STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

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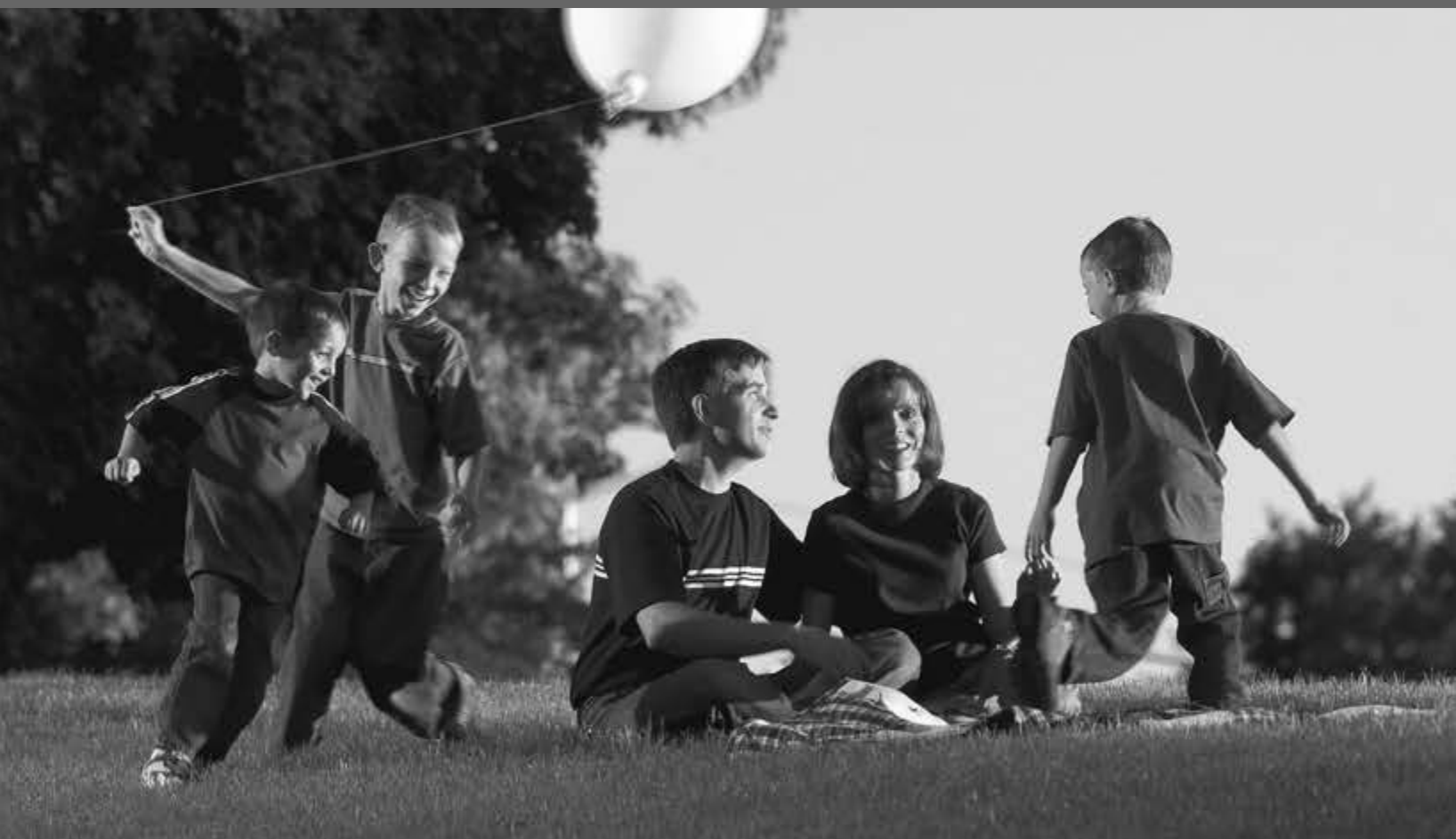
"PRAY IN YOUR FAMILIES UNTO THE FATHER,
ALWAYS IN MY NAME,
THAT YOUR [FAMILIES] MAY BE BLESSED."

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 worshipped 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 their divine destiny as heirs 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" (Psalm 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and 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.

GUIDELINES FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

Marriage and family life is ordained of God (see D&C 49:15). Regarding marriage and families, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated: "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."[1]

Strong, stable families are essential in these latter days to withstand the temptations and challenges that confront parents and children. Speaking of our time, President Gordon B. Hinckley stated: "The family is falling apart all over the world. The old ties that bound together father and mother and children are breaking everywhere. . . . Hearts are broken; children weep. Can we not do better? Of course we can."[2]

This course has been created in response to the need for better parenting and stronger families. It contains gospel teachings and parenting skills to help fathers and mothers successfully rear their children. As parents learn and prayerfully apply the gospel teachings and skills, forming a partnership with God in the raising of His children, He will bless and help them in their efforts (see 3 Nephi 18:20–21).

Use this instructor's guide in conjunction with the resource guide for parents. It provides supplemental information to help you conduct class sessions successfully.

Several ideas in this introduction and in the appendix were adapted from *Principles of Parenting*, a guide written by H. Wallace Goddard and published by the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service.[3]

Administering the Course

The course should typically be taught to groups of 20 or fewer participants by professionals at LDS Family Services agencies or by volunteers in wards and stakes. A typical course will last 9 to 12 sessions. Sessions are usually 90 minutes long. The *Strengthening the Family: Resource Guide for Parents* includes nine topics that may be used in group meetings. While you will select the topics you think will best address the needs of group members, session 1, "Parenting Principles and Practices," should be the first session taught in the course. Some topics may require two or more sessions to be addressed adequately.

Consider the following suggestions for administering the course:

- Follow agency guidelines for charging group fees when the course is sponsored by an agency of LDS Family Services. When the course is sponsored by a stake or ward, participants should only be charged enough to cover the cost of materials. Participants should pay the fee to the instructor at the beginning of the course to help encourage attendance.
- Encourage couples to attend sessions together when possible. The principles they learn are of greatest value when both parents understand them and apply them. The principles can become a divisive wedge if one person is uninvolved or unsupportive. When only one parent can attend, try to ensure that the nonattending parent supports the spouse's involvement in the course and is receptive to new information on parenting.
- Keep track of the number of sessions attended by each participant by taking roll each time you meet (see page 102 in the appendix).
- Contact the nearest LDS Family Services agency if you have questions about teaching the course. Agency locations and telephone numbers can be found at www.ldsfamilyservices.org.

ANNOUNCING THE COURSE

When you share information about the course, describe the benefits parents can gain by participating. A list of the benefits of learning parenting principles and skills—for example, increased unity and better communication in the family, or a greater ability to resolve conflict without anger—will more readily motivate parents to participate than a list of topics to be discussed.

Parents will be taught how to listen to their children in ways that invite the children to share personal feelings. They will be taught how to share their own feelings effectively, even when they are upset at their children. Parents will also learn how to teach their children responsible behavior, resolve conflicts, and foster confidence and healthy development. They will learn how to impose disciplinary measures that will help their sons and daughters learn to behave responsibly. They will gain a better appreciation for the eternal significance of family relationships and of what it means to be successful parents.

Parents who apply the principles and skills taught in this course will create a better home environment in which the Spirit of the Lord can dwell. They will enjoy happier and more harmonious relationships.

Consider using the information sheet on page 100 in the appendix to share information about the course.

QUALIFICATIONS TO TEACH THIS COURSE

This course may be taught by any adult who has developed good relationship skills and who is knowledgeable about rearing children. Keys to effective teaching include sensitivity to others and an appreciation for the sanctity of family life.

The most important qualification for teaching this course is your personal preparation to receive the guidance of the Holy Ghost. The Lord said, "The Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach"

(D&C 42:14). Most people have had the experience of stumbling through a lesson in which thoughts seem disconnected and the message is lost on a disinterested audience. Contrast those experiences with the times when the Spirit was present, when information and impressions came to mind, when words flowed more readily and the Spirit communicated truth to the hearts and minds of others.

EFFECTIVE TEACHING

You will be most effective as you seek inspiration and bring your own knowledge, ideas, experiences, and personality to the class. Take time to think about your life, and consider how you can use your experiences in teaching and reinforcing the concepts in this course. Put your heart into your teaching, and you will find great joy in your interaction with class members.

The wealth of experience of each participant is a great asset to you as you teach the course. Recognize the responsibility each parent has for his or her family, and share your knowledge and expertise as guided by the Spirit. You should also understand that your responsibility is to open the door to new possibilities, not to dictate to course participants. The class is a collaborative effort, with you and the class members sharing ideas and insights and offering support.

As you share your knowledge, experiences, and insights, encourage class members to think about their own experiences and strengths. Help them identify principles that can help them improve, and encourage them as they develop skills to apply those principles. As you practice these same skills, you will grow in your ability as a teacher.

You can organize your presentation by considering what individual class members need to learn about the subject you are teaching. Try asking yourself, "What do class members need to learn today?" You will likely come up with one or two main ideas. Then consider what supporting ideas will help class members understand the main idea. Once you have identified a main idea and supporting ideas, determine the best way to present them. The following teaching strategies may help you as you plan.

Using Stories to Illustrate a Principle

To begin a session, you might write the main idea or principle on the chalkboard and then tell a story that illustrates it. Stories are effective because they can touch hearts and change lives; they can illustrate abstract principles and make them easier to understand. Life is made up of stories, and people easily remember stories and the principles they teach.

The Savior taught powerfully through the use of stories. Try to keep the stories you tell short and as simple as possible. Be careful not to tell too many personal stories. They may invade the privacy of your family and offend others as well.

Class members will have difficulty relating to personal stories if your family seems too perfect. Too many of such stories may discourage class members in their own efforts to change. If it seems appropriate, share some stories about challenges you have faced and struggles you have had as well as stories about your successes. When you share these stories, explain what you have learned from those experiences. Be positive, and explain what you have done to improve. If your stories disclose too many problems, you may lose credibility and participants may get the idea that the principles you teach do not work.

Role Playing

After you have taught class members how to apply a principle, you might reinforce the principle through role play. The best role playing often occurs when you start by saying, "What usually happens in this situation?" Have someone act it out. Class members can then discuss the mistakes of parents in these situations. After the discussion, you might say: "Let's role-play the situation again and this time apply the principle we've been discussing. Then we'll see what worked and where additional improvement is needed."

This method of training is often an effective way to help parents learn principles and change their behavior.

- Teach a principle and how it can be applied to a parenting situation.
- Invite someone to role-play typical behavior.
- Discuss the role play and how parents could apply the principle in this situation and in other similar parenting situations.
- Invite someone to role-play a better application of the principle.
- Discuss the role play and how the parenting approach could be improved.
- Continue the process of role play and discussion until parents are familiar with effective ways to apply the principle.[4]

Participants should not be expected to perform perfectly. They may discover that they do some things well but need to improve in other areas. They may also see that they do not have to be perfect right away; they can improve over time. As you observe things they do well, point out their strengths. Other class members may want to role-play the same situation as the session progresses, or they may want to choose one of their own. Participants can continue to practice applying a principle until they understand the skills they need to learn.

If class members seem uncomfortable with role playing, engage them in a discussion on how to apply the principle in a variety of situations, either in personal situations or in situations involving couples they know (without disclosing identifying information or indulging in gossip).

Inviting and Guiding Group Discussion

Group discussion is a valuable teaching tool. When you invite discussion, you show that you value the insight and experience of others and that you do not feel you have to know all the answers to every problem. You also show that challenges can be resolved in many ways. Rely on the Spirit to help you teach, and recognize that the Spirit will inspire others as well. Ask class members for their suggestions. They will benefit from hearing a variety of ideas.

Some class members will immediately feel comfortable enough to participate in class discussions. Others are more reserved and tend not to offer their opinions and insights. The course will be most meaningful for individuals if they have an opportunity to participate. Other class members will benefit from their insight as well. Make the class environment safe by showing respect for all class members. Show that you value the opinion and experience of each individual, and do not permit anyone to make fun of the comments of others.

The following guidelines will help you invite and guide group participation and will help make the class environment comfortable for class members.

1. Set clear ground rules to help each person feel safe in participating. Include the following:
   - ***Confidentiality.*** Personal information shared in the class remains in the class.
   - ***Brevity.*** Comments from class members should be brief.
   - ***Balance.*** Class members may speak as often as they wish as long as they allow other class members to have an equal opportunity.
   - ***Patience and kindness.*** Participants will need time to learn and integrate new skills. Parents should be patient and kind with each other and with themselves.
   - ***Encouragement.*** Class members should encourage each other as they apply course information in the home.
   - ***Forgiveness.*** Everyone makes mistakes, even after being taught new ways of doing things. Each participant needs to understand the importance of forgiving oneself and others.*
2. Ask questions that invite opinions rather than a single correct answer. For example, you could ask, "What do you think are some of the most important qualities of a good father or mother?" instead of "What is the most important quality . . . ?" People will be more willing to share their ideas when they know you are not searching for just one response.
3. Respect everyone's comments. Consider writing a short summary of each comment on the board, showing that you acknowledge what was said. Look for opportunities to give sincere compliments, such as "These are great ideas." Thank those who offer comments, even when the comment may be questionable.
4. Tactfully direct questions to others when one person tends to dominate a discussion. This redirection is not always easy because some participants want to talk extensively about the problems they face. While their intentions may be good, you should not allow them to use up needed instruction time or deprive other parents of a chance to share their experiences. Listen carefully and acknowledge feelings, but move the focus to other group members. You can say something like this: "That sounds like it has been a real challenge for you. I'll be interested to know how the principles and skills you learn during this workshop help you. Who else has a situation or challenge to share?" or "You have raised some difficult questions that might be better addressed in later sessions."
5. Some participants may recommend unacceptable behavior. Rather than condemn the approach and cause embarrassment, help the person explore new ideas. You may also say: "That sounds like a real challenge. Later, I'll share some ideas on that subject that you may find particularly helpful. The group also will have some ideas." Do not debate with class members about different approaches.
6. When participants feel safe, valued, and respected, you can help them become more sensitive to the feelings of their children. As they describe experiences they have had, ask questions such as "If you were your child in this situation, what do you think you would have felt?" "What might your child have been thinking?" or "Why might this situation have been difficult for her [or him]?" Ask these questions in a nonaccusatory way. As individuals relate the feelings of their children to their own experiences, they may understand their children better.

* Colored text indicates information available in *Strengthening the Family: Resource Guide for Parents.*

7. Ask questions that help you assess the needs of participants. Guide the discussion in ways that are relevant to their needs. Adapt the program and learning activities to their abilities.
8. Help parents discover the situations in which they behave inappropriately or ineffectively. Have them discuss and write a plan for responding differently in those situations.
9. Use appropriate humor and be enthusiastic and energetic.
10. Break up lecture time with a variety of activities—invite group discussion, tell a story, or have a group activity to keep the pace lively.
11. After each session, thank those who have participated.

Following a Schedule

Discussion can sometimes become so dynamic and interesting that you may have difficulty moving the class on to the next activity. Once class members have understood a principle and know how to apply it, additional discussion may waste time you need for other activities. Redirect the discussion or move on to the next activity when it is time to do so.

A schedule written on the board can sometimes help you maintain a good pace. The schedule could be as detailed or as general as is useful. You could write something like the following:

7:00 to 7:15—Review of past concepts and learning activities

7:15 to 7:30—Need for nurturing and ways to nurture

7:30 to 7:45—Steps to help parents nurture their children

7:45 to 8:30—Practicing nurturing skills[5]

If you are ready to move to the next subject of instruction and class members still want to discuss the previous subject, you might point to the schedule and say: "You have some great ideas and insights. Maybe we can discuss them later. For now, let's go to the next topic." However, if you feel that class members will benefit from further discussion on a topic, you can change the schedule.

Using Media

When it is appropriate, select short media segments from CDs, DVDs, or videocassettes to help you teach concepts and to focus the attention of class members. It is recommended that Church-approved media be used. Short segments are better than long ones in holding the interest of participants. Make sure that you do not violate any copyright laws. If you have questions about usage, call the Church Intellectual Property Office at 1-801-240-3959.

Modeling What You Teach

The goal of this course is to teach effective skills and encourage parents to use those skills to create a warm, caring environment for their children. The class setting is a good opportunity for you to model, as well as teach, the principles, attitudes, and skills of good parenting. Teach fathers and mothers to be kind and gentle by treating them with kindness. Be sensitive, empathetic, and caring, especially when participants need redirection. Use good communication skills. Some individuals seldom encounter another person who will listen to them carefully. The way you interact with them

may be as significant as the information you provide. Your positive example can help them change the way they relate to their family members.

Some class members may, on occasion, be frustrated or even angry and hostile. Your manner of response may make all the difference in how much these class members gain from the course. As you respond with kindness, you will demonstrate good listening and problem-solving skills. Do not allow someone who is angry to take over or to dominate class interactions.

STARTING AND ENDING THE COURSE

The suggestions that follow will help you begin and end the course effectively.

Getting Started

To help the first class go smoothly, you may want to do the following:

- If the building is unfamiliar to class members, consider placing signs to mark the way to the classroom and to restrooms.
- Bring copies of *Strengthening the Family: Resource Guide for Parents* for the participants. You could also have name tags and markers or pens available so class members can make name tags and wear them until they get to know each other by name.
- If the class is sponsored by an agency of LDS Family Services, give participants the agency's telephone number so they can call if they have questions.

Be sure to allow 15 to 30 minutes at the beginning of subsequent sessions to review the concepts and learning activities that were presented in the previous session.

Follow-up and Evaluation

During the final session, you may want to do the following:

- Distribute copies of the Program Evaluation Form (see page 103 in the appendix), and have each participant complete it.
- Recognize the efforts and progress of participants. (Page 104 in the appendix contains a certificate that you may want to use.)

NOTES

1. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 69.
3. "Parent Educator Training: A Guide for Instructors," *Principles of Parenting*, Circular HE-711, Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, Auburn University, Alabama.
4. Outline adapted from "Parent Educator Training," page 8.
5. Adapted from "Parent Educator Training," page 6.

"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"

SESSION ONE

PARENTING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

Session Objectives

During this session, help parents:

- Understand their sacred role in rearing their children.
- Understand gospel principles that form a foundation for parenting practices.
- Identify societal views of children that have misguided parents and damaged children.
- Understand how covenants can help parents save their children.
- Be aware of doctrinal teachings on measuring success in parenting.

Guarding against Family Breakdown

The need for loving, effective parents has never been greater. In 1997, President Gordon B. Hinckley observed that families are "falling apart all over the world. The old ties that bound together father and mother and children are breaking everywhere. . . . Hearts are broken; children weep."[1]

Satan strikes at the family because it is vital to the Creator's plan for the happiness and salvation of His children. The Lord has prescribed His remedy for Satan's attacks: "I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth" (D&C 93:40), for "light and truth forsake that evil one" (D&C 93:37).

President Hinckley stressed the urgent need to strengthen, love, and protect children: "My plea—and I wish I were more eloquent in voicing it—is a plea to save the children. Too many of them walk with pain and fear, in loneliness and despair. Children need sunlight. They need happiness. They need love and nurture. They need kindness and refreshment and affection. Every home, regardless of the cost of the house, can provide an environment of love which will be an environment of salvation."[2]

Happy, harmonious homes are a blessing to parents and to children; such homes are also preparatory for eternal life. Indeed, "eternal life is family life with a loving Father in Heaven and with our progenitors and our posterity."[3]

Societal Attitudes about Parenting

Much parental behavior is influenced by societal views that children are (1) innately evil; (2) innately good; (3) like a blank slate; (4) molded by biological factors; or (5) able to interpret their environment, shape their own behavior, and alter or abandon parental values.

- ***Innately Evil.*** Some people have thought that children are innately evil because of the fall of Adam and Eve. Consequently, they maintain, children require harsh punishment to "beat the devil" out of them. Parents who hold this view rarely show affection to their children and may even consider kindness to be detrimental. Perhaps variations of this thinking exist in the minds of some parents who abuse their children.[4]
- ***Innately Good.*** Another view is that children are innately good and well-motivated, "only to be corruptible by a corrupted adult society." French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau suggested that if children were "left to themselves, they would achieve their greatest potential." Consequently, parents try to allow them to learn from experience and follow their own inclinations. Humanistic psychologists, such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, have held similar views.[5]
- ***Blank Slate.*** John Locke promoted the view that children are much like a blank slate, neither evil nor good. Children, he thought, were mostly shaped by their experiences. Behavioral psychologists, such as John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner, have tended to agree, asserting that parents can condition or mold a child into any kind of person they want by controlling and altering the environment.[6]
- ***Biological.*** This perspective, which gained prominence during the 20th century, includes evolutionary, dispositional, and biological theories. These theories suggest that children are more than a blank slate at birth and that early differences between individuals can be explained to some degree by biological factors. Many versions of this perspective are deterministic and tend to diminish the role of individual agency.
- ***Constructivist.*** This perspective, championed by Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget and others, focuses on the individual's ability to interpret—or even to construct—his or her environment. It recognizes agency more than other views and suggests that individuals can modify the effect of biological and environmental influences. But it cannot explain where this ability comes from, nor does it help a parent or a child know what is right or wrong. Proponents of this theory believe that children apply their own interpretation to what they are taught. Consequently, they often suggest that children may naturally and unavoidably abandon or alter the values taught by parents and others.

Most or all of these viewpoints contain some element of truth. For example, although children are pure and innocent, humans have a fallen nature, and environment, biology, and personal agency all influence our lives on earth. However, without the knowledge that comes from God, each of these views—or a combination of them—falls short of the truth.

Most important, none of these perspectives offers stable guidelines for moral behavior. Parents who view their children as innately evil will look for and see the worst in them, even misreading and condemning innocent acts. These parents may feel entitled to engage in any kind of parenting behavior, however damaging, because of their sense of moral superiority. The blank slate view not only discounts the agency of the child by suggesting that he or she is purely a product of the environment, it also avoids offering moral direction. Parents who view their children as innately good may feel little need to guide and discipline them, accepting any behavior that arises naturally from the self. Having this perspective, parents may condone and embrace behaviors that were once considered deviant or inappropriate.

Parents who believe that biology dictates behavior may foster a climate in which children feel no responsibility for their actions. Parents with a constructivist view recognize their children's ability to make conscious choices, but they can provide no measure for right and wrong other than what is acceptable to society. Furthermore, when children abandon parental values in favor of peer values, they are often seen as reasoning at a higher level. With this view, any group of peers may define its own standards of right and wrong.

Learning Activity: Identifying Beliefs about Children

Ask group members to consider some of their beliefs that influence how they think about and relate with their children. Ask them to write down ways they treat their children (positive and negative), including behaviors they would like to change. Then ask them to write down the beliefs that may influence their actions.

The Light of Gospel Truth

Through revelation, Latter-day Saints know the divine nature of mankind and the manner in which parents are to rear their children. In the proclamation on the family, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve declared:

"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. . . .

". . . '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."[7]

The scriptures indicate that children are pure and innocent because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The prophet Mormon taught that "little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them" (Moroni 8:8). However, "when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts" (Moses 6:55). President David O. McKay observed: "Man has a dual nature—one, related to the earthly or animal life; the other, the spiritual life, akin to the divine. Man's body is but the tabernacle in which his spirit dwells."[8] Parents have the responsibility to recognize the divine in their children and to teach them to live righteously and choose good (see D&C 68:25).

Each spirit child of God is unique. Each spirit enters a mortal body, also unique in its genetic composition. Consequently, each child exhibits individual interests, talents, personality, desires, and abilities. Parents, siblings, and others also influence each developing child.

Scientific research suggests that biological characteristics affect "children's dispositions and temperaments," including "tendencies toward . . . shyness, sociability, impulsiveness . . . , activity level . . . , [and] emotionality." Furthermore, children to some degree "select, modify, and even create their own environments according to their biological predispositions."[9] For example, a sociable child will seek opportunities to interact with peers, whereas a shy child may avoid social gatherings; both children reinforce patterns of behavior that may extend into adulthood.

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 Apostles 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."[10]

Differences in children may require a variety of responses in parents. Spirited children may provoke parental concerns, added rules, and increased supervision. Shy children may need less supervision or attention. Furthermore, children respond to similar parenting styles according to their unique perceptions. For example, an anxious child may see a parental command as threatening. The child may dutifully comply with the request but feel helpless and fearful. Another child may see the same command as a challenge and react with defiance or noncompliance.

Parents must be wise in how they respond to their children. Brigham Young encouraged parents to "study their [children's] dispositions and their temperaments, and deal with them accordingly."[11]

The Authoritative Approach to Parenting

Just as children have differing dispositions and temperaments, parents have differing ways of rearing their children. Some methods work better than others. Parents often find it helpful to prayerfully study different parenting approaches, determining what works best and what seems less effective.

Three Approaches to Parenting

Parenting approaches often fall into one of these categories: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative.[12]

Authoritarian. "Authoritarian parents attempt to shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set standard of conduct." In their attempts to guide the behavior of a child, these parents do not invite the child to participate in a discussion of rules and expectations, "believing that children should accept parents' word for what is right." These parents value firm control of their children's behavior, and they often show little warmth. They rarely encourage their children to express their feelings or point of view, particularly in disciplinary situations.[13]

Permissive. Permissive parents usually show warmth and love toward their children but offer little guidance or direction. They "attempt to behave in a nonpunitive, accepting, and affirmative manner. . . . They present themselves as resources to be used as their children wish, not as active agents responsible for shaping or altering their children's ongoing or future behavior. They allow their children to regulate their own activities as much as possible, avoid the exercise of control, and do not insist that their children obey externally defined standards." These parents "avoid the use of overt power" but may attempt to regulate their children's behavior in less obvious ways. They avoid confrontations.[14]

Authoritative. Authoritative parents show the same high expectations for their children as authoritarian parents, but they also show a high degree of warmth and responsiveness. They are loving and supportive. As they guide their children, they "encourage verbal give and take and share with their children the reasoning behind

their policies." These parents "exert firm control at points of parent-child divergence but do not hem in their children with restrictions. Authoritative parents are demanding in that they guide their children's activities firmly and consistently and require them to contribute to family functioning by helping 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." In her studies over several decades, psychologist Diana Baumrind found that children raised in authoritative homes were most likely to be socially confident, friendly, self-disciplined, cooperative, and achievement oriented.[15]

The parenting principles taught in this course most closely resemble those of authoritative parenting. This approach is most consistent with the scriptures and teachings from Church leaders.

According to this standard, parents teach and guide their children by persuasion, patience, and love (see D&C 121:41–44). They are willing to discuss their decisions with their children and explain their reasons for those decisions. They are also willing to reprove their children when guided by the Spirit and give them the guidance they need.

Learning Activity: Identifying Your Parenting Approach

Ask the parents to consider their approach to parenting. Does it match one of the three approaches described above (authoritarian, permissive, or authoritative), or is it a combination of the three? Is their approach responsive to the unique characteristics of their children? Does their approach conflict with gospel principles? Does their approach need to be changed in any way? Ask them to write down any changes that may be needed and to work on improving their approach to parenting.

Principles for Successful Parenting

The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve gave nine 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."[16] Parents can teach and apply these principles in many ways.

- ***Faith.*** Parents should teach children to have faith in Jesus Christ and use their growing faith in gospel principles to govern their personal lives (see Matthew 17:20; Hebrews 11:6; 3 Nephi 18:20; D&C 68:25).
- ***Prayer.*** Children should learn to pray individually and as a family. Children can learn early about the power of prayer (see Enos 1:1–5; Mosiah 27:8–14; Alma 34:17–27; 37:37; 3 Nephi 18:21).
- ***Repentance.*** Parents should acknowledge, confess, and forsake sins so that they can enjoy the guiding influence of the Holy Ghost. They can help their children understand and apply these principles in their lives (see Alma 34:33; 3 Nephi 9:22; Moroni 10:32–33; D&C 6:9; 58:42–43).
- ***Forgiveness.*** Parents can be an example of forgiveness by forgiving themselves, their spouses, and their children for shortcomings (see Matthew 6:14–15; Ephesians 4:32; Mosiah 26:29–31; D&C 64:8–10).

