



TEACHING LIFE & RELATIONSHIP S K I L L S

Cultivating Citizens of God's Kingdom

BIBLICAL PARENTING SERIES, BOOK 3



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Introduction

God instructs parents to talk about his Word with their children all the time: when they sit, when they walk, when they lie down, when they rise ([Deuteronomy 6:7](#)). Helping our kids learn to love the Lord and grow into his gifts as we send them into the world is, of course, the key job of a parent. And it's a lofty goal.

But God knows parents do a lot, day after day, of sitting and walking, lying and rising, coming and going, listening, speaking, and doing. Pouring ourselves into our children every day for years is exhausting and often bewildering.

Kids don't come with an owner's manual, so this booklet is an attempt to provide advice on a particular aspect of parenting from a biblical perspective. In it, we, the team of pastors, therapists, and authors at *Family Fire*, share scriptural instructions and the best pastoral advice we can find.

A great deal of parenting is teaching children how to do things and modeling which things are important. Like sponges, children will absorb what overflows from our hearts, so in a sense, there's no faking our true priorities. Yet there's so much intentionality parents should bring to helping kids become self-sufficient stewards of the gifts God has given them. Too often we underestimate their abilities or find it quicker to do it ourselves. But teaching with intention from the earliest ages will pay big dividends for years to come.

It's our prayer that this primer on parenting blesses your family as you raise your children into the next generation of God's people.

Grace and peace to you all.

Revs. Steven & Deb Koster, editors

8 Things Your Kids Will Thank You for Later

BY KIM SULLIVAN

Children complain. They are children after all. But valuable skills and character are formed when children are prodded to do things like music lessons or household chores. It may seem easier at the time to manage things on your own, but teaching these life skills benefits everyone in the family and sets patterns for ongoing participation. Teaching children how to contribute to the family gives children both a sense of accomplishment as well as a sense of belonging by having a positive role in the family. Children feel good when given opportunities to contribute to family life. Here are just a few meaningful life-long habits to help your children cultivate:

1. Encourage Your Children to Have a Creative Outlet

This may not seem like something to complain about, and often it isn't at first, but later when there's practice to be done or projects to be finished (or cleaned up) you may experience some resistance. It is important for every human being to imitate our Creator by regularly participating in creativity. After all, we are created in his image ([Genesis 1:26](#)).

2. Teach Your Kids to Cook

I can't tell you how often my grown children's friends and significant others have benefited from the fact

that they know how to cook and bake! It also helps to include menu planning and grocery shopping to the mix. Whether your child ends up living alone, with roommates, or gets married, they will appreciate this ability later in life. Like many other chores, often this task is welcomed at first but eventually loses its luster. However, the benefit to your child later will be great. They will save time and money with these skills, and their families will thank you!

3. Teach Your Kids How to Do Laundry

Many of my friends' kids have gone off to college to spread their wings and to accidentally tie-dye and shrink most of their clothes! Cultivating good laundry habits gives you help now, saves money in the long run, and teaches good stewardship over what God has given.

4. Teach Your Kids to Be Hospitable

Encourage sleepovers, tea parties, and bonfires, but encourage your kids to do the planning and preparations themselves (with your supervision of course). Plant this idea by showing them great hospitality in practice. We used to make a hotel suite

for grandma & grandpa when they came to visit. We would place our prettiest towels on the bed, arrange a small coffee service table, and even place mints on the pillows! It was such a pleasure to see my kids do the same for their friends when they would come over. Hospitality skills are valuable and surprisingly rare.

5. Teach Your Kids to Pray

Make faith part of the everyday, and expect participation. Ask them to lead in family prayer, out loud and in front of everyone. Ask about their daily prayer. Most of all, teach by example. Let your children see you pursue God's Word and presence. Allow them to see you turn to God for small things as well as the big stuff. Car won't start? Pray for God's wisdom, and try it again. Rejoice when God answers prayer immediately! Be patient when he doesn't. Establish a family worship time. This shows the family how to budget time for God into our daily schedules. According to scripture, we are to thread our conversation about God and his commands throughout our daily tasks, proving him to be important in every detail of our lives. "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" ([Deuteronomy 6:7, NIV](#)).

6. Encourage Your Children to Show Gratitude

Ask your children to write thank-you cards, bake cookies, write an email, and do other acts of kindness in order to express appreciation for others. Make sure that this isn't only done in response to a gift, but also randomly as a result of the gift of friendship. This will prove to offer multiple benefits as your children get older. For one thing, displaying gratitude will set them apart from their peers and co-workers allowing for promotion and appreciation in every area of life. Even more importantly, the habit of gratitude leads to a joyful

life! What better gift can we give to our children than that of a life full of joy?

