoxious, inappropriate behavior when it is harmless. When behavior is offensive and inappropriate, impose a consequence that prevents the child from receiving undue attention (see session 9).

Listen to Your Children

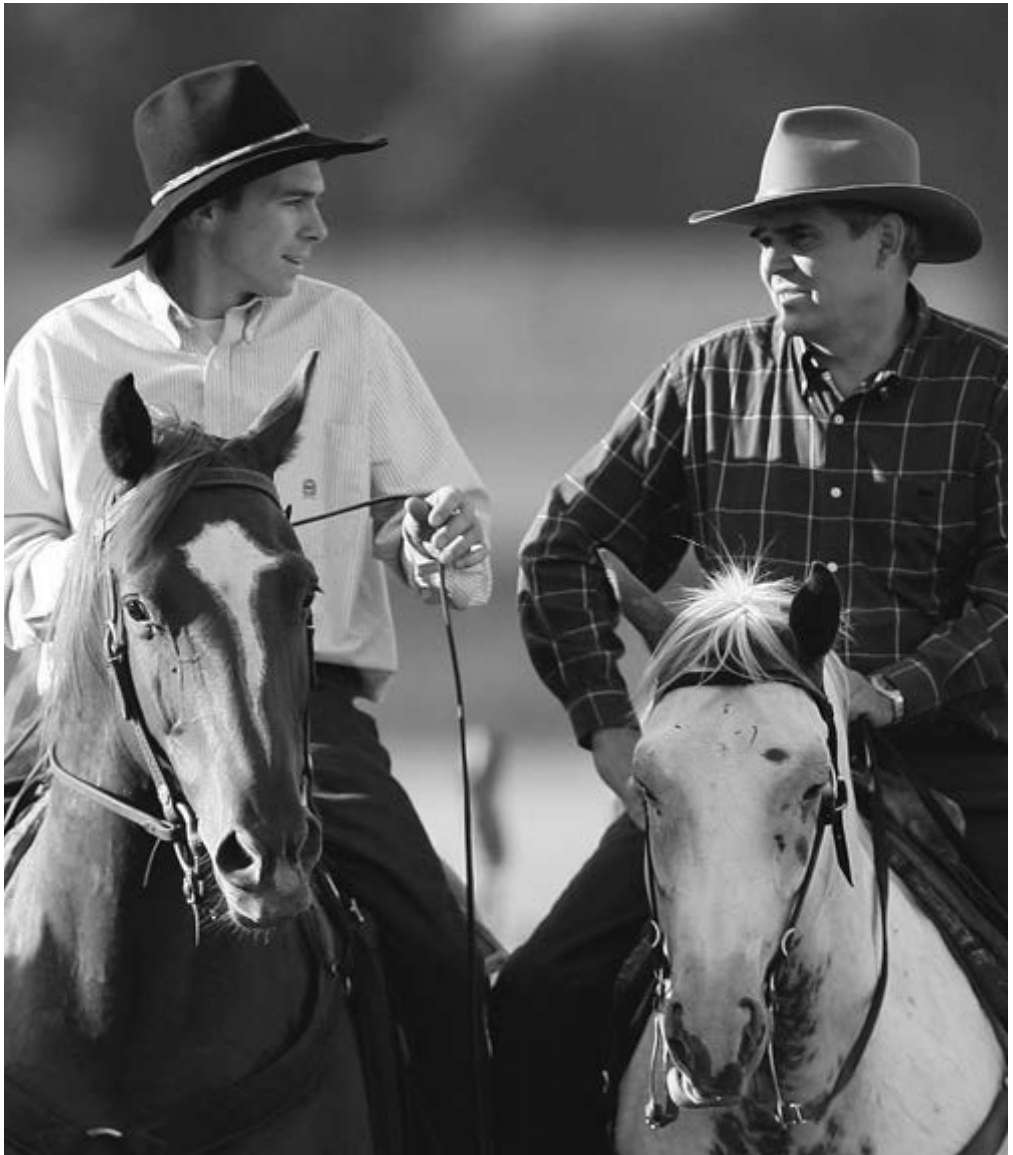
Children usually behave appropriately when they feel valued and respected. You can help your children feel valued and respected by listening to them and accepting their feelings. Sometimes your children have feelings that you may not like. However, undesirable feelings often change when children are allowed to talk about them. Listening suggestions include:

Show interest and a willingness to listen. Sit down and pay attention to your child. If your words express interest but your actions show disinterest or impatience, the child will believe your body language.

Ask questions that invite your child to talk. For example, you may say, "It looks like something is troubling you. Want to tell me about it?" "How do you see it?" "Tell me more."

Identify and name the child's feelings. Your children will feel comforted when you can identify and name their feelings. They know that someone else understands. You could say, "It hurt when John didn't invite you to his party, didn't it."

Listen actively by paraphrasing what you hear. Listen carefully without interrupting. During pauses in the conversation, restate what you understand your child is saying and feeling. Let your child correct your understanding. Be respectful and empathetic. Do not distort or add to your child's message.



Respond Nondefensively When Your Child Is Upset at You

Elder H. Burke Peterson of the Seventy advised, "You can listen to understand, not necessarily to agree."³ If something about what your child says is true, acknowledge the truth rather than defend yourself. Angry feelings often go away when the child can talk about them.

Share Your Feelings Appropriately When You Are Upset

Parents often make their greatest errors when they are angry. Words of anger can inflict wounds that are slow to heal. Inappropriate expressions of anger often contain the word *you* and have been called "you" statements. For example: "Can't *you* do anything right?" Such statements often belittle and condemn, and they provoke defensiveness in the child.

A more appropriate approach is to share how the child's behavior affects you: "I feel frustrated when assigned jobs are not done." These statements focus on the issue without demeaning the child. They have been called "I" statements because they contain the word *I*. They invite a better response from the child. Children who are treated with respect often want to behave in respectful ways.

