

Bonding with Your Child through Boundaries

STUDY GUIDE

JUNE HUNT WITH PEGGYSUE WELLS

Bonding with Your Child through Boundaries

Study Guide

June Hunt

Study Guide for: *Bonding with Your Child through Boundaries*

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Introduction

In *Bonding with Your Child through Boundaries*, we present many scenarios and practical examples of rewards and repercussions you can use to establish boundaries and bond with your child. Hopefully, you've also gleaned other biblical principles from the book: important lessons on love, forgiveness, mercy, and grace. This study guide is designed for those who choose to explore a little more, go a little deeper, and grow a little stronger.

Bonding with Your Child through Boundaries is written as a reference work. As such, it's not necessary to read every chapter sequentially; however, we do recommend that you read at least the first five chapters in order, as these lay the foundational principles for setting, implementing, and maintaining boundaries.

You might choose to do a ten-week study and select ten specific topics, or any number of topics in a given time frame. Determine from the contents page what topics you will study and set a schedule. Develop your own custom curriculum. The structure of this study follows a simple system for each chapter:

- **Overview:** Summarizes the key concepts of the chapter.
- **It's Been Said:** Provides an interesting quote relevant to the topic.

- **For Reflection and Discussion:** Suggests questions to pose and ponder.
- **Going Deeper with God:** Offers directed prayer to support your parenting goals through Scripture.

At the end of the study, you'll find two additional resources: Individual Study Suggestions and Group Leadership Tips and Techniques.

Maybe you lead a small-group study at your church or have a specific topic in mind for a one-time lesson, or perhaps you just want to dig a little deeper with the Lord during your own personal devotional time. Perhaps you and your spouse want to bond with each other as you parent your children together, using this study guide to get on the same page, so to speak. Whatever your motivation, the objective and intended benefit of the book and this study guide is to help you—and eventually to help you help others. Realize that people look to those who are wise for help and hope, and it's God's Word that offers this biblical hope and practical help.

May the Lord bless your efforts to gain wisdom through his Word and apply understanding through this study as you bond with your child through boundaries.

Section 1

What Are Boundaries All About?

More than Ever, Your Child Needs Boundaries

Overview

Fast-paced cultural change brings new opportunities for creative parenting—and new challenges. The traditional family is under fire. Modern media often assaults—and distorts—Christian values. Children can be more tech-savvy than their parents. In the midst of these changes, boundaries can equip children with the stability they need to grow as God intended.

It's Been Said

“The essence of boundaries is self-control, responsibility, freedom, and love. These are the bedrock of the spiritual life.”¹

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) What do you hope to gain from this book?
- 2) How would you describe your own boundaries growing up? What about today? Which area(s) are most challenging for you?
- 3) Do you have any concerns about your ability to build fair and firm boundaries with your kids? If so, briefly describe them.

- 4) In your own words, how do external boundaries build internal character?
- 5) Have you ever had to rely on someone who didn't have boundaries or who infringed on yours? How did that make you feel? How do you think your children feel when you don't maintain boundaries in the home?
- 6) If you have more than one child, how does each one respond to boundaries? What similarities and differences have you noticed?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer to God reflecting your hopes and concerns about bonding with your child through boundaries. Meditate on Jeremiah 29:11, claiming its powerful promises for yourself and your children: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

What Color Is Your Hat?

Overview

Jesus had twelve disciples. As a parent, you have disciples, too—your children. *Discipl*-ing your children involves *disciplin*-ing them in the hope that, as they mature, they will learn to discipline themselves. Though your children may not appreciate godly discipline now, Hebrews 12:11 assures us that “later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

It’s Been Said

“When properly applied, loving discipline works! It stimulates tender affection, made possible by *mutual* respect between a parent and a child.”²

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) What feelings and images come to mind when you hear the words *discipline* and *disciple*?
- 2) How would you describe the discipline you received growing up?
- 3) Do you have any concerns about your ability to effectively discipline your children? If so, briefly describe them.

- 4) Which “hat”—black or white—do you most often wear as a parent, and why?
- 5) If the assessment on page 26 suggests that you have “peace-at-any-price” tendencies, what will you start—and stop—doing to change this aspect of your parenting style? When will you begin?
- 6) If you’ve been overly permissive as a parent, what has been the outcome in your child’s behavior thus far?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer to God, expressing your desire for godly discipline in your home. Ask him to empower you to be a reflection of his truth and grace in the life of your disciples, “being sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil.1:6).