7. Teach Your Kids How to Budget

Your future children-in-law will thank you for some fiscal thoughtfulness. Especially when your kids include charity and a savings account in the spending plan. Even as adults we often cringe at the idea of a "budget," but when we have a car repair we haven't counted on, a home improvement to be completed, or a dream vacation opportunity, we will rejoice that we have planned for these things.

8. Teach Your Children to Be Generous

It is important to know how to budget and stick to it, but I feel it is even more important to know when to give to the point of sacrifice. There are key moments in life when God moves us to give up our vacation fund, or dip into our savings in order to benefit the body of Christ, or fill a specific need elsewhere. In order to prepare for a Christian conference, I once had the kids help me organize a garage sale for the sole purpose of being able to give more in the offerings. It is good for us to give not just our leftovers, but things we love and value as well. God always blesses in return, and we learn to trust God on another level as a result.

Teaching our children these kinds of lessons can be difficult now, but the fruits of these teachings will follow them the rest of their lives. These things hold value that children will appreciate and thank you for down the road. Pushing through the heavy sighs and eye rolls will be worth the success and joy your children will experience later. "No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way" ([Hebrews 12:11, NLT](#)).

Teaching Children Respect

BY DEBI MITCHELL, MS, LMFT

“**T**rain up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” ([Proverbs 22:6 KJV](#)).

My pulse races faster than an Indy 500 driver when I see a child act disrespectfully in public. I confess I desire to meddle in someone else’s situation, knowing it would likely become messier than a toddler eating Spaghetti-O’s. I hear people grumble, “Kids these days...” and I know I’m not alone.

No child is perfect, yet respectfulness should be a baseline behavior for everyone. Respectful children, teens, and young adults do exist. When children act disrespectfully, parents can often feel helpless as to how to redirect behavior. Understanding what respect is and sharing some respect-teaching tools can guide us to healthier relationships.

Understanding Respect

We know respect when we see it. Webster’s dictionary defines respect as: “to regard as worthy of special consideration; to consider worthy of esteem; or, to regard with honor.” Respect sends a message that someone is valuable; he or she has worth.

Most people consider respect something given and something earned. This is biblical. Paul reminds us, “Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect,

then respect; if honor, then honor” ([Romans 13:7, NIV](#)).

However, if we believe that everyone is made in the image of God, and that Jesus valued all of humanity enough to die on the cross for them, we should also value all people. In fact, God commands us by saying, “Show proper respect to everyone...” ([1 Peter 2:17a, NIV](#)). In his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul describes it this way: “Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too” ([Philippians 2:3-4, NLT](#)). This is the attitude that God calls us to cultivate, motivating our choices and priorities.

“No child is perfect, yet respectfulness should be a baseline behavior for everyone”

Respect Teaching Tools

Everyone needs these respect teaching tools:

1. The most basic form of respect is not to belittle others. Within families that can mean simple rules like no hitting, no name-calling, no ridiculing. No

belittling a fellow child of God. Don't allow it at home, and it will seem wrong in public.

2. Be sure the family is on the same page. Respect looks different to different people. For example, I consider eye contact while speaking respectful, while in some cultures it is considered challenging and disrespectful. If the parents don't agree, children become confused and sometimes resentful ([Colossians 3:21](#)).
3. Keep expectations in line with ages and abilities. People become more capable with age. Expecting a lively 2-year-old to sit quietly in the church pew for an hour without something to do is probably asking for trouble, but a 12-year-old is a different story.

"Sometimes we try and it feels like nothing gets through, but we can't give up"

4. Be consistent with respect rules and consequences. Just like other types of rules, they are only taken seriously if expectations and consequences are consistent. Many parents fear disciplining. If you fear losing your child's love, take comfort! God said discipline works! "Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it" ([Hebrews 12:9, NIV](#)).

5. Model it. The saying, "Do as I say, not as I do" doesn't work. Jesus called those people hypocrites ([Matthew 7:3-5](#)). Kids will do what we do, particularly before middle-school when peer influence increases. Modeling respect includes body language: no eye-rolling, texting, or emailing work while she is talking. Let him know you are listening by occasionally nodding and responding.
6. Apologize—without excuses. This means no: "I'm sorry, but..." Healing happens when we confess, both within ourselves and within relationships ([James 5:16](#)).
7. Teach consequences, good and bad. And start young! Point out how one choice affects others (e.g.: "You chose to hit your sister and take her toy. How do you think you can make it right?"). For kids 7-12, it helps to draw the connections, helping the child to work out the consequences. Only use real situations. For kids over 12, you can discuss hypothetical situations or possible future choices (e.g.: "Suppose you attend a job interview and choose to hold the door open for someone, who turns out to be your new manager").

Sometimes we try and it feels like nothing gets through, but we can't give up. The world fights for our children's hearts and attitudes. Study God's Word for ways to improve. Get on the same page with your spouse, and show them what respect looks like. Be real and accountable about weaknesses. Apologize when needed. Teach about the consequences of disrespect and rewards of respect. And someday, when our children are old, they will not depart from it.