Clarify Your Expectations

Parents are often amazed to discover that their children do not have a clear idea of what is expected of them. In addition to sending an “I” statement when frustrated, you should send a clarifying message as to what you want. For example: “I feel taken advantage of when I take you places and never receive any thanks for it. It’s always appropriate to say ‘thanks’ when someone does something for you. I need to hear it, and others do too. Will you please thank people when they do things for you?”

Resolve Problems that Impair Your Ability to Listen

Some parents have unhealthy and unrealistic attitudes and ideas that interfere with listening, such as the following:

- Feeling responsible to solve all the problems their children face.
- Feeling responsible to rear successful children rather than focusing on being a successful parent.
- Wanting to control their children.
- Being overly detached and permissive, allowing children a great amount of freedom without providing supervision, guidelines, and boundaries.
- Fearing failure and public humiliation.
- Believing they (the parents) are always right.
- Needing to feel loved by children and fearing rejection by them.

If you need help with these or other similar problems, counsel with your spouse, fast and pray for guidance, attend the temple, and, as needed, counsel with your bishop and ask about getting professional help.

THE POWER OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The Apostle Paul urged, “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity” (1 Timothy 4:12). In his letter to the Philippians, he also taught, “Let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27). Words and behavior have the power to hurt or to help, to inflict pain and suffering or to soothe the painful feelings, to provoke doubt and fear or to instill faith and courage. As you master the way you communicate, you can exert a tremendously positive influence on your children.

PRACTICE

Choose one of the principles for improving communication. Make a plan to work on it until you begin to master it. Then choose another principle, and work on it.

ADDITIONAL STUDY

Study these scriptures, and consider how they apply to your family.

Proverbs 15:1 Matthew 15:18 James 3:2 3 Nephi 27:27

NOTES

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1962, 7; or *Improvement Era*, June 1962, 405.
3. In Conference Report, Apr. 1990, 107; or *Ensign*, May 1990, 84.



**“TAKE CARE OF YOUR LITTLE ONES,
WELCOME THEM INTO YOUR HOMES AND NURTURE
AND LOVE THEM WITH ALL OF YOUR HEARTS.”**

PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY



nurtured children learned to understand and handle their feelings better, to get along with others, and to solve problems in appropriate ways. They also had better physical health, higher academic scores, better relationships with friends, fewer behavioral problems, more positive feelings, and better emotional health.³ Gottman’s five-step emotion-coaching process⁴ is summarized below.

Step 1: Be Aware of the Child’s Emotions

The successful parents were able to recognize and appropriately respond to the feelings of their children. Feelings are an integral, important part of life. Parents who recognize and accept their own feelings find it easier to recognize and accept their children’s feelings. Children who see their parents handle difficult feelings often learn to manage their own emotions.

Children often provide clues when something bothers them. For instance, they may exhibit behavior problems, have a change in appetite, withdraw, perform poorly in school, or have a sad countenance.

If you are able to recognize when your child is troubled and you feel deep concern for him or her, you are experiencing empathy. The ability to empathize will increase your effectiveness in nurturing your son or daughter.

Step 2: Recognize Emotion as an Opportunity for Closeness

Sometimes parents avoid talking with a child when he or she is upset, perhaps fearing rejection or fearing they have somehow failed the child. Many parents hope that their children’s troubling emotions will go away. Often, these emotions do not go away without some kind of help. Look at your children’s troubling emotions as opportunities for bonding and growth. Helping soothe a child’s troubled feelings is one of the most satisfying things you can do as a parent. Children feel understood and comforted when kind and loving parents acknowledge and understand their feelings.

Step 3: Listen Empathically and Validate Your Child’s Feelings

As your child discloses emotions to you, restate in your own words your understanding of what is being said, using the listening skills taught in session 3. For example, you could say, “You’re feeling sad that your friend moved away.” When you have questions about what your child is saying or feeling, ask for clarification. However, probing questions may cause the child to become defensive and to stop talking. Simple observations often work better. For example, you might say, “I noticed that when you started talking about grades, you seemed to become tense.” Wait and allow your child to continue. Children are more likely to keep talking when they feel a sense of control over the conversation and have a noncritical, empathic listener.

Step 4: Help Your Child Identify and Name Emotions

Sometimes parents mistakenly assume their children have words to describe what they feel inside. However, children do not always have a vocabulary for their emotions. Parents who provide words for their children help them transform vague, undefined, uncomfortable feelings into descriptive words such as “sad,” “angry,” “frustrated,” “afraid,” “worried,” “tense,” and so on. Children begin to feel a sense of control over their emotions as they learn words to describe them.

Children who lack a vocabulary of feeling words sometimes act out their feelings or find inappropriate words such as “shut up,” “leave me alone,” or worse. The best time to teach feeling words is when children experience emotion. Some studies show that

identifying and naming emotions “can have a soothing effect on the nervous system, helping children to recover more quickly from upsetting incidents.”⁵

Step 5: Set Limits While Helping the Child Learn to Solve Problems

A child’s sense of control increases as parents help the child learn to deal with unpleasant feelings. A child must learn to deal with troubling thoughts and feelings in appropriate and emotionally healthy ways. You may need to set limits on inappropriate behavior while helping the child work out problems. Identify the cause of the problem so a solution can be found. Ask questions such as “What is causing you to feel this way?” Don’t allow the child to blame others when it is apparent others are not to blame.

Once the cause has been identified, you can ask, “What do you think will solve the problem?” Listen carefully to the child’s answers. Offer some tentative solutions of your own to help your child consider other possibilities. You will need to take the lead with younger children. You may find it helpful to brainstorm solutions with older children. Express confidence in the child’s ability to identify an appropriate solution. Allow the child to take as much responsibility as possible, helping the child grow from dependence to self-reliance. As much as possible, help your children resolve their own problems, frustrations, boredom, and failures, with you acting as a teacher and leader as needed.

