October 2018

HomeFront
a spiritual parenting resource

LOVE & Respect

“GOD FILLS ME WITH HIS LOVE SO I CAN GIVE IT AWAY.”
HOW TO USE

HomeFront

Each issue highlights an environment your family can create in your home. This month looks at LOVE & RESPECT. Each magazine is divided into two sections: Family Time and Inspire, Equip, Support.

**Family Time** articles are created to equip you to engage with your children on a regular basis.

**Inspire, Equip, and Support** articles are parenting stories, devotions, and ideas to encourage you as you spiritually lead your household.

**USE THIS GUIDE TO GET FAMILY TIME STARTED. IT’S AS EASY AS 1, 2, 3 ...**

1. Start by deciding on a day and time that works well for your entire family. It can be an evening, afternoon, or morning. Just commit to building this time into your family’s natural rhythm—perhaps around a meal.

2. Look through HomeFront to see what stands out. Choose two or three experiences you would like to incorporate into your family times this month. Don’t feel burdened to complete all the activities—just do what fits your family best. This resource provides more than enough experiences to create transforming environments in your home throughout the month.

3. Remember to HAVE FUN! Strive to make each gathering unique to your own family as you enjoy spending time with God and one another.
We believe that the Holy Spirit is God’s chosen teacher. It is He who causes spiritual growth and formation when and as He chooses. As such, we have articulated 10 distinct environments to create in your home. We desire to create spiritual space, which we refer to as an environment, in which God’s Spirit can move freely.

“A NOTE FROM MICHELLE”

Without love, our faith becomes futile. The environment of LOVE & RESPECT recognizes that children need both love and respect in order to be free to both receive and give God’s grace.

Key to this environment is the value that children are respected because they embody the image of God. We must speak to them, not at them, and we must commit to an environment where love and acceptance are never withheld because of one’s behavior.

First Corinthians 13 says if we don’t have love, everything else we do is futile. It’s worthless. So, without love, it doesn’t matter if we have all the knowledge in the world. It doesn’t matter if we’re helping kids understand who God is and we’re modeling what that looks like. If we don’t do all of it in a loving way, then it’s simply worthless! Wow! That’s a sobering thought. When we create an environment of LOVE & RESPECT, we’re helping identify the image of God in every person.

This month, be looking for ways to take the environment of LOVE & RESPECT beyond your family time with HomeFront. Challenge your family to find opportunities to show love and respect to others in your everyday interactions!

Michelle Anthony
Executive Pastor, Family Ministries | New Life Church, Colorado Springs, CO
Michelle has graduate degrees in Christian education, theology, and leadership and more than 25 years of church ministry experience as a children’s and family pastor. She loves a good book and a cup of coffee.
@TruInspiration

OUR MISSION

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The website is filled with fresh ideas and creative resources to help you spiritually parent your children.

PARTNERSHIP

HomeFront magazine is a nonprofit ministry of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. If you are passionate about this resource and the families it equips, please consider making a one-time or monthly donation to allow this ministry to continue to reach thousands of homes.

Please go to pushpay.com/pay/nlcministries and choose “HomeFront” from the Giving Type to make your tax-deductible donation. Thank you for helping HomeFront minister to families around the world.
As our team began brainstorming this issue, the first few lines of the poem “How Do I Love Thee?” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning kept coming to mind:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach …

It made me think about all the ways we show love to our children, tirelessly putting their needs above our own. It truly is to the depth, breadth, and height of our souls. Then, I remembered that God’s love for us is even greater—greater than we can imagine. First John 4:9-10, our FAMILY TIME VERSE (page 5), tells us, “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

This month’s issue of HomeFront is dedicated to counting the ways God shows us His love and the ways we in turn share that love with our children. In our TRADITIONS article (page 14) we hear about parents who recognized the need to spend one-on-one time with their children and cultivated a tradition of “dating.” In WORSHIP (page 10), Erin Comer (who also happens to be our designer) shares how 10 minutes changed their family—this is a worthwhile activity for all parents to implement!

SPIRITUAL GRANDPARENTING (page 48) takes a different look at how we can love our grandchildren well, and our CONVERSATION STARTER (page 12) might draw you into a surprising discovery that your children are satisfied with simple ways of showing love.

As always, our hope is that the articles and activities you find in this resource are a blessing to your family. We are all on this spiritual parenting journey together, and we need each other. We realize that without God’s love we would be lost! Our prayer is that you allow Him to fill you with His love and that one day your children will be able to look back and “count the ways” you were able to give it away to them.

Debbie Guinn
Editor in Chief | New Life Church
debbie@homefrontmag.com

Debbie is the Editor in Chief of HomeFront magazine. She has more than 25 years of experience working in children’s and family ministries. She is passionate about equipping parents to become leaders of God’s truth in their own households. She is a recent transplant to Austin, TX, where she co-parents two of her four grandchildren with her son. She spends her free time enjoying her grandchildren and perusing antique stores and flea markets.

FAMILY VERSE Memorizing Scripture can be an incredible practice to engage in as a family. But words in and of themselves will not necessarily transform us; it is God’s Spirit in these words who transforms. We come to know God more when we’re willing to open our hearts and listen to His Holy Spirit through the words we memorize. Have fun with this verse, and think of creative ways to invite your family to open up to God as they commit the verse to memory.

Consider purchasing an 8” x 10” frame to hold your family memory verse each month!
This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us & sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1 John 4:9-10
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Pumpkins are undoubtedly some of the most recognizable parts of the autumn season. They are in our pies and our coffee, we bake them in bread, and we carve them to decorate our porches. In the last few years they seem to come in every size, shape, and color too.

This month, consider making these beautiful pumpkin succulent planters. Use a variety of shapes, colors, and sizes for both the pumpkins and the succulents. Let this serve as a reminder that God designed variety in people too. He loves each of us equally no matter our shape, size, or color. He demonstrated His love by sending His one and only Son as a sacrifice for our sins, and He fills us with His love so we can give it away to others!

WHAT YOU’LL NEED
- hollow or Styrofoam faux pumpkins
- potting soil
- varied small succulents
- black marker
- utility knife
- scissors or handheld garden shears
- plastic grocery sacks
- something to cover your workspace

WHAT YOU’LL DO
1. Draw a circle the size of your desired opening on the top of your pumpkins.
2. Use a utility knife to cut the circle (slanting in toward the center of the pumpkin).
3. Remove the circle and dig out any extra bits left inside to create a large hole.
4. Line the hole with plastic.
5. Pour a small amount of soil in the bottom of the pumpkin.
6. Remove plant from its nursery container by turning it upside down in your hand.
7. Plant succulents and clippings close together.
8. Fill any gaps with soil mix, tamping gently.
9. Lightly water plants using a narrow spout to direct the stream into the soil rather than onto the succulent.
10. Place inside or outside in a spot that receives at least six hours of direct sunlight per day.

by Debbie Guinn
Ten Minutes Changed Our Family
Like most families, ours is active, and finding quality one-on-one time with each family member can be a challenge.

In the last six months, we’ve stumbled upon a system we lovingly refer to as “10 Minutes.” Simply put, toward the end of the day, I spend 10 minutes with each child for personal one-on-one time. The kids love it! And I do too!

In fact, it’s gone so well my daughters actually beg for it and are brokenhearted on nights we don’t get to do 10 Minutes.

We’re firm on the time but flexible on the task. I usually set the kitchen timer, and one child and I will slip off to a quiet bedroom. She decides on the task, and I participate for 10 full minutes. We may color, read a book, play dolls, or tell stories. I’m not so concerned about the activity as I am with connecting with the heart of my child.

For 10 minutes, what’s important to her is important to me.

For 10 minutes, what’s important to her is important to me.