Teaching Children Empathy

BY JESSICA PARKS, MSW, LCSW

“Love one another: just as I have loved you...”
([John 13:34a](#))

Parents spend much energy teaching social skills for living. We teach children manners, to say “please” and “thank you.” We teach them hygiene, to brush their teeth and wash their hands. We teach them diligence, to do their homework and do their chores. Teach them skills, to tie their shoes, to drive a car, to dress for a job interview. Throughout their lives, we are modeling and teaching countless techniques as building blocks of life.

A Skill Everyone Needs

There is one skill that is necessary in every phase and every situation in human life, yet parents often overlook it or are unsure of how to teach it. That skill is empathy, or the ability to perceive, understand, and share the feelings of others. It is the foundation of emotional intelligence. It is simply wondering and caring about another’s feelings and experience. It starts simply, with wondering “how do you feel about this?”

Teaching children empathy results in their increased capacity to see the face of Christ in others. Children who cultivate the skill of empathy are more respectful, thoughtful, and kind. Empathetic children are less likely to bully and less likely to tolerate bullying behavior in others. “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together”

([1 Corinthians 12:26](#)).

Teaching Emotional Intelligence

How do we begin to teach this crucial skill? Here are some ideas:

- Help children label their own emotions. If your child is crying, you might say, “I see you are feeling sad.” Or, if upset, you might say, “You seem disappointed.” This prepares the way for your child to be able to identify and understand their own and others’ emotions.
- When kids recount stories, ask them how they thought people in their stories were feeling. This encourages not only identification, but asking the question in the first place.
- Run scenarios with them and ask how they think others may feel. You could do this with characters in books, in discussing their day at school, in watching the news, or in any other situation where you are discussing other people.
- Remain calm when your children have strong emotions like anger or grief, but be quick to name those emotions. Model for them being a non-anxious presence when others are upset. Even if they’re mad at you, stay calm and say, “You seem very angry with me. Tell me about that.”
- Make a game out of making exaggerated facial

expressions and having them guess what emotion you are feeling. Then have them try it and you guess!

- Help them identify what they have in common with others. Kids often are curious about differences that they see (like when a friend uses a wheelchair or a stranger dresses differently than they are used to). Acknowledge these differences, and work with them to identify traits that they share (“Yes, she uses a wheelchair to get around. And I notice that she has a rocket ship on her backpack. I wonder if she likes science like you do?”). This helps them see that we share more than divides us as children of God.
- Model kindness and empathy in your behavior toward others. Children are always observing the

adults around them. Let them hear you identify the feelings of others in conversation.

- Help them “zoom out” from simply trying to understand the emotions of family and friends. Talk with them about people impacted by persecution, violence, etc. Encourage them to explore their own emotions about these things, then help them to think about the emotions those impacted may experience.

Empathy is an essential skill for living a life that embraces kindness, calls out and stands up to bullies, and connects with others. Through helping children develop the capacity to understand and experience others’ emotions, you equip them to join the worthy calling to “do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” ([Micah 6:8](#)).

Teaching Children to Manage Conflicts

BY DR. ROB TOORNSTRA

Conflict happened again this evening. In those hectic few moments while dinner was coming from the oven to the dinner table, two of our children dashed to the kitchen and arrived at the same chair at the same time. A minor disagreement soon flared into a quarrel. “This is my spot—I want to sit here!” “Well, I set the table, so I get to choose who sits where!” Why the competition? Each child desperately wanted to sit at the place with a favored plastic juice cup.

Mentoring Matters

Managing conflict between children is never easy, but with our mentoring they can navigate conflict effectively. Life will never be conflict free, and unity matters to God, so learning to manage conflict is a virtue. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesian church, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” ([Ephesians 4:1-3](#)).

It’s probably happened in your family too. Your kids bicker over who gets to play with a particular toy—a toy that, five minutes earlier, no one much cared about. They spend ten minutes arguing about who will sit in which seat in the family van. They spend so long

fighting about what to watch on TV that the program ends before they’ve figured it out.

Empower Them

What can you do to help your kids navigate their conflicts so that they not only resolve the immediate disagreement, but also learn the skills to work through conflict on their own? The last thing my wife and I wanted was to eat a meal under the storm clouds of such a trivial argument. We took four specific steps designed to mentor our kids in the art of conflict management.

Don’t Fix The Problem For Them

The biggest temptation when faced with arguing kids is to put a stop to the conflict. Many times, we’ve given in to the temptation to jump in as an umpire, deciding who is right and who is wrong. Rendering a verdict by saying, “You had the cup yesterday, your sister gets it today!” would have ended the immediate fight, but it would have had the undesirable effect of short-circuiting the opportunity for growth. Instead, we had the two children involved to step away from the table, to a place where they could work through their conflict together, without disrupting everyone else.