- ***Respect.*** Family members are to learn to respect one another. Parents and children can learn to treat each other with courtesy and tenderness, holding each other in highest esteem (see Mark 9:42; D&C 121:41–46). Parents should try to eliminate critical thoughts and words about each other and about their children.
- ***Love.*** Parents are to love their children in the manner described by Paul, Alma, and Mormon—with patience, kindness, gentleness, unselfishness, and humility (see 1 Corinthians 13; Alma 7:23–24; Moroni 7:45–48).
- ***Compassion.*** Parents can show compassion for each other and for their children. They should feel sorrow for the adversities experienced by family members and seek to understand and support family members during their difficult times (see Ruth 1:11–17; Zechariah 7:8–10; Luke 15:11–32).
- ***Work.*** Family work gives children opportunities to learn to appreciate work and to feel the satisfaction of accomplishment (see D&C 42:42; 58:27–28), especially as parents and children work together. Work should be tailored to the age and abilities of children to foster feelings of success and confidence.
- ***Wholesome Recreation.*** Families are strengthened and revitalized when family members join in wholesome, enjoyable activities.

The greatest of these principles is love (see Matthew 22:36–40; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Moroni 7:46). The most important thing parents can do for their children is to love them in a Christlike manner. When children feel and know they are loved, they are more likely to listen to their parents' teachings, follow their example, and accept their discipline. Love should motivate and guide all parental behavior.

Learning Activity: Nine Principles for Successful Parenting

Ask parents to consider how well they follow these nine principles in their personal and family lives. What do they do that seems to work? What principles could they follow better to strengthen themselves and their families? Ask them to select a principle and identify how they can follow it better. When they have begun to implement that principle successfully, they can choose another one that will help their families. Recommend that they continue the process as long as it seems appropriate.

The Gospel Standard for Parental Influence

Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord gave counsel that sets the standard for parental influence:

"No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

"By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—

"Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;

"That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death" (D&C 121:41–44).

According to this standard, parents teach and guide their children by persuasion, patience, and love. They are willing to discuss their decisions with their children and explain their reasons for those decisions. They give their children the guidance they need and reprove them when guided by the Spirit. When parents have reproved their children, they show an increase of love so their children will know of their love.

The Power of Covenants

Parents are not alone in their efforts to save their children. Heavenly Father has provided sacred covenants by which His children can receive blessings. When couples enter into the covenant of eternal marriage and abide by the terms of that covenant, the Father promises them eternal life (see D&C 132:20). 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, helping them return to their Heavenly Father.[17] Brigham Young said that children of this marriage covenant become "legal heirs to the Kingdom and to all its blessings and promises."[18]

Sometimes children go astray. Elder Orson F. Whitney of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles urged parents not to give up on these wayward children:

"You parents of the willful and the wayward! Don't give them up. Don't cast them off. They are not utterly lost. The Shepherd will find his sheep. They were his before they were yours—long before he entrusted them to your care; and you cannot begin to love them as he loves them. They have but strayed in ignorance from the Path of Right, and God is merciful to ignorance. Only the fulness of knowledge brings the fulness of accountability. Our Heavenly Father is far more merciful, infinitely more charitable, than even the best of his servants, and the Everlasting Gospel is mightier in power to save than our narrow finite minds can comprehend.

"The Prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught more comforting doctrine—that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel . . . Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father's heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God."[19]

President James E. Faust of the First Presidency offered this clarification of Elder Whitney's teaching:

"A principle in this statement that is often overlooked is that they [disobedient children] must fully repent and 'suffer for their sins' and 'pay their debt to justice.' . . .

". . . The sealing power of faithful parents will claim wayward children only on the condition of their repentance and Christ's Atonement. Repentant wayward children will enjoy salvation and all the blessings that go with it, but exaltation is much more. It must be fully earned. The question as to who will be exalted must be left to the Lord in His mercy.

"There are very few whose rebellion and evil deeds are so great that they have 'sinned away the power to repent' (Alonzo A. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Oct. 1919, 161).

That judgment must also be left up to the Lord. He tells us, 'I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men' (D&C 64:10)."[20]

In the same address, President Faust suggested that mortals may not understand "how enduring the sealing cords of righteous parents are to their children." He taught that there may be "more helpful sources at work that we know" to draw wayward children back to their Father in Heaven, including the influence of beloved ancestors on the other side of the veil.[21] Prophetic statements indicate that the power to save children is greatest when parents make and keep covenant promises.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: REVIEWING COVENANTS

Covenants are an important guide to behavior. Individuals make covenants when they are baptized and confirmed, when they receive the priesthood, when they are endowed, and when they are married. Each covenant, when kept, strengthens individuals in their relationships with family members. For example, when Church members keep their baptismal covenant to "mourn with those that mourn . . . and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:9), selfishness disappears and the significance of others' imperfections diminishes.

Ask parents to write down the covenants they have made with the Lord and how those covenants should affect their interactions with their children. (Page 10 includes a list that can be photocopied and distributed to class members.)

MEASURING PARENTING SUCCESS

Some parents look for indicators of how well they are doing. 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."[22]

President Faust taught that good parents are "those who have lovingly, prayerfully, and earnestly tried to teach their children by example and precept 'to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord' (D&C 68:28). This is true even though some of their children are disobedient or worldly. . . . Successful parents are those who have sacrificed and struggled to do the best they can in their own family circumstances."[23]

Parents who have successfully reared their children should be sensitive to those who may believe they have failed. Parents who feel successful should be grateful, not boastful in a way that would cause other parents greater sorrow. President Faust counseled:

"It is very unfair and unkind to judge conscientious and faithful parents because some of their children rebel or stray from the teachings and love of their parents. Fortunate are the couples who have children and grandchildren who bring them comfort and satisfaction. We should be considerate of those worthy, righteous parents who struggle and suffer with disobedient children.

"One of my friends used to say, 'If you have never had any problems with your children, just wait awhile.' "[24]

With respect to parents who believe they are failing, President Spencer W. Kimball counseled, "Where there are challenges [with family members], you fail only if you fail to keep trying!"[25] Parents should not condemn themselves when problems arise and mistakes are made but try to learn from them, striving to do better. Parenthood is an ongoing responsibility, even when children leave home and rear children of their own. Parents should never give up on their children. They should continue to love them, pray for them, and wisely use every opportunity to assist them.

President Faust offered this comfort: "To those brokenhearted parents who have been righteous, diligent, and prayerful in the teaching of their disobedient children, we say to you, the Good Shepherd is watching over them. God knows and understands your deep sorrow. There is hope. Take comfort in the words of Jeremiah: 'Thy work shall be rewarded,' and your children can 'come again from the land of the enemy' (Jeremiah 31:16)."[26]

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. Dallin H. Oaks, in Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 115; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 86–87.
4. 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. Dollahite (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2000), 101.
5. See "Proclamation-Based Principles," 103.
6. See "Proclamation-Based Principles," 102.
7. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
8. In Conference Report, Apr. 1967, 6; or *Improvement Era*, June 1967, 24–25.
9. "Proclamation-Based Principles," 104–5.
10. In Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 26; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 21.
11. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 207.
12. See Diana Baumrind, "Effects of Authoritative Parental Control on Child Behavior," in *Child Development*, Dec. 1966, 889–92.
13. Diana Baumrind, "Rearing Competent Children," in *Child Development Today and Tomorrow*, ed. William Damon (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1989), 353.
14. Baumrind, "Rearing Competent Children," 354, 356.
15. Baumrind, "Rearing Competent Children," 353–54.
16. "The Family: A Proclamation," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
17. 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.
18. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 195.
19. In Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 110.
20. In Conference Report, Apr. 2003, 68; or *Ensign*, May 2003, 62.
21. In Conference Report, Apr. 2003, 68.
22. In Conference Report, Oct. 1983, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, 65.
23. In Conference Report, Apr. 2003, 67.
24. In Conference Report, Apr. 2003, 69.
25. In Conference Report, Oct. 1980, 5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 5.
26. In Conference Report, Apr. 2003, 70.

HOW COVENANTS GUIDE BEHAVIOR

Church members often make covenants with the Lord. The following list indicates what Church members commit to do when they make covenants with the Lord. Those who keep these covenants receive blessings, including the companionship of the Holy Ghost, to strengthen them in daily life.

The potential impact of these covenants is tremendous. If parents just abide by the baptismal covenant alone, they will be able to resolve many problems that arise in their families.

Baptism

(See 2 Nephi 31:17–21; Mosiah 18:8–10; D&C 20:37; Articles of Faith 1:4.)

- Take upon oneself the name of Jesus Christ.
- Stand as a witness for Jesus Christ.
- Always keep the commandments.
- Bear the burdens of others; mourn with those who mourn; comfort those who need comfort.
- Show a willingness to serve God throughout life.
- Manifest repentance of sins.

Sacrament

(See 3 Nephi 18:28-29; Moroni 4, 5; D&C 20:75-79; 27:2; 46:4.)

- Renew baptismal covenants.
- Recommit to take upon oneself the name of Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments.

Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood

(See Jacob 1:19; D&C 84:33–44; 107:31.)

- Magnify callings by fulfilling priesthood responsibilities faithfully.
- Teach the word of God and labor diligently to advance the Lord's purposes.
- Be obedient; obtain a knowledge of the gospel and live according to that knowledge.
- Serve others and work to bless their lives.

Temple Endowment

"The ordinances of the endowment embody certain obligations on the part of the individual, such as covenant and promise to observe the law of strict virtue and chastity, to be charitable, benevolent, tolerant and pure; to devote both talent and material means to the spread of truth and the uplifting of the race; to maintain devotion to the cause of truth; and to seek in every way to contribute to the great preparation that the earth may be made ready to receive her King,—the Lord Jesus Christ" (James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* [1968], 84).

Celestial Marriage

- Love one's spouse and remain faithful to him or her and to God through all eternity.
- Live in ways that contribute to a happy family life and work to bless the life of spouse and children.
- "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

SESSION TWO

UNDERSTANDING CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Session Objectives

During this session, help parents:

- Understand the importance of teaching children knowledge and skills when the children are developmentally ready to learn them.
- Understand developmental stages of childhood and adolescence.
- Be aware of warning signs that suggest a child may have developmental problems.

Paced Progress

Some children develop problems because their parents have unreasonable and inappropriate expectations for 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 doesn't expect impossible things from His children; mortal parents should not expect the impossible from them either.

Sometimes parents place unrealistic demands on their children because the parents do not know what to expect of their children at various stages of child development. President N. Eldon Tanner, who served as a counselor in the First Presidency, observed that children "want to live up to the expectations of those who are responsible for directing their lives."[2] When children are unable to meet their parents' unrealistic expectations, they often see themselves as failures. These children believe they are deficient or abnormal, disappointing to others, and worthless. Long-term effects may include feelings of inferiority, insecurity, anxiety, and depression and an impaired ability to feel empathy for others.

The scriptures indicate 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 childhood development. At certain times during their lives, children become physically, intellectually, and psychologically ready to master developmental tasks such as learning to walk, talk, and feed themselves. Instead of pushing their children to do things before they are ready, parents can provide a secure, nurturing environment in which their children can learn and progress.

Research suggests that physical and mental capabilities often develop at certain stages; however, each child is unique. Biology, temperament, parental training, and

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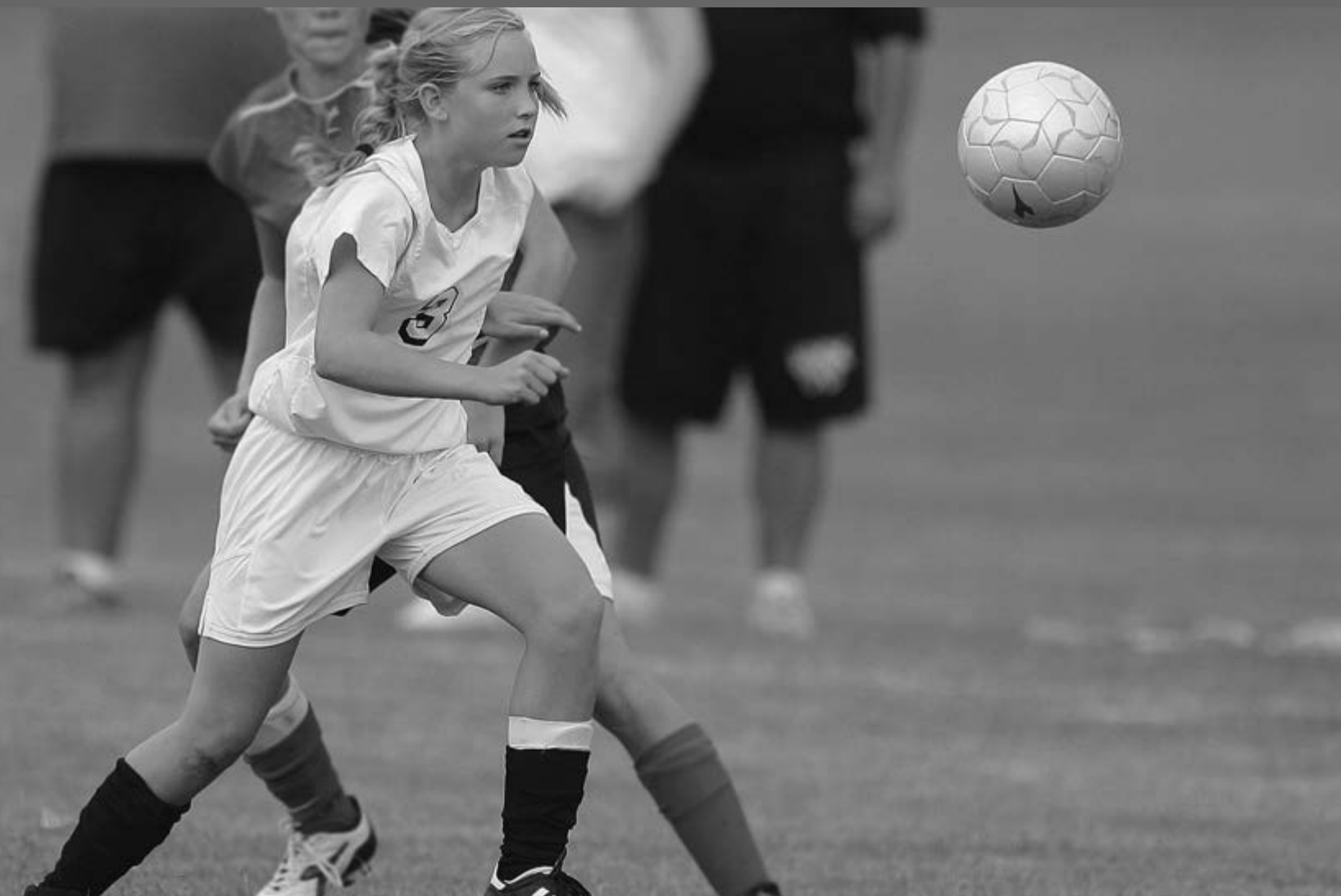


environment all influence a child's development. Parents should not be concerned if a child takes a little longer to learn some things, and they should not get too excited if a child seems a little advanced. Such differences are often temporary and have little to do with the long-term capability of the child. A better approach is to enjoy the gradual development of each child.

Readiness to Learn

Readiness is a key concept to keep in mind as children grow and develop. Parents will prevent many problems if they allow children to acquire skills at their own pace. Parents should try to adapt to each child's needs rather than to make the child adjust to parental expectations.

For example, readiness for walking generally occurs around age one. Parents can watch for indications that the child is ready to walk. The child may pull himself or herself up to furniture and stand or walk while holding on to the furniture. Parents can play with the child by holding him or her in a standing position and letting the child take a step or two. This play may help the child learn to walk sooner than if he or she is left alone. On the other hand, if the child is not physically able to support his or her weight, playing this game will not be helpful and may frustrate the child and may cause physical harm. Children gain no long-term benefit from walking prematurely; they will start walking when they are ready.

Bowel and bladder control training should begin when the child is emotionally and physically ready. Expecting children to be fully trained by age two may place unrealistic, impossible demands on them. Children begin to show readiness when they can understand simple requests that parents make of them, when they begin to push off soiled diapers, and when they imitate the behavior they see when their parents use the bathroom.[3] Some children three years old and older lack physical readiness to sleep through the night without wetting the bed or going to the bathroom. Parents who understand and accept this lack of readiness are less upset when bed-wetting occurs. When parents react with anger or by being upset, they risk reinforcing the undesirable behavior. Instead, they should be calm and patient, and the child will eventually learn to control his or her bladder.

Similarly, parents should not expect a four-year-old to learn to ride a bicycle without training wheels. Most children of this age lack the coordination to master this skill. By age six or seven, most children can ride a bicycle of the right size without training wheels.

Parents can best teach their children to help around the house when the children show interest in helping, to throw a ball when the children want to play catch, or to fix their hair when the children start wanting to do it by themselves. Parents will also have greater success if they try to make these teaching experiences enjoyable. They should give lots of encouragement and recognition for their children's efforts. If parents expect too much too soon, their children will often become discouraged and lose interest in learning new behavior.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

Social-emotional development may be seen as a series of stages that occur around certain ages. The successful completion of each stage is important for healthy childhood development. The developmental information in this session serves only as a general guideline. Children progress at their own rates, and their early progress is not

a reliable indicator of their later success in life. Parents who get to know and love their children as individuals will be best equipped to help them develop into mature and competent adults.[4]

Learning to Trust (infancy)

Caring parents respond to their newborn baby's needs. They recognize cues for hunger and distress. The most frequent distress signal is crying. Parents can help by holding the child, giving affection, and meeting the child's physical and emotional needs. They should comfort the child long enough for the child to calm down and feel secure.

When parents recognize and lovingly respond to their newborn baby's cues for hunger and distress, their baby learns to trust and to develop faith and confidence that the parent will respond to his or her needs in the future. The baby will form an attachment to the parent and will feel secure in his or her environment. The parents' 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. A parent who often turns a distressed child over to the other parent is much less likely to form a secure attachment to the child.

Children of unresponsive parents often feel unwanted, unloved, and unable to accept themselves as persons of worth. Children who grow up feeling this way often have difficulty in relationships and are overly dependent on others for validation. They sometimes turn to alternate sources of gratification, such as excessive TV watching, compulsive eating, sexual indulgence, or drug abuse.

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.) 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 2½, 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.

During this developmental stage, children tend to exert their independence at mealtime, at bedtime, and during toilet training. Children are often curious about body parts, which is normal. This is a good time for parents to teach appropriate names for genitals.

The "terrible twos" can be enjoyable if parents have the right attitude. Parents can help by being patient, by allowing the child to act independently within acceptable limits, and by giving choices (see session 8) as a way of preventing power struggles. They should recognize that the phase is temporary but significant for their child. With help and understanding, their child can gain a sense of self-control that can lead to a lasting sense of self-respect and good will.

Parents should organize their house so children can run and explore without hurting themselves or damaging anything. Parents should enjoy their children, spend time with them, teach them how to play with others, and read to them at bedtime. They should be firm but loving when disciplining them. Saying "no" should not require an explanation at this age. "Because I said so" is usually sufficient.

When parents discipline children in this developmental stage, ignoring misbehavior or imposing consequences usually works well.

These early formative years are an ideal time for increased spiritual instruction.

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 children 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.

Children of this age tend to tell tall tales and even believe in their own imaginings. They are sometimes out of bounds and defy their parents; they may hit, kick, break things, use shocking language, or run away. They are often surprisingly responsive when parents communicate their expectations clearly but are not overly strict, giving their children some latitude.

By age six, most can ride a bike, tie their shoes, bounce and bat a ball, and count to 100. These children are usually active and eager to do things. Their emotions are sometimes tumultuous, and children in this stage often express variations of love and resentment. They tend to take center stage but lack a secure sense of self. They like to get their way. They can be rude and argumentative when told to do something.

Many children at this stage have nightmares. They sometimes cannot choose between two things because they want both. Getting their way is important to them.

Parents can help by being patient and loving, using firmness while allowing these children to test themselves within clearly defined boundaries. Parents should set rules to provide structure for watching television, doing chores, completing homework, and going to bed. They should administer discipline in a loving and kind way, using choices and consequences for behavior problems. Parents should spend time with their children, read to them, and take an interest in their activities at home and school. They should arrange time for their children to explore, run outdoors, and play with others.

Learning to Be Industrious (ages 6 to 12)

This stage begins after a child has entered 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 a broader 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 can often write. They often have a sense of humor. They know right from wrong. They are usually very active and social and have a best friend. They want to "take on the world."

Children of this age generally enjoy helping with chores, which gives them a sense of importance and accomplishment. They resist bossiness but generally respond to parental requests.

By age 10, preadolescence has begun and 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 have begun 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.

Physical changes are important, signaling to these children that they are becoming like their developing peers. Preoccupation with appearance leads some of these children, especially girls, to develop eating disorders (anorexia or bulimia). Most of these children focus on continuing friendships with members of the same sex. However, sudden changes in friendship often cause hurt feelings.

Parents can help their children foster an interest in achievement when they take an interest in their activities and give recognition for jobs well done. Parents should join with their children in projects and activities and help them succeed. They should take time to listen, help their children solve problems, and teach them how to resolve conflicts. Whenever possible, parents should also attend the events in which their children participate.

Parents should involve their children in creating family rules, expectations, limits, and consequences. They should give their children increasing work responsibilities and limit television watching.

Parents need to be particularly aware of the influence of the media on their children during these years. Fashion and model magazines may give a young girl an incorrect perception of beauty. Video games may influence children toward violence and immorality. Parents should discuss with their children the perceptions they are getting from the media and provide corrective teachings. Parents should also get to know their children's friends and encourage their children to invite their friends to their home. Parents should not criticize the friends of their children.

During these years, children are more likely to accept parental help than when they are older. Parents should view problems and challenges as opportunities to offer help. Nurturing will be very helpful (see session 4). Parents should express love for their children often, encourage them, and praise their accomplishments. While encouraging their children to be industrious, they should protect them from taking on too much. Goals should be realistic and attainable and should not interfere with worthy family goals and expectations.

Parents should encourage their children to have reasonable interests and friendships outside the home. They should respect their children's privacy and have realistic expectations for conformity with rules.

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; at the same time, they value the security and comfort of a stable home.

During these years, children see themselves becoming adults and begin to wonder how and where they fit in society. Their primary developmental task is to establish a sense of identity and a place for themselves in adult society.

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.

At this age, puberty is underway for almost everyone, and it is complete for some girls. Children of this age look to peers for socially acceptable behavior. While they often avoid being seen in public with their parents, deep down many still love their parents and feel connected to their families.

By age 16, most adolescents tend to be more relaxed and comfortable around family members. 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 continue to test rules and question authority.

Parents sometimes feel threatened as their teens strive for independence. Instead of feeling threatened, they should try to feel grateful for their teenagers' desire to become self-reliant. Control should be relinquished gradually, allowing teenagers progressively to take charge of their lives. Limits and consequences can still be employed when behavior is unacceptable.

Children should be encouraged to think for themselves. Parents should make an effort to accept their children's traits without becoming defensive or rejecting. They should remain calm and consistent when confronted with the emotional intensity of their teenagers.

Parents should make themselves available to listen when their children are willing to talk, offering suggestions to help them regulate their lives. They should pay attention to the sadness and depression their children might experience. They should listen to the struggles and challenges their children experience. They should teach them ways to deal with peer pressure.

Parents should not feel offended if their children do not want to be around them. Nonetheless, they should expect compliance with family rules without expecting perfection. They should choose battles wisely, imposing consequences when needed.

During this developmental stage, uncertain adolescents become confident young adults with a sense of identity, purpose, and inner direction. Confidence usually develops as teenagers feel accepted, capable, and prepared for the future.

Adolescents who feel incapable and unaccepted are often confused and uncertain about themselves, their role, and their value to society. They may see their parents as an obstacle to their emerging independence. These teenagers may become disrespectful, unappreciative, rebellious, and defiant. Some try to find a sense of belonging by identifying with cliques, gangs, or teenage heroes.

SIGNS OF DEVELOPMENTAL AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

The following warning signs suggest the possibility of developmental or social or emotional problems. A child who has any of these signs or symptoms may need specialized help from a pediatrician or professional counselor.

By age two

- Cannot walk.
- Cannot say two-word sentences or use at least 15 words.
- Does not appear to know the use of common objects, such as a comb, cup, or spoon.
- Cannot push a toy that has wheels.

By age four

- Shows a warning sign or symptom from an earlier age group.
- Drools persistently.
- Speaks unclearly.
- Cannot understand simple instructions.
- Shows little interest in others.
- Has great difficulty in separating from mother.
- Does not engage in pretend play.

By age six

- Shows a warning sign or symptom from an earlier age group.
- Cannot ride a tricycle.
- Cannot throw a ball overhand.
- Cries and clings when left by parents.
- Shows no interest in interacting or playing with other children.
- Is unable to control self when angry or upset.
- Does not want to get dressed, go to sleep, or use the bathroom.
- Is hyperactive to an extent that interferes with school work.
- Cannot get along with other children; lacks friends.
- Wets or soils the bed.
- Is obese.
- Has recurring nightmares.
- Is overly aggressive (argues or fights).
- Appears excessively fearful.

By age eight

- Shows a warning sign or symptom from an earlier age.
- Cannot tell time.
- Avoids school or does poorly in school.
- Is often disobedient, mouthy, and noncompliant.

At any age

- Is unable to talk at the expected level (has a limited vocabulary or errors in tense; is unable to recall words or form sentences or use proper sounds; stutters).
- Is unable to care for self at the expected level.
- Is unable to form relationships with others (lacks the eye-to-eye contact, facial expressions, and sharing of interests that are part of social relationships).
- Cannot seem to succeed in school.
- Is unable to work or to engage in leisure activities at the expected level.
- Shows impaired ability to follow health and safety practices.
- Is unable to read, write, or do math at the expected level.
- Is unable to walk, crawl, sit, throw, catch, or run at the expected level.
- Has difficulty paying attention, doesn't seem to listen, doesn't follow through with instructions, has problems getting organized, or is easily distracted or forgetful.
- Fidgets, squirms, leaves seat at school, runs or climbs excessively, talks excessively, blurts out answers to questions, interrupts, or intrudes.
- Loses temper or argues; defies adult requests.
- Is often angry and resentful; blames others for his or her mistakes.
- Bullies, threatens others, or gets in fights.
- Destroys property, steals, or violates rules.
- Is cruel to animals and people.
- Forces others into sexual activity.
- Does not eat properly and fails to gain weight or shows significant weight loss.
- Has tics (sudden, rapid, recurrent body movements or vocalizations).
- Worries or shows distress when separated from home or parents or anticipates separation.
- Is depressed (symptoms include feeling sad or down, being unable to find pleasure in doing things, withdrawing, feeling guilt and worthlessness, feeling lethargic, having difficulty thinking and concentrating, lacking energy, having suicidal thoughts and feelings).
- Shows anxiety (seems uptight, tense, fearful, panicky, terrified; seems to sense impending doom; has shortness of breath or chest pain).

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."[5] For most people, this progress includes the stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Parents can help their children through these stages, preparing them for the challenges of life. Realistic expectations and paced progress should be their guiding principles in this process. Parents should get to know their children and treasure them as unique individuals. In doing so, they will show them the love Heavenly Father extends to all of us.