It reminds me a lot of worship. Our heavenly Father desires to spend time with us, and we desire to spend time with Him! I believe true worship happens when we connect to the heart of God. Just as I connect to the heart of my child through an activity, worship happens when I connect to the heart of my heavenly Father.

When we think of worship, we often get caught up on what activity to do, but God cares more about the time we spend. Worship happens through singing, giving, loving, serving, sacrificing, working, and (according to Romans 12:1) simply living for Him.

Through 10 Minutes, I’m able to connect to the hearts of my girls, but ultimately, I want to connect their hearts to the heart of our heavenly Father.

Here are four tips for creating a good 10 minute environment.

1. No disruptions. During 10 Minutes, our family knows not to interrupt. Unless the house is burning down, no one is allowed to enter the room.
2. No cell phones. This kind of ties back to the first tip, but I make a point not to bring my cell phone. Checking alerts becomes too tempting, and with three girls—it’s only 30 minutes.
3. Say yes! Sometimes the girls come up with some crazy ideas, but for those 10 minutes I step out of my comfort zone and say yes to their requests. I’ve had to wear funny clothes, pretend to be a tickle monster, and allow my hair to be redone.
4. Four for seven is great! Life happens, and we don’t always get to end the day with 10 Minutes. Don’t worry if you can only do four nights a week. If my mom math is correct, that’s 40 minutes of one-on-one time per week! Ten minutes is better than zero minutes.

Give it a try and see how it works for your family. We’ve shared the idea with several friends and we’ve yet to hear negative feedback. Each child longs for a little one-on-one time, and you can make it happen! Then, challenge each child to spend 10 minutes with God. Remind them that He loves them and wants to connect with them just like they want to connect with you.

by Erin Comer

Erin and her husband Andy are church planters near Austin, TX. They enjoy time with their girls, restoring anything old, and always learning new things. They are growing forward together!
The Big Reward

I learned a lot about six and seven year olds during my years as a schoolteacher. I absolutely adored the kids the Lord handpicked to be in my class each year. Even as an inexperienced 23 year old, I knew I wanted to be the kind of teacher who intentionally acknowledged good behavior rather than one who spotlighted poor choices. I found it fascinating how quickly the mischievous kids picked up on my approach and redirected their misguided attempts for attention into doing good things for recognition. Without fail, I always had one of the best-behaved classes on campus.

I’ll never forget when one of my classes had earned enough “good deed” points to receive a big celebration. I was so proud of them that I was more than happy to reward their accomplishment with something extra special. On the day I announced it, I asked the kids to think about what they would like as their reward. I expected them to request a pizza party, or an ice cream sundae and movie party, or some other grand reward. I fully expected that I would spend at least $100 on the party. What I never expected was the decision they unanimously agreed upon for their big reward ... cans of soda pop! That’s it. Just a can of soda for each student. I’ve never forgotten the unexpected lesson I learned that day.

For this month’s conversation starter, I encourage parents to remember that your mind-set and a child’s mind-set are vastly different. Adults tend to think in terms of the whole pizza while our kids might just want the soda. So, with this in mind, be prepared to be amazed by sincere, childlike responses to the following questions.

GET YOUR FAMILY TALKING ...

• What is one activity Mom/Dad does that makes you feel the most loved?
• What is your favorite way to show Mom/Dad/Sister/Brother that you love him or her?
• Is there something you really love that you want me to know about?
• What is one way you can show Jesus you love Him?
• What can our family do together to show Jesus’ love to others?

by Cynthia Clark

Recently Cyndi and her family moved from Southern California to the small town of Franklin, TN. She enjoys countless hours renovating their farmhouse and has big dreams for her garden. Her joy is to encourage women in the Lord.

@cyn4Jesus
Dating Your Children
MY HUSBAND AND I HAVE FOUR UNIQUELY DIFFERENT CHILDREN.

Before each one of our children was born, my husband and I dreamed and talked about the accolades our kids would achieve or how one would look like him or maybe more like me. Jared prayed over my pregnant belly and we began to form our expectations of what each child would be like. Now that I know each of my children, I can’t help but laugh at my incorrect preconceived ideas of personality, temperament, and talents.

God truly made each child uniquely different, even in the ways each one receives love. One child needs one-on-one attention without any interruptions while another child needs to experience adventure. But, no matter how different my children are, they have one thing in common—-a need for quality time with Mom and Dad. When my second daughter was born, my oldest daughter began acting out. It didn’t take us long to realize that she needed some extra “love” in that season. So, my husband and I prayerfully came up with the idea of “dating” our children.

The dating tradition began as a means to show each child love during a difficult season. However, now it has become part of our regular rhythm of life. We look at the dates as opportunities to intentionally invest in our children. There are two values we want to communicate through the dates:

1. **We are always available and accessible to our children for any concern, thought, or situation— or just to laugh.**
2. **Our kids walk away from the date feeling loved, encouraged, and affirmed. This means we cannot use this time to discipline or correct behavior.**

I wish I could say that our one-on-one dates are a regular, weekly occurrence, but our messy, fulfilling life doesn’t always allow for everyone to have a regular night. Instead, we organically look for opportunities to celebrate our children. I encourage you to begin one-on-one or both-parents-with-one-child dates if you haven’t already. It’s never too late or too early to start. Here are a few tips to help have a great date night.

- **Choose to do something your child wants to do.** A wise counselor, Mark Mayfield, told us that if you are having problems relating to your child, try immersing yourself in something your child is interested in and watch the connection form.

- **Celebrate the differences in each child.** Every child is uniquely different. The date nights should reflect their differences. Think of their love languages and construct dates that cater to those specific love languages.

- **Choose activities that lend to communication.** If you are going to see a movie or something that prohibits communication, find a way to connect in conversation during the date at some point. Ask your kids about their interests, opinions, friendships, and feelings. Try to stay away from questions that can be answered with yes or no.

- **Listening to your child shows that you value him.** When kids feel heard, it brings them a feeling of safety and assurance.

- **Be playful and joyful.** It is important for your children to feel like you are having as much fun on the dates as they are and that it is not a burden to carve out the time to spend together.

- **Laugh a lot.** One of the best ways to form a strong connection with your child is to laugh and have fun. We have found that laughter softens their hearts and breaks down walls.

My husband and I pray that God works in miraculous ways in your relationship with your child or children through the tradition of date nights like He did for ours.

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by Holly Newman

Holly is the Pastor of Elementary and Spiritual Parenting at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO. She has written children’s curriculum as well as developed her own tween and teen curriculum about identity called Girltime. Her passion is for family ministry that leads others to create influential, faith-building moments with their children. She has been married to her high school sweetheart, Jared, for 17 years. They have four children: two girls and two boys. In her spare time, she loves to get outdoors with her family.
I recently found myself in my girls’ playroom late one evening, armed with two bags and an unwavering purpose: donate or throw away every item I deemed outdated, unloved, or unnecessary.

I’m not a clean freak by nature, but thanks to a highly sensitive nervous system, an excess of clutter can quickly send me into a full-blown anxiety attack. Needless to say, I tend to be a bit (ahem) energetic in my decluttering efforts.

But on this particular evening, I couldn’t shake a growing sense of guilt. I became acutely aware of the fact that my daughters were just on the other side of the playroom wall, sleeping peacefully in their beds, with no idea that their mother was ruthlessly weeding out their childish treasures.

How would I feel if somebody rummaged through my things without my knowledge? I began to wonder. And the answer immediately became clear:

I would feel painfully disrespected.

BEAUTIFUL CHAOS

I put back each item I had relegated to the trash that evening, but I continued to begrudge our household clutter. Our home looked so nice before toys filled its walls, I silently mourned. I’m sick of sweeping Barbie shoes out of every corner!