Ask for a Resolution

Rather than giving vague instructions to “just figure it out,” we asked them both to talk together to find a solution to their problem that would be fair to the both of them. I have to confess to a bit of craftiness here. When we asked this of our kids, my wife and I knew that a 9-year-old and a 5-year-old probably wouldn’t be able to sort the problem out on their own. Instead, our goal was to get the two to communicate with each other in a constructive way and have them wrestle with ideas of fairness and compromise. Shortly after their bargaining session began, they returned to our dinner table. It seemed clear that a solution had been reached. “It’s fine,” my older daughter sighed. “I don’t care. She can have the cup.” It was clear from her voice, however, that their solution was anything but fine. The argument had been “fixed,” but the underlying issues hadn’t been addressed, meaning that the underlying issue had been simply ignored. We sent them back to the bargaining table, with a second instruction.

Seek the Root of the Problem

My wife had a stroke of brilliance. “I want you to come back here when you can answer why it is so important for you to fight over this cup every day.” Once again, they returned with a few ideas. “This cup is different from the others.” “This cup is from our favorite restaurant.” “I don’t want to be left out.” Finally, with a hint of exasperation, my daughter got it. “It’s because I want to put myself first,” she said. This was the gold we’d been searching for, and she was immediately affirmed for her honesty. If children are going to learn to

manage their conflicts, it’s important for them to learn to see themselves honestly, and this means learning to identify the way that our selfish, sinful nature works in our hearts and minds. Challenging them to recognize their own brokenness should be met with gracious affirmation that creates a safe place to be honest about sin, but also allows an opportunity to hear a message of grace.

Call for Renewal

Hearing our daughter admit that she was motivated by a desire to put herself first opened the door to talk about how Jesus treats us. We reminded our girls of the way that, rather than putting himself first, Jesus loves us by being a servant and by putting others before himself. We explained that not only does Jesus love us like that, but he also wants us to love others in the same way. We concluded our discussion by asking our kids to look for specific ways to love each other by putting their needs before their own.

Shortly after dinner, another potential conflict came up—this time, between our son (who had only been an eyewitness to the earlier conflict!) and his sister. Immediately, he caught my eye, watching him without a word. A thoughtful look passed over his face, and he changed his mind. “It’s okay,” he said to his sister. “You can choose the TV show this time.”

These steps of mentoring conflict resolution have the benefit of empowering children to manage conflict productively and help them develop skills of self-examination, empathy, and negotiation. Then we can share the words of the psalmist, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” ([Psalm 133:1](#)).

How to Help a Grieving Child

BY MIMI LARSON

Wouldn't it be wonderful to live in a place where nobody ever dies or gets sick, a place where school shootings do not exist and natural disasters do not destroy? Yet the reality is that we live in a broken world where there is death and tragedy, and sadly, children are no strangers to loss and grief. While dealing with loss and grief can be difficult for anyone, children's reactions may differ from those of adults. Here are some suggestions to consider when helping a child who is grieving.

"A grieving child might have a physical symptom of grief like a loss of appetite, or emotional symptoms like mood swings or severe crying"

Explore the Child's Level of Understanding

The age of the child will affect the way they understand loss and grief. Younger children might not understand the permanence of death or may believe they are somehow responsible for a tragic event. Older children engage in concrete thinking and might ask for more details if they want to know more. They will understand the consequences of a loss and that a person who dies will not be around anymore. Different ages will need differing levels of explanation.

it's in their best interest to either wait or spare them bad news, it is important for children to hear as soon as possible so they can start facing the loss. Silence is seldom helpful, though often tempting.

It is also important to prepare them for what lies ahead. If this is the beginning of a long illness, telling children early helps them prepare. If there is a funeral coming up, explain what they will encounter in the days ahead. Even if a child was not directly exposed to a tragedy such as a school shooting or natural disaster, he or she may have heard the news or adult conversations and still feel stress or anxiety. Make a point of raising the topic to a depth appropriate to their level of understanding.

Prepare the Child

Children need to know they are safe and secure, so it is best to hear hard news from someone they feel safe with, someone they trust. While you might think

Listen to the Child

Children often go in and out of grief, so be patient. Answer any questions they have, even if they are

hard questions. Some children might ask a lot of questions, some might communicate without words through actions and reactions. Some children might communicate in pictures and could draw for you what life looked like before, what it's like now, and what it will look like someday. A grieving child might have a physical symptom of grief like a loss of appetite, or emotional symptoms like mood swings or severe crying. It is not uncommon for a child to revert to an earlier stage of development and suck their thumb or wet the bed. Children might become aggressive when angry or clingy when scared. Recognize bad behaviors as symptoms of underlying grief, and address the grief more than the behaviors.