THE ETERNAL VALUE OF NURTURING

Your children will respond favorably as you nurture them with love, kindness, and sensitivity. The nurturing process should begin early and continue throughout each child’s life in ways that are appropriate for his or her needs.

President Gordon B. Hinckley stressed the need to work in harmony with Heavenly Father in loving and nurturing children: “Never forget that these little ones are the sons and daughters of God and that yours is a custodial relationship to them, that He was a parent before you were parents and that He has not relinquished His parental rights or interest in these His little ones.”⁶

PRACTICE

Role-play with your spouse or another parent the five-step nurturing process. One of you can take the role of child while the other acts as the parent. Practice for 5 to 10 minutes; then switch roles. During the week, try the five-step process with your children, as needed.

ADDITIONAL STUDY

Study these scriptures, and consider how they apply to your family.

Ephesians 6:4 Enos 1:1 Mosiah 4:14–16 D&C 81:5

NOTES

1. Salt Lake University 3rd Stake conference, Nov. 3, 1996; in *Church News*, Mar. 1, 1997, 2.
2. In *Church News*, Feb. 3, 1996, 2.
3. From *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* by John Gottman, Ph.D., with Joan DeClaire, foreword by Daniel Goleman. Copyright © 1997 by John Gottman. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster, Inc., NY. Pages 16–17.
4. *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, 76–109.
5. *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, 100.
6. In *Church News*, Mar. 1, 1997, 2.



CHILDREN VIEW THEMSELVES BY HOW THEY ARE TREATED BY OTHERS, ESPECIALLY PARENTS AND SIBLINGS. WHEN THEY ARE LOVED AND ACCEPTED, THEY TEND TO FEEL LOVABLE AND ACCEPTABLE.



Jesus Christ effectively influenced others because he wisely chose the way He responded to them (see John 8:11). Church leaders and professionals are often able to help troubled individuals by listening without reacting, giving direction without preaching, and conveying love and support without rejecting. You too can convey love and respect, even when your children disobey.

Look for your children's good qualities. Tell them that you love and appreciate them. Never say anything negative about them. Wisely impose consequences when they are disobedient. (Other sessions in this book focus on expressing love, listening, sharing expectations, offering choices, and imposing consequences in an appropriate way.)

Help Children Gain Faith in God

Children gain great confidence when they feel secure in their relationship with Heavenly Father and their ability to receive spiritual blessings, promises, and direction for their lives. Jesus Christ taught, "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). Without faith, no one can have confidence. Confidence also comes from living a clean, virtuous life. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord declared, "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God" (D&C 121:45).

To help your children develop confidence in the Lord, you should strive to live a faithful, virtuous life, demonstrating your own faith. Your children learn best when you live an exemplary life. You should "bring up your children in light and truth" (D&C 93:40), making spiritual activities a part of everyday life (family prayer, scripture study, gospel discussion, and Church participation).

Help Children Develop Personal Integrity

Children have been given the light of Christ (see John 1:9; Moroni 7:16; D&C 93:2) and are able to discern right from wrong. As children listen to their conscience and follow their own best judgment, they become less vulnerable to others and more confident in themselves and their ability to make good decisions. While children must be taught to heed the wise counsel of parents and Church leaders, they must also learn to think for themselves and develop confidence in their own ability to manage their lives. This ability grows as children mature, as they gain experience, and as they learn to follow the light of Christ by making correct choices. Parents can encourage growth by helping their children learn to evaluate their own thoughts and actions.

When your child approaches you with a problem, encourage him or her, at a level the child understands, to consider personal convictions about the matter. Ask appropriate questions, such as "How do you feel about it?" "Do you approve of the way that you've handled the problem?" "You've told me what your friends think is right, but I'm interested in what you think." "What is the proper thing to do?"

When you ask children to evaluate their behavior, you should do it in a calm, nonaccusing, noncondemning way. If you sound harsh or judgmental, your child is more likely to focus on your reaction rather than on personal feelings.

Help Children Develop Competence

When parents have high but realistic expectations, their children tend to develop confidence that they can do things successfully. This confidence especially comes when parents provide a loving, supportive environment in which children can learn through trial and error without being demeaned or condemned for failure. Children readily learn from setbacks when they feel love, support, and encouragement to try again.

Help your children develop competence in areas that are important for their future. Children must learn to work, study, achieve goals, live within rules, and get along with others. As they become competent in those areas, their confidence grows. Teach them to work by working alongside them, especially when they are young. Be pleasant and patient. Try to make the work enjoyable for them. Encourage your children in activities in which they can succeed. Help them develop talents and natural abilities. Don't make them pursue activities merely to fulfill your ambitions for them, particularly when the activities are not essential to their well-being. They will become frustrated and so will you.

Recognize your children's accomplishments. Praise them when they do something good and noteworthy. When giving compliments, be brief and genuine. Focus on their behavior and how it affects you, rather than on praising them. For example, a parent might say to a child who brought home a good report card, "It means a lot to me when I see you are doing such good work in school. I'm very pleased with you." Saying to the child, "You're such a good boy," may sound phony and unbelievable, especially if the child doesn't feel like a good person.

Involve Children in Serving Others

Service projects teach unselfishness and help children to consider the welfare of others. President Spencer W. Kimball taught the value of service:

"In the midst of the miracle of serving, there is the promise of Jesus, that by losing ourselves, we find ourselves!

"Not only do we 'find' ourselves in terms of acknowledging guidance in our lives, but the more we serve our fellowmen in appropriate ways, the more substance there is to our soul. We become more significant individuals as we serve others. We become more substantive as we serve others—indeed, it is easier to find ourselves because there is more of us to find."¹

CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD

Children will gain confidence as they develop faith, virtue, integrity, and competence. As parents, you play an important role in helping your children develop in each of those areas. It is best to begin while your children are young.