Yet when my husband and I enjoyed a rare, kid-free weekend at home a few weeks later, the stillness afforded me the opportunity to view our living room with fresh perspective. And suddenly the markers, glue sticks, books, dolls, glitter, and dresses that littered the room were no longer the bane of my existence—they were tangible reminders of the big, boisterous, messy blessings of family life.

You prayed for this, the Holy Spirit gently whispered to my heart. And someday you’ll miss it ...

The tears rolled freely down my cheeks as I realized that my constant desire to purge my children’s belongings was not just a disrespect to their feelings—it was a disrespect to the beautiful chaos of this season.

PRAYING OVER POSSESSIONS

Since that weekend, the Lord has gradually led me to a place of greater balance in homemaking—for although clutter invariably accompanies the territory of family life, teaching our children to manage their possessions is a vital part of intentional parenting. So when our beautiful chaos begins to lean toward excess, my husband and I now invite our girls to join us in the process of decluttering. As we sort through our possessions, we pray for the Lord’s help and guidance in the following areas:

Generous Hearts—We want to share our excess with joy, not with reluctant or begrudging attitudes.

Responsible Giving—Which organizations will do the most good with our donations? Do we personally know someone who would be blessed by a particular item?

Contentment—Just because we’re removing items doesn’t mean they need to be replaced. We want hearts of contentment and peace—not striving and greed.

Respect for Our Seasons—Some seasons require extra “stuff” (new babies, extracurriculars, etc.) and some are naturally leaner. We seek to honor God with responsibility and gratitude through every season He ordains.

by Brittany Woodward

Brittany is a born-and-bred Oklahoman living in the heart of Tornado Alley with her husband and two young daughters. She is a homeschooling mama by day, an aspiring picture book author by night, and a lover of literature, worship, fitness, The Office, and coffee (give her alllll the coffee).
"You prayed for this", the Holy Spirit gently whispered to my heart. "And someday you'll miss it..."
aisy loved gardens and dress-up and snuggling with her parents and adventure, but most of all Daisy loved animals. She begged her parents to let her have a pet. But they always said no.

One day, Daisy’s parents surprised her with a trip to a farm and let her pick out a kitten. Daisy was thrilled. She promised to feed it and love it and care for it.

And she did.

She was ready for all the responsibility, but what she was mostly ready for was SNUGGLES. She was so excited about snuggling that she named her kitty Snuggles.

She fed Snuggles, cleaned her litter box, and spent all her allowance on cat toys. But Daisy had a problem. Snuggles did not like snuggles. Daisy chased that kitty around the house, desperately trying to love Snuggles with all her heart. But Snuggles just wriggled right out of her arms, ran down the hall, and hid in her parents’ closet. Daisy was heartbroken. She was doing everything right. But Snuggles did not care for Daisy’s love at all.

So Daisy tried even harder. She played with Snuggles the way she herself liked to play and loved her in all the ways she liked to be loved. She took Snuggles into the garden for an adventure. Snuggles climbed up a tree and meowed in terror. Daisy tried to put doll clothes on Snuggles so they could play house, but Snuggles scratched her and hid under the bed. Daisy tried to hold Snuggles on her lap while watching a movie, but Snuggles just bit her hand and crawled under the couch.

“Why won’t Snuggles love me?!?” Daisy sobbed to her mother. “I’m doing everything to show her I love her, but she just doesn’t care!”

“Sweet Daisy,” her mother replied softly. “Love looks different for different creatures. You feel loved when we give you fun adventure and affection. But Snuggles needs a different kind of love.”

“What kind of love does Snuggles need?”

“The best way to figure out how to give someone the exact love she needs is to watch and listen.”

So Daisy did. She spent a whole day just letting Snuggles do whatever she wanted and paying very close attention. Snuggles spent most of the day sleeping. She’d eat breakfast, chase a bug, meow at a bird outside the window, then sleep. Then she’d have a snack, meow at a squirrel, then sleep. It was difficult to hold back and not snuggle with her kitty, but Daisy did. And at the end of the
day she got the most wonderful surprise. While Daisy sat on the couch reading a book after dinner, she felt a soft paw on her leg. Snuggles wanted to snuggle! Daisy stretched out her legs, and Snuggles curled up in her lap, closed her eyes, and purred softly. Daisy’s heart was fit to burst.

Sweet children, know that your parents love you deeply and with everything they’ve got. Like Daisy did for Snuggles, they work hard to provide for you, make sure you have everything you need, and show you love. You mean the world to them, and their greatest desire is to make sure you know just how loved you are.

dear parents, you’re so good at loving your children. You give them everything you’ve got. You provide for them, make sure they have everything they need, and show them love.

I have two sweet cherubs, and they are as different as two genetically linked humans could be. I have an introvert and an extrovert; one loves to cuddle, one loves to adventure; one is cautious, the other is brave. And when it comes to making them feel loved, I’ve learned, oftentimes the hard way, that what works for one doesn’t often work for the other. One needs a lot of verbal affirmation, and the other needs a lot of quality time. Sometimes they trade. Sometimes they need something entirely different. And honestly, sometimes that’s hard and exhausting. I love them with everything inside me, and some days it’s a struggle to figure out exactly what that needs to look like. But at the end of the day I love them—deeply—and that’s going to need to look different for different kiddos, sometimes changing by the day or even hour. Because “love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Corinthians 13:4–7, emphasis added). The bottom line is that love is not about us. It’s about those we love. We may love to snuggle, but if the one we’re trying to make feel loved doesn’t like to snuggle, it’s not going to feel like love to that person. So we need to watch and listen.

Parents and children alike: How can you watch and listen for signs of love? How can you show love to others in the ways they need the most?

by Shannon Miller

Shannon lives in Oregon with her husband and two children. A former middle school teacher from California, Shannon spends her days substitute teaching, volunteering at her kids’ school, reading, knitting, and going on adventures with her family. She is passionate about good yarn, raising kind human beings, and the God who made this beautiful world and its beautiful people.

illustrations by Kathryn Swogger
God pours out His lavish love on us. What a privilege it is for us to worship Him and point that love back the other way; we can show God how much we love Him too! This month, spend some time as a family making paper pumpkins that express some of the most wonderful things about God. As you read each thing you love about Him, remember that He fills you with His love so you can give it away to others!

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- construction paper (orange, white, brown, or whatever fall colors you’d like your pumpkins to be)
- scissors or paper cutter
- hole punch
- black pens or markers
- brown pipe cleaners or 10” of ribbon, 1 per pumpkin

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. For each pumpkin, choose 2 or 3 sheets of construction paper. (Consider using a different color for each family member to make a nice variety of pumpkins.)
2. Cut the sheets of paper into strips 1” wide by 8” long. (For larger pumpkins, cut 10” or 12” strips.)
3. Write one thing you love about God on each strip of paper.
4. Stack your paper strips together (with the words facing down) and punch a hole in each end.
5. Keep your paper strips stacked and string your ribbon through one end, tying a knot to secure it. This will be the bottom of your pumpkin.
6. String your ribbon through the other end, tying a knot to secure that end as well.
7. Fan out the paper strips to make a circle around the ribbon so it looks like a pumpkin. (You may need to adjust your top knot and cut off any excess ribbon.) Make sure your words are facing out so you can read the things you wrote about God!

by Emily Schulz

Emily is the Family and Women’s Ministries Pastor at New Denver Church in Denver, CO. She has her BA in Christian Ministries from Biola University and her MDiv from Denver Seminary. Emily loves seasonal activities; date nights with her husband, Phil; cooking; playing games; spontaneous song and dance; and creating space for people to be known and loved.
Optional:

Decorate the top of your pumpkin however you'd like. Use additional ribbon to tie a bow around the top knot. Or, cut out paper leaves, punch a hole each one, and tie those on top. If you use a pipe cleaner instead of ribbon, wrap it around a pen a few times to make a curly stem.
**WHAT YOU’LL NEED**

- mini pumpkins (faux or real, 10-20 depending on number of players)
- any color acrylic craft paint
- paintbrushes
- cup of water
- newspaper
- permanent marker
- orange construction paper (optional)
- scissors (optional)

**BEFORE YOU START …**

For 1 to 2 children, you’ll need 10 to 12 mini pumpkins. For 3 to 4 children, you’ll need 12 to 16 mini pumpkins. For 5 or more children, you’ll need 20 or more pumpkins. Please note that these numbers are flexible! As you read the directions, feel free to make the game bigger by adding more pumpkins or smaller by using fewer. If you prefer, you may choose to cut pumpkin shapes out of orange construction paper rather than buying and painting the mini pumpkins.