Talk to the Child

When you do say something, be direct and especially honest so that there is less confusion for the child. Use simple, concrete language, avoiding euphemisms, with an age-appropriate amount of detail. And always provide reassurance, letting the child know you care. Acknowledge the feelings of hurt, sadness, and fear. Here are some guidelines when you talk to a child:

- Remind the child that someone will care for him or her. It is helpful to name that person if at all possible.

- Emphasize that it is okay to feel sad or angry about what happened, even if others do not feel that way. And point out that these feelings might last a while and that is okay.
- Assure the child that God is always there to comfort us, and that we can take all our sadness and pain to God in prayer.
- Reassure the child that he or she is not at fault for this situation. This situation is not the result of something they said or did.

Allow Yourself and the Child to Grieve

If someone is dying, encourage children to say goodbye and express their emotions. And don't feel you need to hide your own grief. Remembering the person who died is part of the healing process. Share memories and pictures, talking about the loved one. If a traumatic event means there are changes, involve children in those decisions as appropriate. Giving children choices whenever possible helps them regain a sense of control.

Grief is a natural consequence of losing something or someone important. Acknowledge that pain as appropriate, validating your and the child's feelings of loss. May your shared loss let your relationship grow stronger.

Teaching Children about Chores

BY NADIA SWEARINGEN-FRIESEN

I am one of those moms who makes my children work. All four of my kids do chores in our home nearly every single day. Chores are a part of caring for one another as a community. “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” ([1 Peter 4:10](#)). Our family works together to steward the gifts that we have been given.

When my children were very young, I found myself cleaning up their messes, working hard to keep our home clean, and feeling a bit frustrated that so many jobs were left for me. Over time, I began to realize that my frustration was a nudge to look more closely at what was happening in our family. It seemed faster and easier to do things myself, but they also had lessons they needed to learn.

“Our family works together to steward the gifts that we have been given”

All Homes Require Work to Run

As we thought about our goals for our kids, we realized we wanted to raise children who take

responsibility for their own needs and messes. We want to raise children who understand what it means to work and to do so diligently. We wanted to raise children who understand that all homes take considerable work to manage, and this home we share is a blessing that runs most smoothly when we all do our part. Having chores not only helps us to spread out the work it takes to enjoy the life we love, it’s part of belonging to the team.

Doing Chores Curbs Entitlement

When my son would leave his cereal bowl on the table for me to clean, there was a hint of unstated entitlement there that bothered me a lot. He was able to clear it himself, yet he knew that if he left it there, I would swoop in and pick it up for him. Since he did not have to work, he chose not to. He relied on a parent to clean up his mess. This laziness wasn’t good for either of us.

Doing Chores Shares the Burden

The burden is heavy when only one person is working, but many hands can make the workload light. It may take some time before they learn to do a chore

well, but with patience and persistence progress is made. So each day we all do chores. We pick up our messes, and we clean the house. From the time my kids were little they fed our pets, put away their shoes, cleaned up toys, and emptied the dishwasher.

Doing Chores Creates Belonging

As they got older, they vacuumed carpeting, changed bed sheets, cleaned the kitchen, and dusted bookshelves. Our teens and tweens now mow the lawn, shovel snow, wash vehicles, and even make meals. As our children have gotten older, their chores have grown more complex, but every one of my kids understands that what they are doing in helping at home makes a world of difference to our family.

Doing Chores Enriches Fellowship

My husband and I have also found ourselves working side-by-side with our children and enjoying conversation as we get a job done. Working shoulder to shoulder can be as intimate as talking face to face. The distraction of a chore is often helpful in allowing space to let our kids open up. As we plant the garden, clear the table, or straighten a room, we hear their stories and listen intently to the experiences of our kids.

Doing Chores Builds Life Skills

I have become one of those moms—and I am really okay with—teaching life skills with intention. As we go through the day, I know that I am enabling and equipping my children with tools they will need later on in life. They are contributing to our lifestyle and taking the time to communicate with their parents. They are developing competence that will serve them well as they move into adulthood. They can feel good about all the skills they have mastered and can share with others when they move on to new living arrangements.

Doing Chores Is Part of Our Design

From creation, we have been given jobs to do, cultivating the gifts God has given us. God designed us for more than idleness, “for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” ([Ephesians 2:10](#)). We are God’s handiwork, designed so that we could accomplish good things.

And yes, there are days when they fuss. But, if I hold steady and remain consistent, the fussing will fail, the chores will get done, and my children will grow into adults who do not take for granted a home well kept and a job well done. This is a gift to their future roommates and spouses, and to their momma as well.

Whose Homework is This?