The Confident Parent

Overview

Parents gain confidence as they gain experience, which may explain why many moms and dads humorously refer to their firstborn as their “practice child.” Fortunately, as believers, we don’t have to rely on trial and error alone to gain confidence. The Word of God is filled with practical parenting guidance, serving as a “lamp” for our feet and a “light” for our path.³

It’s Been Said

“You as parents *are* up to the task. The Lord made us to reproduce and nurture children. So don’t be ruled by your fears, but rise up to your hopes.”⁴

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) List each of your children’s top three strengths and weaknesses. How can you use boundaries to enhance their strengths and diminish their weaknesses?
- 2) Which “Dos and Don’ts of Discipline” are you already using, and which one(s) do you need help implementing?
- 3) Write a list of “house rules” you can use to foster respect, cooperation, and harmony in your home. Share your list with at least one other person to get feedback, or with your discussion group, if applicable.

- 4) Describe a time when you intended to help your child, but instead you ended up rescuing. How did you feel about the incident? What could you do better next time?
- 5) Think of a time when you experienced a “teachable moment” with your child. Did you seize the moment? If so, how? If not, how could you do so next time?
- 6) Role play confronting your child’s poor attitude or actions by giving a “sandwich,” as described on page 36. Realistically, do you see yourself using this technique? Why or why not?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer to God, acknowledging key areas where he’s already given you wisdom and discernment as a parent. Ask him for increased confidence in those areas of parenting where you struggle. Meditate on the implications of 2 Peter 1:3 as it relates to parenting: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.”

Your R & R Toolkit

Overview

Why would you need a toolkit instead of just relying on one tool? Because different jobs call for different tools depending on the nature of the task. So it is with children. Each child is unique. What works with one doesn't necessarily help another. Likewise, your approach to discipline must also be customized. To provide rewards and repercussions that will be effective with each child, you need a "toolkit" well stocked with a variety of parent-tested options and ideas.

It's Been Said

"Each child enters the world with his own completely unique script and purpose. That is why it is impossible to state simplistic rules for parenting and expect them to work for each child. Parenting, like teaching, must be approached on an individual basis."⁵

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) June's niece, Kathryn, is training her children to "love obedience." Is this a realistic goal for *your* child? Why or why not?
- 2) How well do you think your kids would respond to the "token system" described in this chapter? If you're interested in implementing it, what steps do you need to take to get started, and when will you begin?

- 3) What virtues are you cultivating in your child? How do you measure progress?
- 4) How likely is it that your child would volunteer to help *you* without being asked? If you answer, "Unlikely," what might this tell you about your child? About yourself?
- 5) Are your go-to repercussions mainly task-oriented or time-oriented? If the latter, how can you move toward more task-oriented repercussions?
- 6) What are your views on spanking as a form of discipline? What factors have been most influential in forming your convictions?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer expressing to God your desire to be the parent he created your children to need—a parent equipped to train them according to his unique design for their lives. As you write, think about each of your children in light of Jeremiah 1:5—"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you."

Questions and Answers about Boundaries

Overview

Questioning is vital to learning. Jesus asked masterful questions to enable discovery: “Who do you say I am?” (Matt. 16:15 NIV); “Do you want to be healed?” (John 5:6) Questions can raise important issues, uncover key assumptions, and enhance shared understanding. This chapter addresses key questions you may have about boundaries, but by no means is it an exhaustive list. As a lifelong learner, never stop asking questions! Not only will your life be enriched, but you will set a powerful example for your children.

It’s Been Said

“Attitude, Behavior, and Character are the three most important things your children need, not only to learn but to carry with them for the remainder of their lives. You, of all people on the planet, are in a unique role to teach those aspects—because you’re continually on display in front of your kids.”⁶

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) How can fair, firm boundaries boost your child’s creativity?
- 2) Do you think boundaries would add to or decrease your family’s stress levels? Why?

- 3) Of the factors necessary to “lay the foundation” for boundaries, which ones are already in place in your home, and which ones need to be put into place?
- 4) Role play explaining to your protesting child the need for boundaries.
- 5) Can you think of a “bad” boundary you’ve enacted? What did you do to fix the fallout? If you did nothing, what *will* you do?
- 6) What additional questions do you have about boundaries? Where could you look for solid biblical answers?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to grant you *his* answers to your questions about boundaries, being mindful that “if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5).