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**Pumpkin Matchup**

**GAME TIME**

To start, lay the newspaper on the ground and place your pumpkins on top and upside down (as best as you can). Paint the bottom of each pumpkin and let dry.

This game is played like Memory, so the next thing you will need to do, once the pumpkins are dry, is create matching pairs. For this, you simply need to think of some “You are …” statements that describe things you love and respect about your child(ren). For example:

- You are kind.
- You are funny.
- You are generous.
- You are loyal.
- You are forgiving.

Write each of these statements on two pumpkins (e.g., “You are kind” on two pumpkins). If you are playing with little ones who can’t read yet, you may consider painting different colors on the bottoms of the pumpkins so they can identify pairs by color (each pair should be the same color).

Finally, turn the pumpkins correct side up, mix them up, and set them out in a grid-like shape (just like in the game Memory). Now you’re ready to play!

**TIME TO PLAY!**

Invite your family to join you around the pumpkins. Explain to the group that this game is played just like Memory. Players will take turns turning over two pumpkins and reading the words written on the bottom out loud. If the pumpkins do not match, the player will flip them back over and the next player takes a turn. If the pumpkins do match, the player can keep the pumpkin pair by her side. If you are playing with a child who cannot read, be sure you or another adult or older sibling reads the statement out loud.

Once all the pumpkins have been matched up, the person with the most pairs wins!

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by Heather DePartee

Heather worked in children’s ministry for seven years and recently earned her degree in early childhood development. She is now working on her Multiple Subject Teaching Credential and MA in teaching at Fresno Pacific University in Fresno, CA. She is in love with her husband, Adam, and all of their adorable houseplants!
REMEMBER!

The environment of Love & Respect is not just about teaching our children to be kind and loving but is our opportunity as parents and grandparents to show love and respect to our own children. Use the end of this game as an opportunity to affirm and love your children by going back through and reading the “You are …” statements again as a family. Expand upon each one for your children so they can hear exactly why you chose each statement for them. Then, of course, remind your children that God is the one who loved us first. He sent His one and only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. There is no greater love than the love of our Lord!
FAMILY TIME  INSPIRE  EQUIP  SUPPORT

FAMILY TIME RECIPES

Butternut Squash & Sausage Stuffed Shells

THIS STUFFED SHELLS RECIPE WELCOMES YOU TO THE WARM AND COZY COMFORT OF FALL FOOD. IT WILL BE LOVE AT FIRST BITE FOR YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY!
WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- 1 butternut squash, peeled and cubed
- 1 onion, sliced
- 3/4 cup milk
- 3/4 cup vegetable broth
- 1 pound sausage
- 2 cups spinach
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 pound jumbo shells, cooked al dente
- 15 ounces ricotta
- 1 egg
- 1/4 cup Parmesan, shredded
- additional Parmesan, shredded
- olive oil
- salt and pepper

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Preheat oven to 400° F.
2. Arrange onion and butternut squash in an even layer on a lined baking sheet.
3. Drizzle with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Roast for 40 minutes.
4. While squash and onion are roasting, cook sausage over medium heat.
5. When sausage is mostly browned, add spinach and garlic. Cook until spinach is wilted and remove from heat.
6. Place roasted butternut squash and onion in a blender or food processor.
7. Pulse to a smooth puree.
8. Allow to cool. Stir in milk and vegetable broth.
9. Pour butternut squash puree into base of a 9” x 13” baking dish.
10. In a large mixing bowl, stir together ricotta, Parmesan, and egg.
11. Add sausage and spinach to ricotta and stir until evenly distributed.
12. Fill cooked pasta shells with 3 to 4 tablespoons of filling.
13. Arrange shells in butternut squash sauce in the 9” x 13” baking dish.
14. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 30 minutes. Uncover and bake for an additional 15 minutes.
15. Top with additional Parmesan.

by Debbie Guinn
Easy Energy Bites

THIS MONTH, ENCOURAGE YOUR KIDS TO GET IN THE KITCHEN WITH YOU AND MAKE THESE EASY ENERGY BITES. THEY ARE LOADED WITH NUTRIENTS, WHICH MEANS YOU WILL FEEL GOOD ABOUT SERVING THEM FOR A SNACK OR EVEN BREAKFAST!

PREP: 10 min.  YIELDS: about 24 bites

* For an easy metric conversion chart, search the Internet for “metric kitchen.”

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- 1 1/2 cups creamy peanut butter
- 3/4 cup mini semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 2 cups old fashioned oats
- 3/4 cup ground flax seeds
- 1 cup shredded coconut
- 4 tablespoons honey

WHAT YOU’LL DO

1. Preheat oven to 325° F. Spread coconut flakes on a baking sheet in a thin layer and bake for 5-10 minutes. After a few minutes stir the coconut to help ensure even color. Let cool.
2. Place all ingredients in a medium bowl.
3. Stir to combine.
4. Place in the refrigerator for 15-30 minutes.
5. Allow your children to roll into spoonful-sized balls.
6. Store in the refrigerator for up to a week.

BENEFITS OF ENERGY BITES

Peanut butter is full of protein, fiber, and potassium and gives you an energy boost.
Coconut is highly nutritious, rich in fiber, and packed with essential vitamins and minerals.
Oats are a fibrous whole grain.
Honey is a natural sweetener and full of vitamins.
Flax seed is high in Omega 3, antioxidants, and vitamins.
The relational dynamic of Jesus’ disciples often makes me laugh. In Matthew 18:1–5, the disciples are literally arguing over who will be the most important person in the kingdom of heaven. By this point, Jesus is preparing them for His death and for their future ministry—but they’re arguing like middle school boys about to be picked for a kickball game at recess.

About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. Then he said, “I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me.” (Matthew 18:1–5 NLT)

I can imagine Jesus being more than a little let down by their debate, yet He was patient enough to share with them a big truth.

Who is the greatest? According to Jesus, the greatest in the kingdom of heaven isn’t the most powerful, nor the wealthiest, nor the most well-respected. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven are those who are humble enough to love people with simple hearts—not seeking status or favors from others but truly loving and serving them. Jesus even said of Himself that He came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:28).

Serving our own kids isn’t glamorous and can seem thankless, but it is the essence of greatness in God’s kingdom. When we are patient with a fussy child, we show greatness. When we are kind when we want to snap, we show greatness. When we love our children in a way that’s meaningful to them, we are great in the kingdom of God.
HEAR IT

Parents, engage your family with the following prompts:

Read Matthew 18:1-5 with your family.
1. What does it mean to be “the greatest”?
2. Why does it make us feel so good to be “the greatest” at something?
3. How does Jesus surprise His disciples when He explains what makes someone great?

Then, read Matthew 20:28 together.
1. What did Jesus say His own purpose was?
2. If that was Jesus’ purpose, what should our purpose be?
3. Why can that be so hard for us to do inside our family?