Regarding faith in the Lord, President Ezra Taft Benson stated: "My message and testimony is this: Only Jesus Christ is uniquely qualified to provide that hope, that confidence, and that strength to overcome the world and rise above our human failings. To do that, we must place our faith in Him and live by His laws and teachings."²

PRACTICE

Choose one of the principles for helping children develop greater confidence, and apply it in your family. When you begin to master it, select the next most important area to work on.

ADDITIONAL STUDY

Study these scriptures, and consider how they apply to your family.

Alma 53:20–21

Alma 56:41–48

NOTES

1. "There Is Purpose in Life," *New Era*, Sept. 1974, 4.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 1983, 5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, 6.



“WHO CAN CALCULATE THE WOUNDS INFLICTED,
THEIR DEPTH AND PAIN, BY HARSH
AND MEAN WORDS SPOKEN IN ANGER?”

PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY



your muscles tense, your respiration increases, and your mind focuses on responding to the perceived provocation. In this state, you are more likely to explode physically or verbally, even over situations that you would normally disregard.

OVERCOMING ANGER

Listed below are several principles for helping you overcome anger-related problems you may have. Read through the principles, and find the ones that work best for you.

Pray

Pray with real intent for help in overcoming angry feelings. Fasting and priesthood blessings can also help. To be most effective, priesthood blessings, prayers, and fasting should be combined with persistent effort to change.

Resolve Underlying Problems

Talk with your son or daughter and work out the problems that tend to provoke your anger. Parents and children can resolve most problems peacefully. For help, review the sessions in this manual on communication, solving conflict, and using consequences for disciplinary problems.

Take Responsibility for Your Anger

If you have an anger problem, you must acknowledge it and take responsibility for it before you can overcome it. Children may provoke you, but you are responsible for how you respond. You can learn to control your anger and respond in better ways.

Identify Your Anger Cycle

If you are chronically angry, you may engage in cyclical behavior that includes four phases. In the first phase, you may pretend that everything is normal, but anger lurks beneath the surface. This phase may be brief, or it may last for days or weeks or longer. The second phase involves anger build-up, where you focus on distorted, anger-producing thoughts and make plans to act on the anger. This phase also may last for days or weeks at a time. Phase three is the acting-out phase: you explode and demean and assault another person physically or verbally. Phase four is the downward-spiral phase, in which you feel guilty and ashamed and try to cover your outburst by being a “good” person. As your resolve breaks down, you repeat the cycle.⁵

Keep an Anger Log

An anger log can help you learn to deal with anger more constructively. Write down the triggering event or person and the date and record the intensity of your anger on a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being *mild* and 10 being *severe*. Record the thoughts that fed your anger, how you dealt with the anger (your success or failure to control it), what seemed to help, and what you could do better next time.⁶ Keeping an anger log will increase your awareness of your anger cycle. You can interrupt anger in the early stages, using the principles in this session.

Defuse Anger-Provoking Thoughts

Look for alternate explanations for the situations you get angry about. For example, the child who is rude to you may have had a difficult day at school. The child who defies you may feel accepted only by peers who engage in unacceptable behavior. Think of situations that bother you as problems that need to be resolved, not as threatening events that demand a dramatic, angry response. Work on changing

Seek Spiritual Change

The process of coming unto Christ involves a spiritual transformation that results in peaceful, loving behavior. As Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Quorum of the Twelve explained, when we become truly converted the “way we treat others becomes increasingly filled with patience, kindness, a gentle acceptance, and a desire to play a positive role in their lives.”⁸ Anger becomes less of an issue. Your bishop can assist you in developing a plan to increase spirituality.

Prevent Relapse

You can disrupt the anger cycle and prevent relapse by changing your thoughts and behavior and by using other intervention strategies described above. These strategies provide alternatives to anger. They may involve help from family, friends, co-workers, a bishop, or others. These strategies are most effective during the early phases of the anger cycle: the pretends-to-be-normal phase and the build-up phase.

THE PEACE OF GOD

President Joseph F. Smith emphasized the importance of being kind to children instead of being angry: “When you speak or talk to them, do it not in anger, do it not harshly, in a condemning spirit. Speak to them kindly; . . . weep with them if necessary. . . . Soften their hearts; get them to feel tenderly toward you. Use no lash and no violence, but . . . approach them with reason, with persuasion and love unfeigned.”⁹

The Apostle Paul said, “The peace of God . . . passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). Those who have struggled with anger know how liberating it is to feel peace and freedom from that emotion. As one person described it, “I used to walk around feeling like I wanted to hurt everyone I saw. Anger dominated my life. As I applied gospel principles and as I learned to think differently and to view others in a better way, my anger went away. Now I can enjoy being around others. I have my life back again.”

PRACTICE

Develop a plan to resolve any anger problems in your life, using the principles in this session. Disrupt anger during the early stages of the anger cycle, before buildup occurs. Involve others in your plan, such as your family, friends, and bishop.

ADDITIONAL STUDY

Study these scriptures, and consider how they apply to your family.

Proverbs 16:32 James 1:19 3 Nephi 11:29–30 3 Nephi 12:21–22

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 97; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 74.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 106; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 80–81.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 1991, 71; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 50.
4. Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (USA: Bantam Books, 1995), 59.
5. See Murray Cullen and Robert E. Freeman-Longo, *Men and Anger: Understanding and Managing Your Anger* (Holyoke, Massachusetts: NEARI Press, 2004), 67–70. ISBN# 1-929657-12-9.
6. Suggestions for an anger log are adapted from *Men and Anger*, 31–32.
7. *Anger Control: The Development and Evaluation of an Experimental Treatment* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1975), 7, 95–96.
8. In Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 26; or *Ensign*, May 1992, 20.
9. *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 316.