Section 2

Building Beneficial Boundaries

Anger and Aggression

Overview

Anger is a God-given emotion and serves a legitimate purpose in specific situations. However, it can become your child's adversary if mishandled.⁷ As a parent, you're called to discern the difference between productive and unproductive anger and to help your child find godly ways to resolve it.

It's Been Said

"The word *anger* is one letter short of danger."⁸

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Do you have unaddressed anger in *your* life? What would it take to resolve it?
- 2) Which of the four "root causes"—hurt, injustice, fear, frustration—is fueling your child's anger? (Note: there may be more than one.) What specific event or situation may be at the heart of the matter?
- 3) Do you ignore or excuse your child's inappropriate anger? If so, when and why are you most likely to do so?

- 4) Where is your child's anger most often expressed—at home or away from home? How can you use this awareness to help your child?
- 5) Do you suspect a neurological condition may be behind your child's anger and/or aggression? If so, why? When will you seek professional help, and what resources are available?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer to God asking him to give you wisdom and grace as you prepare to address your child's inappropriate anger (and, as needed, your own). Ask God to show you what it means to be angry without *sinning*, as Ephesians 4:26 instructs.

Back Talk

Overview

Battle-worn parents may be tempted to minimize the ill effects of back talk. But back talk reflects a rebellious spirit, which is openly condemned throughout Scripture.⁹ Why? “When you grumble and complain, either against God directly or against those to whom He has delegated leadership over you (like parents, teachers, pastors, bosses), you are really questioning His wisdom, His grace, His goodness, and His righteousness.”¹⁰

It’s Been Said

“Train up a child in the way he should go . . . and go there yourself every now and then.”¹¹

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) How do you speak to someone in authority with whom you disagree? Do your attitude and speech reflect a godly example for your child?
- 2) Typically, who decides how your child treats you—you or your child?
- 3) If your child talks back to you now without any repercussions, how likely is your child to “grow out of” the behavior by the teen years?

- 4) How many warnings do you usually give your child before administering discipline? Going forward, how many warnings will you give?
- 5) How often do you ignore or excuse your child’s back talk? When, where, and why are you most likely to do so?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to show you how to effectively address your child’s disrespectful words and actions (and your own, as needed). Ask him to make Colossians 4:6 a reality in both your child’s life and yours: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.”

Bedtime Battles

Overview

You dream of bedtime being a restful routine at the end of each day: bath taken, teeth brushed, books read, prayers said, and to all said a good night. Even if the evening regimen in your home doesn't always follow this script—and it won't!—effective bedtime boundaries will move you one step closer to making this dream come true.

It's Been Said

“If you've ruled out fear of the dark, fear of bed-wetting, and fear of not waking up, that leaves us with oppositional behavioral issues—the power struggle.”¹²

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) What are the most common reasons bedtime battles erupt in your home? What patterns do you see?
- 2) How can you tell when your child is overly tired? What behaviors let you know a “second wind” is brewing?
- 3) What distractions and sources of stimulation may keep your child from falling and staying asleep? What will you do to eliminate them?

- 4) What short, simple bedtime routine will you implement for your child? If you already have a routine, what more could you do to strengthen it?
- 5) Have you made Scripture a part of your child's bedtime routine? If so, how have you used it and what have the results been? If not, what might the benefits be?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you make bedtime a peaceful close to each day—a time to reflect on the Lord's love and faithfulness and his blessings. Pray, too, that he would make Psalm 127:2 a reality in your child's life: “[God] gives to his beloved sleep.”

Biting

Overview

Sometimes it's hard to know what's more concerning—your child's behavior or your fear about how it reflects on *you*. For many parents, a biting toddler is a prime example of misbehavior that makes them second-guess their parenting skills. The sudden spectacle—screams of the innocent, physical wounds—all stem from an *uncivilized act of aggression*. With practice, there's a good chance you can learn to predict and prevent biting—an awkward behavior that, fortunately, most little ones quickly outgrow.

It's Been Said

“There's a stigma attached to biting—an attitude among adults that ‘Kids who bite will grow up to rob banks.’ But many parents do not realize that biting behavior is developmentally normal.”¹³

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) What's your first impulse when your child bites? Your first priority?
- 2) Have you ever bitten your child in an attempt to deter biting? How did it make you feel? What was the outcome?