DO IT

Have each member of the family think of the most meaningful way the other members of the family can love and serve him in the next week. Is it spending time with him? Is it asking about his day? Is it throwing a football in the backyard? Is it helping with the dishes? Have each person share his or her idea, and then challenge each family member to love and serve each other in those specific ways during the next week. Be sure to privately follow up with family members to see if they have served each other before the week runs out.

by Stephen Castleberry

Stephen is a husband, father to a great son, and the Experience Pastor at Antioch Georgetown Church in Georgetown, TX. He has a master’s degree from Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. He and his wife, Ashley, grew up in Arkansas but are becoming more Texan every day.
When You Get Up

THese Commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 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 6:6–7)

This month, as you wake your little one, start your day singing this rhyme to the tune of “Brother John” (a.k.a., “Frère Jacques”). May these words become a memorable reminder to your children that God fills them with His love so they can give away to others.

My God’s love, my God’s love
Lives in me, lives in me
I’ll give it away, I’ll give it away
How ‘bout you? How ‘bout you?

Get the audio recording of this song at bit.ly/octtottimerhyme

by Tommy Larson

Tommy has been serving as a pastor at ROCKHARBOR Church in Costa Mesa, CA, for the past 11 years. He was part of the development team of the Tru curriculum. He lives in Costa Mesa with his wife and two children.
Many years ago, I read the book *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* by Gary Chapman. In his book, Chapman concludes that after many years of marriage counseling he believes there are five emotional love languages—five ways that people speak and understand emotional love. They are:

1. **Words of affirmation**
2. **Quality time**
3. **Receiving gifts**
4. **Acts of service**
5. **Physical touch**

As a mom, I became fascinated with trying to figure out which love language each of my children possessed. I wanted desperately for them to feel loved and accepted in a meaningful way. I quickly realized each one of my three children had his own unique way of receiving and giving love. Believe me, I’m not saying it was always possible to love three children in three different ways that best met their emotional needs. However it was eye opening and a useful tool whenever the demands of parenting allowed me the luxury of being intentional.

Being a perfect Father, God always knows how to show life-giving, life-changing perfect love. As parents, we can rely on Him to fill our children’s hearts; we can turn to His Word and speak His beautiful love language over our children as a blessing.

**PARENTS, READ 1 JOHN 4:9–10 OVER YOUR CHILDREN.**

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

**BLESS**

As you pray the following blessing over your child, encourage him to look you in the eye and hold his hands out with palms facing up in a posture to receive the words you are about to speak.

(Child’s name), may you understand the deep love God has for you. May you always remember He sent His one and only Son so that you might live. May this example of love set the standard for the way you love others throughout your lifetime. Never forget that God fills you with His love so you in turn can give that love away to others.

*by Debbie Guinn*
Rice Love co-founders Coney Pulla and Corbin Thomander talked about what they could do to have a positive impact on the world. After doing some research, they found that the world had enough food to end global hunger. And yet, one in nine people in the world still go to bed on an empty stomach. With 800 million people affected, ending global hunger is one of the world’s top challenges. India is the country with the most people affected: 200 million. Rice is consumed more than any other food in India, which also meant that Coney and Corbin would be able to find a lot of discarded rice bags there. Their plan was to repurpose rice bags into tote bags and sell them. For every bag they made, they would give a kilo of rice away to a family in need. Giving rice is equal to giving life, which symbolizes love. Thus, Rice Love was born.

In December 2014, Coney graduated and moved back to India. Corbin quit his job in order to ship the first 200 tote bags to the first 200 customers. The following month, the two gave 200 kilos of rice in Coney’s hometown to the very people he had imagined helping years earlier.

Today, Rice Love finds families in India with temporary job loss or illness to give to. Every family is delivered 25 kilos of rice. Families share their photos and stories on ricelove.org to say, “Thank you!”

**WHAT WE DO**

We design tote bags and backpacks utilizing eco-friendly, cruelty-free materials. For every item we make, we give a kilo of rice to a family in need. We are committed to showing you the proof. Every item comes with a unique tag number that can be used to find the photo and story of the family that YOU have fed. When you buy our bags, you are raising your hand in support of the fight to end global hunger and improve the planet.

We have given over 10,000 kilos of rice. There are an equal number of wanderers wearing our bags and sharing our story around the world. Our goal is to give one million kilos of rice by the end of 2020. We invite you to join the movement. Buy a bag. Feed a family.
Feed a family.

families helped

making the bags
GLOBAL

Awakening a compassionate heart and a global mind-set in children for people beyond the boundaries of their own neighborhoods.

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS ...  

MOROCCO

Morocco is located in the northwestern corner of the African continent. It is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the Mediterranean Sea to the north, and Algeria to the east and southeast. The Strait of Gibraltar separates it from Spain at its northern tip. Its southern border is the Sahara Desert. Morocco is 172,413 square miles and has 1,140 miles of coastline. Morocco’s capital city, Rabat, is located in the northwest part of the country overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Other major cities are Casablanca on the Atlantic Ocean, Marrakech (the business capital) near the center, and Tangier in the north on the Strait of Gibraltar.
NOW THAT WE KNOW WHERE IN THE WORLD MOROCCO IS, LET’S MEET AND GREET THE PEOPLE.

There are 36,265,988 people who call Morocco their home.

If you went to religious services in Morocco, you would most likely go to an Islamic temple.
Religion: Islam 99%, Christianity less than 1%, Judaism less than 1%

If you lived in Morocco you would speak Arabic. To say, “Hello” you would say, “Marhaba” (pronounced MAR-HAH-BAA).

If you lived in Morocco you most likely would eat a main Moroccan dish called couscous. Couscous consists of small steamed balls of crushed durum wheat semolina that are traditionally served with a stew spooned on top.

DID YOU KNOW?

• Morocco’s national animal is the Barbary lion. DNA evidence from two lion skulls found in the Tower of London prove that English royalty owned at least two Barbary lions sometime between the 13th and 15th centuries.

• White is the color of mourning in Morocco. A Moroccan widow wears white for 40 days after the death of her husband.

• The Sahara Desert covers a large portion of Morocco. But the entire country isn’t desert; there are also mountain ranges, forests, and fields.

Live Dead Africa exists to plant churches and make disciples of 867 unreached people groups of the 48 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. Live Dead Africa serves 316 million African people. Here is a recent note from a team member serving in Morocco:

The team here has grown and is thriving in so many ways. Arabic is being diligently, and at times painstakingly, learned. The gospel is being boldly proclaimed. The Bible is being regularly distributed through various media. The Word of God is being studied across our city and nation. This month we were excited to send out an amazing young missionary from the training team. Having completed his two years of full-time language study and missiology training, this passionate young leader will soon move to a new city in North Africa with his soon-to-be bride to serve with the launch of a new church planting team. Jesus is faithful!

We are so grateful for what God has been doing, yet with the sober realization that there are still so many who have yet to hear the truth. We read a recent study that estimates the evangelical Christian community of Morocco at .04 percent and were reminded that almost everyone we see each day has no real understanding of the reason Jesus came to earth. They don’t know about a God who loved the world so much that He would give His Son for them.

africa.livedead.org
An Open Letter to Middle School Parents

Dear Parents of Middle School Students,

Thank you. Middle school is hard. Your child is changing and feeling enormous pressure, and you often bear the brunt of that. He feels like the whole world is watching him, and he often forgets that he is not the center of the universe. He is unsure where he belongs, caught somewhere between being a kid and being a teenager. His body is changing in ways he can’t explain, and his hormones are putting him through the ringer. As a result, you often end up being the target, the one who takes the heat. My hope is that these words fill you up in the places you feel empty as a parent.

Don’t give up. Continue to show your child love when she acts like she doesn’t need you. Continue to show her respect as she tries out 100 new ways to rebel. This too is just a phase. Try to simply be faithful with each day, and before you know it, she will be in high school and then leaving home for good.