BY REV. DEB KOSTER

It's hard for parents to watch kids struggle, including with school homework. The homework might be difficult, it might take a long time, it might be an emotional wall kids don't want to scale. We want our children to do well, we don't want them hurting, we want to fix it. We are tempted to step in, help them along, and take over, but that's a lot about what parents want, rather than what kids need. Homework is an area where boundaries are needed. We can guide our children by structuring time for homework. We can acknowledge that the work is not always fun. We can be available to give advice. But our children need to own their own responsibilities. Taking over for this hurdle only makes all the other hurdles harder.

Small Victories Build Bigger Victories

It is unhealthy to take charge of your child's homework or projects—these tasks are their studio for developing both skills and responsibility for their work. Managing challenges is a life skill they will need forever. It might be heart-wrenching to watch, but we don't want to be managing their homework in college, so it is wise to let them have control and responsibility from an early age. This is the beginning of parents moving to an advisory role as your kids grow. We need to let our kids do their own work, even if it sometimes means that they fail.

It is Not about You

This is not about you, neither your reputation as a parent nor your anxiety at having unhappy kids. It might rip at your heart not to step in while they are miserable. But not all protecting is beneficial to our kids. Sometimes our over-helping actually hurts our kids and interferes with their learning from a situation. When we continually rescue our kids, they learn that they are not capable of handling things on their own. It impairs their path to growing competence and independence. “But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load” ([Galatians 6:4-5](#)). God has given each of us tasks to do that belong to us and not our neighbor.

Responsibility Grows with Ownership

Responsibility is learned when kids have ownership in the project. If we step in and interfere, our kids no longer have ownership—their homework becomes your job. They lose investment in a project in which they might otherwise have taken pride. Having ownership of a project is important. It is better for your child to get a lower grade on their own than to get a perfect grade with a parent taking over the project.

Growth Happens When We Are Stretched

When we are stretched, we discover what we are capable of achieving. If parents step in to do everything for our kids, they lose the opportunity to struggle on their own and discover their true gifts. You will not always be able to help your child, so you need to equip them with the skills to manage—even managing frustrations—without you. Those skills are learned through struggle. It is very hard to watch our children struggle, but it is where God grows us.

“Acknowledge the struggle, hug the frustration, but don’t let them off the hook”

We Learn through Consequences

Natural consequences are great teachers. Having to stay after school because of incomplete work or taking a bad grade for poor work can be huge motivators. Do not step in to rescue, but allow kids to experience the natural consequences of their actions. Don’t say “I told you so,” just let the consequences be the teacher. Use the leverage of consequences. If your child doesn’t care

about the low grade, you can help him find more time to study by thinning his social calendar. Your response should be, “We agree that you are responsible for your grades. As long as you are pulling at least B’s you are in control. If your grades fall, we will help you clear your calendar to make more time for studying.”

Low Stakes Learning Costs Less

The stakes are low at young ages, so don’t be afraid of failure. They will learn valuable lessons—that they are responsible, they need to take control to be successful, that some things are just plain hard work, and that you love them even in failure. Failure makes clear where we need to change and improve. Be empathetic about their struggle, and encourage them to see this as a learning opportunity.

Bless your children by letting them take charge of their own homework and projects. Take joy in their responsibility, following a project through to completion. In times where they fail, empathize with their pain while allowing the natural consequences to teach them. Don’t do the work, but hear the heart. Acknowledge the struggle, hug the frustration, but don’t let them off the hook. Don’t be angry, but be firm and resolute. Later you can celebrate success and a job well done. Let them discover their capabilities and stretch themselves. This is the way God works with us. We are not rescued from challenges, but God walks alongside us through them all. Through all of our struggles, God is growing us. Don’t miss the opportunity to grow your kids.

Teaching Children Stewardship

BY REV. JOEL VANDE WERKEN

“Mine! It’s mine!” What parent hasn’t heard these words? We human beings, it seems, are naturally wired to hoard and grasp after the things we set our hearts on.

The Bible tells a different story: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it; the world all who live in it” ([Psalm. 24:1, NIV](#)). Our time, treasures, and talents do not belong to us but to God. This means that parents have an important responsibility to teach our children what it means to be good stewards of all that God has given.

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Though there are a variety of perspectives on whether the Old Testament principle of tithing (see [Leviticus 27:30](#), [Deuteronomy 14:22-29](#), [Malachi 3:10](#)) still applies to Christians, the New Testament clearly calls God’s people to be generous with what they have ([2 Corinthians 8:1-15](#), [1 Timothy 6:17-19](#)). How do we

teach this to our children?

I’d suggest a few basic tasks that can help develop a generous spirit in our families:

Teach Thankfulness

In a materialistic culture, advertisers constantly bombard our children with the message that they “deserve” more than what they have now. Take time each day to identify three or four things that they are thankful for—dollhouse furniture, Lego, the food on the table. Then teach them to say “thank you” to God and to others for what they’ve been given.

Teach Servanthood

Giving of ourselves is not natural. Young children need to be taught how to give to others. Find a service project that you can do as a family, even something like washing toys in the nursery at church, and talk about how to give back from the time or treasure God has given you.