- 3) What nonverbal cues signal that your child is about to bite?
- 4) How could you help your frustrated child use words or gestures to express frustration, rather than biting?
- 5) Role play reacting confidently and calmly when your child bites another child. What do you anticipate the most difficult aspects will be, and what skills do you need to develop?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you comfort and redirect your child when biting occurs. Ask him to help your child quickly outgrow this awkward stage, mindful that “when I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11 NLT).

Bullying

Overview

Bullying among children has become epidemic. Maybe it's even crept into your home—undetected. Unlike ordinary conflict among kids, bullying involves “an imbalance of power between perpetrator and victim. Hitting, kicking, shoving, name-calling, spreading of rumors, exclusion and intimidating gestures (e.g., eye-rolling) by powerful peers . . . all constitute abuse.”¹⁴ As a parent, your job is both to protect your child and to cultivate humility and the heart of Christ in your child. Do this, and you'll STOP bullying dead in its tracks.

It's Been Said

“We can re-channel the behaviors of the bully into positive leadership activities; acknowledge the nonaggressive behaviors of the bullied child as strengths that can be developed and are honored; and transform the role of the bystander into that of . . . someone willing to stand up, speak out, and act against injustice.”¹⁵

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Is your home a safe place where bullying is *never* tolerated? If not, what will you do to create a safe home environment?
- 2) Does your child exhibit traits of a bully or of one who has been bullied? If so, what specific traits concern you?
- 3) If you are the parent of a bully, how can you help your child discover and meet the unmet needs that motivate this behavior?
- 4) If your child is being bullied, do you feel equipped to offer adequate protection? Is your *child* aware of your commitment to protect, no matter what?
- 5) Have you discussed what your child is to do if targeted by cyberbullying (using digital technology to bully a victim)? If your child has been bullied—virtually or in person—how can you help your child avoid being a target in the future?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you raise a child who is neither a bully nor an easy target for bullies. Ask him to show you how to be a change agent in your home and neighborhood, equipped with courage and skills to intervene when you suspect or witness bullying. And ask the Lord to make Ephesians 5:11 a reality in your child's life: “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

Car Etiquette

Overview

Rather than your kids clamoring, “Are we there yet?” you might be the one wondering how quickly you can reach your destination. Long periods of time spent driving with kids aren’t always fun, but they don’t have to be marked by unending strife. Rather than dreading drive time as something to endure, use it as a strategic opportunity to grow closer as a family and cultivate character in your kids.

It’s Been Said

“Movies, music, coloring books, juice boxes . . . even with these distractions—and more—any drive will *drive you crazy* if your kids aren’t trained to travel.”¹⁶

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) On average, how would you describe time spent in the car with your child?
- 2) How often do you ignore or excuse misbehavior in the car? When and why are you most likely to do so?

- 3) Based on age and temperament, what’s reasonable to expect from each of your children when traveling by car?
- 4) What could you do to make car-travel rules fun?
- 5) Are you willing to implement roadside “timeouts” as a repercussion—even if doing so would cause you or your child to arrive late? Why or why not?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you and your children cultivate the fruit of the Spirit as you drive: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23).

Cell Phone Struggles

Overview

Cell phone users check their phones, on average, 150 times a day.¹⁷ How about you? As you require your kids to respect reasonable boundaries on cell phone use, be sure you lead by example.

It's Been Said

"The greatest device for connecting with others may be your phone's off button."¹⁸

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) If you're considering giving your child a cell phone, what are your reasons for doing so?
- 2) How will you determine if your child is mature enough to use a cell phone responsibly?
- 3) What are the primary risks of your child having a cell phone? How do you plan to minimize these risks?
- 4) How will you stay up-to-date with technology so you can monitor and control your child's cell phone use?

- 5) What boundaries will you place on your child's cell phone use in terms of when, where, why, and how it's operated?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you help your child develop *well-rounded* communication skills—vital to every facet of life. Ask him to grant you discernment to know if your child is ready for a phone and how to minimize the associated risks. Ask God to help you model excellent phone habits, so that "discretion will watch over you, [and] understanding will guard you" (Prov. 2:11).

Cheating

Overview

Cheating may seem harmless to a child *until* there's an understanding that it erodes trust and integrity, is unfair to those who earned their grades honestly, masks a knowledge deficiency, robs students of needed assistance, and dishonors the Lord. If your child is caught cheating, *thank God!* Being caught gives you an opportunity to address the problem before it becomes deeply ingrained.