During these years, we want to partner with you and share the load. We love it when your student shows up at youth group. We want him here. We want him to know Jesus as his Lord and Savior and we want him to begin to shift his focus to Jesus. We are doing our best with the moments we have to remind your son or daughter of what is true. But we can’t do it alone. We need you. We need you to model your love for God each and every day in your home. When you want to choose anger, choose grace. When you want to hide, show up. When you want to cry, let your student in. And remember, you are not alone.

Most importantly, God is with you, and we also stand beside you in this season.

If I could say one thing to you it would be this: Please don’t try to be a perfect parent. You will get it wrong, you will lose your patience, you will get fed up. It’s okay. It is much more important to be a praying parent than a perfect parent. Continue to bring your student before God in prayer.

Lastly, I want to say I’m sorry. On behalf of youth programs everywhere, I’m sorry for the places we have gotten it wrong. For the times your student showed up and went unnoticed. The times your student showed up and we missed the moment to invest in her. Please forgive us. We also are doing our best and sometimes we get it wrong.

The good news is that we have a God who is so much bigger than us. He loves your student so much more than we ever could, and He is faithful. God will give us both the strength to love your student well in this season. Don’t give up.

Love,
The Church Youth Staff

by Krista Heinen

Krista is a pastor who desires to help the next generation understand its place in The Big God Story. She has her BS in elementary education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and her MDiv from Bethel Seminary. Krista loves to preach, play board games, and spend time chatting over coffee. She and her husband, Greg, live in Wisconsin.
I remember the day a friend invited me over to help harvest potatoes. I knelt in front of the unimpressive raised beds, plunged my hands down into the black, warm soil, and rummaged around for the tubers. Somehow, each time I brought up a pale-fleshed potato, it was both shocking and deeply satisfying, like unearthing treasure. Way beneath the surface, where no one could witness the miracle, growth had been at work.

For me, motherhood began as a seed planted one morning in late May when my daughter came into the world knowing what she wanted. She spent all day communicating in no uncertain terms that her arms were not to be trapped inside the swaddling. As the years followed, she boycotted car seats, strollers, even shoes. Later, we battled over hair barrettes, bath time, naps—oh, the campaigns waged over naps! The strategies plotted from inside my child’s bedroom rivaled those of any great war general.

Though I was both timid and drained, I kept tending my seedling, wondering if anything could grow under my care. The season seemed to never end, and little sign of progress was visible from the surface. And yet I watered and kept watering, often with my own tears. Harvest, being able to taste and enjoy the fruit of my labor, seemed so very far off.

Today while shopping, she reminded me that next week she receives her driver’s license. “Maybe I should get a wallet so I have a place to keep it.” We stand eye to eye now, and I marvel at the way she is more adult than not. “Sure,” I said. “Would you like me to help you choose, or should I meet you in office supplies?” She beckoned with her hand and said quietly, “No, stay with me.”

She’s always known what she wanted, and lately, what she wants is me. We linger over tea in our pajamas on Saturday morning, hers with milk, mine without. I introduce her to my favorite movies when I was her age; she loves them. And most savory are the late nights I perch on her bed while she shares the things only able to be spoken after the lights are out.

These days, I am unearthing buried treasure in my high schooler, my fingernails caked black from cultivating, and the truth is right there: I am what she’s always wanted. Each childhood battle begged the question of whether I’d stay with her, keeping my part of the unspoken agreement: I’ll keep watering; you keep growing, little one. Surely she would not have sprawled her defiant toddler body across the grocery store aisle without also making sure my eye was still on her. And it was.

We forget the soil of parenting is best worked when we set our sights long, faithfully watering with hope and prayer. No matter the age, what our kids truly want is us—our commitment to being present even through the teen years, and our belief that harvest is indeed coming.

by Leslie Padgett

Leslie Padgett is a writer, speaker, mother, and mentor. Her passions include equipping her children to be world changers and loving and leading women to greater freedom—emotionally and spiritually. Five years ago, she moved from SoCal to Montana and may have cried in the laundry room her first winter.

Instagram @leslie_padgett
DEAR NON-STRONG-WILLED CHILD

I’ve been hearing a lot about your friends.

I’ve heard about these strong-willed children—how they test limits and push buttons and are bound and determined to go their own way. I’ve heard about how incredibly exhausting they are, while also being so, so worth it. I’ve heard about how they take it all out of their sweet mamas, draining them of every ounce of their waning patience and grace—but they’ll most certainly be world changers, so their uncompromising spirits are cause for celebration.
I hear that your strong-willed peers will move mountains and make waves. I have absolutely no doubt that that’s true. The greatness they will achieve, the lives they’re likely to change, will be thanks, in part, to that unwavering nature they possess.

But I want you to know that you’re just as capable of changing the world. I want you to hold fast to the truth that you don’t have to push boundaries to do good. Being strong-willed isn’t the end all, be all for making a difference. In fact, your quiet leadership and tender, passionate heart may be exactly the kind of strength this world needs.

You see, God crafted you this way, little one. He fashioned you before you were even born in accordance with His own perfect plan for you and your life. You were made in His image, and I see so much of Him—His goodness, kindness, and meekness—in you. And when He looks at you, sweet one, when He examines the glorious creation that is you, He’s overwhelmed with love.

Because He’s head over heels for you, just as He is over all of His children. But the fact that He chose me to be your mama—out of all the magnificent choices He settled on me—lights my soul on fire. There’s a purpose for both of us; there’s a reason He placed you in my life and me in yours, of that I am certain.

Maybe it’s that He knew your tender, quiet, sweet demeanor would be celebrated in our home. Maybe it’s that He knew your heart would be safe here, that we would never attempt to harden it or “toughen you up.” Maybe it’s that He knew you’d be loved well, respected for who you are. Maybe it’s that He knew we had prayed for you, trusting in Him to shape and mold you into the exact child we were meant to raise, the extraordinary human we have been called to nurture.

I don’t know exactly what this life holds for you. I don’t know what your laid-back, amiable personality will look like years down the road. But I do know that, just like with your strong-willed peers, your personality doesn’t define you. Your innate nature isn’t the end—it’s only the beginning. Because what you choose to do with the gifts and talents and traits you’ve been given—that’s what counts.

And His kingdom? It needs you. It needs your gifts and talents and traits; it needs you to be exactly who He shaped you to be. Because when you rest in who you are, when you learn to marvel at your uniqueness with gratitude and humility, knowing just how intricately and intentionally you were designed, that is when you can fully live out His calling on your life. That is when you can take your non-strong-willed nature and use it to further Him and His name.

So, while you may not be strong-willed, I pray that you will be resolute. That you will hold your core values close to your heart, never wavering on what’s important to you. That you will know who you are, embracing each bit of your uniqueness, changing the world by being true to you: tender, easygoing, non-strong-willed you.

Love,
Your Somehow-Still-Exhausted Mom

by Krista Murphy

Krista is a former first-grade teacher turned stay-at-home mom to her insanely precious little boys, Hudson and Jones. She is married to her best friend and high school sweetheart, Randy, who is the peanut butter to her chocolate. Krista hopes to be a light and joy to the world, especially to other mamas feeling stuck in the daily grind, through her writing.

facebook.com/kissesfromboysblog
@kissesfromboys
I know, I know, another article talking about how dads can show love to their kids. Just what we dads need, right?

It’s hard, showing love. Our wives beat the pants off us at this. But, we can show love and have a lot of fun doing it.

I realized that to enjoy parenting I had to do things/activities with my kids that I enjoy too. The following ideas may be a little outside the box but I think you’ll like them.

BE INTERESTED

This may seem like a Captain Obvious one but being interested in what your kids are interested in is a huge win in parenting. Thankfully my kids are interested in some really cool things. Learn how to play the games or apps they enjoy. If they enjoy art, well, learn art, too. Andrew Smith said, “People fear what they don’t understand and hate what they can’t conquer.” I find that true in today’s world. If we don’t understand something, we say it’s bad. Learn what your kids are into, be interested in what your kids are into, and do those things together.
COMPETE TOGETHER
Last summer I went on a father’s weekend retreat with my oldest son. One night we played a game called Night Rangers (if you haven’t played this, it’s a blast). My son and I were on the same team. Our team came in dead last but we had a great time together. We’re both pretty competitive so it was a bit frustrating to lose, but we were frustrated together. A year later and my son still talks about what a blast he had playing Night Rangers with me.