Be Generous as a Family

If you’re looking for hands-on ways to model generosity for your children, identify a cause you can pray for and support together. Christmas is an

especially good time to do this, as your local church or a national mission organization would have programs to share with those in need.

Take time with whatever cause you support to discuss as a family how your service is an act of stewardship of what God has given.

Teach Biblical Money Management

On their fifth birthday, my wife and I have given our children a coin bank with three slots, one for spending, one for giving, and one for saving. It helps them begin to think about money with purpose and to understand that their money doesn't belong only to them. With each allowance or birthday gift, we help them divide what they receive into savings, spending, and church. You may also want to allow your children to participate in the offering during a worship service: first with your money, then as appropriate with their own.

A while back, my church began a fund-raising campaign for a building project. One Sunday morning, the deacons discovered an envelope with a dollar bill and a handwritten note. In the note, a parent explained

that as their family had discussed the church project after dinner, their daughter had grown so excited that she went to her room and came back with a dollar from her piggy bank, exclaiming, "If the church is doing something so exciting, then I want to be a part of it too."

"Take time with whatever cause you support to discuss as a family how your service is an act of stewardship of what God has given"

The amount of our children's gifts may not be large. But we don't have to wait until their gifts are significant in the world's eyes to teach them the importance of a generous heart through which God does his own work ([Luke 21:1-4](#)). God has given us an infinitely great gift in the person of his Son, Jesus. He did not hoard heaven for himself but offered all of himself for us. It's never too early to begin teaching our children to respond with thanks and generosity to that greatest of all gifts ([2 Corinthians 9:15](#)).

Teaching Children about Sex

BY REV. DEB KOSTER

Sooner or later, your kids will ask about the birds and the bees. And it will probably be in public.

Be the Safest Place for Awkward Questions

Conversations with children about sex can be uncomfortable. But sex education is not the job of the school or the church; it is the responsibility of the parents. Our kids will certainly look for answers at some point, so we parents want to be the first, best, and safest place they want to go for answers. Getting flustered tells the child that you don't want to talk

"Parents want to be the first, best, and safest place they want to go for answers"

about this and that they should look elsewhere. When children lack answers, they'll Google it, and our culture will fill that gap with its own answers. It is best to step up, early and lightly, and have these conversations from the beginning, even if they make us uneasy.

Give Biblical Answers from the Beginning

God's design includes sexuality, so it's a good topic at age-appropriate levels for all ages. In our family, we've tried to have these conversations with our kids in simple and relaxed ways at young ages so the pressure for the "BIG TALK" never had a chance to build up. You don't have to talk about being found under a cabbage leaf or dropped off by the stork. Just give them straight answers without excessive detail.

Overreaction Communicates Shame

All too often the most intimate questions happen at inopportune times. A comment gets made in the grocery store or in front of the company at the dinner table. My son once asked what a tampon was in front of my parents. Avoid overreacting. Be careful not to embarrass or shame your child for asking a question—it is important that they feel comfortable coming to you with their concerns. If we panic or grow visibly uncomfortable, we might say things that we don't mean to say just to avoid embarrassment in the grocery checkout line. Much worse, our negative, embarrassed, stammering reaction tells our kids that we parents are not safe places to ask questions.

Be Calm, Warm, Direct, and Simple

When questions come, stay calm and answer simply and directly in age-appropriate language; if they've asked an honest question, you should give them an honest answer with zero drama. Give only enough information to satisfy the question, and move on.

Conversations Can Be Moved

Give a simple answer on the spot if you can, and offer to talk more about the question later when you can have more time to talk. If it's truly not a good time, praise your child for asking a great question. "I want to give you the best answer, so let's get back to that question when we're home and I can give you my undivided attention." Then follow through, and give them the information they seek. This honors the question and gives you time to think thoughtfully about your answer without trying to, for example, explain what the word "raped" means in front of the librarian.

You Will Get Another Chance, Lots More

Talking about sexuality is not a one-time conversation, but an ongoing dialog from a young age about God's care for every aspect of our lives including their bodies and their sexuality. If you don't explain things perfectly, you will have more chances to build on the last conversation in the next conversation. And you don't have to explain everything from romance to anatomy to childbirth all at once. Just answer the question simply, truthfully, and at an appropriate level.

Guidelines for Answering Hard Questions

So how should you respond when your kids ask uncomfortable questions?

- Don't freak out. Answer questions about sex in a relaxed way, without translating anxiety onto our kids.
- Answer truthfully, if simply. Talk honestly to your kids when they are asking questions.
- Don't feel the need to explain everything you know. Let your answer be as simple or complex as the child is at this age.
- Seize these teachable moments without shying away from the issue. It shows you're invested and interested in what your child is thinking.
- Give a brief answer when the question comes at an inopportune setting, and postpone if needed. Be sure to circle back to the question at the first opportunity. It is okay to defer as long as you come back to it.
- God is the hero in the story. Sexuality is a gift from God. He has lordship over this area of life as well.