It's Been Said

"Logical consequences teach invaluable lessons that are based in reality."¹⁹

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) What steps can you take to determine why your child cheated?
- 2) How can you help your child see through God's eyes—boosting a sense of self, a sense of significance? How might doing this minimize the temptation to cheat?
- 3) If your child has cheated, why is it important to avoid labeling your child a "cheater?"

- 4) If your child cheated because of perceived parental pressure to make good grades, do your expectations need to be adjusted? Why or why not?
- 5) What could the story of Jacob and Esau teach your child about the perils of cheating?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help your child become a person of integrity—able to withstand temptation in favor of making "hard, right" choices in life. Ask him to help you use this disappointment as a learning opportunity to redirect your child in view of Proverbs 10:9, "Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out."

Chores

Overview

Parents can view work as a blessing or a curse. Either way, your attitude is likely to rub off on your child. Start training your children early to embrace hard work and put forth their best effort for each task. When you do, you'll equip your child to rise above life's challenges and excel, even against the odds.

It's Been Said

"The choice shouldn't be 'excitement or chore.' The choice should be 'boredom or chore.'"²⁰

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) How would you describe a "good work ethic," and why is having one important for your child?
- 2) If you were to become—or already are—financially able to hire household help to do all your child's chores, would you? Why or why not?
- 3) Is your child currently handling chores according to capacity? (See examples of specific tasks by age group, pp. 102–4.) If not, how will you help your child grow in this area?

- 4) How often do you ignore or excuse work that doesn't reflect your child's best effort? How often do you redo your child's work? When and why are you most likely to do each?
- 5) How would you redirect a child who continually convinces siblings to do his or her chores?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you train your child to become a diligent, skillful worker who does "all things without grumbling or disputing" (Phil. 2:14), and who works "for the Lord rather than for people" (Col. 3:23 NLT).

Cliques

Overview

Cliques are an ancient phenomenon, fueled by our fallen nature's futile attempts to meet legitimate needs for significance and belonging in illegitimate ways. Helping your child bypass cliques and learn to embrace a diverse group of friends will build character and impart lifelong lessons.

It's Been Said

"If you're in the clique, you may feel excited that the cool kids like you. At the same time, though, you may miss your friends who have been pushed out of the group."²¹

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) As a parent, do you welcome new people into your group of friends, or are you exclusive and excluding? If the latter, do you expect your child to behave differently? Why or why not?
- 2) If involved in a clique, where does your child fit in the group's "pecking order": a leader, a follower, or somewhere in between? How can you use this information to help your child grow?

- 3) What steps can you take to instill in your child a sense of belonging that's not tied to a social group?
- 4) How can you encourage your child to make friends and belong to a group without leaving others out?
- 5) How well is your child able to empathize, that is, "understand and share another person's experiences and emotions?"²² If lacking age-appropriate empathy, how can you help your child cultivate it?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you help your child value all people—not just those who look, dress, act, or talk the same—mindful that "people judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7 NLT).

Clothing Clashes

Overview

Clothing choices communicate unspoken messages. As a parent, you can help your child understand the messages appearance present—intentionally or otherwise—and dress in a way that reflects self-worth and honors your family and God. It’s a nuanced task, to be sure, requiring discernment, finesse, and flexibility.

It’s Been Said

“Modesty is a powerful aid in developing sound family discipline and long-term self-control.”²³

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Are your clothing choices modest and age-appropriate? How and why might your choices influence those of your child?
- 2) How can clothing choices provide insight into your child’s heart?
- 3) What are your family’s “clothing standards?”

- 4) When your child’s choices fall within the family’s standards—but outside your personal preference—what tends to be your response?
- 5) When it’s been necessary to redirect your child’s clothing choices, what tactics have worked best? What hasn’t worked well?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you help your child develop the desire, judgment, and integrity necessary to glorify him through clothing choices. Ask him to cultivate in your child a desire—first and foremost—to be clothed “with the Lord Jesus Christ,” as Romans 13:14 (NIV) instructs.

Disrespectfulness

Overview

Sometimes kids lash out at those with whom they feel most safe. And sometimes that safe person is *you*. At other times, they target the parent who hasn't given them what they need: security within boundaries. Whatever the reason for your child's disrespect, don't wait for a teacher, coach, Sunday school worker, or other authority figure to address it. Curbing childhood rebellion needs to begin at home, and it needs to begin now.