Responding to Behavior

Parents who treasure their children and get to know them as individuals are more likely to respond appropriately to the behavior of their children. They are more capable of teaching their children correct principles.

Children often engage in behaviors parents may not like, such as thumb sucking, climbing, and exaggerating. Such behaviors are sometimes associated with developmental stages and are abandoned as children mature. Knowing that children grow and develop, parents will feel less guilty and worried when these acts occur. Parents may also be able to respond more effectively.

Parents sometimes reinforce unwanted behavior by punishing, ridiculing, or berating the child. Such an emotionally intense focus draws undue attention to the behavior, sometimes provoking the child to feel bad, defiant, or inordinately curious about the behavior. For example, an extreme response to thumb sucking sometimes provokes a child to cling to the behavior. However, when parents respond in an easygoing way or even ignore the behavior, the child is more likely to abandon it when it no longer serves a purpose.

Too much emphasis on age-appropriate behavior can also reinforce it unduly, encouraging the child to repeat the behavior excessively, even in ways that are unsafe. For example, parents who make a fuss over a toddler's attempts to climb ("he's so adorable when he does that") may encourage behavior that could endanger the child's safety.

Teenagers often withdraw from family involvement and are critical of parents. Parents who take this personally, feel rejected, and try to impose control may provoke the child to rebel, thereby impeding his or her progress through this phase. However, when parents take the child's behavior in stride without becoming unduly concerned, they enable the child to move through this phase of adolescence. Generally, children become more accepting of their parents as they approach adulthood.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: CHANGING UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Using the information provided in this session, ask parents to discuss with each other or another parent how their expectations relate to their children's current level of development. Have them write down any of their expectations that may cause problems. Have them discuss how they can respond to their children in ways that are more developmentally appropriate. Have them write down the changes they will make. Ask them to implement their changes during the coming week, and share their experiences during the next group meeting.

Getting to Know Each Child

The best way for parents to get to know their children—their likes and dislikes, hopes and fears—is to spend time with them. Families can spend time together each day in family prayer and scripture study. They can work together and have simple, pleasant conversation. Parents can involve their children in group activities such as going to a park, building a tree house, going for a drive, going on a hike, planting and caring for a garden, and playing games. Often, the most enjoyable activities cost the least.

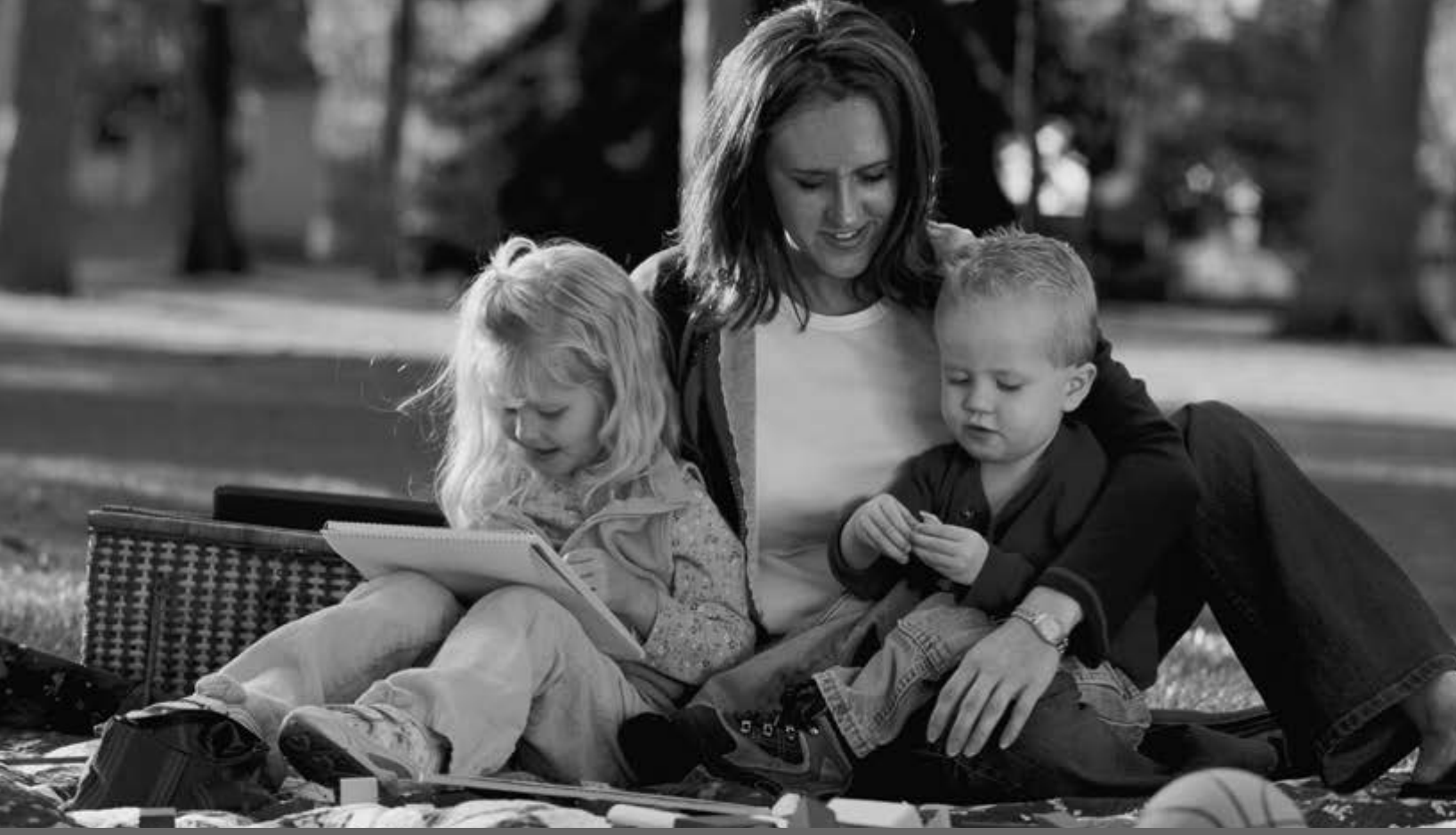
Parents should spend time individually with each child, often allowing the child to choose the activities they will do together. The conversations that occur on those occasions should usually center on the child's interests.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: PLANNING ACTIVITIES TO DO TOGETHER

Ask the parents to brainstorm wholesome activities they could enjoy as a family or with individual family members. Have them write down everything that comes to mind, making their list as long as possible. Invite them to obtain suggestions from family members during a family home evening or at another suitable time. Challenge them to choose one or two activities from this list to do each week for the next month.

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Oct. 1999, 6; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 7.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 1977, 64; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1977, 43.
3. See William Sears and Martha Sears, *The Baby Book: Everything You Need to Know about Your Baby from Birth to Age Two* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1993), 536.
4. 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.
5. "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.

SESSION THREE

COMMUNICATING WITH LOVE

Session Objectives

During this session, help parents:

- Understand the value of good communication practices and the impact of poor communication.
- Identify and stop destructive ways of communicating with their children.
- Learn communication skills and practices that strengthen family relationships.

The Importance of Good Communication

Communication includes every thought, feeling, act, or desire that is shared verbally and nonverbally between parents and children. It is impossible not to communicate. As President Spencer W. Kimball observed, "Our expressions, our voice tones, our movements, our thoughts betray us."[1] Our actions and words communicate who we are, how we feel about things, and what we have become. Even the refusal to talk sends a message to others, though the message may or may not be accurately understood.

Poor communication is a symptom and a cause of family problems. Angry, frustrated parents and children often communicate in destructive ways, feeling less inclined to listen and more prone to say derogatory and hurtful things. Likewise, when subjected to derogatory, hurtful messages, parents and children often respond with inappropriate words and actions. Changing one's attitude toward life, self, and others is sometimes needed before good communication is possible.

Parents can break destructive communication cycles by changing the way they listen and respond, thereby creating a healing environment that can lead to a change of heart in their sons and daughters.

Harmful Practices

Common communication practices that drive children away include:

- Lecturing, moralizing, preaching, interrogating.

  "If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times. Can't you get it through your thick head that . . ."

  "You should be ashamed of yourself. Now look at what you've done."

  "Why in the world did you do that?"

- Discounting, placating, providing empty reassurances.

  "Calm down. There's no reason to be upset."

  "Okay, whatever it takes to make you happy."

  "Everything will be okay. Lots of people have suffered worse."

- Judging, condemning, threatening.

  "The trouble with you is . . ."

  "You'll never amount to anything."

  "Try that again and you won't sit down for a week."

- Blaming, criticizing, ridiculing.

  "It's all your fault."

  "You're so irritating."

  "I can't stand it when you whine like that."

- Talking about one's own feelings when a child needs to share his or her feelings.

  "I know exactly how you feel. When I was your age, I . . ."

LEARNING ACTIVITY: STOPPING HARMFUL COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

Ask the parents to consider how the following scriptures apply to them:

- *"Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart" (Matthew 15:18)—ask the parents what thoughts, attitudes, and desires affect the way they communicate with family members.*
- *"If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body" (James 3:2)—ask the parents to consider how well they manage their feelings to avoid giving offense, particularly when their children do things that are offensive to them.*

Ask class members to write down the inappropriate communication practices they have used. This list will help them remember not to repeat these practices. Instruct them that the first step in improving communication is to recognize what they have done wrong and then to stop saying and doing destructive things. Encourage them to be persistent in making this change, even if their children continue to misbehave.

Christlike Communication

Parents who communicate in a Christlike manner can more easily fulfill their "sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness" and to "teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens."[2]

Appropriate values and beliefs are unlikely to be transmitted to children without a caring, sensitive exchange of information. The willingness of children to listen and talk often depends on the climate for communication that parents create in the home.

As Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ is our example: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). As the only perfect individual who has lived on the earth, He provided the supreme example of how individuals ought to be and how they ought to communicate with each other.

The scriptures indicate that Jesus was:

- ***Slow to condemn***, as with the woman taken in adultery (see John 8:3–11).
- ***Forgiving***, as when He sought the Father's forgiveness for the crucifiers (see Luke 23:33–34).
- ***Compassionate***, as when He wept with Mary and Martha over Lazarus's death (see John 11:33–36).
- ***Considerate of His family***, as when He made provisions for His mother while He was on the cross (see John 19:25–27).
- ***Willing to return good for evil***, as when He healed the ear of one of His captors (see Luke 22:50–51).
- ***Loving of children***, as shown by His blessing them (see Matthew 19:14–15; 3 Nephi 17:21–24).
- ***Appreciative***, as when He praised the woman who anointed Him with oil (see Luke 7:44–48).
- ***Eager to serve***, as when He washed His disciples' feet, teaching them to serve others (see John 13:4–17).
- ***Willing to sacrifice***, as shown by His atoning for the sins of the world (see Matthew 26:35–45).

Effective communication is a natural outcome as men and women develop Christ-like attributes of faith, hope, charity, love, an eye single to the glory of God, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, humility, and diligence (see D&C 4:5–6). President David O. McKay taught: "No man can sincerely resolve to apply to his daily life the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth without sensing a change in his own nature. The phrase, 'born again,' has a deeper significance than many people attach to it."[3] As parents follow the teachings of Christ, they overcome ineffective and harmful communication practices. As they acquire godly attributes, they are able to manage personal feelings better and respond better to the behavior of others; they are more apt to respond appropriately when children are disrespectful and unruly.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF YOUR COMMUNICATION

Ask class members to consider how they would answer the following questions (without disclosing their answers to the class):

- *Do your children believe you are interested in what they say?*
- *Are you interested in their activities, goals, and achievements?*
- *Do they feel safe in talking with you about their personal problems and needs?*
- *Can they ask you sensitive questions without being criticized or chastised?*

If their answers were all yes, their children probably listen to and accept the righteous values and beliefs they teach. Suggest that the parents discuss their answers at home to see if their spouses or children agree with their answers.

Making a commitment usually increases a person's motivation to carry out a plan. Ask the parents to write down one or two things they will do differently to follow the Savior's example as they communicate with their children. Recommend that they tell their spouses and children what they are going to do.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

Communication problems develop over time. Determining when problems began and who started them is often difficult, and it usually does more harm than good to place blame. Rather than placing blame, parents should focus on improving their communication skills.

The communication principles and skills taught in this session are particularly useful when children are upset and can benefit from talking with someone. As psychologist John Gottman pointed out, parents who appropriately interact with their children during troubled times exert a life-changing influence, helping their children learn to regulate their emotions better and manage their relationships with others.[4] Parents can learn and successfully apply effective communication principles and skills. When they do so with a genuine desire to listen and understand, the quality and frequency of their interactions with their children usually increase. The following principles will help parents improve communication with each other and with their children.

Return Good for Evil

An effective way to break destructive patterns of communication is to follow Jesus's example of returning good for evil. Parents should speak in an even tone of voice when being yelled at, talk respectfully if their children are disrespectful, be reasonable when their children are unreasonable, lovingly provide consequences when their children violate family rules (see session 9).

Being Christlike does not mean that parents give in to unreasonable demands. On the contrary, it means addressing problems rather than avoiding them. When parents are patient and loving, most children eventually respond in a positive way. Sometimes behavioral changes do not come until the child is convinced that parents genuinely want a better relationship. Consequently, parents will need to persist in their efforts to communicate appropriately, regardless of how their children act.

Look for the Good in Children

Parents need to pay attention to their children, particularly when their children behave appropriately. Attention is a powerful reinforcer. If parents listen and talk with their children during good times, they will encourage healthy behavior. Children will likely repeat behaviors that capture their parents' attention. Parents should ignore obnoxious, inappropriate behavior when it is harmless. When behavior is offensive, inappropriate, or destructive, parents should impose a consequence that prevents the child from receiving undue attention (see session 9).

Listen to Children

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

A child's feelings of anger toward a parent often quickly turn to love when the child is allowed to talk about the feelings without being condemned. Listening to the difficult feelings of children is a way of providing emotional first aid. Children become frustrated and confused when their feelings are discounted or denied; they may

even learn to distrust what they feel. Young children, in particular, depend on their parents to help them make sense of their emotions.

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve offered this counsel: "The time to listen is when someone needs to be heard. Children are naturally eager to share their experiences, which range from triumphs of delight to trials of distress. Are we as eager to listen? If they try to express their anguish, is it possible for us to listen openly to a shocking experience without going into a state of shock ourselves? Can we listen without interrupting and without making snap judgments that slam shut the door of dialogue? It can remain open with the soothing reassurance that we believe in them and understand their feelings."[5]

The following principles will help parents listen more effectively.

Show interest and a willingness to listen. If the parents' words express interest in what a child says but their actions show disinterest or impatience, the child will believe the body language. Parents should set aside other things they might be doing and give full attention to their children. Instead of standing and looking down at their children, which conveys power and superiority, they should try to communicate at an eye-to-eye level. They should be aware of their body language. Actions do speak louder than words.

Ask questions that invite the child to talk. For example, the parent may say, "It looks like something is troubling you. Want to tell me about it?" "How do you see it?" "Tell me more." Questioning should be done in a supportive rather than a pushy way so children will not feel like they are being interrogated.

Identify and name the child's feelings. Children will feel comforted when parents can identify and name their feelings. They know that someone else understands. A parent could say, "It *hurt* when John didn't invite you to his party, didn't it." Some children grow up without hearing words that name their uncomfortable feelings. (See session 4 for more information on identifying and naming feelings.)

Listen actively by paraphrasing what the child says. When a child is troubled and wants to talk, some parents listen to a word or two, assume they understand the problem, and then interrupt and start giving advice. When parents do not listen fully, the child often becomes frustrated.

Parents should listen carefully without interrupting. During pauses in the conversation, they can restate what they understand the child is saying and feeling, allowing the child to correct them if they have misunderstood the message. They should be respectful and empathetic and refrain from distorting or adding to the child's message.

Paraphrasing in this manner has been called reflective or active listening. It is an effective way of showing children that their parents care and understand what the children think and feel, as in these two examples:

A child enters a room, slams a book on the table, and glares at the parent.

Parent: "You're angry at me. I've done something you are unhappy about."

A child comes home from school, dejected.

Child: "I really blew it in chemistry today. The exam was terrible."

Parent: "You're worried that you didn't pass the exam."

LEARNING ACTIVITY: LISTENING ACTIVELY AND PARAPHRASING

Ask the parents to practice with their spouses or another parent the listening skills described above. One of them should take the role of the child while the other responds in the role of the parent. The major emphasis should be on learning to paraphrase or listen actively. Have the parents practice 5 to 10 minutes and then change roles. Ask them to discuss what it felt like to have someone listen to them in this manner. Request that they give each other feedback to improve skills. Have them schedule time to continue practicing at home until using these skills is comfortable for them and sounds natural to their children.

Respond nondefensively when the child is upset. Parents find that listening is particularly challenging when a child is angry at them. Most parents want their children's approval and feel threatened, defensive, and rejected when criticized.

Instead of reacting defensively, they should respond nondefensively by listening to understand. In addition, they should acknowledge the truth in what their child says about them. Even when accusations are greatly exaggerated, they usually have some grain of truth. (For example, a parent may say: "I made a mistake, and you're upset at me. I shouldn't have . . . " If the parent's concern is to defend him- or herself, the parent will probably end up arguing with the child. Even if the parent wins the argument, the relationship may be damaged, and the parent will lose a chance to be helpful. Children are usually able to resolve angry feelings when they have a chance to talk about them with a listening parent.

The advice of Elder H. Burke Peterson of the Seventy may be helpful: "Remember, you can listen to understand, not necessarily to agree."[6]

LEARNING ACTIVITY: RESPONDING NONDEFENSIVELY

Ask class members to practice with their spouses or another parent good listening skills. One should take the role of the child while the other responds in the role of the parent. Have them focus on learning to respond nondefensively. Have them practice 5 to 10 minutes and then change roles. Ask them to discuss what it felt like to have someone listen to them nondefensively. Ask the parents to give each other feedback to improve skills. Ask parents to continue practicing these skills at home until they are comfortable with them and the responses sound natural to their children.

Share 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 children.

A more appropriate approach is for parents to share how a child's behavior affects them: "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. They invite a better response from the child. Children who are treated with respect often want to behave in respectful ways.

"I" statements are more accurate than "you" statements because they consist of a simple disclosure of personal feelings about a child's behavior. ("I feel upset when . . .") It is hard for a child to debate a parent who says, "I'm upset and disappointed when the car is taken without permission." However, if the parent says, "You are dishonest and a sneak" (a "you" statement), the child may believe that the parent's assessment is unfair and excessive. The child may want to argue with the parent. Worse, the child may believe the parent's assessment and act according to the label.

"I" statements invite a better response from a child. When a child hears a parent saying with emotion, "I'm heartbroken that my favorite vase is in pieces on the floor," he or she is more likely to feel contrite and want to make restitution than if the parent says, "You clumsy idiot. Now look what you've done." Children who are treated with respect often want to preserve that respect. Children who are mistreated often feel resentful and worthless and care little about helping the parent feel better.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: PRACTICING "I" STATEMENTS

*Have class members practice using "I" statements with their spouses or another parent. One way to structure an "I" statement is to divide it into three parts. The parent can: (1) state his or her feelings (angry, irritated, nervous, and so on); (2) explain why he or she is upset; and (3) describe how the behavior affects him or her. For example: "**I feel** upset **about** the juice on the living room floor **because** now I'll have to get the carpet shampooed and that will be expensive." One parent should take the role of the child while the other responds in the role of the parent. They can practice sharing a concern they have about the behavior of one of their children. After practicing 5 to 10 minutes, they should reverse roles and practice for another 5 to 10 minutes. Ask them to give each other feedback to improve skills.*

Clarify What Is Expected of Children

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, parents should send a clarifying message of what they expect. 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?"

The mother who made this request indicated that her daughter, now an adult, continues to express appreciation for the things she does for her. Obviously, not all children will respond so well. Repetition may be needed as well as other appropriate measures described in later sessions.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: STATING BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS

Ask the parents to practice "I" statements with this addition—after the "I" statement, they should clearly state their behavioral expectations for the child. For example, a parent might say to a child who does a haphazard job of cleaning out the garage: "I get frustrated when you say that you've cleaned the garage, but I find that things are still in disarray. It looks untidy, and it's unsafe. Others can trip over items that are left on the floor. Here's what I want you to do: pick up the tools and put them on the shelves where they belong; then take out the lawnmower and the other items on the floor, sweep the floor,

and then put those things in their proper places." Have one parent take the role of child while the other responds in the role of parent. After practicing for 5 minutes, have them reverse roles and practice for another 5 minutes. Ask them to give each other feedback on how well these statements were done and whether the statements seemed appropriate.

RESOLVING PROBLEMS THAT IMPAIR THE ABILITY TO LISTEN

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

- Feeling responsible to solve all their child's problems. Young children in particular often need their parents' help to resolve problems. Older children sometimes need help as well. However, all children must learn to resolve some problems on their own. Confidence comes from facing and resolving life's challenges and problems. Parents should be available as a resource when problems exceed their children's abilities.
- Feeling responsible to rear successful children rather than focusing on being a successful parent. (Review the definition of a successful parent in session 1.)
- 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 parents need help with any of these problems, they should counsel with their spouse, fast and pray for guidance, attend the temple, and, as needed, counsel with their 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 painful feelings, to provoke doubt and fear or to instill faith and courage. As parents master the way they communicate, they can exert a tremendously positive influence on their children.

Elder L. Lionel Kendrick of the Seventy taught the importance of being Christlike in communication with others:

"Our communications reflect in our countenance. Therefore, we must be careful not only *what* we communicate, but also *how* we do so. Souls can be strengthened or shattered by the message and the manner in which we communicate. . . .

". . . Christlike communications are expressed in tones of love rather than loudness. They are intended to be helpful rather than hurtful. They tend to bind us together rather than to drive us apart. . . .

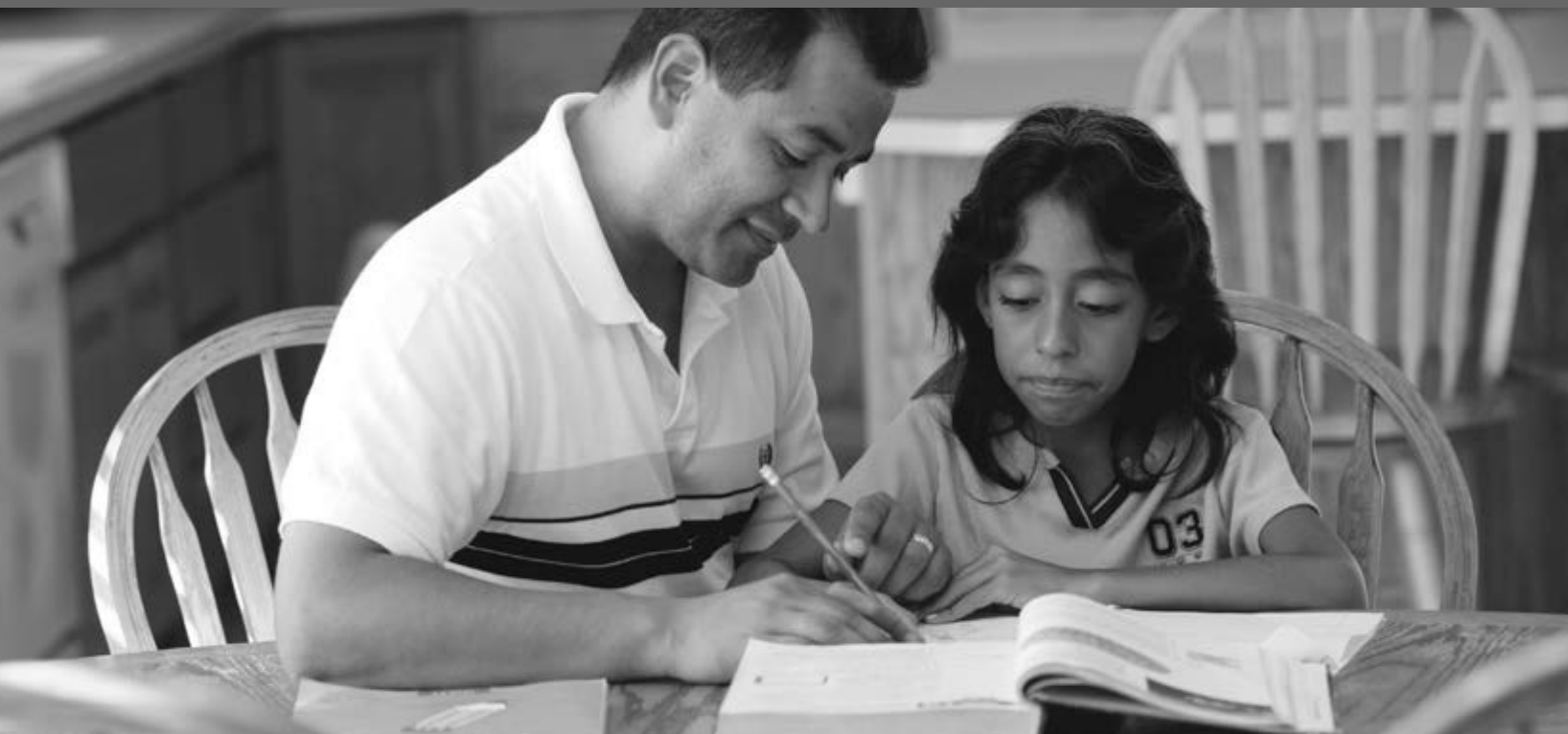
"The real challenge . . . is to condition our hearts to have Christlike feelings for all of Heavenly Father's children. When we develop this concern for the condition of others, we will then communicate with them as the Savior would. We will then warm the hearts of those who may be suffering in silence. . . . We can then make their journey brighter by the things that we say."[7]

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1954, 106.
2. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
3. In Conference Report, Apr. 1962, 7; or *Improvement Era*, June 1962, 405.
4. 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.
5. In Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 27; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 22.
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 1990, 107; or *Ensign*, May 1990, 84.
7. In Conference Report, Oct. 1988, 28–30; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 23–24.

"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



SESSION FOUR

NURTURING CHILDREN

Session Objectives

During this session, help parents:

- Understand the importance of nurturing their children.
- Be aware of different ways to nurture children.
- Learn and apply the five-step nurturing process called "emotion coaching."

The Need for Nurturing

President Gordon B. Hinckley encouraged parents to nurture their children: "Rear your children in love, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Take care of your little ones, welcome them into your homes and nurture and love them with all of your hearts."[1]

Nurturing involves responding to a child's needs in a kind and loving way. It includes nourishing (physically, emotionally, and spiritually), loving, teaching, protecting, helping, supporting, and encouraging.

Parents play a crucial role in preparing their children to handle life's many challenges. Children who are properly nurtured are better equipped to withstand troubling times. Nurturing their children is one of the most important things parents can do.

Unfortunately, busy mothers and fathers sometimes leave their children unattended. For many years, parents, educators, and church and community leaders have been concerned about the well-being of unsupervised children. Of even greater magnitude are problems associated with the breakdown of marriage. Mothers and fathers who struggle in painful relationships often have a diminished capacity to teach, soothe, and comfort their children. Children often feel the pain and loss associated with discord in marriage. Even when their parents do not divorce, children experience the consequences of the choices other people make and of living in a mortal, imperfect world. While some of these problems seem unavoidable, many can be prevented.

The scriptures provide a doctrinal foundation for nurturing children. The Psalmist explained the divine origin of parents and children: "Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High" (Psalm 82:6). Similarly, Paul taught that people "are the children of God" (Romans 8:16). God has entrusted His children to the care of their mortal parents. Parents have the sacred responsibility to help their children return to His presence. Paul counseled that parents should "bring [children] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). The Lord gave similar instruction

through the Prophet Joseph Smith: "I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth" (D&C 93:40).