“SATAN KNOWS THAT THE SUREST . . . WAY TO DISRUPT THE LORD’S WORK IS TO DIMINISH THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FAMILY AND THE SANCTITY OF THE HOME.”

ELDER M. RUSSELL BALLARD



while refusing to give in to manipulation. Teach correct principles and the rationale for family rules. Encourage your children to make correct choices. Persuade them when they are argumentative. Impose consequences (see session 9) when they choose to disobey, and tenderly plead with them when they are on the verge of making serious mistakes.

Listen to Understand

Many conflicts are averted when parents use good listening skills and seek to understand their upset, angry children. The scriptures teach that “a soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Proverbs 15:1). Your child’s angry feelings will often dissipate when he or she feels understood. You may also find that your own feelings and perspectives change.

Refuse to Argue

Parents who refuse to argue with a contentious child soon discover that the contention is short-lived. Quarreling and fighting cannot occur when one person refuses to engage in it. Glenn Latham, a Latter-day Saint parent educator, emphasized the magnitude of Christ’s great example of refusing to contend with others, even when unfairly accused and abused. Latham observed, “In my research on the treatment of behavior problems, I have been astounded to find that if parents remain calm, empathetic, and direct even in the face of outrageous reviling, 97 out of 100 times, on the third directive [the third statement of parental expectations], children will comply.”³

Follow Scriptural Guidelines for Reproving Children

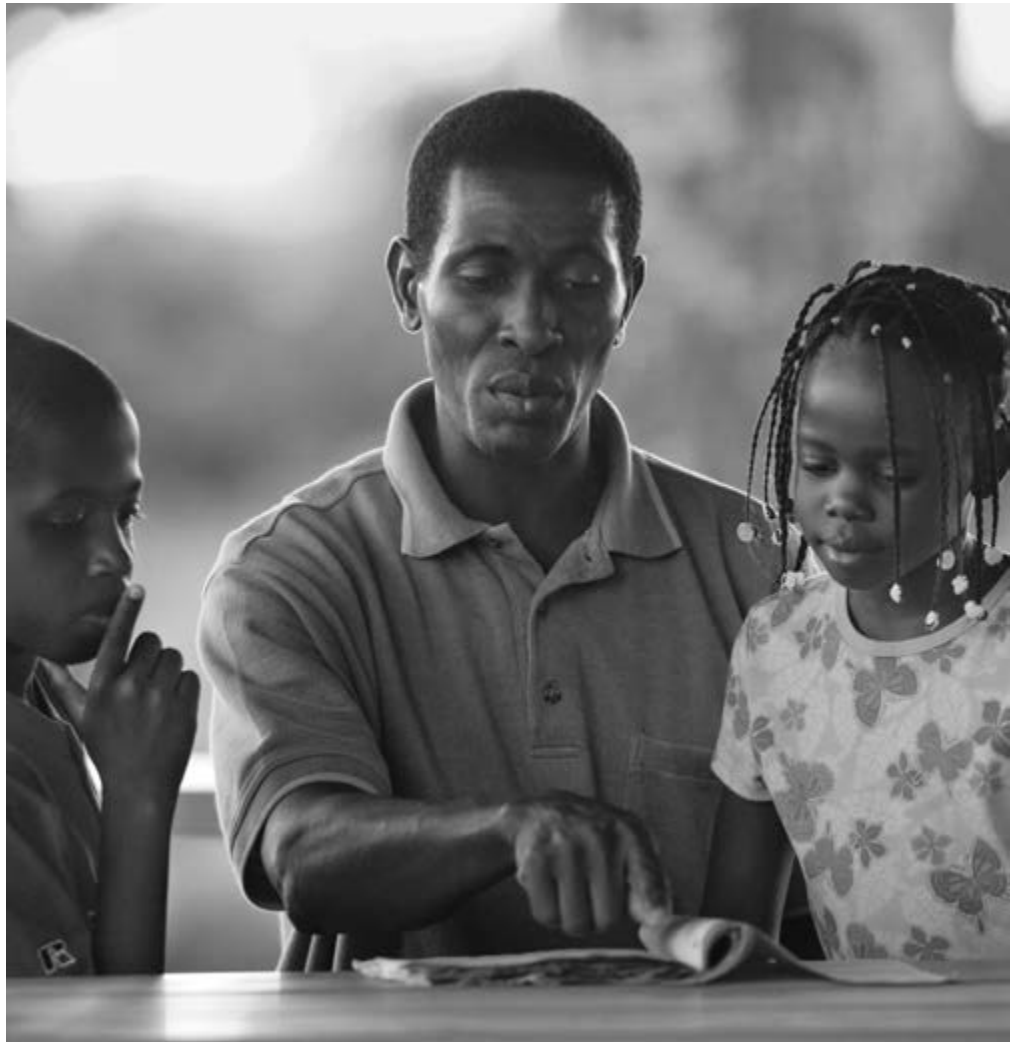
You may need to reprove a child “betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost” and then show “an increase of love” so the child is reassured of your love (D&C 121:43). This reproof should happen rarely and with gentleness. The word *sharpness* in this context does not mean with anger or forcefulness, but clearly and distinctly.

Selectively Arbitrate Conflicts between Children

Children sometimes argue with each other to get attention and to have parents take their side. These arguments can place you in a no-win position. You may never fully know how the conflict started and what has happened between the children. By taking sides, you may reward an undeserving child and alienate the other child.

You can often help best by taking a neutral position and by giving the children responsibility to solve the problem. Listen to each child and paraphrase what each has to say. Then point out that they are blaming each other instead of taking personal responsibility (if that is the case). Ask them how they think the problem can be solved. Listen to what they say, paraphrase their suggestions, and try to identify a possible compromise. If none seems evident, send an “I” statement (see session 3) expressing your frustration over the conflict and your intention to impose a consequence (see session 9) if the fighting doesn’t stop. Ask them again for their suggestions, and see if you can identify a compromise that is agreeable to both children. Compliment them if they agree on a solution. If not, impose the consequence.