You Are the One God Chose

God picked you to parent your children. He equips you to guide them lovingly towards understanding about God and his world. Culture promotes a distorted sexuality that is not in agreement with God's Word, but you are there to share the truth. Be clear with kids that God designed sex to be good, and he placed it within marriage for our benefit.

About the Authors



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Deb Koster is the Senior Producer, editor, writer, and speaker for [Family Fire](#). After more than 20 years as a Registered Nurse, she followed her passion for family ministry and completed a Master of Divinity degree. She has since been ordained as a pastor in the [Christian Reformed Church](#). Deb and her husband, Steven, enjoy leading marriage retreats and family seminars to encourage people in their most intimate relationships. The Kosters are the parents of three awesome young adults and reside in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



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Steven Koster is an editor, writer, and speaker with [Family Fire](#). Formerly the Director of [ReFrame Media](#), Family Fire's parent organization, Steven currently leads a hospitality ministry through [The Parsonage Inn](#), a B&B the Kosters created in their 1882 Victorian home. Steven has founded two consultancies: [Dutch Root](#), which provides individuals and historians with genealogical and family history research, and [The Joshua Lab](#), which helps organizations think strategically about their mission and infrastructure.



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Kim Sullivan

Kim Sullivan is a writer with a background in everything from homeschooling to nonprofit management. She has raised three children, each of whom are successful in their own unique way. Recently, Kim has done the most radical and risky thing she has ever done: she moved 700 miles from her suburban Chicago home and everything familiar to her and relocated to Tulsa, Oklahoma. She is working on a brand-new website and blogs at kdsullivan.com. She is also writing a book about her adventures in following Jesus.



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Nadia Swearingen-Friesen is a writer and national speaker with a passion for empowering parents to approach their families with great intentionality and grace. Nadia and her husband, Mark, are the parents of four children and live in the Chicago area. Nadia also blogs at nadiaswearingen-friesen.com.



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About Family Fire

[Family Fire](#) is a Christian ministry committed to fanning the flames of the Holy Spirit in our family relationships. *Family Fire* hosts an active [Facebook community](#) and offers a library of deeper resources on our [website](#). We also offer live teaching events such as marriage and parenting retreats. Together we explore spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy and how we should live as members of a Spirit-fed family.

[Romans 8:14-17](#) teaches us how the Holy Spirit connects us in our relationships:

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

Discussing God’s design for marriage and parenting, *Family Fire* is produced by Pastor Deb Koster in collaboration with her husband, Pastor Steven. The Kosters are passionate about using God’s Word to help families nurture faith formation and navigate relationship challenges.



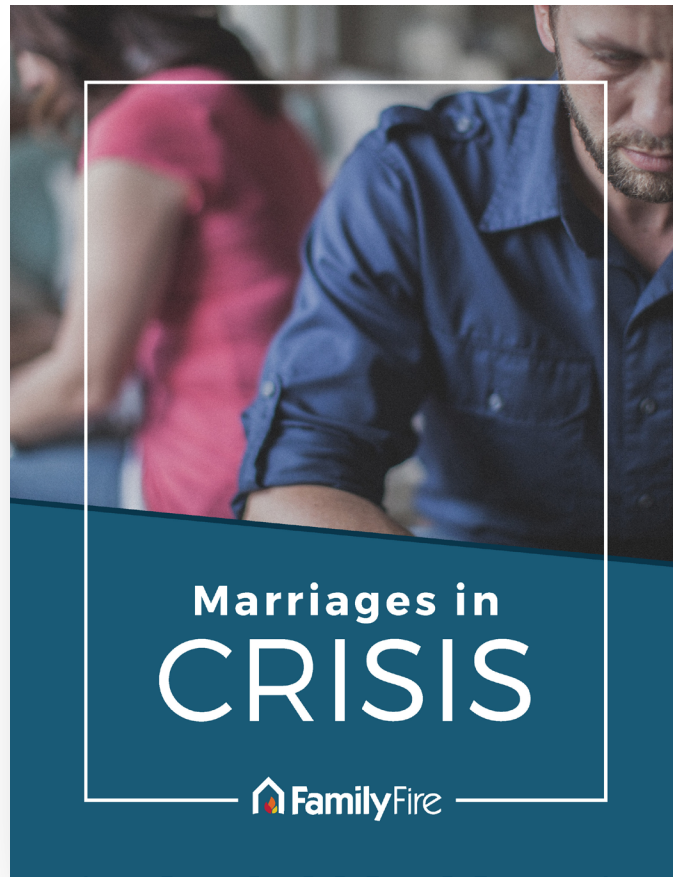
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