Modern prophets reaffirm this scriptural truth. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve have solemnly proclaimed: "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."[2]

Parents must never lose sight of their sacred responsibility to care for their children. President Gordon B. Hinckley counseled parents: "I hope you keep nurturing and loving your children. . . . Among all the assets you possess nothing is so precious as your children."[3]

Ways to Nurture Children

Nurturing should take many forms, including:

- Teaching children true doctrines of salvation. President Ezra Taft Benson emphasized that righteous fathers in the Book of Mormon taught their sons " 'the great plan of the Eternal God'—the Fall, rebirth, Atonement, Resurrection, Judgment, eternal life. (See Alma 34:9.) Enos said he knew his father was a just man, 'for he taught me in his language, and also in the nurture and admonition of the Lord . . .' (Enos 1:1)."[4]
- Fostering spiritual development through scripture study, prayer, family home evening, and participation in Church activities.
- Providing children with food, clothing, and shelter.
- Speaking and listening to children in a Christlike manner.
- Teaching appropriate behavior.
- Imposing consequences for misbehavior.
- Showing love, respect, and devotion.
- Setting a proper example.
- Teaching the value of work and providing work opportunities.
- Teaching financial discipline and money management principles, including tithing and savings.
- Providing fun and wholesome recreational activities.

One of the greatest opportunities for nurturing children comes when they experience troubles or face problems.

NURTURING CHILDREN DURING TROUBLED TIMES

When people face problems, sometimes they need help from others—a listening ear, a helping hand, a suggestion from a trusted friend. President Spencer W. Kimball explained that "it is usually through another person that [God] meets our needs."[5] When children are troubled, they particularly need help from their parents because their parents, more than anyone else, should have their best interests at heart. Parents should be their children's allies, their friends in time of need. Parents have the opportunity and obligation to meet the needs of their children. How parents respond to the

needs of their children often influences the children's impressions of Heavenly Father and His willingness to love and help them.

Regarding the nurturing role of mothers, Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve suggested: "When her . . . children . . . return from a day marred by the world's rude realities, a loving woman can say, 'Come unto me. I will give you rest.' Wherever she is can become a sanctified place, safe from the storms of life. Refuge is there because of her ability to nurture and to love unconditionally."[6] This statement applies to fathers as well.

In a 20-year study of 119 families, psychologist John Gottman of the University of Washington found that couples who had the greatest parenting success were able to help their children when their children needed help the most—when they were distressed and upset. The successful parents did five things—all nurturing tasks—that gave their children a much better foundation for life.

Gottman used the term "emotion coaching" to describe the activities of these parents. He found that the 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.[7] The five-step emotion-coaching process[8] is described below.

Step 1: Be Aware of the Child's Emotions

The successful parents in Gottman's study 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 usually 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.

Parents experience empathy when they recognize when a child is troubled and when they feel deep concern for him or her. The ability to empathize increases the effectiveness of parents in nurturing their children, as shown in the following case study.

BRANDON

Four-year-old Brandon entered the room to watch television with his mother and two siblings. Before sitting down, Brandon stood for a few moments in front of a chair, talking with Katie, his sister. During their conversation, Steve, an older brother, came into the room, moved the chair away from behind Brandon, and sat down. Not seeing this, Brandon proceeded to sit down but fell on the floor. The event was accidental but humorous. Everyone laughed except Brandon. Humiliated, he ran to his room, shut himself in the closet, and began weeping. Moments later his mother knocked softly and opened the door. She kneeled beside him, kissed him on the cheek, and said, "I know you're embarrassed and hurt. I'm sorry for laughing. I love you." She got up and left.

Years later, Brandon remembered the event as one of the significant moments of his childhood. Expressions of affection were rare in his family, but on this occasion he felt understood and loved at a time when he needed it most. He never forgot it.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: IDENTIFYING FEELINGS

Ask the parents to keep a log during the coming week of feelings they experience at various times during each day. This log will help parents increase their awareness of the variety of feelings they experience. They can keep a log by reflecting back at the end of each day on what occurred that day or by writing about their feelings as they experience them throughout the day. Another approach is to record their feelings at designated times, such as after each meal. In addition to recording their feelings, they should note the intensity of their feelings and the thoughts or events related to them. As they learn to recognize, express, and resolve their feelings, they will increase their ability to help their children do the same.

Step 2: Recognize Emotion as an Opportunity for Closeness and Teaching

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 their children's troubling emotions will go away. Often, these emotions do not go away without some kind of help. Parents should look at their children's troubling emotions as opportunities for bonding and growth. Helping soothe a child's troubled feelings is one of the most satisfying things parents can do. Children feel understood and comforted when kind and loving parents acknowledge and understand their feelings.

KARL

It was a beautiful, warm Saturday morning. Oscar felt happy to be alive and looked forward to spending the day with his family. After weekend chores were done, he planned on taking his children for a picnic at the city park. The family enjoyed these outings because there were so many things to do. When Oscar suggested that the children finish their work as soon as possible, he noticed that Karl, his 11-year-old son, appeared angry. Karl looked at his father defiantly, turned around and walked off. Oscar felt surprised and concerned. Karl was a very conscientious child. Oscar asked if they could talk for a moment.

Oscar: You seemed angry when I brought up the subject of chores. Is something troubling you?

Karl: (Curtly.) No. I'll get them done. Don't worry about it.

Oscar: You sound upset. What's the matter? (Active listening, inviting child to speak.)

Karl: What do you care? All you want is to get the work done, right? So I'll get it done.

Oscar: It's true that I want the work done, but that's not all I care about. I also care about your feelings and what is bothering you. You're angry about something, and it sounds like it could be at me. I'd like to know what that's all about. (Nondefensive listening, clarifying.)

Karl: I don't like your dumb job chart—that's what's bugging me. How come my name comes up on the list to do the worst jobs more than everyone else's? It's not fair.

Oscar: Your name doesn't come up more. I made the chart so everyone does the same amount, except Meg and Annie. They're too young for the outside work.

Karl: You're wrong. I have to do more than the others.

Oscar: You think I'm being purposely unfair to you. (Nondefensive listening.)

Karl: Yes.

Oscar: Show me what you mean. (Karl shows his father that his name is indeed on the job chart more than his two male siblings. Oscar is surprised and troubled.) You're right. I made a mistake. I'm sorry. I'll fix it right away. (Nondefensive listening—acknowledging an error.)

Oscar changed the chart and gave his son a holiday from chores the following week. Karl was no longer angry, and good feelings soon returned.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: ASKING ABOUT FEELINGS

In the step 1 learning activity, parents are asked to keep a log of the feelings they experience during the coming week. For this next learning activity, ask them also to record the feelings they see in their children during the same time period. Suggest that, when appropriate, they share with each child their impressions to see if they are accurate. Remind them to use good communication skills. Have them describe their experiences during the next session.

Step 3: Listen Empathically and Validate the Child's Feelings

As a child discloses emotions, parents can restate their understanding of what was said, using the listening skills taught in session 3 and as illustrated in the conversation between Oscar and Karl. For example, the parent could say, "You're feeling sad that your friend moved away." When parents have questions about what their child says or feels, they can ask for clarification. However, probing questions may cause the child to become defensive and to stop talking. Simple observations often work better. For example, the parent might say, "I noticed that when you started talking about grades, you seemed to become tense." The parent should then wait and allow the child to continue. Children are more likely to keep talking when they feel a sense of control over the conversation and have an uncritical, empathic listener.

ANDREA

Valerie noticed that her seven-year-old daughter, Andrea, appeared distressed upon arriving home from school. Valerie sought to understand the reason.

Valerie: You look pretty unhappy. Why the frowning face and slumped shoulders?

Andrea: I don't want to go to school anymore.

Valerie: You're discouraged with school?

Andrea: It's not school; it's Lynette and Ashley. They don't like me, and they say mean things when they see me. I don't know why. I haven't done anything to them.

Valerie: They've hurt your feelings, and you can't understand why.

Andrea: I know they didn't like it when I became friends with Melanie. They want her all to themselves. Now they're trying to get her not to be my friend anymore.

Valerie: That would hurt. So you're worried they're going to break up your friendship with Melanie.

Andrea: The thing that hurts the worst is that they don't like me. Why should they care if I'm friends with Melanie? She can still play with them too. I haven't done anything to them. (Starts to cry.)

Valerie: (Holds her daughter in her arms for a moment without speaking, and then responds.) I would feel hurt too and sad. It's always difficult when you feel rejected by someone.

Andrea: What should I do?

Valerie: That's a good question. I'll have to think about it. What do you think you could do?

Andrea: I've already tried being nice to them. But they just laugh and pull faces at me. Maybe I just need to ignore them. Melanie told me to ignore them because they're just being rude. She said she's still my friend. But I hate it when somebody doesn't like me.

Valerie: It's not easy, is it?

Andrea: I want everyone to like me.

Valerie: One thing that has helped me is to realize that I can't please everyone. No matter who you are or what you do, there will always be someone who doesn't like what you're doing. The best thing is to try to please Heavenly Father by doing what you feel is right and what you think He would want you to do. If you do that, then it doesn't matter so much whether other people like you.

Andrea: Then I'll keep on being nice to them, but I'll try not to let it bother me so much when they're mean to me.

Valerie: Does that seem okay to you?

Andrea: I think so. I know I feel better just being able to talk about it.

Valerie: Well, let me know how things work out. I'll be cheering for you.

Andrea: Thanks, Mom.

In this example, Valerie helped her daughter feel better about a problem at school. While Andrea's peers may continue to mistreat her, she will likely view the situation differently and not be hurt so deeply. She will feel the understanding and support of her mother. As she focuses on doing what she feels is right more than seeking approval from others, her feelings of self-worth are likely to increase.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: LISTENING SKILLS

Have participants practice listening skills with their spouses or another parent. One parent should take the role of child and the other the role of parent. The child is to present a problem while the parent uses listening skills to understand it. Have the parents practice for five minutes; then have them switch roles and practice for another five minutes. Afterward, have them give each other feedback on their use of communication skills.

Step 4: Help the 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.

The best time to teach feeling words is when children experience emotion. The mother who sees her daughter crying because her friend is moving away can say, "You must feel really sad. You've been such close friends." Hearing this said, the girl not only feels understood but now has a word that describes her experience.

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."[9] 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, as shown in the following case study.

TODD

Todd's parents brought him to the counselor after his most recent tantrum. They had hoped that their seven-year-old son would have outgrown his temper problem. However, the afternoon before, Todd had gone into a rage when his mother refused to take him to see his friend Brett. Todd screamed at the top of his voice, called his mother names, and kicked the wall. When the counselor asked Todd what he was feeling when his mother refused his request, he responded, "I don't know." When asked how he felt when doing the things he liked the most, he gave the same answer. Further questioning revealed that Todd had no vocabulary to express his emotions.

Todd's story may have been different if he had been able to describe his feelings clearly and accurately. Helping a child learn names that describe feelings does not guarantee the child will behave more responsibly. However, children are less likely to act out their feelings when they are able to talk about them. Also, when children describe their feelings, parents can more easily comfort and soothe emotional wounds.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: LABELING EMOTIONS

Invite participants to practice labeling emotions with their spouses or another parent. (You can photocopy the list of feeling words on page 43 to give to parents.) One person should take the role of the parent and the other the role of the child. The child should invent a problem situation or use one of the scenarios that follow. The parent should use good listening skills, correctly identifying and labeling feelings. After they practice for five minutes, ask participants to switch roles and repeat the activity for another five minutes. Then invite them to give each other feedback on how well they identified and labeled each other's feelings.

SCENARIO 1:

Tess, age 16, comes home looking for either of her parents. One of her friends has accused her of telling lies about her. Tess could not convince her friend that she was innocent, and now her friend wants nothing to do with her. Other teenagers witnessed the confrontation. Tess feels alone and rejected. She does not understand why this conflict has happened.

SCENARIO 2:

Vince, age 12, spent the weekend with his father. While Vince was there, his father spent much of the time criticizing his ex-wife, Vince's mother. He also told Vince not to listen to his mother or do anything she asked of him. Vince returned home, feeling angry, hurt, sad, and confused. He loves both his parents.

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. Children must learn to deal with troubling thoughts and feelings in ways that are socially acceptable and emotionally healthy. Parents may need to set limits on inappropriate behavior while helping children work out problems.

REUBEN

Reuben, age 12, dropped a fly ball, which cost his team a win and entry in the championship playoffs. While he was walking off the field, one of his teammates shouted, "Way to go, klutz!" Already feeling horrible, Reuben ran to the youth, grabbed him around the neck and shoulders, and tried to throw him to the ground. Reuben's father immediately bolted from the stands, pulled his son away, held him firmly, and said: "I know you're angry and hurt, but we never hurt others. Let's go home and talk about a better way to handle this."

Rather than scold or preach, the father in this example can use the occasion to draw close to his son by listening empathically, validating Reuben's feelings, and helping him explore other ways to handle difficult situations. The process will help Reuben feel understood, valued, and better able to manage his feelings.

If parents do not know the cause of a child's problem, they should first ask questions to identify the cause so a solution can be found. Parents should ask questions such as "What is causing you to feel this way?" They should not allow the child to blame others when others are not to blame.

Once the cause has been identified, parents can ask, "What do you think will solve the problem?" They should listen carefully to the child's answers. They can offer some tentative solutions to help the child consider other possibilities. Parents will need to take the lead with younger children. They may find it helpful to brainstorm solutions with older children. When parents and children brainstorm, they should not consider any solution too silly or inappropriate; criticism impedes the creative process, and parents and children can select appropriate solutions later. Parents should express confidence in the child's ability to identify an appropriate solution. They should allow the child to take as much responsibility as possible, helping the child grow from dependence to self-reliance.

Sometimes it is helpful for a child to recall other times in life when he or she handled problems successfully. What did the child do at that time to cope? Can the same approach be taken with the current problem? Additional suggestions on problem solving can be found in session 7.

The next phase of step 5 is to evaluate the possible solutions. Parents may need to ask the child questions like these:[10]

"Is this solution fair?"

"Will it work?"

"Is it safe?"

"How are you likely to feel?"

"How will the solution affect others?"

"Will the solution help or hurt someone?"

"Does the solution show respect to everyone involved?"

Once they have explored the implications for each solution, the parents should help their child decide which solution is best. Parents should offer their opinions and guidance. Children need the benefit of their parents' wisdom and experience. Parents can share their experiences in resolving similar problems. They can tell their children the choices they made and what they learned from them.

If a child seems determined to try a solution that parents believe will fail, they may want to allow that to happen if the outcome will not be harmful and will not burden the child with major problems. Some of the greatest lessons in life are learned through failure. Afterward, without saying, "I told you so," parents should help the child work out another solution.

Parents can consider their relationship with their children to be like a bank account. Parents invest in the relationship by treating their children appropriately, respecting their boundaries, listening to their thoughts and feelings, coaching them through their problems, and disciplining with love. Each act of kindness, love, and respect is a deposit in the relationship account. When problem-solving efforts fail and a child seems determined to make a serious mistake, parents can make a withdrawal if the investments have been sufficient. A withdrawal involves asking the child to do something that is important to the parent. For example, if a son wants to spend a weekend with highly questionable friends, parents can ask him not to go and he is more likely to comply when the parents have made sufficient deposits in the account.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: APPLYING THE FIVE-STEP PROCESS

Ask participants to practice with their spouses or another parent the fifth step in the nurturing process ("Set limits while helping the child solve problems"). One of them should take the role of child and the other the role of parent. They can use one of the scenarios in the learning activity "Labeling Emotions" on page 39, or they can create one of their own. After they practice for five minutes, have them switch roles and repeat the activity for another five minutes. Afterward, invite them to give each other feedback on what they did well and how they could improve.

Invite the participants to try the five-step process with one of their children during the coming week. Ask them to write down afterward the parent-child dialogue as closely as they can remember it. Invite them to report on their experience in the next session.

Guidelines for Becoming Involved in Children's Problems

Parents sometimes wonder how involved they should become when a child has a problem. The following principles may help.

- Parents have a responsibility to help their children. (See Mosiah 4:14–15; D&C 68:25; 93:40.)
- Children who can discern good from evil are accountable for how they use their agency. (See 2 Nephi 2:27; Moroni 7:12–17; D&C 58:27–29.)
- As children progress toward adulthood, they must learn how to take care of themselves. As adults, they are to be self-reliant, meeting their own "social, emotional, spiritual, physical, or economic" needs.[11]

An important part of parenting is to help children grow from dependency to self-reliance. Parents can help their children develop self-reliance by teaching them correct principles so children can learn to govern themselves righteously and responsibly. If parents take over their children's problems, they unnecessarily burden themselves while depriving their sons and daughters of the opportunity to learn responsibility and self-reliance. As a general rule, children should solve their own problems, frustrations, boredom, and failures, with parents assisting as teachers and leaders as needed.

Sometimes parents will need to take the lead in problem solving. Parents should take the lead when the child is too young, inexperienced, or immature to handle a problem. Parents should also intervene when their child threatens them, takes or destroys property, or threatens others. In such cases, parents can help by confronting the misbehavior. The "I" statement format described in session 3 is a good way to discuss the misbehavior. (If both parents are present, they should use "we" instead of "I.") Parents can also help their children take responsibility by giving choices (discussed in session 8) or by imposing consequences (discussed in session 9).

THE ETERNAL VALUE OF NURTURING

Children will respond favorably as parents nurture them with love, kindness, and sensitivity, applying the suggestions in this session as needed. The nurturing process should begin early and continue throughout each child's life in ways that are appropriate for his or her needs.

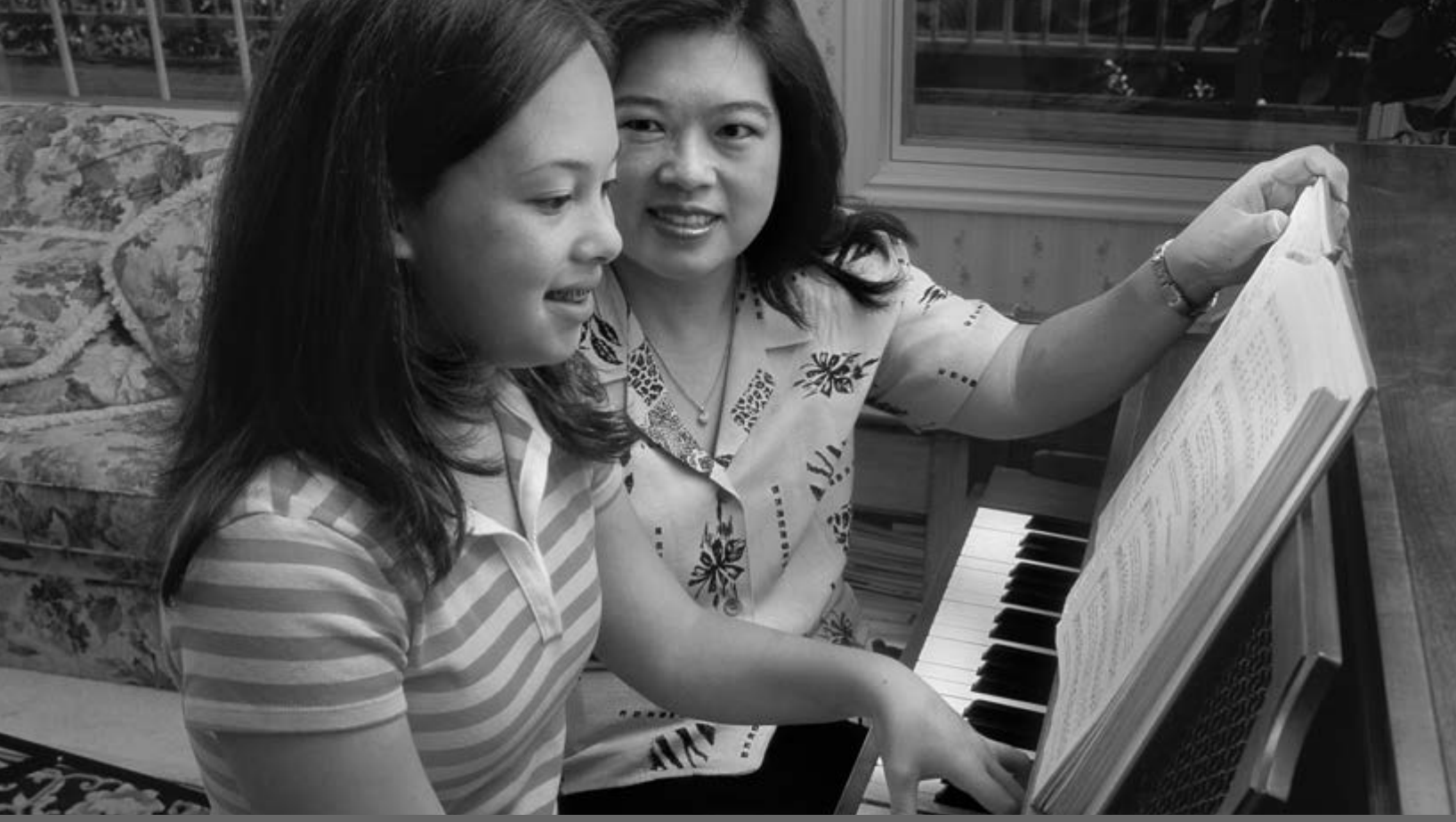
President Gordon B. Hinckley stressed the need to work in harmony with Heavenly Father in loving and nurturing children: "Never forget that these little ones are the sons and daughters of God and that yours is a custodial relationship to them, that He was a parent before you were parents and that He has not relinquished His parental rights or interest in these His little ones."[12]

NOTES

1. Salt Lake University 3rd Stake conference, Nov. 3, 1996; in *Church News*, Mar. 1, 1997, 2.
2. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
3. In *Church News*, Feb. 3, 1996, 2.
4. In Conference Report, Oct. 1985, 47; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 36.
5. "Small Acts of Service," *Ensign*, Dec. 1974, 5.
6. In Conference Report, Oct. 1989, 27; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 22.
7. 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.
8. *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, 76–109.
9. *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, 100.
10. See Gottman, *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, 108.
11. Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, Oct. 1977, 124; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1977, 77.
12. In *Church News*, Mar. 1, 1997, 2.

FEELING WORDS

Afraid
Alone
Amused
Angry
Anxious
Appreciative
Apprehensive
Astounded
Bad
Belittled
Betrayed
Bewildered
Blah
Boiling
Bored
Bothered
Brave
Bugged
Burdened
Calm
Captivated
Chagrined
Cheerful
Cold
Comfortable
Compassionate
Competent
Concerned
Confident
Confused
Content
Cool
Cowardly
Crushed
Curious
Defensive
Deflated
Degraded
Delighted
Dependent
Depressed
Deprived
Disappointed
Disarmed
Discontented
Discouraged
Disgusted
Distracted
Distressed
Distrusted
Disturbed
Doubtful
Drained
Dreadful
Dull
Dumb
Dumbfounded
Eager
Ecstatic
Efficient
Elated
Embarrassed
Empathetic
Empty
Enchanted
Encouraged
Energetic
Enraged
Enraptured
Enthusiastic
Envious
Exasperated
Excited
Exhausted
Exhilarated
Fascinated
Floored
Flustered
Fond
Foolish
Frantic
Friendly
Frightened
Frustrated
Furious
Glad
Good
Grateful
Grieved
Guilty
Hampered
Happy
Hateful
Heartbroken
Helpful
Helpless
Honored
Horrified
Hostile
Humble
Humiliated
Hungry
Hurried
Hurt
Impatient
Important
Imposed upon
Impressed
Inadequate
Incompetent
Indifferent
Inexperienced
Infantile
Infatuated
Infuriated
Inhibited
Insecure
Inspired
Interested
Irritated
Isolated
Jealous
Jovial
Joyous
Kindly
Lazy
Left out
Let down
Little
Lonely
Low
Lucky
Meek
Melancholy
Miserable
Misused
Modest
Mortified
Moved
Naive
Needed
Nervous
Opinionated
Optimistic
Ornery
Overcome
Overjoyed
Overwhelmed
Pained
Panicky
Paralyzed
Peaceful
Peeved
Perplexed
Persecuted
Perturbed
Pessimistic
Pitied
Plagued
Prepared
Protective
Proud
Provoked
Puzzled
Rattled
Rejected
Relaxed
Relieved
Remorseful
Repentant
Resentful
Restless
Revengeful
Reverent
Ridiculous
Riled
Ruffled
Sad
Satisfied
Scared
Seething
Self-conscious
Selfish
Self-pitying
Sensitive
Sentimental
Serene
Serious
Shaken up
Shocked
Sick
Silly
Slow
Smart
Solemn
Sore
Sorrowful
Sorry
So-so
Staggered
Startled
Strange
Struck
Stumped
Stupid
Submissive
Superior
Susceptible
Sympathetic
Tense
Ticked off
Tired
Tolerant
Trusted
Trustworthy
Tuckered out
Unappreciated
Uncomfortable
Uneasy
Unhappy
Unimportant
Unkind
Unloved
Unprepared
Unsure
Unworthy
Upset
Uptight
Used
Useless
Vain
Vindictive
Warm
Weary
Weird
Wild
Wonderful
Worried
Worthless
Worthy



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.

SESSION FIVE

FOSTERING CONFIDENCE

Session Objectives

During this session, help parents:

- Understand why it is important for children to have confidence.
- Understand how children develop confidence.
- Know how they can help their children develop greater confidence.

The Need for Instilling Confidence

Confident children do better in life. They are healthier, more optimistic, more socially comfortable, and more emotionally secure than children who lack confidence. Children who lack confidence tend to be more anxious, self-conscious, socially inhibited, frustrated, fearful, and prone to failure.

A successfully employed 24-year-old was reared in a loving home by parents who recognized her accomplishments and abilities. She did well in school, had many friends, and was involved in many school and church activities. Looking back on her life, she said: "I wasn't afraid to try new things because I knew where I stood with God, my parents, and my close friends. They all encouraged me to do my best. The recognition I received at home was very important when I was young, but it became less important as I grew older because I came to know that God knows and loves me. I know that if I live righteously, according to His plan, the things that matter most will work out for me."

Most parents would like their children to develop a high level of confidence, as this young woman enjoyed. Children usually have confidence in some areas but lack confidence in others. A child may excel at school but feel extremely insecure socially or physically. Another child may excel at sports but lack academic skills. Parents need to help children gain confidence in areas that are important to the children's well-being. Parents should recognize and respect their children's interests, talents, and abilities.

Helping Children Develop Confidence

Parents can do many things to help their children gain confidence. They can treat their children with love and respect. They can help them gain faith in God and develop personal integrity. They can help them develop competence in areas that are important to their well-being. They can involve them in serving others.

Treat Children with Love and Respect

Children often view themselves according to how they are treated by others, especially by parents and siblings. When they are loved and accepted, they tend to feel lovable and acceptable. If they are loved conditionally, they often feel valued only when they please others. If they are mistreated, they tend to feel insecure and worthless.

Parents sometimes underestimate the impact of their actions upon their children. Some otherwise loving parents make thoughtless remarks that deeply undermine their children's feeling of confidence and sense of self-worth. One mother who was prone to criticize said to her preschool-age son, "You sure have a funny-looking nose." Nearly half a century later, the son disclosed to his siblings at a family gathering that he had felt self-conscious about his nose all his life because of that remark. His siblings were surprised, seeing nothing that was funny or even unusual about his facial appearance.