Negotiation may be unnecessary if you have something the children want. For example, if you are taking your children to a ball game and they are fighting in the car, stop the car and give them a choice—they can settle the argument or you will take them home. Often the least intrusive solution is the most effective one.



A PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

Some families have successfully used the following five-step model for solving conflicts, adapted from the work of psychologist Susan Heitler.⁴ The model works best when family members understand it and agree to use it.

Step 1: State Your Positions

Each person in the conflict states his or her position or preference—how he or she would resolve the issue—without fear of interruption, attack, or ridicule. Sometimes a solution becomes apparent during this process, although solutions usually come in step 4.

Step 2: Explore Your Underlying Concerns

Family members explore their positions in greater depth, examining the concerns that underlie their positions. They look for concerns common to everyone.

Step 3: Brainstorm Possible Solutions

Each person suggests solutions without being attacked or ridiculed. In considering solutions, each person proposes what she or he could do to contribute to a total plan of action that would respond to everyone’s concerns. Every solution, no matter how impractical, is written down. This freedom fosters creativity from which a viable solution may emerge.

Step 4: Select a Solution

After brainstorming is completed, family members create a plan that will be responsive to the concerns of everyone. The feelings of the parents matter, as do the feelings of the children. For example, a couple may feel that they should teach gospel principles during family home evening while a child may want only to play games. To be responsive to the child's feelings as well as their own, the parents could include gospel instruction in a way that interests the child and is understandable to him or her.

Step 5: Carry Out the Solution

As family members carry out the solution, they evaluate where modifications are needed. In some cases, they may need to find a different solution.

A NEW COVENANT

President James E. Faust of the First Presidency reminded us that Christ introduced a new covenant that requires men and women to abide by a higher law. No longer were individuals to follow the law of retribution (see Exodus 21:24), but they were to be guided by a desire to do good, turning the other cheek to those who smite them (see Matthew 5:39). They were to love their enemies and pray for those who would spitefully use and persecute them (see Matthew 5:44). They were to seek and follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit in their actions toward others.⁵

As your family strives to abide by Christ's teachings, resolving differences in an amicable way, you will enjoy greater love, peace, and harmony in your family relationships.

PRACTICE

Select a minor area of disagreement in your relationship with a family member, and apply the conflict resolution model in resolving it. When you have learned how to apply the model successfully, use it to resolve a conflict of greater importance.

ADDITIONAL STUDY

Study these scriptures, and consider how they apply to your family.

Colossians 3:21

Mosiah 4:14–15

3 Nephi 12:23–24

NOTES

1. "The Sacred Responsibilities of Parenthood," *Brigham Young University 2003–2004 Speeches* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 2004), 89.
2. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
3. *Christlike Parenting: Taking the Pain out of Parenting* (Seattle: Gold Leaf Press, 1999), 69.
4. *From Conflict to Resolution: Skills and Strategies for Individual, Couple, and Family Therapy* by Susan M. Heitler, Ph.D. Copyright © 1990 by Susan Heitler. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, pages 22–43.
5. See "The Surety of a Better Testament," *Ensign*, Sept. 2003, 3–6.



*“THOSE WHO DO TOO MUCH FOR
THEIR CHILDREN WILL SOON FIND THEY
CAN DO NOTHING WITH THEIR CHILDREN.”*

ELDER NEAL A. MAXWELL





TEACHING RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR

Parents have a sacred duty to teach their children to obey the commandments of God and the rules of home and society.¹

How successful have you been in teaching responsible behavior to your children?

In what ways can you teach appropriate behavior more effectively?

TEACHING CHILDREN PROPERLY

The Lord has instructed Church members to teach their children to be prayerful and obedient, to have faith in Christ, to repent of sins, to be baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and to be industrious (see D&C 68:25–32). Parents are to “bring up [their] children in light and truth” (D&C 93:40), because “light and truth forsake that evil one” (D&C 93:37). The Lord rebuked some early Church leaders for not teaching their children properly (see D&C 93:42–44, 47–48).

Some parents fail to teach their children appropriately because they do not understand or fail to apply good parenting practices and gospel principles. Parents tend to rear their children in much the same way they themselves were raised. Some parents are overly permissive and others excessively controlling. Many are so preoccupied with other matters that they neglect their responsibility to teach their children.

The time to begin teaching your children is when they are very young. The writer of Proverbs counseled, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). Children are born with a natural desire to learn. Parents can use this curiosity to their advantage, imparting through words and example what children need for successful living.

Teach by Example

Elder Delbert L. Stapley of the Quorum of the Twelve extolled the value of teaching by example: “A wise man, when asked to list three cardinal points that exemplified the lives of the great teachers of all time and that would be a guide to new teachers, said: ‘First, teach by example. Second, teach by example. Third, teach by example.’”² President Thomas S. Monson of the First Presidency explained that Jesus “taught forgiveness by forgiving. He taught compassion by being compassionate. He taught devotion by giving of Himself. Jesus taught by example.”³

Teach children by deed as well as by word. You will have a good influence on them when you teach them to live righteously and responsibly and when your life is in harmony with your teachings. You cannot teach principles you do not know or understand. Study the scriptures, and learn and apply gospel principles in your own life.

Give Your Children Responsibilities

Many parents tend to overindulge their children and shield them from the responsibilities they once had to go through—experiences that helped them become capable adults. When parents dole out goods and services for their children while requiring little in return, their children lose the motivation to become self-reliant and responsible. Instead, they tend to become lazy, selfish, and self-indulgent. Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve taught: “Those who do too much *for* their children will soon find they can do nothing *with* their children.”⁴

Teach your children to work alongside you, starting when they are young and have a natural desire to help. Assign your children routine chores according to their abilities. Family work activities “can become daily rituals of family love and belonging.”⁵

Teach your children to serve others. Elder Derek A. Cuthbert of the Seventy taught, “Wise parents will provide service opportunities in the home for their children from an early age.”⁶ Teach them to do their best and to try again if they fail.