For you, this could be a 5k you run together, or maybe a board game tournament. Something you can compete in together.

DON’T LET THEM WIN … EVERY TIME
I love to win or, more accurately, I hate to lose. I’ve read some parenting advice that talked about letting your kids win to give them confidence. I’ve also read about crushing your kids to teach them humility. I like to live in the middle. We play a lot of games where my kids have a good chance of winning even if they aren’t very strategic (e.g., Monopoly Deal). If they need a little pick-me-up in life, let them crush you. Have fun with it. Lose well, love well.

DAY OF FUN
My marriage mentor, Tim Evans, taught me about D.O.F., as he calls them: Days of Fun. These are days dedicated to, well, fun. We do this with the kids. I’ll pull them out of school for a day and we’ll do pretty much whatever they want. Go to the zoo, bowling, have dessert for lunch, arcade, you name it. What I also do is plan a treat ahead of time. The morning they wake up for their Day of Fun there are surprises waiting on the dining room table for them. Just some fun stuff—stuffed animals, notebooks, water bottles—something that ties into the Day of Fun.

I also write them cards talking about how much I love them and, more specifically, what about them I love. Their senses of humor, their compassion. I also recommend finding some real-life examples that back these words up. “I loved it when you did ___; it showed me how ___ you are.”

CREATE SOMETHING TOGETHER
I love to create. New business ideas, stories, websites, apps, whatever. To create something out of nothing. My kids inherited this, too. Come to think of it, most kids I know love to create. Give a kid a can of play dough and next thing you know a whole new world comes to life.

My kids and I had fun creating a comic book character, Johnny Churro. We were sitting at Costco, eating churros and laughing about the idea of a superhero whose superpower involved churros. And then Johnny Churro came to life. We illustrated him. Wrote stories of his childhood and how he became a superhero. It was a blast.

For you, it could be creating something physical together—a doghouse, a skate ramp, something tactical. The key is time together but also an object you can point to and remember that time together.

Well, dads (and moms, too), I hope this article gave you some unique (and practical) ideas to show love to your kids. We’d love to hear the unique ways you are showing love to your children. Find us on social media and let us know @homefrontmagsp.

by Mike Ruman

Mike is the founder and CEO of Parenting Academy (parentingacademy.com). Parenting Academy is a digital learning community equipping moms and dads to be rockstar parents. Mike also founded the Swipe It app (swipeitapp.com) that helps connect families together through fun table-topic questions and challenges.
Love and Respect alongside
DISAGREEMENT
You have probably heard the remark, “We can agree to disagree.” The expression promotes an admirable idea for a peaceful compromise, but I recently heard a comparable phrasing that paints an even more attractive picture. I heard someone say, “We don’t have to see eye to eye in order to walk hand in hand.” I love that expression because, as followers of Jesus, one of our biggest challenges is to love and respect people with whom we disagree.

Our culture has adopted a lie that supposes if you disagree with someone’s lifestyle, decisions, or beliefs, then you do not love or respect that person. There is nothing further from the truth. People do not need to agree with each other in order to sincerely love each other. In fact, learning to disagree graciously and respectfully is one of the most loving things we can learn to do.

So how can we show others, specifically our own children, love and respect alongside conflict and disagreements? Engaging in any level of disagreement while maintaining a posture of love and respect certainly poses challenges, but there are a few things that can help.

Affirm your love verbally, listen attentively, and purpose in your heart to love unconditionally.

There is rarely a better opportunity to verbally affirm our love for our children than when we are in direct conflict with them. No matter how we are feeling, we must be willing to look our children in the eyes and let them know that, like their heavenly Father, we will never give up on them and will always love them (Romans 8:38). We must encourage our children that we will love and respect them as God’s wonderful creations no matter how much they might disappoint us. Genuine words that affirm unconditional love, especially in times of disappointment, have the power to encourage our children to believe that our love for them, and God’s love for them, is secure—not based on performance or agreement but rather on the grace and assurance of Jesus Christ.

Occasionally, a conflict will erupt between my 15-year-old son and me. I have the tendency to be impatient, and I will sometimes use my authority to quickly shut him down. When this happens, my son ends up feeling hurt, misunderstood, disrespected, and unloved. I have learned to obey the gentle nudge of the Holy Spirit, to show love and respect by taking the necessary time to try to understand and be a better listener. When I show interest in my son’s feelings by taking the time to listen and make things right with him, he feels loved and respected, even if we might still disagree on some things. We can love with our ears. Listening leads to understanding, and understanding leads to stronger relationships where we can walk hand in hand even when we don’t see eye to eye.

Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions. (Proverbs 18:2 NLT)

When we were opposed to Christ, He laid down His life for us (Romans 5:8), and it is His kindness that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). As representatives of Jesus, we must be willing to love like Him. We must model true love and respect to all people by being willing to listen and, when appropriate, to speak. When we do speak, may it be with kindness, grace, and humility, especially to those with whom we disagree.

by Trent Armstrong

Trent lives in Southern California with his wife and four children. Trent studied organizational leadership and holds a bachelor of science degree from Biola University. He currently serves at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA, as a drummer on the worship team and has been involved in music ministry for more than 25 years.

trentarmstrong.com

MY DEAREST BROTHERS AND SISTERS, TAKE THIS TO HEART: BE QUICK TO LISTEN, BUT SLOW TO SPEAK. AND BE SLOW TO BECOME ANGRY, FOR HUMAN ANGER IS NEVER A LEGITIMATE TOOL TO PROMOTE GOD’S RIGHTEOUS PURPOSE. (JAMES 1:19–20 TPT)
PRACTICAL IDEAS for a High-Maintenance MARRIAGE
Cathy and I have often said publicly that we have a high-maintenance marriage. We have been married for over 40 years, and we relate to Billy Graham’s description of his 54-year marriage: “Ruth and I are happily incompatible.” Cathy and I wouldn’t trade our relationship for anything, but it hasn’t always been easy. It’s kind of like what Rocky Balboa said to his wife in the famous movie Rocky: “I got gaps; you got gaps; we fill each other’s gaps.”

For 25 years we have lived next door to Bill, who has the coolest Corvette Stingray roadster. It is a beautiful car and fun to drive. Okay, he has never actually let me drive it—but I know it would be fun if I did! Bill spends a great deal of time, energy, and money to keep his high-performance machine in good shape. It needs regular oil changes and all the other maintenance cars need to keep it beautiful and in running order. If he ignored that car, it would eventually break down and just quit working.

In differing degrees, marriages are high maintenance with at least a bit of incompatibility mixed in. But that doesn’t stop the good marriages from being even better, and there is hope for even the most difficult relationships. What does it take to make a high-maintenance marriage successful? One word: intentionality. The best marriages are the ones where both parties are willing to work and be proactive at it on a regular basis.

Regardless of your history, today is the day to choose to make your marriage better. And this is your promise from the Bible: “[God] who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” (Philippians 1:6).

Here is a list of five things every couple can do to invest in their marriage. None of these are rocket science but they all take work. My experience is that it is definitely worth it.

Talk. Communicate on a deeper level daily, if possible. Take a walk. Sit together on the couch for 15 minutes after dinner, even if chaos surrounds you. You can’t grow together if you don’t talk.

Show affection. Authorities on the subject tell us that it takes eight to ten meaningful touches a day for a person to thrive. Showering your spouse with affection is one of the best ways to keep the sparks flowing. Women often say that nonsexual affection is even more powerful.