Elder H. Burke Peterson of the Seventy affirmed the power of love in altering the lives of individuals: "Impossible mountains are climbed by those who have the self-confidence that comes from truly being loved. Prisons and other institutions, even some of our own homes, are filled with those who have been starved for affection."[1]

Disrespectful children are sometimes difficult to love. They tend to say and do things that trigger their parents' anger and feelings of failure. Parents, in response, often say and do things that deepen the child's sense of worthlessness and desire to rebel.

Jesus Christ effectively influenced others because He wisely chose His response 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. Parents too can convey love and respect, even when children disobey. They can treat a disrespectful child with kindness, softening hearts and helping the child find peace and confidence in a troubled world.

Negative relationships can be repaired when at least one person is willing to break the cycle and return anger with kindness and an intelligent response. The following are some suggestions for parents.

Find ways to convey love and respect. Parents should find ways to convey love and respect for their children, even when the children are disrespectful and disobedient. Parents can do this without condoning inappropriate behavior. In fact, when they love their children, parents care enough to intervene when children are disobedient. Other sessions focus on ways parents can love and discipline their children—by listening and talking to them, nurturing them, helping them solve problems, sharing expectations, giving them choices, and imposing natural and logical consequences. All these things should be done out of love, not anger. Love is the governing principle that should motivate and guide all parental interaction with children. Parents can convey love and respect to a disobedient child in many ways.

- They can look for times when the child behaves appropriately and compliment him or her—"I really appreciate it when you pitch in and help with the chores"; "I'm proud of you for helping your little sister." Parents should take care not to go overboard and say too much or they will sound insincere and diminish the effectiveness of the compliment.
- They can express affection—"Spence, I want you to know I love you and I'm glad you're a part of our family."

- They can give physical affection. Sometimes a touch on the shoulder or arm, accompanied by words of affection, such as "It's good to see you," can be helpful. Parents should not be offended or react negatively if the child seems irritated by this show of affection. The touch and expression may mean more to the child than he or she is willing to acknowledge.

Never say anything negative about children. If parents have been saying negative things about their children, they should stop immediately and commit themselves never to do it again, no matter how angry they become or how justified they feel. Where reproof is needed, parents can chastise without using negative, demeaning words. The negative words parents say will tend to remain prominently embedded in their children's memories, affecting the way they see themselves and the way they behave. Thoughtless statements, such as "Can't you do anything right?" or "You're so dense," can have a lasting effect. Even well-meaning but negative comments can do damage, such as "Dan tries hard, but he's not as gifted as Henry."

COLTON

By the time he reached high school, Colton was failing most of his classes. He frequently stayed home from school (both parents were employed and gone during the day), became involved in smoking and using drugs, and was arrested for shoplifting. He had stopped attending church during his first year of middle school. He often argued with his father, even to the point of threatening physical violence.

Colton's bishop reached out to him in love and friendship, encouraging him to give up drugs and change his life. Colton began to respond positively. He stopped smoking, quit arguing with his parents, and started coming to sacrament meeting. One day his father, who was struggling with his own problems, said to him in a moment of anger, "Why don't you cut out this act and quit pretending to be something you are not?" Although he said nothing in response, Colton was devastated. From that moment on, he reverted to his prior behavior. The bishop could no longer influence him to return for further visits.

Set a good example for children. Parents should make an effort to be happy. They should try to like themselves and, without boasting or pride, speak respectfully about their personal abilities and qualities. If parents have problems that make it difficult for them to do this, they need to work them out so these problems are not passed on to their children. They should get help if needed. A depressed teenager recalled that for as long as she could remember, her mother openly spoke of her own inadequacy and self-hatred: "I concluded that if Mother wasn't good enough, I couldn't ever be any better, because I'm a part of her." Sometimes children who dislike their parents the most end up being the most like their parents. The example of parents will greatly influence children, even when children appear to reject their parents.

Show interest in children and care for them. Again, parents may have difficulty showing interest and care if their children are disobedient and rejecting. But it is worth the effort. One father with limited financial resources bought tickets to ice hockey games because his son, a school dropout with a history of drug use, loved the game and would go with him. The son had recently been released from a drug treatment facility and was struggling to stay off drugs. The experience brought new life to their relationship, enabling the father and son to talk about a common interest and develop good feelings toward each other.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: IMPROVING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Invite the parents to consider prayerfully any problems they may have in relating to their children. Ask them to contemplate questions such as:

- *How much love do you feel for your child?*
- *Do you enjoy doing things with him or her?*
- *Do you encourage your child to develop his or her talents?*
- *Do you have difficulty spending time with your child when he or she is upset?*
- *Do you discount your child's distressful feelings or try to help him or her resolve them?*
- *When you are upset with or disappointed in your child, do you say things that are mean, sarcastic, or derogatory?*
- *Do you recognize the good things that your child does?*
- *Do you praise your child often, without expecting anything in return?*

Ask the parents to explore with their spouses or other parents ways to convey greater love and respect to their children. Have them write down their plan for conveying greater love. Invite them to follow their plan during the coming weeks, modifying it as needed as they evaluate the results.

Helping 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.

President Gordon B. Hinckley cited virtue as "the only way to freedom from regret. The peace of conscience which flows therefrom is the only personal peace that is not counterfeit." He also observed:

"The voice of modern revelation speaks a promise—an unmatched promise that follows a simple commandment:

"Here is the commandment: '. . . let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly.' And here is the promise '. . . Then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God. . . .

" 'The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, . . . and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever.' (D&C 121:45–46.) . . .

"It has been my privilege on various occasions to converse with Presidents of the United States and important men in other governments. At the close of each such occasion I have reflected on the rewarding experience of standing with confidence in the presence of an acknowledged leader. And then I have thought, what a wonderful thing, what a marvelous thing it would be to stand with confidence—unafraid and unashamed and unembarrassed—in the presence of God. This is the promise held out to every virtuous man and woman."[2]

Children will grow toward such confidence as they learn to live faithful, virtuous lives. To help children develop confidence in the Lord, parents should strive to live faithful, virtuous lives, demonstrating their own faith. Children learn best when their parents live exemplary lives. Parents should "bring up [their] 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).

LEARNING ACTIVITY: FOSTERING FAITH AMONG FAMILY MEMBERS

Ask participants to discuss with their spouses the spiritual activities that occur in their homes and consider these questions:

- *What activities are you already doing that promote faith and confidence?*
- *What do you need to do to ensure that those activities continue?*
- *What changes are needed to help your children grow in faith and confidence?*
- *Are there influences in your home that are detrimental to faith and confidence, such as drugs, alcohol, pornography, abusive language and behavior, or negative and destructive media?*
- *How can you eliminate these influences?*
- *How can you build your own confidence in the Lord?*
- *In guiding your children, do you practice what you teach?*
- *Do you pray consistently and fervently for help in guiding your children?*

Invite participants to write down what they can do to help increase the faith and confidence of their family members.

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, upon reaching the age of accountability, are able to discern right from wrong. As children listen to their consciences and follow their own best judgment, they become less dependent on 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 and learn to heed inner promptings. Parents can encourage growth by helping their children listen to their self-evaluative thoughts and live in harmony with the Light of Christ within them.

On one occasion, the scribes and Pharisees brought an adulterous woman to Jesus, asking if she should be stoned as the law specified. Jesus invoked their own self-judgment: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8:7). When these scribes and Pharisees evaluated their own behavior, they were speechless and, "convicted by their own conscience," departed "one by one" (v. 9).

When a person engages in behavior that he or she deems to be acceptable, self-evaluative thoughts are positive, leading to self-approval and confidence. When a person engages in unacceptable behavior, the outcome is generally self-disapproval and loss of self-regard.

These case examples illustrate how the self-evaluative process works:

RON, REBEKAH, AND CARLOS

Ron solves a difficult math problem. His self-evaluation is positive: "I can do this. I can get good grades in this class." His confidence increases.

Rebekah tells a lie. The lie makes her look good to her friends, who even give her a hug. She feels elated momentarily but suffers the remorse of a guilty conscience. Her self-evaluative thoughts are negative: "I lied. It was the wrong thing to do. It made me look good, but it was all a hoax." Her confidence and self-regard decrease.

Carlos refuses to join his friends in making fun of Tom, a physically disabled classmate. Carlos's friends begin to exclude him from their group. Carlos feels hurt, but he also knows he has done the right thing. His self-evaluative thoughts are positive.

When a child approaches a parent with a problem, the parent should encourage him or her, at a level the child understands, to consider personal convictions and spiritual promptings. The parent can 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 parents ask a child to evaluate his or her own behavior, they should do it in a calm, unaccusing, uncondemning way.

In the case example that follows, a mother helped her daughter consider personal convictions as a guide to the daughter's behavior.

GINGER

Ginger, age 14, and her friend Jenny began avoiding Alison and tried to exclude her from neighborhood and school activities. Alison felt hurt and rejected. Ginger's mother observed what was happening and confronted her daughter.

Mother: I'm troubled about you and Alison. What's going on?

Ginger: She thinks she's Miss Popularity. We're just putting her in her place.

Mother: And how are you doing that?

Ginger: Jenny and I avoid her. If she comes around, we don't talk to her. That's all.

Mother: She has offended you?

Ginger: Not really. We just don't like her. She can be Miss Haughty at school but not around here.

Mother: I'm curious, Ginger. How do you feel about yourself when you treat her that way?

Ginger: *(Defensively.)* Well, she deserves it. Somebody needs to put her in her place.

Mother: But you said she's done nothing to offend you. I'd like to know how you feel about treating another person badly just because you don't happen to like her.

Ginger: I feel just fine, and besides that, I don't want to talk about it.

Mother: Okay, if you wish. I hope you'll think about it some more. I love you a lot, but I'm having a hard time with what you're saying.

The next evening, Ginger sought out her mother.

Ginger: You were right. I don't feel good about the way I've been acting. You helped me look at myself, and I didn't like what I saw. To be honest, I'm jealous of Alison. She has a lot of friends at school. I wish I had half as many. I know that's no reason to be cruel to her. I went to her and apologized. I feel a lot better. Thanks for helping me.

While not all children will respond this dramatically, asking them to evaluate their behavior can be a powerful way to help them live in harmony with personal beliefs and expectations. Helping them judge their own behavior is often effective because the judgment does not come from the parent.

When parents invoke self-evaluation in a harsh, judgmental, and condemning way, the child may lose sight of personal wrongdoing and focus instead on the excessive, inappropriate behavior of the parents. Or the child may respond with unnecessarily severe feelings of guilt and self-condemnation.

Parents should exercise caution in encouraging self-evaluation in children who are prone to berate themselves excessively. Parents will need to guide these children carefully in their self-evaluations. Self-assessments need to be accurate, not a product of a child's distorted thinking that comes as a result of depression or unhealthy life experiences.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: HELPING CHILDREN EVALUATE THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR

Ask participants to consider prayerfully the issues and challenges their children face and how they, as parents, attempt to help them. Do they find themselves judging their children's actions and offering solutions without seeing any change in their children's behavior? If so, suggest that they consider helping their children evaluate their own actions in the manner described above, without the parents being accusatory and condemning. Invite them to discuss with their spouses or another parent how they can do this, role-playing what they might say and do.

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. Children also need to know that Heavenly Father loves them even when they make mistakes.

Parents need to help their 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 these areas, their confidence grows. Parents should teach them to work by working alongside them, especially when they are young. Parents should be pleasant and patient and try to make the work enjoyable for their children. They should encourage their children in activities in which the children can succeed and help them develop talents and natural abilities. Parents must not make their children pursue activities merely to fulfill the parents' ambitions for their children, particularly when the activities are not essential to their children's well-being. Parents and children will both become frustrated.

Parents should recognize their children's accomplishments, praising them when they do something good and noteworthy.

The following are guidelines for giving praise. Parents should:

- Be sincere. A child will detect and reject phony compliments.
- Focus on the behavior and how it affects the parent. For example, "I really like it when you're here with us and we can talk peacefully without contention. That means a lot to me." Parents should avoid focusing on the child by saying such things as, "You're such a good boy (or girl)." The child may not feel like a good person and will see the compliment as phony and manipulative.
- Keep it brief. A few words are better than many. Parents who go on and on will embarrass the child and turn a potentially positive act into one that is negative.
- Do it randomly. Praising a child for every act may diminish the significance of the parents' words. Not giving praise at all will starve the child of much needed affection. Randomly given praise will have the greatest impact. Parents should make sure they recognize the significant things their children do.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: PROMOTING COMPETENCE

Ask participants to discuss with their spouses or other parents how they can promote competence in their children. Parents can help their children learn to work, accomplish projects that are important to them, get good grades in school, develop athletic abilities, and identify, pursue, and excel in areas of interest. Invite the parents to develop, write down, and carry out a plan to help the children develop competence. Encourage them to reinforce their children's successes through recognition and praise.

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."[3]

LEARNING ACTIVITY: PROVIDING SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Invite participants to discuss with their spouses or other parents the need for service opportunities for their children. Have them explore possibilities and decide on an activity that would seem appropriate for their family members. Ask them to schedule a time when they can participate with their children in doing the activity.

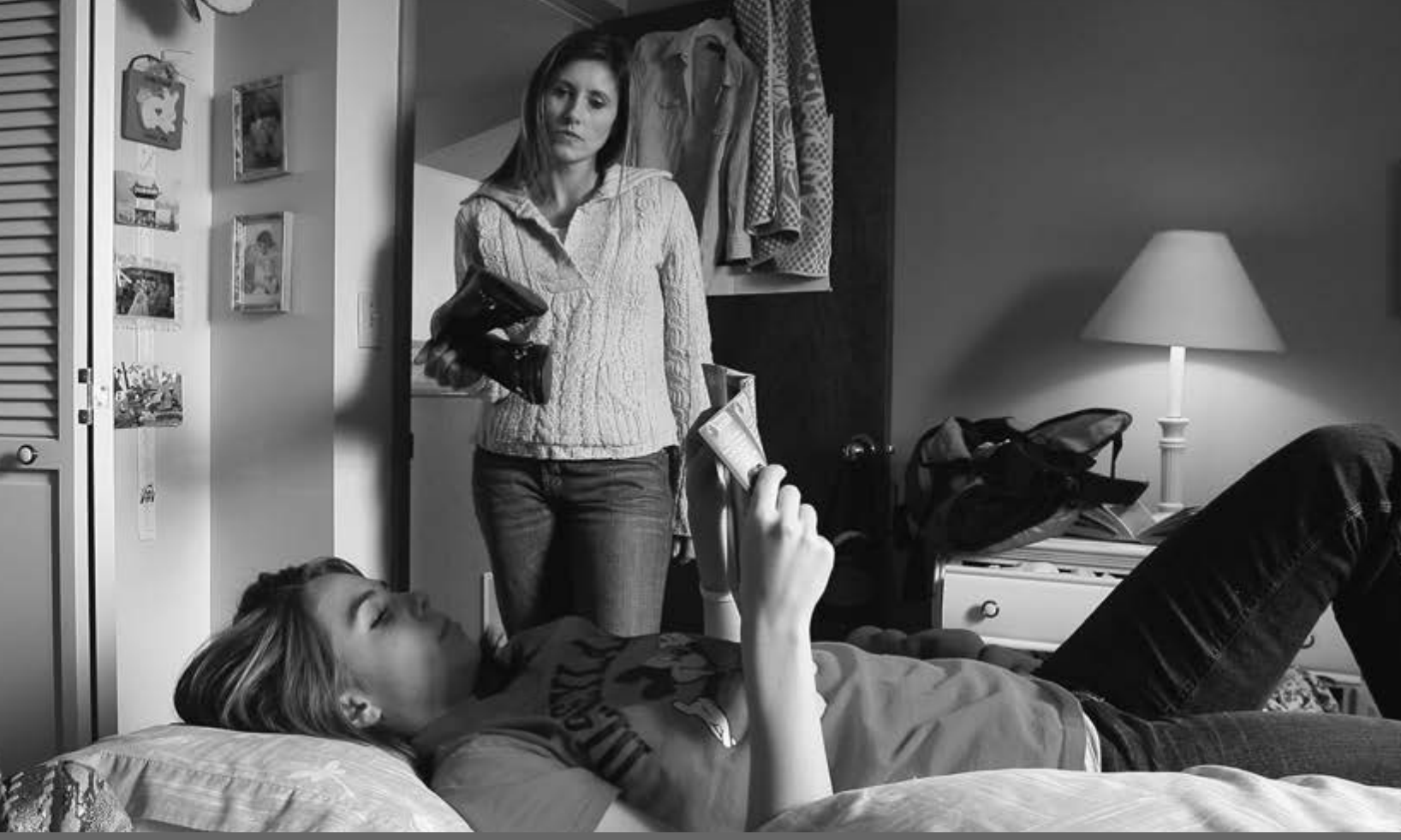
CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD

Children will gain confidence as they develop faith, virtue, and integrity. Parents can also instill confidence in their children by loving and respecting them, by helping them develop competence, and by giving them opportunities to serve others.

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."[4]

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1977, 103; or *Ensign*, May 1977, 69.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 1970, 66; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1970, 72, 73.
3. "There Is Purpose in Life," *New Era*, Sept. 1974, 4.
4. 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

SESSION SIX

OVERCOMING ANGER

Session Objectives

During this session, help parents:

- Become aware of the devastating effects of uncontrolled anger on family members.
- Understand how they become angry and the need to take responsibility for anger problems.
- Learn ways to control and overcome anger.
- Develop a relapse prevention plan so that anger problems do not recur.

The Problem with Anger

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, "Temper is a vicious and corrosive thing that destroys affection and casts out love."[1] Satan seeks to stir up anger and cause contention in families (see 2 Nephi 28:20; 3 Nephi 11:29; Moroni 9:3).

JACK

Jack seethed with anger as he watched his son Bart, 15, swagger into the room and grab Steve, 11, by the neck, removing him from the recliner in front of the television. "You're in my chair, stupid," he said, menacingly. Steve winced in pain, responding feebly, "It's not your chair." Bart cuffed the side of Steve's head with the back of his hand as Steve moved away from him. Bart dropped himself into the chair, picked up the remote, changed the channel to a rock music station, and turned up the volume. Months of rage welled up inside Jack. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead. His arms began to twitch and shake. I can't stand this, *he thought.* Not only does he lack respect for others, but he's deliberately defying me. He knows I won't stand for that kind of behavior. *Enraged, Jack charged over to Bart, grabbed and twisted his arm and shouted: "Who do you think you are anyway? You have no respect for anyone. All you think of is yourself." Pulling Bart from the chair, Jack yelled: "Go to your room. I don't even want to look at you." Bart jerked his arm loose and strode defiantly out the front door, slamming it behind him.*

A few days later, Jack and his wife recounted the episode to a counselor at LDS Family Services. "I get so angry at the kid that I can't see straight," he lamented. "I can't talk to him in a civilized manner. Sometimes I say things I later regret. The problem keeps getting worse."

Most parents get angry at their children from time to time. Feelings of anger can serve a purpose, alerting parents that something is wrong and needs to be addressed; wise parents take appropriate action to prevent little problems from escalating. Sometimes problems are complex and beyond a simple solution. Children can be rebellious and disrespectful and provoke angry feelings in their parents over and over again. Parents must not give in to angry feelings and retaliate in ways that escalate conflict.

Elder Lynn G. Robbins of the Seventy described anger as the "thought-sin that leads to hostile feelings or behavior. It is the detonator of road rage on the freeway, flare-ups in the sports arena, and domestic violence in homes."[2] President Gordon B. Hinckley warned of the tragic consequences of anger, asking, "Who can calculate the wounds inflicted, their depth and pain, by harsh and mean words spoken in anger?"[3] Throughout the world, angry parents assault their children verbally, physically, and sexually. Each year, millions of reports alleging child abuse are made to governmental agencies.

Anger has been described as "the most seductive of the negative emotions."[4] Those who become angry almost always believe their anger is justified. Some people find that expressing their rage is satisfying and exhilarating. They feel powerful and superior when they intimidate others. However, anger is addictive; it damages those who fall victim to its seductive appeal and those who become angry.

Anger is inappropriately handled in three ways—through aggression, internalization, and passive-aggressive behavior.

Aggression. Anger is expressed through physical violence (hitting, kicking, slapping, spanking, hair and ear pulling); emotional and verbal abuse (yelling, name calling, swearing, threatening, blaming, ridiculing, manipulating, demeaning); sexual abuse (incest, molestation, sexual harassment); and control and domination.

Internalization. Anger is directed toward the self, leading to self-denigration, depression, or self-damaging acts (drinking, drug use, suicide attempts, self-mutilation).

Passive-aggressive behavior. Anger is expressed in indirect actions (tardiness, irresponsibility, stubbornness, sarcasm, dishonesty, irritability, discontentment, criticism, procrastination).

Angry parents may intimidate children into obedience, but the resulting behavioral changes are often temporary. Children who comply under duress are more likely to rebel later.

The Costs of Anger

A parent is less likely to respond to a child in anger when the consequences appear too costly. Unfortunately, many parents get angry with their children because they perceive the costs of their anger to be relatively low. They are much more likely to lash out at their children than to direct their anger at a friend, an employer, a police officer, or a respected ecclesiastical leader. However, the long-term costs of venting anger at one's children far outweigh possible benefits. Costs include the following:

- Loss of the Spirit.
- Loss of respect (for self and from family members).
- Loss of friendship and cooperation.

- Loss of self-confidence.
- Guilt and loneliness.
- Strained relationships.
- Damage to self and others.
- Children who fear rather than love their parents.
- Children who rebel, engage in delinquent behavior, and leave home at an early age.
- Children who fail in school.
- Increased risk for problems such as depression, poor health, addictive behavior, and job-related concerns.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: ACKNOWLEDGING THE COSTS OF ANGER

Angry parents sometimes deny or minimize the consequences of their anger. Fully acknowledging those costs can increase their motivation to overcome anger problems. After presenting the information on the costs of anger provided above, invite class members to write down what their anger is costing them. If necessary, take a few minutes to help them identify the costs.

After parents have listed the costs, suggest that they look at their lists often to remind them of the consequences of acting out their anger. As they learn to control their angry feelings and as items on their lists no longer apply, they can start crossing them off—a happy reminder that they are making progress.

CAUSES OF ANGER

Some parents use anger to intimidate and control their children, to feel superior, and to avoid dealing with problems. Anger may stem from pride and selfishness, such as when a person fails to get his or her way, or from lack of meekness (patience in the face of provocation). Some individuals become angry when feeling frustrated, hurt, or disappointed.

Anger often occurs when a person perceives a threat, injustice, or mistreatment to oneself or others. The threat may be physical or emotional. For example, the person may be fearful of bodily harm, humiliation, or loss of esteem to self or others. In the opening case example, Jack felt a threat to his image as a respected father who was in control of his children's behavior. He was concerned that others would judge him to be a powerless and ineffective parent.

Distorted Perceptions

Perceptions of endangerment are often distorted. Too often, anger results when a person wrongly judges the intent of others: "He is trying to hurt me"; "She is keeping me from getting what I want"; "He doesn't care about my feelings"; "He is using me."

Some individuals get angry almost without thinking. This kind of anger is often difficult to control because it occurs so quickly. In other situations, anger builds slowly as an individual perceives ongoing threats, injustice, or mistreatment. Anger also builds when the person dwells on a situation, engaging in thoughts that are often highly distorted and exaggerated.

When individuals perceive a threat and respond to someone in anger, their bodies prepare for action. Their blood pressure increases, their muscles tense, their respiration increases, and their minds focus on responding to the threat or mistreatment. This state of readiness may be released in a single, explosive verbal or physical response to the perceived threat. Or it might build slowly over time as individuals experience a series of provocations. Anger-provoking thoughts increase until a person explodes over a situation, sometimes over something minor that would normally be disregarded.

These physiological changes suggest important keys to controlling anger. The best time for a parent to act is on first noticing an increase in stress. The parent can seek additional information about the perceived threat, coming to understand it more clearly. A better understanding may reduce the perception of endangerment, decreasing the possibility of anger. Negative, anger-provoking thoughts can be replaced with more positive, calming thoughts as the person views the stressful situation more positively. The parent can consider more productive ways to respond to the threat or injustice, a response that will resolve the problem rather than cause it to escalate.

A stressed parent can also avoid situations that are likely to provoke more stress until he or she is more relaxed and in control. Then the parent can work to resolve the situation without anger.

OVERCOMING ANGER

The following principles can help parents overcome anger-related problems. As you teach, ask the parents to find and apply the principles that work best for them.

Pray

Parents should pray with real intent for help in overcoming angry feelings. The Psalmist taught that the Lord will deliver the prayerful from the storms of life: "They cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven" (Psalm 107:28–30). Fasting and priesthood blessings are also helpful in overcoming angry feelings. Priesthood blessings, prayers, and fasting should be combined with individual effort to change.

Resolve Underlying Problems

Parents should talk with their children and work out the problems that provoke their anger. Most problems can be resolved peacefully. For help, parents can review session 3 ("Communicating with Love"), session 7 ("Resolving Conflict"), and session 9 ("Applying Consequences"). When addressing problems, parents should speak to their children with the same respect they would show to an employer, a friend, or a Church leader.

Take Responsibility for Anger

Parents who have an anger problem must acknowledge that they have a problem and take responsibility for it before they can overcome it. Children may provoke their parents, but the parents are responsible for how they respond. They can learn to control their anger and respond in better ways.

Some individuals excuse their anger, claiming it is a part of their cultural heritage. For example, some parents physically assault their children, justifying themselves

because the behavior is widely practiced in their ethnic group. Such actions are not acceptable to Heavenly Father. Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that membership in the family of God takes precedence over cultural identity:

"Your Heavenly Father assigned you to be born into a specific lineage from which you received your inheritance of race, culture, and traditions. That lineage can provide a rich heritage and great reasons to rejoice. Yet you have the responsibility to determine if there is any part of that heritage that must be discarded because it works against the Lord's plan of happiness. . . .

". . . No family can long endure under fear or force; that leads to contention and rebellion. Love is the foundation of a happy family."[5]

Once individuals have recognized and acknowledged a problem, they can repent and begin to overcome the problem.

Identify the Anger Cycle

If a parent is chronically angry, he or she may engage in cyclical behavior that includes four phases. Behavioral scientists have given differing names to phases of the anger cycle, but the essential elements are the same. Below is a synopsis of the cycle described by anger-management specialists Murray Cullen and Robert E. Freeman-Longo.[6] People are most successful at controlling anger during early phases in the cycle, before the physiological build-up occurs.

Pretends-to-be-normal phase. Life runs smoothly, but anger lurks beneath the surface, affecting the way the person lives and thinks. Events or situations readily trigger habitual, distorted patterns of thinking. The person rationalizes and justifies these distortions.

Build-up phase. As the person focuses on the distorted thinking, he or she begins to feel threatened or endangered and begins to react angrily. The person's thoughts replay familiar themes such as "She doesn't care what I say as a parent," or "I do all the work around here; he never helps out." Physical cues indicate the person is becoming angry (tension, stiffness, tightness, pounding heart, rapid breathing, upset stomach, or a hot or flushed feeling). The person fantasizes and plans for acting out the anger and may engage in addictive behavior that feeds the anger (drug and alcohol abuse, overeating, overworking).

Acting-out phase. Anger is vented on others through yelling at them, demeaning them, and physically or sexually assaulting them. Or it may be turned inward through self-denigration, suicide attempts, or alcohol or drug abuse.

Downward-spiral phase. The person feels guilt and shame. Defenses then emerge, and the person tries to cover the anger by doing something generically good to prove that he or she is a good person. The person then resolves to control his or her temper. As the resolve breaks down, the person cycles back to the pretends-to-be-normal phase.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: IDENTIFYING YOUR ANGER CYCLE

Give participants copies of the form "Identifying My Anger Cycle," found on page 65. Ask participants to fill in the blanks. Inform them that this activity will help them identify their anger cycle, if they have a problem with anger.