Clarify Your Expectations

Sometimes parents assume their children know exactly what is expected of them. The parents feel disappointed when these unexpressed expectations are not met. Your children will learn better when you:

- Have realistic expectations of them.
- Share expectations clearly and lovingly.
- Show by actions (consequences) that you are serious about the expectations.
- Give recognition when they do what you have asked.

When sharing your expectations, you should:

- Clarify in your mind what you want before making the request.
- Choose a time when your children are not stressed, angry, or preoccupied.
- Be positive and specific. (“When you put away your toys, I’d like you to put them in the box and then put the box on the shelf.”)
- Demonstrate what you expect, if needed. (“Let me show you what I mean.”)

After the job has been completed, give positive feedback, telling the child how the action has benefited you and others.

Teach Responsible Behavior One Step at a Time

In directing the spiritual development of His children, the Lord prescribed the teaching of basic doctrine—the *milk*—to prepare them for greater light and knowledge—the *meat* (see D&C 19:22). In a similar way, children need to be taught to perform simple actions that are stepping stones to the behavior expected of them as adults. Children may need progressive steps to learn such things as respecting others, using good manners, cleaning a room, or doing yard work. Behavior can be broken into simple, achievable tasks, according to the age and capabilities of the child. For example, a child can be taught to pick up toys before learning how to clean an entire room. With patience and ingenuity, parents can help their children become cooperative, helpful, and responsible individuals, preventing many problems as children mature.

Give Choices

Children, like adults, do not like to be ordered around. Ordering a child to “pick up the room right now” usually provokes resistance, such as “I’ll do it later.” Children cooperate more readily when they can choose between two acceptable alternatives:

“I would like you to pick up your clothes before you go out to play this afternoon. Would you like to pick them up now before the bus comes, or as soon as you come home from school?” The options are limited, but children can make a choice, which helps them take responsibility.

When you allow your children to choose, ensure that the choices you offer are acceptable to you. For example, if you say to your teenager, “You can mow the lawn now, or you can forget about using the car tomorrow night,” the child may choose to forego the car and go with friends instead. The child gets what he wants, and the lawn remains unmowed—an unacceptable outcome to you. It is better to say, “You can mow the lawn today, or you can clean the garage for me so I’ll have time to mow the lawn.” In this case, both options are acceptable to you, and the child has a choice.

The choices should not involve punishment: “You can mow the lawn now, or you are grounded for a month.” This statement offers no real choice (“You must do as I say or I’ll punish you”) and will provoke feelings of resentment.

Engage in Family Activities

Your teaching efforts will be enhanced as you engage in family activities. Children who work and play alongside you are more likely to incorporate your teachings and example in their lives. Plan activities that are meaningful and enjoyable for everyone. Even work can be satisfying when you foster good relationships with your children.

THE VALUE OF TEACHING RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR

President James E. Faust of the First Presidency emphasized the importance of teaching responsible behavior to children: “If parents do not discipline their children and teach them to obey, society may discipline them in a way neither the parents nor the children will like. . . . Without discipline and obedience in the home, the unity of the family collapses.”⁷ Greater peace and happiness will come to your family as you lovingly teach your children to obey the commandments of God and the rules of home and society.

PRACTICE

Consider the needs of your children in learning responsible behavior. From the principles in this session, select one that seems appropriate for each child. When you have successfully applied it, select another one if needed.

ADDITIONAL STUDY

Study these scriptures, and consider how they apply to your family.

Deuteronomy 6:5–7 1 Samuel 3:13 D&C 68:25–29 D&C 88:77–79

NOTES

1. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1969, 44; or *Improvement Era*, June 1969, 69.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 1985, 43; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 33.
4. In Conference Report, Apr. 1975, 150; or *Ensign*, May 1975, 101.
5. Kathleen Slaugh Bahr and others, “The Meaning and Blessings of Family Work,” in *Strengthening Our Families: An In-Depth Look at the Proclamation on the Family*, ed. David C. Dollahite (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2000), 178.
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 1990, 12; or *Ensign*, May 1990, 12.
7. In Conference Report, Apr. 1983, 58; or *Ensign*, May 1983, 41.



PARENTS WHO PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN FROM THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF MISBEHAVIOR DO THEM A GREAT DISSERVICE, PREVENTING THEM FROM LEARNING THE VALUE OF OBEDIENCE.





APPLYING CONSEQUENCES

Children learn as they make everyday choices and experience the consequences. Those who keep the commandments of God, work hard, and abide by societal laws have greater opportunities to live productively and successfully. Those who are lazy and disobedient often enter adulthood unprepared for successful living. Ultimately, we all experience the consequences of our actions. The righteous will receive eternal life while unrepentant sinners will be cast out (see Matthew 25:46). Parents can apply consequences in ways that help their children learn responsible behavior.

To what extent do you allow your children to experience the consequences of their actions?

How can you effectively apply consequences?

THE VALUE OF CONSEQUENCES

Presiding Bishop H. David Burton observed that “parents who have been successful in acquiring more often have a difficult time saying no to the demands of overindulged children. Their children run the risk of not learning important values like hard work, delayed gratification, honesty, and compassion.”¹ According to William Damon, director of the Stanford Center on Adolescence, the actions of many parents encourage self-centeredness and irresponsibility in their children. These parents attempt to bolster their children’s self-esteem by telling them how terrific they are without requiring anything substantive from them.² This unmerited praise often results in lazy, demanding, disrespectful, undisciplined children and teenagers. Permissive parents require very little of their children, providing few or no consequences for disobedience or failure to perform.

Parents can teach their children responsible behavior by applying consequences. Children who receive positive consequences for responsible behavior are more apt to repeat the behavior. Parents who protect their children from the negative consequences of misbehavior do them a great disservice, preventing them from learning the value of obedience.