Walk. This may sound corny, but couples who walk together talk together. We find that when we put a leash on the dog and walk around the block, we end up having good conversations.

Express kindness. Random acts of kindness go a long way in a high-maintenance marriage. A nice card or running an errand for your spouse may do more for your relationship than many other things.

Pray. Couples who pray together stay together. We have said before that without God’s presence in our marriage, we would probably not be married today. The odds would be against us. We like what Paul said: “I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13 NLT). That statement goes for marriage as well.

Leo Tolstoy was not necessarily known as a marriage expert, but he was so right when he said, “What counts in making a marriage happy is not so much how compatible you are but how you deal with your incompatibility.” Good thoughts, Leo.

**CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE**

- Do you think our marriage is high maintenance, low maintenance, or somewhere in between?
- What is the one thing you think our marriage needs more of?
- Is there something our marriage needs less of?

by Jim Burns

Jim Burns is the President of HomeWord. He speaks and writes on the four values of HomeWord: strong marriages, confident parents, empowered kids, and healthy leaders. You can find out more at homeword.com.
It seems a natural story: grandparents loving their grandchildren. But there’s a significant and important difference between indulging or treating grandchildren and loving them well.

Loving well is something we are able to do over and over again without it being “too much.” So, how do we “love well”? Jesus is our perfect example.

**Jesus showed His love for His disciples by praying for them.** Look at John 17 and you’ll see one of His prayers. In verses 11 and 12, He asked God to make His disciples one. I love like Jesus did by first of all praying for my grandsons to be united. I want them to love one another and be close brothers. Yes, there will be times when they squabble and disagree, but I want them to love the brothers God gave them.

I also want them to be united with other believers, so I pray for them to be part of a solid church and have friends who love God and encourage them to make wise choices.

In verse 13, **Jesus prayed for His disciples to have “the full measure of [His joy] within them.”** Life will be difficult at times, but if my grandsons have Jesus’ joy they’ll be able to face and make it through anything life brings their way. I show love by modeling this joy and praying for them to know it as well.

In verse 15, **Jesus prayed for His disciples to be protected from the evil one.** Jesus’ disciples walked with Him, learned from Him, and talked with Him in person. They saw Him walk on water, feed more than five thousand people with one small lunch, and raise the dead. If Jesus needed to pray for them to be protected from the evil one, then I certainly need to follow His example as I pray for my grandsons. I love well by letting my grandsons know the things I pray for them and by being willing to have important discussions with them—especially as it relates to their walk in this world.

In verses 20–23, **Jesus prayed for us!** He prayed we would believe, be one, and live so the world will see Him in us. I love my grandsons well by being faithful to the Lord and unified with other believers myself and by allowing them to see Christ in me.

When we think about loving our grandchildren, these four things may not be the first things that come to our minds, but they are what Jesus prayed for His disciples and us, and they are a great example for us to follow when it comes to loving our grandchildren well.

by Lynda Freeman

Lynda met her husband on a volcano. She has a daughter, son, daughter-in-law, and three grandsons who fill her heart with joy! She is one of the founding members of the Legacy Coalition, is one of the founders of Grandmas with Heart, writes their daily blog, and is the author of It is Impossible to Spoil Grandchildren.
Jesus showed His love for His disciples by praying for them.
10 ENVIRONMENTS

The order of the 10 Environments listed coincides with the monthly distribution of this resource.

1. RESPONSIBILITY
   “God has entrusted me with the things and people He created around me.”

   This environment captures the ability to take ownership for one’s life, gifts, and resources before God. A child must be challenged to take responsibility for his or her brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as for those who are spiritually lost. Our hope is that the Holy Spirit will use this environment to allow each child to understand that God has entrusted His world to us.

2. OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE
   “God transforms me when I step out in faith.”

   As children and students are challenged to step out of their comfort zone from an early age, they learn to experience a dependence on the Holy Spirit to equip and strengthen them beyond their natural abilities and desires. We believe this environment will cultivate a generation that, instead of seeking comfort, seeks a radical life of faith in Christ.

3. LOVE & RESPECT
   “Asks the question, ‘What needs to be done?’”

   Without love, our faith becomes futile. This environment recognizes that children need an environment of love and respect in order to be free to both receive and give God’s grace. Innate to this environment is the value that children are respected because they embody the image of God. We must speak to them, not at them, and we must commit to an environment where love and acceptance are never withheld due to one’s behavior.

4. STORYTELLING
   “God fills me with His love so I can give it away.”

   The power of The Big God Story impacts our lives by giving us an accurate and awe-inspiring perspective into how God has been moving throughout history. It is the story of redemption, salvation, and hope and tells how I have been grafted into it by grace. It further compels us to see how God is using every person’s life and is creating a unique story that deserves to be told for God’s glory.

5. SERVING
   “God has a big story, and I can be a part of it!”

   This posture of the heart asks the question, “What needs to be done?” It allows the Holy Spirit to cultivate a sensitivity to others and focuses on a cause bigger than one individual life. It helps fulfill the mandate that as Christ-followers we are to view our lives as living sacrifices that we generously give away!
IT IS OUR PRAYER THAT HOMES AND CHURCHES WOULD CREATE THESE ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN TO LIVE IN SO THEIR FAITH WILL GROW IN A COMMUNITY OF CONSISTENCY, COMMON LANGUAGE, AND PRACTICE.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW THESE ENVIRONMENTS CAN IGNITE A TRANSFORMING FAITH IN YOUR FAMILY, WE SUGGEST YOU READ:

SPIRITUAL PARENTING: An Awakening for Today’s Families

BY MICHELLE ANTHONY

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Knowing
Nothing could be more important than knowing and being known by God. We live in a world that denies absolute truth, and yet God’s Word offers just that. As we create an environment that upholds and displays God’s truth, we give children a foundation based on knowing God, knowing His Word, and a relationship with Him through Christ. God is holy, mighty, and awesome, and yet He has chosen to make Himself known to us!

“God knows me, and I can know Him.”

Course Correction
This environment flows out of Hebrews 12:11-13 and is the direct opposite of punishment. Instead, biblical discipline for a child encompasses a season of pain, the building up in love, and a vision of a corrected path for the individual with the purpose of healing at its core.

“When I get off track, God offers me a path of healing.”

Identity
This environment highlights who we are in Christ. According to Ephesians 1, we have been chosen, adopted, redeemed, sealed, and given an inheritance in Christ ... all of which we did nothing to earn. This conviction allows children to stand firm against the destructive counter-identities the world will offer.

“I belong to God, and He loves me!”

Faith Community
God designed us to live in community and to experience Him in ways that can only happen in proximity to one another. The faith community serves to create an environment to equip and disciple parents, to celebrate God’s faithfulness, and to bring a richness of worship through tradition and rituals, which offer children an identity. Our love for each other reflects the love we have received from God.

“God’s family cares for each other and worships God together.”

Modeling
Biblical content needs a practical living expression in order for it to be spiritually impacting. This environment serves as a hands-on example of what it means for children to put their faith into action. Modeling puts flesh on faith and reminds us that others are watching to see if we live what we believe.

“I see Christ in others, and they can see Him in me.”

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Let Your Kids Become Who They Are Created to Be

Growing Kids with Character helps you cultivate your children’s unique way of encountering, following, and worshipping God. Through tree metaphors, you will discover how to let kids excel at being who they naturally are. This book takes you on a journey to identify your kids’ God-given personalities, guide them on their spiritual journeys, and help them firmly establish their identity and purpose in Christ.

HETTIE BRITTZ is a South African–born author, international speaker, and foremost voice in parenting advice and personality styles. She is the author of (un)Natural Mom, the developer of the Evergreen Parenting Course, and the codeveloper of Tall Trees Profiles. Hettie and her husband, Louis, have three children.

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