Keep an Anger Log

Keeping an anger log will increase a parent's awareness of his or her anger cycle.[7] The parent can learn to interrupt anger early, using the principles in this session.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: KEEPING AN ANGER LOG

Instruct parents to fill out an anger log whenever they experience anger during the coming week. (A sample anger log is on page 66. A blank log is on page 67. Make a copy of the sample and three or four copies of the blank log for each group member.) This exercise will help participants become aware of how they think, feel, and react when situations trigger their anger. They may become conscious of behavioral patterns that they need to change. The log will also remind them to begin thinking and acting in ways that can lead to better outcomes.

Defuse Anger-Provoking Thoughts

Parents should look for alternate explanations for the behavior about which they get angry. For example, a child who is rude to them may have had a difficult day at school. A defiant child may feel accepted only by peers who engage in unacceptable behavior. Parents should think of situations that bother them as problems that need to be resolved and opportunities to grow closer to their children, not as threatening events that demand a dramatic, angry response.

As parents challenge angry thoughts, timing is crucial. When a person reaches a high level of anger, he or she becomes irrational. When feelings approach this level, the person should get away from the situation and take time to calm down.

Just as athletes and musicians prepare through long hours of practice to perform appropriately in specific situations, parents can prepare themselves to respond appropriately when they get in anger-provoking situations. Raymond Novaco of the University of California at Irvine suggested that individuals learn to recognize the beginnings of an angry response and replace distorted thoughts with coping statements that foster a more accurate perception of the situation.[8] In calm moments, they can mentally review statements like these: "How can I resolve this problem? I'm getting upset, but I know how to deal with it. I can manage this situation. I know how to regulate my anger. I can keep my sense of humor."

When an actual provocation begins, a person can use these coping statements and others: "What do I want to get out of this interaction? I'm not going to gain anything by getting mad. If I get angry, I'll pay a price I don't want. I need to look for the positives. I can't assume the worst or jump to conclusions. My anger is a signal that it's time to instruct myself. I can reason this out. I can treat this person with respect."

LEARNING ACTIVITY: USING COPING STATEMENTS

Invite class members to describe anger-provoking situations they typically encounter. Ask them to write coping statements that will help them avoid getting angry in those situations and to rehearse responses to anger-provoking situations using the coping statements. They can visualize each anger-provoking situation while repeating in their minds the coping statements. They should do this exercise several times a day until they incorporate the new way of thinking. This mental rehearsal will prepare them to respond appropriately in real-life situations.

Get out of the Situation

The best time for parents to act is when they notice stress is increasing. They can learn to monitor their anger. One way to monitor anger is to imagine a thermometer that measures their anger level. If they lose control at 80 degrees, they should get out of the situation before it gets that hot. They should tell the child, "I'm getting angry. I need some time to cool down." It's not helpful to blame the child by saying, "You're making me angry."

Identify Calming Activities

Relaxing activities may include meditating, working, jogging, swimming, listening to music, or reading a book. Parents must not try to calm down by venting their anger or brooding over the incident associated with it. If they brood or vent, their anger will probably escalate. As they mentally review the incident again and again, they will most likely continue to exaggerate the situation. As they vent, they do the same, justifying in their minds the violent expression of their anger.

A sense of gratitude and an effort to look for the good in their children can help parents calm their anger. Another way of calming down is to follow the counsel of President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve, who suggested that undesirable thoughts be replaced with sacred music: "As the music begins and as the words form in your thoughts, the unworthy [thoughts] will slip shamefully away. It will change the whole mood on the stage of your mind. Because [the music] is uplifting and clean, the baser thoughts will disappear."[9]

Share Underlying Feelings

Anger is often expressed in place of feelings of hurt, fear, embarrassment, or rejection. Some individuals hesitate to share these feelings, fearing they will show weakness or vulnerability.

When individuals calmly share underlying feelings, they begin to talk about the things that really bother them, not just their animosity. When the real issues are discussed, conflicts are more readily resolved.

It often takes greater courage to be honest than to be angry. When parents share underlying feelings, they often find that their children are less defensive and more willing to work out problems. The relationship between family members improves.

Some individuals have difficulty identifying and expressing feelings connected to their anger. It may be helpful for them to explore with their spouses why they are feeling angry, looking for reasons beyond the obvious misbehavior of the child, such as concern that one is failing as a parent, or a fear that the child will not succeed. Once the parent recognizes and acknowledges the underlying feelings, he or she can talk about them with the spouse or child instead of expressing anger.

BETH

Whenever Beth attended after-school activities, she dreaded Mom's angry response. After taking a parenting class, Mom began to share the feelings connected to her anger. "I have a fear you're going to get in trouble, like my mother did when she was a teenager. She became pregnant and had me as a child," she confided. "I never want that to happen to you." Beth responded by assuring Mom of her complete commitment to the law of chastity. Mom felt reassured and more readily supported Beth's future activities.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: IDENTIFYING UNDERLYING FEELINGS

Ask participants to identify and label their underlying feelings when they become angry. Challenge them to acknowledge and express those feelings; in so doing, they can resolve their anger better, while learning more appropriate responses.

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."[10] Anger becomes less of a problem.

The Book of Mormon describes a "mighty change" of heart that comes through conversion and discipleship—a disposition "to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2). Paul wrote that the fruits of the Spirit are "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22–23). Mormon gave the following counsel, which can apply to those who are struggling to change their angry behavior: "Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with [charity], which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (Moroni 7:48).

As individuals change spiritually, they start to feel less anger and gain confidence that they can control angry feelings better. To help this change begin and to help it continue, they can:

- Read the scriptures each day and incorporate the teachings in their lives.
- Pray daily for help in all aspects of life, including anger problems.
- Repent and seek access to the healing power of the Atonement.
- Seek counsel from the bishop as needed.
- Set personal goals to overcome temper problems; work on one problem until they overcome it and then begin on another one.
- Pray that they will see those around them as the Lord sees them.
- Renew covenants and worship in the temple and in Church meetings.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: INCREASING SPIRITUALITY

Invite the participants to consider writing what they will do to increase their spirituality and closeness to the Savior. Ask them to give careful thought and prayer to this subject, talking with their bishops or spouses as needed.

Prevent Relapse

Relapse prevention is the process of disrupting the anger cycle by changing thoughts and behavior and by using other intervention strategies that the person develops. Intervention strategies provide alternatives to anger build-up. Relapse prevention and intervention strategies may involve help from family, friends, co-workers, a bishop,

or an instructor. Relapse prevention usually occurs during the first two phases of the anger cycle: the pretends-to-be-normal and buildup phases. The person learns to recognize and respond to risk factors (events or emotions that trigger anger) in ways that disrupt the cycle and prevent relapse. The following is an example of how a person may prevent relapse.

Pretends-to-be-normal phase. The person acknowledges an anger problem but manages it in a healthy way. He or she has an awareness of anger triggers and uses strategies to cope, such as avoiding high-risk situations, relaxing, and taking time-outs. The person actively works to resolve the conflicts and problems leading to anger.[11]

Build-up phase. The person uses new coping strategies to limit anger level and intensity. He or she corrects and replaces negative thoughts with positive statements ("I can handle this" or "I can find other solutions to this problem"). He or she acknowledges the painful feelings underneath the anger and recognizes that these nonangry feelings are normal. The person stops addictive behaviors, including fantasizing about acting out the behavior and planning to vent angry feelings. He or she talks out the problems or, if the situation is unchangeable, writes about them. The person releases energy through physical activities and builds self-confidence by doing something he or she enjoys.[12] The person also strives for spiritual rebirth.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: DEVELOPING A RELAPSE PREVENTION PLAN

Ask the participants to use the outline on page 68 to identify and record a plan to help prevent recurrence of their anger. Provide copies of the outline for them. Discuss how the suggestions in this session can be applied to the Relapse Prevention Plan outline. Suggest that during the coming week they prayerfully seek help from the Lord as well as help from family and selected friends as they prepare and carry out their plan.

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."[13]

Individuals who apply the principles and suggestions in this session can learn to overcome their anger instead of being controlled by it. The following is an example of how one person overcame his anger:

"I used to walk around feeling like I wanted to hurt everyone I saw. Anger dominated my life. I couldn't talk with my own wife and kids without exploding. People avoided me. I hated myself, and I hated them. I often felt like I wanted to hit someone—anyone. I would burst into a rage over the slightest provocation. I finally sought help. Through counseling I talked about a lot of things that had bothered me for a long time—problems related to my anger. I learned to think differently and to view others in a better way. I applied gospel principles to my problem—prayer, scripture study, forgiveness. I began to feel better about myself. Over time my anger went away, and I felt in control of my life once again. Now I can interact with my family. I can enjoy socializing with others. I feel like I have my life back again."

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. Parents who have been shackled by anger can break free from this problem and experience peace of mind.

Parents should not forget nor underestimate the powerful influence of the Holy Ghost. As they seek help from the Lord, the Holy Ghost will comfort, support, and direct them in managing and overcoming angry feelings (see John 14:26–27; D&C 8:2–3).

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. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 112–13; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 86.
6. See *Men and Anger: Understanding and Managing Your Anger* (Holyoke, Massachusetts: NEARI Press, 2004), 67–70. ISBN# 1-929657-12-9.
7. The idea of using an anger log is adapted from *Men and Anger*, 31–32.
8. *Anger Control: The Development and Evaluation of an Experimental Treatment* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1975), 7, 95–96.
9. "Inspiring Music—Worthy Thoughts," *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 28.
10. In Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 26; or *Ensign*, May 1992, 20.
11. *Men and Anger*, 70–71.
12. *Men and Anger*, 72–74.
13. *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 316.

IDENTIFYING MY ANGER CYCLE

Describe the typical situations that trigger your anger (for example, spouse argues with me; bank account is overdrawn; house is in disarray):

Describe the thoughts or justifications that feed your anger (for example, my spouse doesn't care about anyone but herself; my husband is totally irresponsible):

Describe the feelings underlying your anger (for example, disrespected, used, ignored):

Describe the physical cues that indicate you are getting angry (for example, sweaty palms, rapid heart rate, tenseness, irritability):

Describe what you do that feeds your anger (for example, dwelling on the offense, refusing to talk about it, drinking alcohol):

Describe how you act out your anger (including your worst behavior):

Describe your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors after acting out your anger (for example, relief, guilt, sorrow, contrition):

SAMPLE ANGER LOG

Information Requested	Situation A	Situation B
Date and triggering event or person:	10/19 Argument with husband.	10/20 Kids misbehaving.
Intensity of my anger:	Mild Severe 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 (9) 10	Mild Severe 1 2 3 4 (5) 6 7 8 9 10
Thoughts feeding my anger:	He's a jerk. Doesn't care about me.	Kids never listen. Don't respect me.
Feelings underlying my anger:	Unloved, ignored, unappreciated.	Used, ignored.
How I dealt with my anger:	Screamed at him. Called him a jerk.	Calmly told them to go to their room until they could behave.
Self-talk in dealing with anger:	He deserves to be punished. He hurt me. I'm only paying him back.	They were just being children. They weren't trying to defy me.
Success in controlling my anger:	None Great 1 (2) 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	None Great 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 (9) 10
What seemed to help:	Nothing I did helped. What I did made it worse.	Took a time out. Went for a walk, and then talked with the kids.
Suppressed, vented, or resolved anger:	Suppressed feelings after my outburst.	Talked out my frustrations.
What I'll do better next time:	Not react. Calm down before I talk.	Nothing. I did well this time.

Adapted from Murray Cullen and Robert E. Freeman-Longo, *Men and Anger: Understanding and Managing Your Anger* (Holyoke, Massachusetts: NEARI Press, 2004), 33–34. ISBN# 1-929657-12-9.

ANGER LOG

Information Requested	Situation A	Situation B
Date and triggering event or person:		
Intensity of my anger:	Mild 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Severe	Mild 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Severe
Thoughts feeding my anger:		
Feelings underlying my anger:		
How I dealt with my anger:		
Self-talk in dealing with anger:		
Success in controlling my anger:	None 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great	None 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great
What seemed to help:		
Suppressed, vented, or resolved anger:		
What I'll do better next time:		

Adapted from Murray Cullen and Robert E. Freeman-Longo, *Men and Anger: Understanding and Managing Your Anger* (Holyoke, Massachusetts: NEARI Press, 2004), 33–34, 117. ISBN# 1-929657-12-9.

MY RELAPSE PREVENTION PLAN

NORMAL PHASE

Anger Triggers:	Coping or Escape Strategies:

Actions to Solve Problems Leading to Anger:

BUILD-UP PHASE AND USE OF INTERVENTIONS

Anger Triggers:	Coping or Escape Strategies:

SESSION SEVEN

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Session Objectives

During this session, help parents:

- Understand that differences of opinion are inevitable and that families who resolve conflicts grow closer and become stronger.
- Learn ways of dealing with conflict in the home.
- Understand how to resolve differences peacefully.

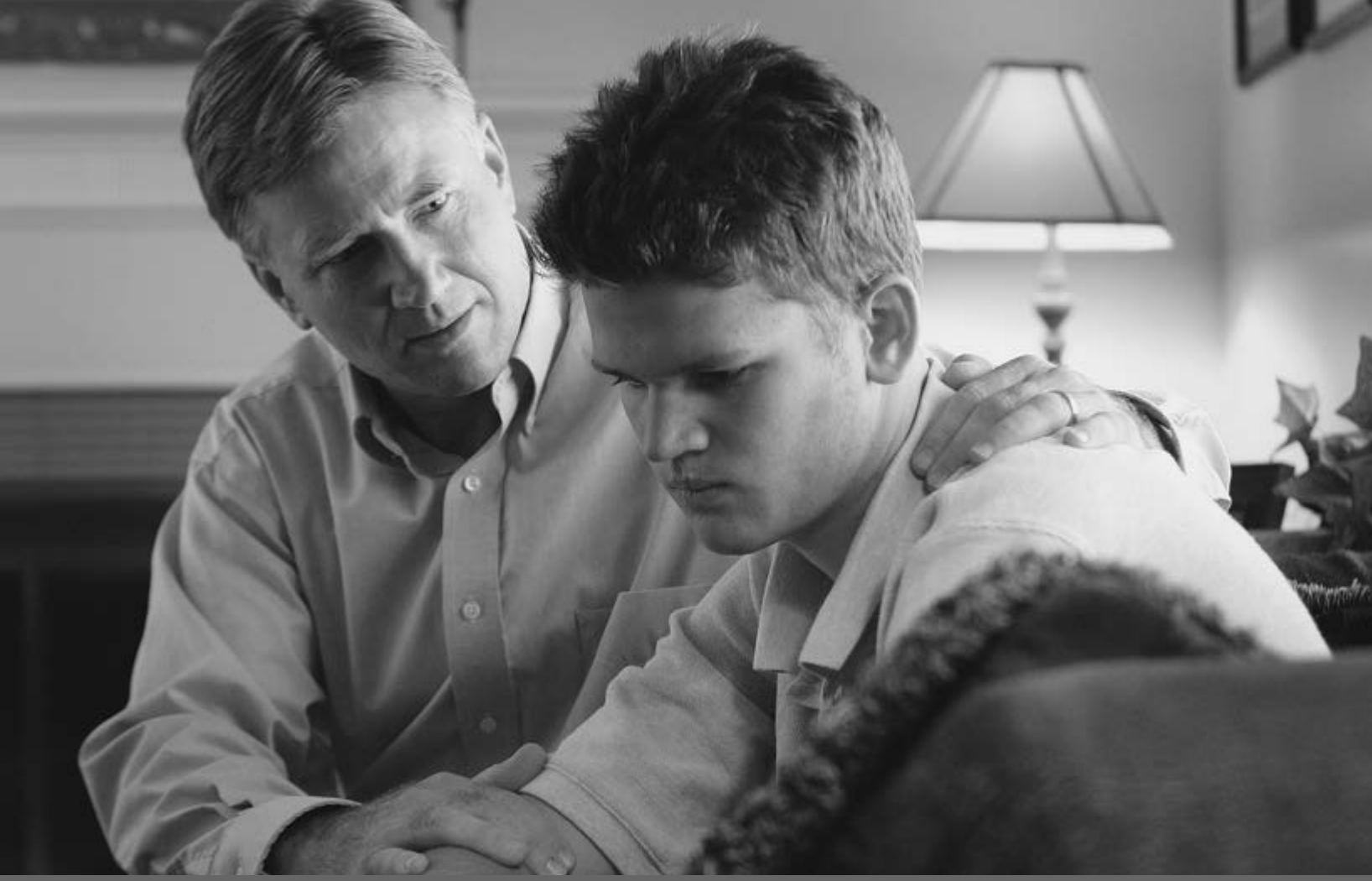
The Problem of Unresolved Conflict

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that the family is one of Satan's favorite targets: "[Satan] works to drive a wedge of disharmony between a father and a mother. He entices children to be disobedient to their parents. . . . That's all it takes, because Satan knows that the surest and most effective way to disrupt the Lord's work is to diminish the effectiveness of the family and the sanctity of the home."[1]

An elderly woman recalled with great sorrow the results of unresolved conflict in her family: "As I attended the graveside service for my last remaining brother, I reflected on the tragic childhood events that embittered my three brothers, driving them from home and from the restored gospel that has meant so much to me. My father, a religious man, was demanding and contentious, verbally chastising his children in public as well as private. As my brothers grew older, they began to fight back. The fights were vicious and ugly, and escalated into cursing and slugging. Each of my brothers left home at an early age, rarely returning to visit their parents. Nor did they want anything to do with the religion espoused by my father."

The causes of conflict are many. Some parents are overly permissive, giving in to their children's whims until their children's behavior is out of control. Others are too restrictive, provoking their children to rebel. Some parents overreact to their children's normal drive for independence. Some children go astray and willfully engage in behavior that violates family rules and standards.

Family members grow closer and become stronger when they resolve differences successfully. Left unresolved, conflicts destroy family relationships and cause sorrow among family members.



"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

HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

During His ministry among the Nephites, the Savior denounced those who are contentious:

"He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

"Behold, . . . this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away" (3 Nephi 11:29–30).

Jesus counseled that people should resolve contentions with others before they come unto Him:

"If ye shall come unto me, or shall desire to come unto me, and rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee—

"Go thy way unto thy brother, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I will receive you" (3 Nephi 12:23–24; see also 3 Nephi 12:9).

These teachings apply to parents and the manner in which they relate to their children. In the proclamation on the family, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve prescribed anew the Savior's formula for rearing children successfully: "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."[2]

Review with parents the following principles for resolving conflict.

Approach Parent-Child Problems with a Christlike Attitude

Applying the Savior's teachings to their role as parents, fathers and mothers should show love and a willingness to resolve conflict, making concessions in a spirit of compromise while upholding values and standards, striving to persuade their children while refusing to give in to manipulation. Parents should teach their children correct principles and the rationale for family rules. They should encourage their children to make correct choices, persuade them when they are argumentative, impose consequences when they choose to disobey (see session 9), 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). A child's angry feelings often dissipate when he or she feels understood and respected by the parent. Parents who listen may find that their own feelings and perspectives change.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: LISTENING TO UNDERSTAND

Ask the participants to recall an occasion when a child wanted to argue rather than listen to them. Have them role-play, using the communication skills in session 3, how they would listen to the child rather than argue with him or her in that situation. One of them should take the role of the child while another listens as the parent. Have them practice

for five minutes, and then change roles so that both have the chance to practice listening. Afterward, have them discuss the experience. How did it feel to have someone listen to them? How difficult was it for them to listen when the child wanted something objectionable? Invite them to practice listening to their children during the week, particularly when their children want to argue.

Refuse to Argue

One of the basic principles for resolving conflict in the home is so simple that it is often overlooked. It involves living the higher law of Christ and refusing to argue. 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: "Christ is the perfect example of nonreviling, even in the face of cruel and unwarranted assaults; in circumstances where he was spit upon, buffeted, smitten, taunted, rejected and denied, mocked and even crucified (Matt. 26:67–70 and 27:29, 35), he did not revile. He did not strike back. Though he could have called down 'more than twelve legions of angels' (Matt. 26:53), he 'reviled not.' He was a frequent, almost continual, victim of reviling from the very beginning to the very end of His life, even by those who suffered with Him: 'And they that were crucified with him reviled him' (Mark 15:32). . . . The more supreme the goodness, the more it seems to attract revilers—and the less it seems to revile in return. This is the model parents should emulate when being buffeted about by unruly children. 'Revile Not!' "[3]

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. 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."[4]

Some parents may think that a noncombative response (not fighting back) gives children the upper hand, allows them to win arguments, and places them in control of family matters. This is not the case. Christ stood courageously in front of His tormentors, always in control of His response, never seeking to escape. Loving them and recognizing their ignorance, He even pleaded for his Father to forgive them (see Luke 23:34).

In other sessions, parents review ways to communicate expectations, to give their children choices between acceptable behavioral alternatives, and to impose consequences that are agreed upon in advance when their children do not obey. When children want to argue, parents can restate their expectations in a kind and loving way and judiciously remind their children of consequences already agreed upon. When parents have done these things, their children will have little to argue about.

Children are often governed to a great extent by the things that go on around them. One of the things they want most is parental attention. According to Glenn Latham, "parental attention is *the most powerful* force or consequence in the shaping of children's behavior."[5] When children fail to draw negative attention by being argumentative, they usually calm down and engage in more socially acceptable behavior.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: REFUSING TO ARGUE

Have the participants discuss with their spouses or another parent how they could, without arguing, approach a situation in their family that is typically full of conflict. How would they share their expectations for their children in a positive way without contention so their expectations are clearly understood? How would they inform their children of the consequences for misbehavior? How could they express their love? Give them a few minutes to practice what they would say and how they would say it. Ask them to try their approach during the week.

Follow Scriptural Guidelines for Reproving Children

Parents may need to reprove a child "betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost" and then show forth "an increase of love" lest they be esteemed as the child's enemy (D&C 121:43). President James E. Faust clarified that the Holy Ghost moves a person to reprove with sharpness "only very rarely" and that "any reproving should be done gently in an effort to convince the one being reproved that it is done in his own interest."[6] Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve taught that *betimes* means "early or soon,"[7] suggesting that the reproof should occur soon after the infraction so as to be understood. The word *sharpness* in this context does not mean with anger or forcefulness, but clearly and distinctly. Wise parents often follow up an intense session with a child by expressing love to the child, giving the child appropriate physical affection, and sometimes engaging the child in an enjoyable activity.

Selectively Arbitrate Conflicts between Children

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

Parents can often help best by taking a neutral position and by giving the children responsibility to solve the problem. Parents can do this by using good communication skills, as shown in the following example (see also session 3).

SID AND VANCE

Dad entered the room as Sid, 12, and Vance, 9, were wrestling on the floor, hitting and yelling at each other. Vance began to cry, and Sid called him a baby. Dad stepped in and pulled the boys apart.

Dad: What's going on between you two?

Sid: Vance started it.

Vance: I did not. You started it.

Dad: So, you're both blaming each other for starting the problem. *(Gives them responsibility for solving the problem.)* What do you think we should do to solve it?

Vance: Tell Sid to leave me alone.

Sid: Leave you alone? What about me? Who was it that took my cards and scattered them all over the floor? Leave my stuff alone, and we'll get along fine.

Dad: *(Remains neutral; uses reflective listening.)* So Vance, you're saying that Sid started it, and Sid, you're saying that Vance started it by taking your cards without asking.

Vance: Yeah, well who was it that took my CD without asking?

Dad: Both of you are blaming each other for taking things without asking. So let me ask again, what needs to happen to solve this problem?

Sid: Tell Vance to grow up.

Vance: Why don't you grow up?

Dad: *(Prepares to impose a logical consequence.)* It sounds to me like you want to keep arguing. Maybe you better go to your separate rooms until you're ready to solve this.

Sid: I'm ready.

Vance: So am I.

Sid: Tell Vance he needs to ask before he borrows my things.

Vance: Sid never asks me before he takes my things. He needs to ask too.

Dad: So both of you want the other to ask before borrowing things. Is that right?

Sid: Yes.

Vance: I guess.

Dad: I like that suggestion. Is that agreeable to both of you?

Sid and Vance: Yes.

In this case, arbitration worked because the father was able to listen without taking sides and obtained the children's cooperation in suggesting and carrying out a solution. The threat of consequences seemed to motivate the children to look for a solution to their problem. Although the consequence turned out to be unnecessary, it would have been an appropriate intervention had the children wanted to continue the argument.

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

Some parenting educators advocate asking children to go outside when they are fighting and not to return until the argument is settled. They reason that children, once deprived of adult attention, soon lose their motivation to fight. That may be true, but children fight for more reasons than adult attention. The risk of leaving children on their own to work out conflict is that the stronger child may abuse the weaker child emotionally and physically. Parents should heed King Benjamin's commandment to his people: "Ye will not suffer your children . . . [to] fight and quarrel one with another" (Mosiah 4:14).

LEARNING ACTIVITY: ARBITRATING CONFLICT

Have the participants identify and discuss with their spouses or another parent the situations in their families where two or more children engage in conflict. Ask them to discuss how they could apply the suggestions for arbitrating conflict. What problems might they encounter in using this approach? How could they address those challenges? Ask them to look for opportunities to use the approach with their children during the coming week. Invite them to report on their experiences during the next meeting.

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.[8] The model works best when family members understand it and agree to use it.

Step 1: State Positions

Each person 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.

EXAMPLE

Dad wants the family to start having a regular family home evening. Mom is content not to have family home evening. Alfredo, 15, wants to play soccer with his friends on Monday nights. Marietta, 10, wants to have family home evening.

Step 2: Explore Underlying Concerns

Family members explore their positions in greater depth, examining the concerns that underlie their positions.

Dad shares his spiritual conviction that family home evening could bless their family. He is also concerned about the implications of disobeying the leaders of the Church when they have taught the importance of this program for so many years.

Mom, while growing up, saw her family argue every time they tried to have a family night. She does not want the same thing to happen with her children. While she wants to obey prophetic counsel, she fears that family home evening will cause more conflict than it is worth.

Alfredo shares his feelings about the importance of being with his friends and his reluctance to join the family in a spiritual activity.

Marietta shares her desire to do what the prophet has asked their family to do.

During this phase, family members should look for any underlying concerns that are common to everyone.

Family members observe that they all care about each other and want the family to be happy and harmonious. They all have at least some desire to engage in activities that will strengthen the family, although they disagree about what those activities should be.

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.

Family members list these possible solutions:

- Have family home evening each Monday night before soccer.
- Decide not to have family home evening.
- Have family home evening but excuse those who do not wish to participate.
- Hold family home evening on a Sunday night.
- Have a family activity night without a spiritual message.
- Have family home evening, but make participation in spiritual activities optional.

Step 4: Select a Solution

After brainstorming is completed, family members evaluate each suggestion and create a plan that will be responsive to the concerns of everyone. Since the solution generally needs multiple components to address the concerns of all family members, the family should think in terms of "building a solution set rather than simply . . . finding *a* or *the* solution."[9]

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.

Once a plan has been created, responsibilities for carrying out the plan of action are agreed upon and commitments received from participants.

After evaluating the suggestions, the family decides to hold family home evening on Sunday nights whenever Alfredo plays soccer the following evening. The parents would prefer always to have family home evening on Monday, but not at the price of excluding their son.

Alfredo is willing to sit in on family home evening gospel discussions as long as he does not have to give lessons. Mother feels comfortable with the arrangement, particularly since her children agree to the meetings. Father is responsible to organize and conduct the meetings. Dad, Mom, and occasionally Marietta will share in giving lessons.