President Joseph F. Smith taught the importance of holding children accountable for their inappropriate behavior: “God forbid that there should be any of us so unwisely indulgent, so thoughtless and so shallow in our affection for our children that we dare not check them in a wayward course, in wrong-doing and in their foolish love for the things of the world more than for the things of righteousness, for fear of offending them.”³

APPLYING CONSEQUENCES

The following principles will help you give consequences appropriately. As you read them, consider how you can use consequences effectively with your children.

Recognize and Acknowledge Appropriate Behavior

Children tend to repeat behaviors that draw their parents' attention. According to Latter-day Saint parent educator Glenn Latham, "Parents typically ignore 95–97 percent of all the appropriate and good things their children do. But if a child misbehaves, parents are 5–6 times more likely to pay attention to that behavior."⁴ When parents only respond to the negative things children do, no one should be surprised that the children misbehave.

You can reinforce desirable behavior by showing interest in what your child does and by interacting in a positive way—smiling, expressing gratitude, or giving a pat on the back. Praise should be genuine and directed at the child's behavior and its value to you and others. For example: "I appreciate when you help clean the kitchen. I enjoy the time together, and the work gets done much more quickly." Praise directed at children ("You're such a good child") may come across as insincere or manipulative.

Allow Children to Experience Appropriate Natural Consequences

Natural consequences automatically follow actions. For example, a child who fails to study for a test usually gets a lower grade. A teenager who gets a speeding ticket must pay a fine. Individuals learn quickly from natural consequences because the consequences occur in spite of protests or arguments against them. If parents protect their children from natural consequences, such as paying their traffic fines for them, they deprive the children of valuable lessons.

Natural consequences may harm children who are too young to understand them. For example, a toddler must be protected from touching a hot stove or walking alone by a stream of water or playing in a busy street.

Apply Logical Consequences

Logical consequences are imposed by parents in a way that is logically connected to a child's behavior. For example, a child who acts up during dinner may be asked to leave the table until he or she is willing to eat quietly. Logical consequences work best when they make sense to the child, indicate respect for the child, and require the child to pay a price. Impose them in a firm and friendly manner—not in anger—or they will invite resentment. Here are two examples: (1) A child is often late for dinner, so the parents put the food away and tell the child the next meal will be served in the morning; (2) A teen who is arrested for shoplifting calls home and demands to be picked up immediately, but his parents allow him to spend the night in detention.

You can also use consequences that seem less logical, such as taking away the privilege of watching television when your children have not done their work. The connection has to do with work and privileges. Watching television is a privilege that is earned by being responsible. A child who is irresponsible can lose a privilege.

Give the Child Responsibility

Children are more likely to improve their behavior when they help identify the course of action they should take. When confronting problem behavior and before imposing a consequence, you can discuss the problem with the child, asking how he or she is going to correct it. Allow the child to take responsibility for solving the problem.



If he or she refuses to engage in this kind of conversation, you should proceed with the consequence.

Let the Consequences Do the Teaching

When parents impose consequences, children sometimes react with anger and want to argue. The best learning occurs when you say little but follow through with the consequences. If there is a clear connection between the infraction and the consequence, the child will feel responsible and learn from the experience. However, if you impose a consequence and then argue about it, the child will focus on winning the argument and will lose sight of the reason for the consequence. Likewise, yelling and moralizing usually won't work either; it will only provoke resentment in the child. Let the consequences do the teaching. In all cases, apply consequences with love and kindness (see D&C 121:41–42).

Use Time-Out

Time-out is a consequence that is used most effectively with children ages three to eight. It involves moving a child from a disruptive situation to another room or area where the child does not receive attention. Time-out can especially help children who are easily distracted; it does not help destructive children who are in a power struggle with their parents. When imposing time-out, remain calm and explain why time-out is being used. Ask the child to think about how the problem will be solved. Tell the child how long time-out will last, and return when it is over (a general guideline is one minute per year of the child's life—a five-year-old spends five minutes in time-out).

Seek Advance Agreement on Rules and Consequences

Family councils, family home evenings, and personal interviews are great times to involve children in discussing family rules, the rationale behind them, and the consequences for disobeying them. Try to obtain their agreement on rules and consequences.

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When a child breaks a rule, you can remind him or her of the rule and the consequences. Then the child is less likely to view the consequences as punishment. You can express genuine empathy that privileges have been lost. Generally, parents have a better relationship with their children when the children understand and consent to family rules.

Use Good Judgment

Minor misbehavior does not warrant the use of consequences. Talking with the child may be sufficient. Obnoxious but harmless behavior is best ignored. Children will give it up more readily when such behavior is disregarded. Attention may only reinforce negative behavior.

DISCIPLINING WITH LOVE

President James E. Faust of the First Presidency taught the importance of love and of recognizing differences in children when disciplining them: "Child rearing is so individualistic. Every child is different and unique. What works with one may not work with another. I do not know who is wise enough to say what discipline is too harsh or what is too lenient except the parents of the children themselves, who love them most. It is a matter of prayerful discernment for the parents. Certainly the overarching and undergirding principle is that the discipline of children must be motivated more by love than by punishment."⁵

PRACTICE

Discuss with your spouse the disciplinary principles described in this session and how they may be used with your children. Select one of the principles you would like to apply. Decide who will apply it and how. Afterward, evaluate your success in using the principle. Then select another principle to apply, if needed.

ADDITIONAL STUDY

Study these scriptures, and consider how they apply to your family.

Galatians 6:7

Alma 3:26-27

Moses 3:17

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 103-4; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 98.
2. *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1995), 19-24.
3. *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 286.
4. *What's a Parent To Do?: Solving Family Problems in a Christlike Way* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 116.
5. In Conference Report, Oct. 1990, 41; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 34.

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