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.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: USING THE PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

Give the participants 5 or 10 minutes to discuss with their spouses or another parent an area of conflict in their family that could be resolved using the problem-solving model. Ask them to discuss how they could introduce the model to their families and enlist their children's cooperation in using it to solve the problem. Ask them to try the model with their families during the coming week. Invite them to report on the outcome in the next session.

A NEW COVENANT

President James E. Faust of the First Presidency pointed out that during Jesus Christ's mortal ministry He introduced a new testament—a new and better covenant that requires men and women to abide by a higher law. No longer were individuals (including parents) to follow a 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 despitefully 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.[10]

Love at Home

President Thomas S. Monson told a poignant story that underscores the importance of resolving differences that can destroy family solidarity:

"There are those families comprised of mothers and fathers, sons and daughters who have, through thoughtless comment, isolated themselves from one another. An account of how such a tragedy was narrowly averted occurred many years ago in the life of a young man who, for purposes of privacy, I shall call Jack.

"Throughout Jack's life, he and his father had many serious arguments. One day when he was 17, they had a particularly violent one. Jack said to his father, 'This is the straw that breaks the camel's back. I'm leaving home, and I shall never return.' So saying, he went to the house and packed his bag. His mother begged him to stay; he was too angry to listen. He left her crying at the doorway.

"Leaving the yard, he was about to pass through the gate when he heard his father call to him, 'Jack, I know that a large share of the blame for your leaving rests with me. For this I am truly sorry. I want you to know that if you should ever wish to return home, you'll always be welcome. And I'll try to be a better father to you. I want you to know that I'll always love you.'

"Jack said nothing but went to the bus station and bought a ticket to a distant point. As he sat on the bus, watching the miles go by, he commenced to think about the words of his father. He began to realize how much love it had required for him to do what he had done. Dad had apologized. He had invited him back and left the words ringing in the summer air: 'I love you.'

"It was then that Jack realized that the next move was up to him. He knew the only way he could ever find peace with himself was to demonstrate to his father the same kind of maturity, goodness, and love that Dad had shown toward him. Jack got off the bus. He bought a return ticket and went back.

"He arrived shortly after midnight, entered the house, turned on the light. There in the rocking chair sat his father, his head in his hands. As he looked up and saw Jack, he arose from the chair and they rushed into each other's arms. Jack often said, 'Those last years that I was home were among the happiest of my life.'

"We could say that here was a boy who overnight became a man. Here was a father who, suppressing passion and bridling pride, rescued his son before he became one of that vast 'lost battalion' resulting from fractured families and shattered homes. Love was the binding band, the healing balm. Love so often felt, so seldom expressed. . . .

". . . Ours is the responsibility, yes, even the solemn duty, to reach out to those who have . . . strayed from the family circle."[11]

As families abide by the new covenant introduced by the Savior, resolving differences in a loving, amicable way, they will enjoy greater love, peace, and harmony in their family relationships.

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), 66.
4. *Christlike Parenting*, 69.
5. *Christlike Parenting*, 67.
6. In Conference Report, Oct. 1980, 51; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 35.
7. In Conference Report, Apr. 1993, 97; or *Ensign*, May 1993, 78–79.
8. *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.
9. *The Power of Two: Secrets to a Strong and Loving Marriage* (California: New Harbinger Publications, 1997), 202.
10. See "The Surety of a Better Testament," *Ensign*, Sept. 2003, 3–6.
11. In Conference Report, Oct. 2003, 61–62; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 58.

SESSION EIGHT

TEACHING RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR

Session Objectives

During this session, help parents:

- Understand how to teach their children responsible behavior.
- Know how to tell their children what they expect of them.
- Understand the concept of teaching children one step at a time.
- Know how to give choices to help their children behave responsibly.

The Importance of Teaching Properly

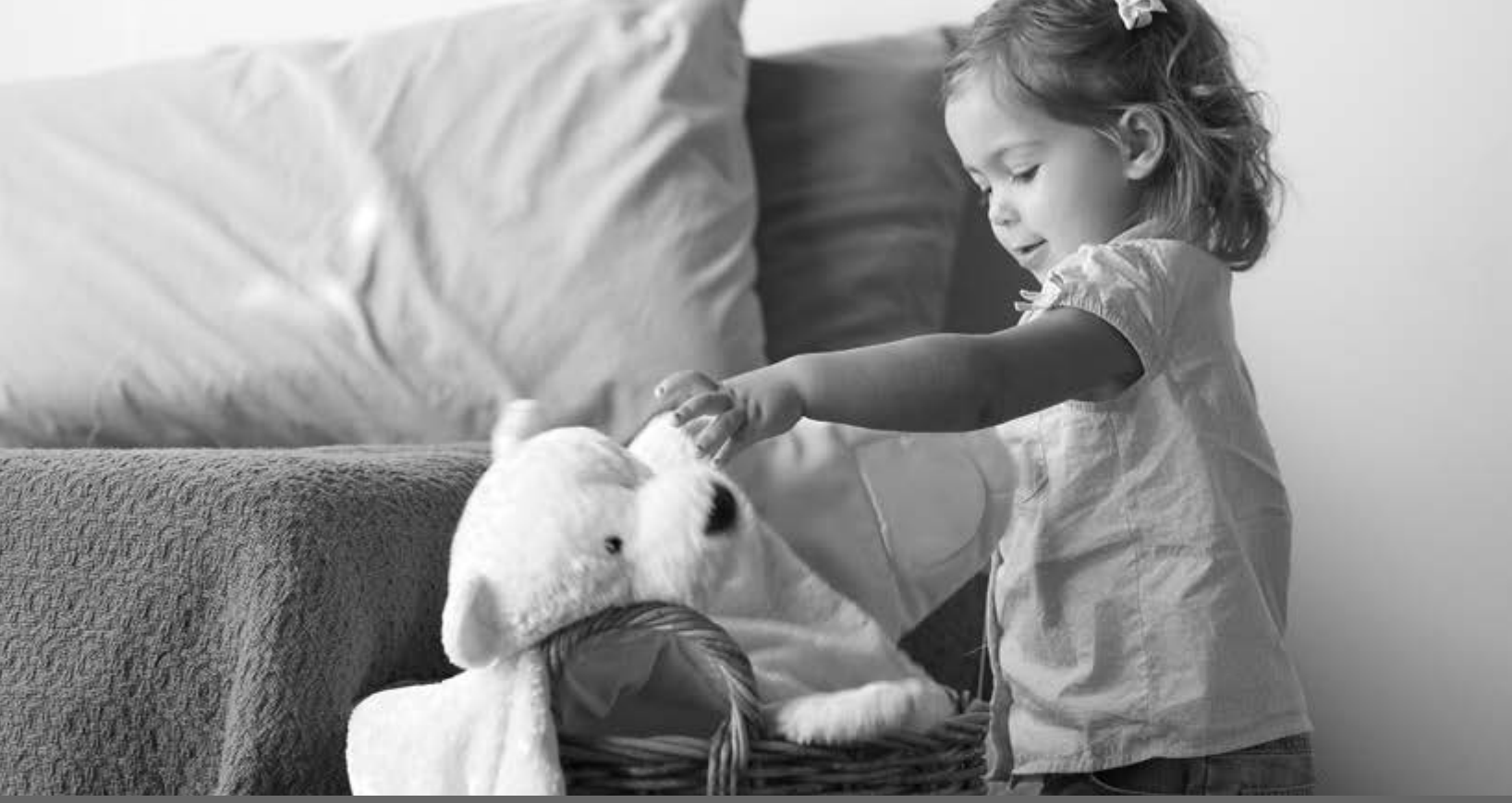
Parents have a sacred duty to teach their children to obey the commandments of God and the rules of home and society.[1] The Lord has instructed parents to teach their children to be prayerful and obedient, to have faith in Christ, to repent of sins, to be baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and to be industrious (see D&C 68:25–32). He rebuked some early Church leaders for not teaching their children properly (see D&C 93:42–44, 47–48). 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).

Some parents fail to teach their children appropriately. Parents tend to rear their children in much the same way they themselves were raised. Some parents are overly permissive and others excessively controlling. Others are so preoccupied with other matters that they neglect their responsibility and opportunity to teach their children. Some parents have distorted ideas about children, seeing them as innately good, without need for instruction and discipline, or innately evil and in need of punishment. A few parents fail to teach their children because they never wanted children in the first place; these children are often at risk for emotional abuse and neglect.

The Lord expects parents to take their teaching responsibilities seriously. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve have proclaimed: "Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of [their] obligations."[2]

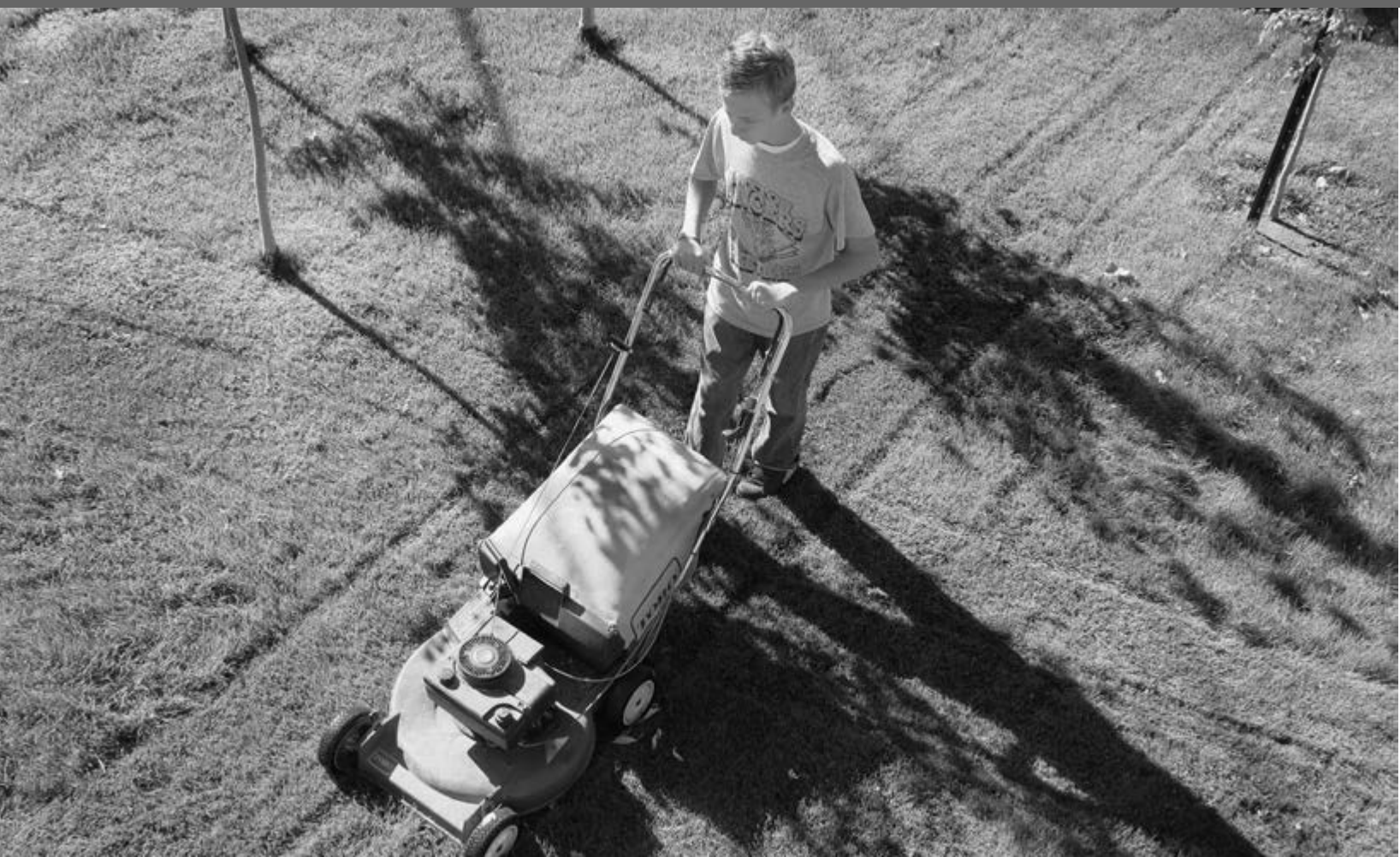
Learning Activity: Identify and Stop Poor Parenting Practices

Ask the participants to take an inventory of the way they relate to their children and consider the teaching implications of their actions. Do they teach their children appropriate behavior by precept and example? Do they engage in any inappropriate behavior,



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

ELDER NEAL A. MAXWELL



such as swearing, lying, mistreating family members, being rude and controlling or selfish or dishonest? If they are setting a bad example, ask them to consider what the behavior will cost them and how it may affect their children's behavior in the future. Suggest that they decide now to stop the inappropriate behavior. Invite them to write down one or two changes they can make and to commit themselves to make those changes.

TEACHING CHILDREN

The time to begin teaching children is when they are infants. Children are born with a natural desire to learn. A bond between parents and child "develops gradually over weeks and months" following the child's birth as they repeatedly interact with one another, learning to adapt to "each other's unique ways."[3] The relationship between parents and children creates an ideal climate for learning. Children begin to absorb their parents' ways of doing things by watching and listening, even before language skills are developed. After learning to talk, children ask questions to help them gain information about the world. Parents can use to their advantage the natural curiosity of children, imparting through words and example the information children need for successful living.

Perhaps the most crucial years in a person's life occur when he or she may be the most carefree and unconcerned about the future—childhood and adolescence. During these formative years, children acquire values, attitudes, and habits that will guide their behavior throughout their lives. Parents have the wonderful opportunity to teach their children proper values and responsible behavior in ways that invite cooperation rather than rebellion.

The following principles will help parents teach their children.

Teach by Example

One of the great challenges and opportunities parents have is to teach their children in such a way that the children will want to follow their parents' counsel. President David O. McKay described example as "the best and most effective way of teaching."[4]

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.' "[5] 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."[6]

Bishop H. David Burton, Presiding Bishop of the Church, declared that parents can guide their children when they provide a righteous example: "We must make certain our personal lives are in order. Hypocrisy has never worked, and it will not work today. We are required to lead out in righteousness and encourage our families to follow our examples. Lead out in family home evening. Lead out in scripture study. Provide priesthood blessings. Lead out in personal and family prayer."[7]

"Examples become memories that guide our lives," observed Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve.[8] Your children will remember the examples you set for them more than anything else you do or say.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

Ask the participants to take a few minutes to discuss with their spouses or another parent the behavioral changes they would like to see in their children. Have them explore whether they can make any changes in their own behavior that will set a proper example and influence their children. Have them write down what they will do.

Give 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 to 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."[9]

Elder Joe J. Christensen of the Seventy explained that overindulging children weakens them and deprives them of valuable lessons:

"In our day many children grow up with distorted values because we as parents overindulge them. Whether you are well-to-do or, like most of us, of more modest means, we as parents often attempt to provide children with almost everything they want, thus taking away from them the blessing of anticipating, of longing for something they do not have. One of the most important things we can teach our children is to deny themselves. Instant gratification generally makes for weak people. How many truly great individuals do you know who never had to struggle? . . .

". . . Somewhere along the line it is important for the character development of our children to learn that 'the earth still revolves around the sun' and not around them. Rather, we should train our children to ask themselves the question, How is the world a better place because they are in it?"[10]

Elder Christensen cautioned that children must learn to work or they will leave home ill-prepared for the outside world. He stated: "Even in family activities we need to strike a balance between play and work. Some of my most memorable experiences while growing up centered around family activities: learning how to shingle a roof, build a fence, or working in the garden. Rather than being all work and no play, for many of our children it is almost all play and very little work."[11]

Parents should teach their children to work alongside them, starting when their children are young and have a natural desire to help. Parents should assign their children routine chores according to their abilities.

Kathleen Slaugh Bahr of Brigham Young University and her colleagues suggest that working side by side strengthens family members, linking them together in enduring relationships:

"When family members work side by side in the right spirit, a foundation of caring and commitment grows out of their shared daily experience. The most ordinary tasks, like fixing meals or doing laundry, hold great potential for connecting us to those we serve and those with whom we serve. . . .

". . . Each rendering of a task is a new invitation for all to enter the family circle. The most ordinary chores can become daily rituals of family love and belonging."[12]

Parents should also teach their 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."[13] Where possible, parents should work and serve alongside their children, striving to make activities enjoyable.

As children take on responsibilities, parents need to comfort them when their efforts fall short, and in such cases parents should continue to encourage them to try again. President Thomas S. Monson taught: "Our responsibility is to rise from mediocrity to competence, from failure to achievement. Our task is to become our best selves. One of God's greatest gifts to us is the joy of trying again, for no failure ever need be final."[14]

LEARNING ACTIVITY: TEACHING CHILDREN TO BE RESPONSIBLE

Ask the participants to discuss with their spouses or another parent whether they give their children sufficient work opportunities to help them learn to be industrious. Do their children have opportunities to serve others? Are they motivated to do their best with those responsibilities given to them? Ask the parents to discuss whether they need to institute a plan for helping their children learn greater responsibility. Invite them to write down and follow through with their plans for teaching responsibility.

Clarify Expectations

Sometimes parents assume their children know exactly what is expected of them. The parents feel disappointed when these unexpressed expectations are not met.

Some parents are afraid to ask their children to do chores or make behavior changes, fearing the child will say no or resent or reject them for asking. When parents fail to clarify expectations, a wall of frustration and resentment may develop, creating emotional distance between them and the child. Clearly expressed expectations remove uncertainty and disappointment, thereby strengthening the parent-child relationship.

Discuss with parents these principles for making their expectations known:

- ***Clarify in your mind what you want.*** Make sure your expectations are reasonable. Privately discuss with your spouse and agree beforehand on the expectations, the methods of asking, and the consequences that will be imposed if the child does not comply. If your child is noncompliant or troubled, both of you should be present when making requests, if possible.
- ***Choose a good time to make your requests.*** Discuss your requests when the child is ready emotionally and physically, not when he or she is stressed, angry, or preoccupied with another matter. Family councils or family home evenings are often ideal.
- ***Be positive and specific.*** Instead of speaking in a negative or a general way ("This room is messy. Please pick it up!"), be positive and specific: "Crystal, when you do the dishes, I'd like you to rinse off each dish before you put it in the dishwasher because the dishes will be cleaner and the dishwasher will last longer."

- ***Show what you mean.*** Without doing the job for the child, demonstrate what you expect. For example, you could help the child properly rinse off the dishes, place them in the dishwasher, and wipe off the counter.
- ***Give lots of positive feedback.*** When the job is done, you might say: "Very good. That's exactly how it should be done." Tell the child how the behavior benefits you and others: "I feel good when I see the dishes done properly. Our home is a more peaceful place when it is neat and tidy."

LEARNING ACTIVITY: COMMUNICATING EXPECTATIONS

In the previous learning activity, parents were asked to plan how they can help their children learn to accept responsibility. For this activity, ask the participants to practice with their spouses or another parent how they will share their expectations with their children, using the suggestions above. One of them should take the role of the child while the other takes the role of the parent. After they have practiced for five minutes, have them change roles and practice for another five minutes. Ask them to give each other feedback on what it was like to share expectations and how it felt to be given expectations. Suggest that they schedule additional practice time, if needed, until they both feel comfortable sharing their expectations. Have them apply what they have learned with their children during the week. Invite them to report their experiences during the next session.

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.

CAMILLE

Camille, an energetic four-year-old, enjoyed shopping with her mother. Invariably, she pulled items from shelves, demanded to touch and take, and threw tantrums when Mother restricted her. Mother, who wanted Camille to behave responsibly, scolded and threatened her but had little success in changing the behavior.

After talking with a more experienced friend, Mother tried a new approach involving multiple teaching steps. The first step was to share the problem in a kind and loving way: "Camille, I want to take you shopping with me, but I get upset when you take items from the shelf. And then you start to scream as I put them back." Next, she made her expectations clear: "You may come shopping with me when you're helpful. If you take things or make a fuss, I will have to take you home, and you will not come with me next time. You must not take anything unless I ask you to pick it up for me. I want to make sure you understand this, so tell me what you've heard me say." When Camille accurately restated the expectations, Mother then said: "Tell me what will happen if you take things or make a fuss." When the child understood the expectations and consequences for not complying and agreed to them, she was allowed to go shopping again.

In the next phase of teaching, Mother took Camille for brief visits to the store. Purchases were limited to one or two items. Recognizing Camille's desire to be helpful and wanting to channel that desire in a positive way, Mother allowed Camille to help choose a grocery item and to hold it. Appropriate behavior was recognized with verbal compliments. After Camille learned appropriate behavior during short visits, she was invited for longer outings. Mother found useful roles for her, such as choosing between two acceptable kinds of cereal, selecting the nicest-looking apple, or holding Mother's purse while she placed an item in the cart. Mother gave her lots of positive feedback when she was helpful.

On one occasion, Camille threw another tantrum. Mother took her home as quickly as possible. Without anger or vindictiveness, she said: "I'm sorry you chose to misbehave in the store today. Next time I go shopping, you will stay home with a babysitter. If you decide you can follow the rules when we go shopping, we will try it again, okay?" Within a few weeks, Camille was consistently behaving appropriately in public.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: PROGRESSIVE TEACHING

Ask the participants to choose one of the more complex behavioral changes they have already identified for their children (from previous learning activities). Have them discuss with their spouses or another parent how they could break the activity into incremental steps. Suggest that they determine what they should expect the child to do at each stage of learning and how best to share those expectations with the child. Invite them to share their plans with the group if they would like feedback and suggestions.

Give Choices

Children, much 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 parents allow their children to choose, the parents should ensure that the choices they offer are acceptable to them as parents. For example, if a parent says to a teenager, "You can mow the lawn now, or you can forget about using the car tomorrow night," the child may choose to forgo the car and go with friends instead. The child gets what he wants, and the lawn remains unmowed—an unacceptable outcome to the parent. 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 the parent, 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.

Listed below are some possible choices for differing situations.

- An 11-year-old starts staying up later at night, has difficulty getting up in the morning, and wants his mother to drive him to school. The parent could say, "You can either get up in time to catch the bus, or you can walk to school." (This choice should be given only if walking to school is feasible and safe.)

- An eight-year-old delays doing the dishes. The parent could say, "You can do the dishes now, or you can do them tonight while the family watches TV."
- A teenager plays music too loud. The parent could say, "You can listen to your CD player in your room with the door closed, or you use your headset. I can't carry on a conversation because your music is so loud."

Children are not always eager to embrace new changes that require them to behave responsibly. Be prepared to hear phrases such as "That's not fair," "Why do I have to do this?" "Other parents don't make their kids do that," or "You don't care about my feelings or you wouldn't make me do this." Parents should not be manipulated by such comments. They need to be consistent in the matter of choices. Consider the example below.

MARTY

Marty sat down in front of the computer, a nightly routine that had recently started to take precedence over his assigned chores. In a family council meeting a few months earlier, family members had agreed that chores should be done first, but once again he disregarded the rule. His father gave him a choice:

Father: Marty, you have my permission to use the computer tonight when your chores are done, or if you want to do your chores tomorrow, you can use the computer tomorrow night when the work is done.

Marty: I'll do the chores after I'm done with the computer. I don't have time now.

Father: That may be so, son. But you may use the computer *after* the chores are done.

Marty: I've got to get online now. One of my friends is expecting to hear from me.

Father: I'm sure that's true. This is all the more reason to remember to get your chores done as soon as you get home from school. I don't enjoy seeing you frustrated or upset. But the work needs to be done. You'll recall we discussed this rule in family council, and you agreed to abide by it. You're welcome to use the computer as soon as the work is finished.

Marty: That's not fair. I told you I'd do the chores later. I've got other things I need to do right now.

Father: That may be so, but you can use the computer *after* the work is done.

A parent may need to repeat the choices several times and should do so without becoming angry. The child may soon tire of hearing the message and comply with the request if he or she knows the parent means it.

When giving choices, parents should not become defensive or argue. If the child wants to debate the matter, the parents can acknowledge his or her comments with a brief statement such as "That may be true" and then restate the choices. The whole process goes more smoothly when rules are agreed on in advance.

When a child refuses to comply when given choices, the parent should impose a consequence (as described in session 9) that logically relates to the misbehavior. Properly implemented, consequences make sense and help children learn responsible behavior. If the consequence is disproportionate or unrelated to the offense, it may seem unreasonable, arbitrary, and excessive, provoking the child to feel angry, resentful, and rebellious.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: GIVING CHOICES

Ask the parents to identify behavior problems they would like to see their children correct. Then have them identify and write down choices they can give to help their children resolve those problems. Invite them to give their children these choices during the coming week as needed.

Engage in Family Activities

The teaching efforts of parents will be enhanced as they engage in activities with their children. Children who work and play alongside their parents are more likely to incorporate the teachings and example of their parents in their own lives. Parents should plan activities that are meaningful and enjoyable for everyone. Work and play can both be satisfying when parents foster good relationships with their children.

THE VALUE OF TEACHING RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR

President James E. Faust of the First Presidency emphasized the importance of teaching children responsible behavior: "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."[15] Greater peace and happiness come to families as parents lovingly teach children to obey the commandments of God and the rules of home and society.

NOTES

1. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. "The Family: A Proclamation," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
3. Martha Farrell Erickson and Karen Kurz-Riemer, *Infants, Toddlers, and Families: A Framework for Support and Intervention* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 55.
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6. In Conference Report, Oct. 1985, 43; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 33.
7. In Conference Report, Apr. 2000, 51; or *Ensign*, May 2000, 40.
8. In Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 9; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 9.
9. In Conference Report, Apr. 1975, 150; or *Ensign*, May 1975, 101.
10. In Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 9; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 9–10.
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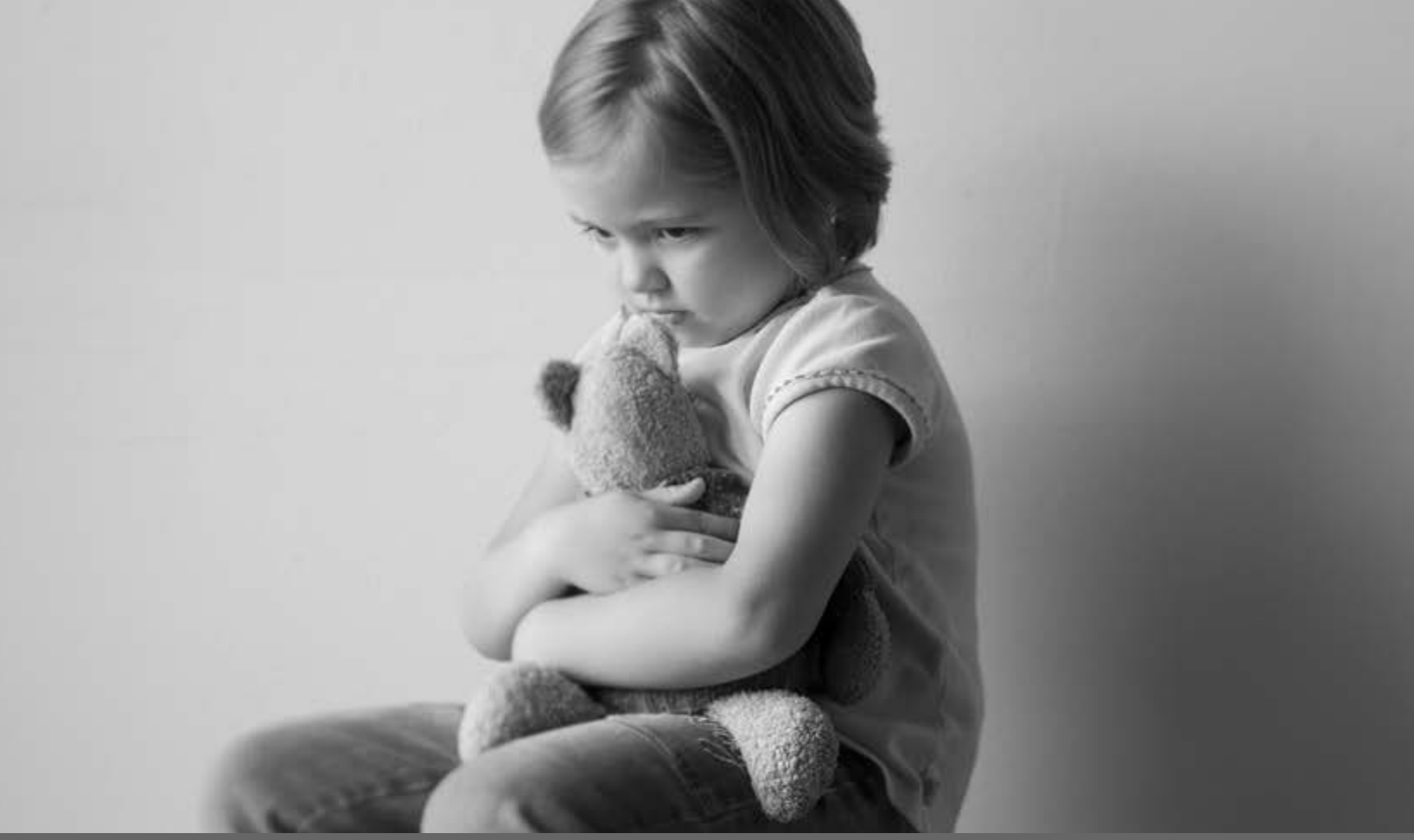
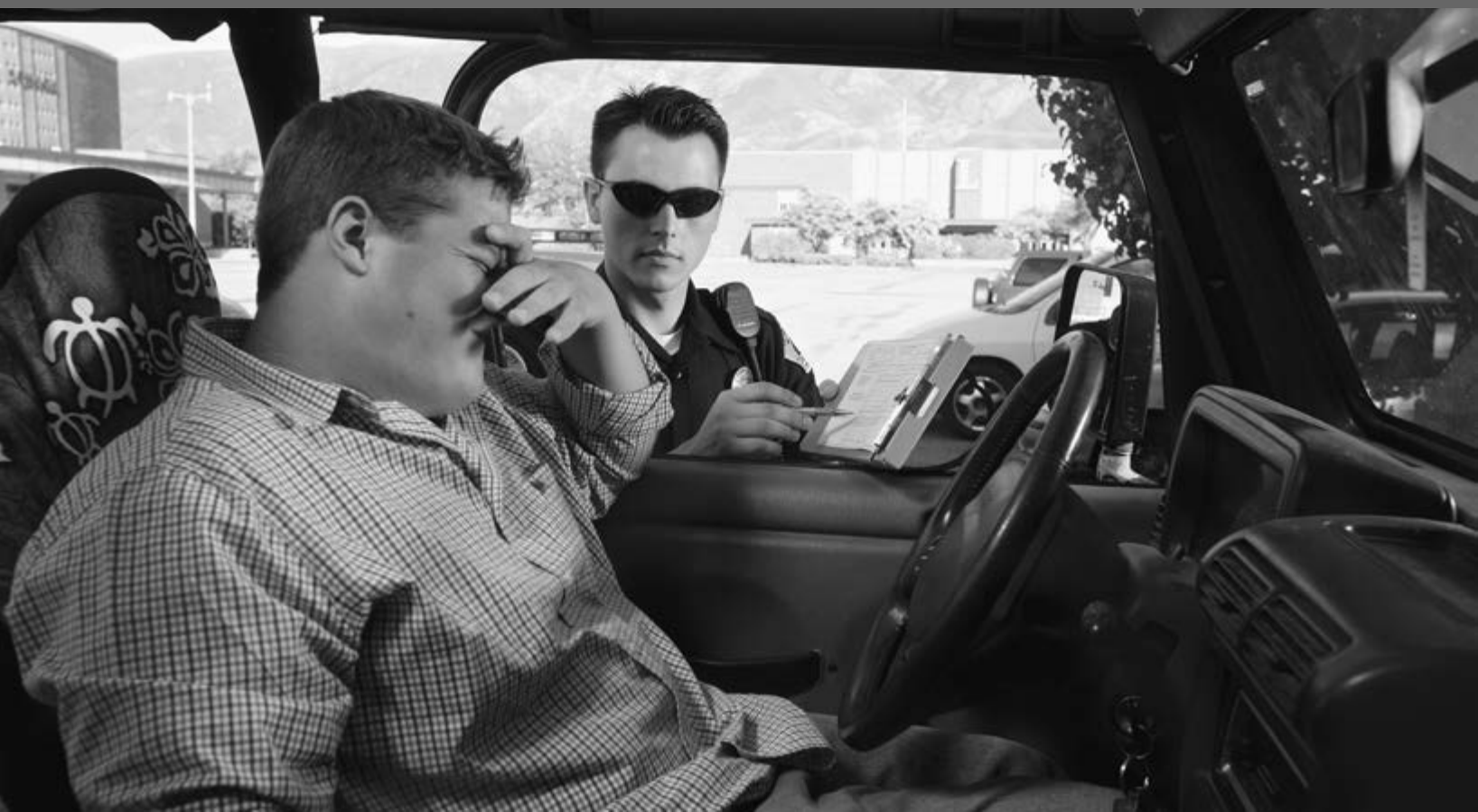
12. Kathleen Slaugh Bahr and others, "The Meaning and Blessings of Family Work," in *Strengthening Our Families: An In-Depth Look at the Proclamation on the Family*, ed. David C. Dollahite (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2000), 178.
13. In Conference Report, Apr. 1990, 12; or *Ensign*, May 1990, 12.
14. In Conference Report, Apr. 1987, 83; or *Ensign*, May 1987, 68.
15. 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.



SESSION NINE

APPLYING CONSEQUENCES

Session Objectives

During this session, help parents:

- Understand the value of consequences for acceptable and unacceptable behavior.
- Know the difference between natural and logical consequences and how and when they are useful in guiding behavior.
- Know how to apply logical consequences.
- Understand how to use time-out as a form of consequence.

The Value of Consequences

Children learn as they make everyday choices and experience the consequences of their choices. 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 or disobedient often enter adulthood unprepared for successful living. Ultimately, we all experience the consequences of our actions. The righteous will receive eternal life, while the unrepentant will be cast out (see Matthew 25:46). Parents can apply consequences in ways that help their children learn responsible behavior.

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 over-indulged 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.[2] These parents attempt to bolster their children's self-esteem by telling them how terrific they are without requiring anything substantive from them.[3] 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.

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."[4]

DOUG

Doug was a bright but rebellious teenager. While his father, a wealthy businessman, conducted Church meetings on Sundays, Doug often drove recklessly through town, intoxicated. Doug wrecked two cars while under the influence of alcohol. After each collision, his father bought him a new car.

Doug's father believed he was helping his son when he gave him what he wanted. Doug seemed to be testing whether there were any limits for his behavior. Finding none, he continued to pursue ways to violate the commandments and defy the rules of society. A few years later, Doug was convicted of a felony and was sentenced to prison. Sometime after his release, he committed suicide. While it was impossible to know exactly what contributed to this final self-destructive act, it was apparent to those who knew him that he had been protected as a child from the consequences of his misbehavior.

The Challenge of Rearing Children in Difficult Times

Some parents try to influence their children's behavior through generosity and permissiveness. Doug's father was such a man. He thought he could show his love best by giving Doug whatever he wanted. He was afraid that if he refused a request, Doug would get angry or would think he wasn't loved. But the more Doug's father gave, the more Doug seemed to expect and the less grateful he was for what he received.

Doug needed his parents to care for him in another way. To develop into a responsible adult, Doug needed limits, boundaries, and responsibilities. He needed his parents to refuse his inappropriate requests and to allow him to suffer the consequences of his bad decisions.

Many parents face difficult challenges with their sons and daughters. Church leaders and professionals are also deeply concerned about the paths many children take. Referring to the account of the Savior blessing the little children, recorded in 3 Nephi 17, Elder Jeffery R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve observed:

"We cannot know exactly what the Savior was feeling in such a poignant moment, but we do know that He was 'troubled' and that He 'groaned within himself' over the destructive influences always swirling around the innocent. We know He felt a great need to pray for and bless the children.

". . . Some days it seems that a sea of temptation and transgression inundates them. . . . And often at least some of the forces at work seem beyond our personal control."[5]

Many children are regularly confronted with drugs, alcohol, pornography, and sexuality. Temptations are great. Those who lack parental direction, spiritual values, and consequences for misbehavior often give in.

Responsible parents provide guidance, rules, and discipline within the context of love and caring. In the homes of such parents, rules make sense, and consequences are logically connected to behavioral infractions. Children in this environment learn from mistakes and feel that consequences are fair, though they do not always readily endorse them.

APPLYING CONSEQUENCES

The following principles will help parents know how to use consequences appropriately with their 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."[6] When parents only respond to the negative things children do, no one should be surprised when the children misbehave.

Parents can reinforce desirable behavior by showing interest in what their children do and by interacting with them 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 the parents 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.

However, parents can allow a younger child to experience minor natural consequences, such as breaking a toy by defiantly banging it against the sidewalk or ruining a marker by refusing to put the lid on it. In such cases, children can learn best from consequences if they have been taught the rules and understand the natural consequences that will occur as a result of breaking the rules.

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.
- Require the child to pay a price.

Parents should impose them in a firm and friendly manner—not in anger—or the consequences will invite resentment. For example: (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.

In each example, the consequence makes sense to the child (it is connected to the misbehavior) and requires the child to pay a price (missing a meal for being late for dinner; spending time in detention for committing a crime). Although neither child may like the consequence, the consequence is respectful if it is firmly applied by

loving parents who are not vindictive and judgmental. Each consequence represents what one should expect for committing the infraction.

Parents can also use consequences that may seem less logical, such as taking away the privilege of watching television when their 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.

When implementing consequences, parents should focus on being in control of their own behavior rather than on controlling their child. Parents should tell the child what the parents are going to do, not what the child will do, which is beyond their control. For example, they might say to a rebellious teenager: "Use of the family car is a privilege that we give to family members who get their jobs done. If you choose not to do your chores, the family car will not be available to you."

In all cases, consequences should be imposed in an atmosphere of love and kindness. Consider the statement from Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42: "No power or influence can or ought to be maintained . . . , only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile."

CHAD

Chad was a fun-loving, headstrong, impulsive child. During the first years of his life, his parents suspected that he would challenge them as he grew older. They lovingly taught him the gospel and respect for family and societal rules. Nevertheless, Chad had difficulty adhering to those standards. At age nine, he stole several pens and a deck of playing cards from a downtown store several miles from their country home. Chad's mother discovered the items and asked him to explain. Chad admitted that he had stolen them.

Chad's father took him and the stolen merchandise back to the store. He instructed Chad to tell the store manager what he had done, return the merchandise, apologize for his actions, and accept whatever consequences the manager would require. Feeling guilty and contrite, Chad did as he was told. The manager listened intently and thanked him for admitting his violation and for returning the merchandise. He said he hoped that Chad had learned a valuable lesson but took no further action. For the next two weeks, Chad's parents left him at home whenever they went to town. They asked him to think about what he had done and assured him they would take him to town again, allowing him further opportunity to show that he could obey the law.

Many other infractions came later, such as fighting with siblings, experimenting with tobacco and alcohol, violating curfew, and skipping school. In each instance, Chad's parents imposed logical consequences to help him learn from his misconduct. As he approached age 18, behavioral problems came to a stop. Chad served a mission, graduated from college, married in the temple, and became a responsible father. On several occasions, he thanked his parents for the discipline they provided, discipline that helped him become a responsible, law-abiding adult.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: APPLYING CONSEQUENCES

Have the participants discuss with their spouses or another parent the situations described below. Ask them to decide what consequences would be appropriate for the misbehavior, keeping in mind that consequences are more effective when closely related to the misbehavior. Then discuss their answers as a group.

SITUATION A

Your 3-year-old daughter begins to throw a tantrum when you stop her from pouring milk on the kitchen floor.

SITUATION B

Your 8-year-old son is disruptive in his Primary class. The teacher has come to you for help.

SITUATION C

Your 14-year-old has been bullying and intimidating a 9-year-old brother. The aggressive behavior occurs when you are not at home. The frightened sibling comes to you in tears.

SITUATION D

You discover that your 17-year-old daughter, who has been staying out late at night with her boyfriend, has a supply of birth control pills.

Give the Child Responsibility

When confronting problem behavior and before imposing a consequence, parents are often wise to discuss the problem with the child, asking the child how he or she is going to correct the problem. The question is important because it allows the child to take responsibility for solving the problem. Children are more likely to improve their behavior when they help identify the course of action they should take. If a child refuses to engage in this kind of conversation, the parents should proceed with the consequence.

Let the Consequences Do the Teaching

When parents apply consequences, children sometimes react with anger and want to argue. The best learning occurs when parents say little but follow through with the consequences. If the connection between the infraction and the consequence is clear, the child will feel responsible and learn from the experience. However, if the parents impose a consequence and then argue about it with the child, 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; they will only provoke resentment in the child. Parents should let the consequences do the teaching.

The teaching power of consequences is illustrated in the following example of a four-year-old child and his parents.

Mother: It's time to get the room picked up. We have some friends coming over in a few minutes.

Son: I don't want to. I want to watch cartoons.

Father: (Calmly.) You can pick up the toys now, or I will pick them up. If I pick them up, you won't see them again unless you do some extra work to earn them back. Which do you choose?

Son: You pick them up.

The father calmly picks up the toys and puts them in a bag, and he places the bag in storage. The following day:

Son: Where are my toys?

Father: I put them away.

Son: I want to play with them.

Father: You remember yesterday when we asked you to pick them up and you didn't want to? Well, they're gone just like I said.

Son: Well, I want them back. I want to play with them.

Mother: *(Respectfully.)* I'm sure you do. They are your favorite toys.

Son: I want them back. Give them to me.

Mother: *(With empathy.)* We can see you feel really bad. (Pauses, as if considering what to do.) Maybe we can think of some jobs you can do to earn them back. Would you like that?

Son: *(Yells in anger.)* I don't want to earn them back. Give them to me right now.

Father: I'll tell you what, when you can talk calmly, without yelling or getting angry, we'll see if we can find a way for you to earn them back. But right now we have some other things we need to do.

The parents walk off. An hour later the son approaches his father and arranges to do some extra chores to earn back his toys. In the days that follow, he willingly complies when asked to pick up after himself.

This example illustrates many benefits of imposing logical consequences:

- The child learns that his parents mean what they say.
- The child experiences the consequences of irresponsible behavior.
- The consequences teach the message that the child has to be responsible if he wants to enjoy privileges such as playing with toys.
- By remaining calm, the parents teach that problems are worked out peacefully and cooperatively instead of through manipulative displays of temper.
- The parents' calmness keeps the focus on the inappropriateness of the child's behavior. A scolding or an argument would have drawn attention to the parents.
- By refusing to argue, the parents bring closure to the issue and prevent further argument and escalation of temper.

The next case example illustrates how verbal chastisement could have hindered a young woman from learning valuable lessons. When the parents were able to show love and support instead of rejection, their daughter was able to focus on the natural consequences of her behavior.

MARLA

Marla, age 17, was eight weeks pregnant. She concluded that she could no longer put off telling her parents of her pregnancy. An abortion was out of the question, as was marriage to Lyle, the father of her child. Marla knew her parents would be outraged. She pictured their never-ending disappointment, scolding, harsh treatment, shunning, and a thousand "I told you so's." Dinner had just ended. Marla was frightened and nauseated, on the verge of throwing up. Still, she mustered up the courage and announced, "Mom and Dad, there's something I've got to tell you. I'm pregnant."

As expected, her parents reacted with shock, anger, and disappointment. How could she do such a thing? Had their teachings been in vain? Had she no morals or principles? Why hadn't she listened to them when they had warned that she was spending too much time with Lyle?

Then the unexpected began to occur. Words of anger and hurt gave way to expressions of love and compassion. Tears welled up in her mother's eyes. She embraced

Marla in her arms. "You must feel terrible," she said. "I'm so sorry this has happened. I'm sorry we reacted so strongly. How can we help?" Father placed his arms around both of them, adding: "Marla, we love you very much. We'll do anything we can to help you through this." Marla broke into tears, almost overwhelmed by feelings of love and support.

Soon afterward a new insight came to Marla. She had worried for weeks about her parents and how they would react. She had pictured continual arguments, condemnation, rejection, even the possibility of running away. But now those concerns were gone. Something even more frightening began to dawn on her. What had she done to herself? What was she going to do? What about the child growing inside her? What had happened to the peace and happiness she had once found as an active member of the Church? As she thought back on it, worrying about her parents had been easier; she could blame them for the mean, cold, insensitive, vindictive hearts she believed they had. Now she knew she had been wrong. She had only her own problems to think about. And reality was hard to face. At least she knew she didn't have to face it alone.

Use Time-Out

Time-out is a consequence that is most effective 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 is especially helpful for children who are easily distracted. It does not help destructive children who are in a power struggle with their parents. These children may be too upset to sit in a chair or stay in a room. If forced to comply, they may damage or destroy property or household furnishings.

Time-out teaches the child a controlled, nonviolent way of handling problems. When parents take a child to time-out, they should remain calm and kind, remembering that "a soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). The time spent away from the family should be the only consequence.

This approach should not be used by angry parents who would drag their children to the designated room as punishment. When parents resort to tantrumlike behavior and say things that hurt the child, they unwittingly teach and reinforce inappropriate behavior. Paul urged Church members, "Provoke not your children to anger" (Colossians 3:21).

Give parents these instructions to help them effectively use time-out. Parents should:

1. Tell the child in advance about the behavior expected of him or her and the behavior that is not allowed. Tell the child about the time-out consequence and how it will be used.
2. When misbehavior occurs, tell the child calmly and briefly why he or she is going to time-out. Select only the worst behavior rather than enumerating every infraction. ("You will stay in the room for three minutes of quiet time for hitting your brother.")
3. Ask the child to think about his or her behavior and how it can be corrected. Parents should also tell the child they will ask for his or her solution at the end of the time-out. (Parents should not place a child in time-out who is unable to reason.)
4. Have the child remain in time-out for a minimal amount of quiet time, possibly a number of minutes that is equal to the age of the child (a five-year-old remains in time-out for five minutes); set the timer when the child becomes quiet.

5. Approach the time-out area after the child has been quiet the designated amount of time. Parents should not respond if the child engages in attention-seeking behavior, such as crying or shouting.
6. Before allowing the child to leave time-out, ask for his or her solution to the problem. In some situations, it may be helpful to have the child show how he or she will behave differently so the problem does not recur. If the solution seems satisfactory, parents allow the child to rejoin the family. If the child is not ready to comply, parents can have him or her repeat the activities described in items 3, 4, and 5.
7. Once compliance has been achieved, thank the child for doing what was asked. Later, parents should seek opportunity to give approval and positive feedback for appropriate behavior, showing forth an increase of love as indicated in Doctrine and Covenants 121:43.

Many parents prefer a time-out room with minimal potential for distraction or destruction (no television, toys, books, or other objects that would entertain the child or that the child could destroy). If no such room is available, parents can require their child to sit in a time-out chair in the same room or an adjoining room that is within their view. Some parents have found time-out to be successful when children are allowed to read, listen to music, take a walk, or be held by the parent. The individual needs of each child should dictate what is best.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: USING TIME-OUT

Ask class members to discuss with their spouse or another parent the use of time-out with children. Under what circumstances would they use it? What misbehavior would require time-out? Would they use time-out for every infraction or only for extreme misbehavior? Who would implement this consequence? What room would they use? What would they say to a child when administering time-out? Ask them to write their responses. Invite them to try using time-out during the coming week if the need arises. Ask them to discuss their experiences during the next session.

Seek Agreement in Advance on Rules and Consequences

Generally, parents have a better relationship with their children when the children understand and consent to family 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. When a child agrees to a rule and then breaks it, the parents can remind him or her of the rule and the consequences. Parents can express genuine empathy that privileges have been lost. Then the child is less likely to view the consequences as punishment, as shown in the following example.

Mother: You remember our agreement about Saturday nights and what the consequence will be if you break the rules?

Daughter: Yes. I'm supposed to be home by midnight, or I lose the privilege of going out the following Saturday night.

Father: So what does that mean?

Daughter: I won't be going out next Saturday night.

Mother: That's right. We know you were planning on going to a concert. We feel sad that you won't be able to go. It sounded like a lot of fun.

Once the rules are discussed and agreed upon by parents and children, further discussions and negotiations at the time an infraction occurs are unnecessary and may encourage manipulative ploys by children to avoid responsibility for their behavior. While parents should usually impose the agreed-upon consequences, they should be guided by common sense and make adjustments as new and relevant information comes to light.

Use Good Judgment

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

LEARNING ACTIVITY: USING CONSEQUENCES

In session 8, participants were asked to identify behavior problems they would like to see their children correct (see the learning activity on giving choices, on page 87). In this learning activity, ask participants to identify logical consequences for each of the behaviors they identified. Before they do this, however, have them first discuss whether they have taken other helpful measures to address the behavior problems, such as clarifying their expectations, teaching appropriate behavior, obtaining their children's agreement on rules and consequences, sharing their concerns when they see problem behavior, asking the child how he or she will solve the problem, and giving choices. Then have participants identify and write down possible logical consequences for the problem behaviors. Ask them to begin implementing the consequences they have identified during the coming week, as needed.

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."[7]

The important responsibility that parents have in rearing their children cannot be overstated. In concluding this course, it may be helpful to share this statement from President Faust, who underscores the importance of teaching and of being good parents:

"While few human challenges are greater than that of being good parents, few opportunities offer greater potential for joy. Surely no more important work is to be done in this world than preparing our children to be God-fearing, happy, honorable, and productive. Parents will find no more fulfilling happiness than to have their children honor them and their teachings. It is the glory of parenthood. John testified, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 1:4). In my opinion, the teaching, rearing, and training of children requires more intelligence, intuitive understanding, humility, strength, wisdom, spirituality, perseverance, and hard work than any other challenge we might have in life. This is especially so when moral foundations of honor and decency are eroding around us. To have successful homes, values must be taught, and there must be rules, there must be standards, and there must be absolutes. Many societies give parents very little support in teaching and honoring moral values. A number of cultures are becoming essentially valueless, and many of the younger people in those societies are becoming moral cynics.

"As societies as a whole have decayed and lost their moral identity and so many homes are broken, the best hope is to turn greater attention and effort to the teaching of the next generation—our children. In order to do this, we must first reinforce the primary teachers of children. Chief among these are the parents and other family members, and the best environment should be in the home. Somehow, some way, we must try harder to make our homes stronger so that they will stand as sanctuaries against the unwholesome, pervasive moral dry rot around us. Harmony, happiness, peace, and love in the home can help give children the required inner strength to cope with life's challenges."[8]

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), 19–20.
3. *Greater Expectations*, 22–24.
4. *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 286.
5. In Conference Report, Apr. 2003, 90; or *Ensign*, May 2003, 85.
6. *What's a Parent To Do?: Solving Family Problems in a Christlike Way* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 116.
7. In Conference Report, Oct. 1990, 41; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 34.
8. In Conference Report, Oct. 1990, 40.

APPENDIX

STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY

A Course for Parents

Prepared by LDS Family Services

How can I benefit from this course?

This course uses a gospel perspective to offer practical help for parents. It is designed to help you:

- Understand gospel principles that guide parenting practices.
- Understand child development and have realistic expectations of your children.
- Learn to communicate more effectively with your spouse and children.
- Know how to nurture children through emotional and troubling times.
- Know how to instill confidence in children.
- Resolve anger issues that may impede effective parenting.
- Resolve parent-child conflict.
- Understand how to teach children responsible behavior.
- Use consequences in disciplining children.
- Provide a better home environment in which the Spirit of the Lord can dwell.

Who can attend?

The course is particularly beneficial for parents who are having problems and challenges with their children. In two-parent families, both husband and wife should attend to enhance skills and prevent divisiveness over their approaches to parenting. Single parents will also find this course to be very helpful.

How long does the course last?

The length of the course may vary according to the needs of its participants. Generally, nine sessions are held, one session per week. Each session is approximately 90 minutes in length.

What will be expected of me if I participate?

You should attend every meeting. You will receive and be asked to study *Strengthening the Family: Resource Guide for Parents.* The guide contains course information and learning activities to help strengthen your parenting skills. You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire at the end of the program to help evaluate its success. You will not be required to sign the questionnaire. All information is confidential.

What will the program cost?

A fee of _____ will be charged to cover expenses.

When and where is the course being taught?

The next Strengthening the Family course is scheduled for _____,
beginning at _____at _____.

How can I sign up for the course or obtain more information?

Call _____
or _____ at LDS Family Services, _____.

Who will teach the course?

A representative of LDS Family Services or a ward or stake volunteer.

PREPARATION LIST

There are many small details that contribute to a successful training course. Use the checklist below to ensure that such details are remembered.

The following items have been reserved:

- ❑ microphone or sound system
- ❑ videos or DVDs
- ❑ podium
- ❑ overhead projector
- ❑ TV and VCR or DVD player
- ❑ chalkboard
- ❑ chalk
- ❑ easel/writing pads
- ❑ markers
- ❑ blank paper
- ❑ pencils
- ❑ other:_____

- ❑ All necessary materials for participants have been copied and collated.
- ❑ The room has been reserved.
- ❑ The room has been set up for the expected number of participants.
- ❑ Extra chairs are available.
- ❑ Bathrooms are clean and easy to find. (If not, signs with arrows have been displayed.)
- ❑ The room air conditioner or heater has been turned on in advance so the room is comfortable.

STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY
CLASS ROSTER

Class Starting Date: _____

Location: _____ Instructor: _____

	Name	Phone	Address	Ages of children	Attendance 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1																
2																
3																
4																
5																
6																
7																
8																
9																
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11																
12																

PROGRAM EVALUATION FORM

Thank you for participating in our parenting workshop. You have invested your time in learning information and skills to improve your parenting. We would like to know if the workshop has helped you achieve that goal. Please complete this evaluation form. *Do not write your name.* We want you to be able to answer questions openly, without any concern about disclosing your identity. With your help, we can improve future parenting courses.

Please circle the answer in each column that best describes how well you are doing now as compared to how you were doing before taking the course.

	How I'm doing now:			Compared to before the course, I am now:		
A. Taking time to listen to my children	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
B. Dealing with the stress of parenting	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
C. Emotion coaching (nurturing) my children	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
D. Helping my children accept responsibilities	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
E. Feeling and expressing love for my children	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
F. Applying consequences without anger or cruelty	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
G. Resolving parent-child conflicts	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
H. Helping my children develop greater confidence	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
I. Having realistic expectations of my children	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better

1. In what areas has this parenting course helped you the most?

_____

_____

2. In what areas do you still need help to improve as a parent?

_____

_____

3. How can this course be improved?

_____

_____

4. What did you like or not like about the instructor's teaching style?

_____

_____

5. How many course lessons did you read?_____

On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the value of the lessons in helping you.

Not Helpful Very Helpful

1 2 3 4 5

6. Did you do the learning activities in each lesson? ____Yes ____No

On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the value of the learning activities in helping you.

Not Helpful Very Helpful

1 2 3 4 5

STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY

This certifies that

_____

has completed the

Strengthening the Family

Course of

LDS Family Services

_____ _____

AGENCY DIRECTOR INSTRUCTOR

_____

DATE

LDS Family Services

ENGLISH
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