It's Been Said

"Whatever form of discipline you choose, administer it with respect. Your child will learn nothing if you lose your cool. If you want him to be respectful, then you'll model respect."²⁴

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) "Developmentally, children go through argumentative phases" (p. 117). What phase is your child in now? Behavior-wise, how does this phase differ from the last one?
- 2) Do you tend to ignore or excuse your child's disrespectful behavior? If so, when and why are you most likely to do so?

- 3) Would you deny your child's every request until a sincere apology is offered for disrespecting you? Why or why not?
- 4) How likely are you to use a "children's play therapy feelings chart" to help your child identify feelings? What factors influence your response?
- 5) Do you routinely memorize Scripture? Do you favor requiring your child to memorize Scripture related to boundaries you're implementing in your home? Why or why not?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to give you resolve and wisdom to address your child's disrespectful behavior. Ask him to cultivate a love of obedience in your child and a deep desire to please God in all things, remembering that "rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshipping idols" (1 Sam. 15:23 NLT).

Disrupting Class

Overview

As aggravating as it may be, your child's disruptive behavior is not a "root problem." It's a *symptom* of a root problem that *manifests* itself as classroom disruption. As you create boundaries to curb the behavior, it's important to look beyond your child's *fault* to discover the core *need*.²⁵ Addressing that need will greatly increase the likelihood of eliminating the disruptions altogether.

It's Been Said

"I was a timid little guy when I was a kid. I used humor as a defense; I became the class clown. But deep inside, I felt real vulnerable."²⁶

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Which (if any) of the reasons listed on pages 121–22 seem most likely to explain your child's disruptive behavior? Do you suspect other factors? If so, what are they?
- 2) Read "Teacher to parents: About THAT kid (the one who hits, disrupts and influences YOUR kid)."²⁷ What insights do you glean in the article about kids who "act out" in class?
- 3) Are your child's legitimate needs for attention being met at home? If so, and if attention seeking seems to be the motivation for the disruption, what extracurricular activities might help meet this desire?

- 4) Which do you tend to recognize and reward more: your child's effort or ability? If the latter, how will you move toward recognizing and rewarding effort instead?
- 5) Do the nature and persistence of your child's disruptive behavior lead you to suspect attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may be involved? If so, when will you have your child professionally evaluated?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to grant you insight into any deep, unmet needs hidden in your child's heart—needs that could be driving disruptive behavior. Seek his guidance to address these needs, mindful that "the purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out" (Prov. 20:5 NIV).

Forgetfulness

Overview

Everyone forgets things from time to time. But when your child's forgetfulness becomes chronic—and when you become the “go-to” person bearing the brunt of the natural consequences of forgetting—it's time to enact firm and fair boundaries to rally *remembering*. Not just for your child's sake but for yours, too.

It's Been Said

“A man must *get* a thing before he can *forget* it.”²⁸

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Of the factors mentioned on pages 126–27, which ones contribute most to your child's forgetfulness: age, power struggles, lack of in-home structure, bad habits, lack of priority, or no repercussions in place? If other significant factors are at play, what are they?
- 2) Do you believe your child often “chooses” to forget? If so, how will you address this exercise of will?
- 3) Think of a time you allowed your child to experience natural repercussions resulting from forgetfulness, and another time when you shielded your child. What were the short- and long-term results of each approach?

- 4) If you've been reluctant to allow your child to experience natural repercussions, what steps could you take to boost your comfort level?
- 5) What strategies could you enact, tailored to your individual child, to help reinforce remembering key routines at specific times?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to give you insight into your child's unique makeup, and the reasons behind forgetfulness. Ask him to help your child remember responsibilities, your instructions, and the biblical principle reflected in James 1:23–25 (NLT): “If you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.”

Gossip and Tattling

Overview

As their abstract-thinking skills develop, children need training to grasp the sometimes subtle nuances between gossip, tattling, and constructive communication—especially since *motive* (an abstract concept) may factor into the equation. That’s where *you* come in. By setting a positive example, role-playing how *to* communicate (not just how *not to*), and sharing principles from Scripture, you can help your child become a champion at communicating.

It’s Been Said

“Kids often think that if a deed doesn’t hurt anybody, it’s OK. But wrong actions always hurt someone in some way in the long run. The damage may be indirect or take time to become obvious. . . . But in the end, everything we do has an effect on others.”²⁹

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Do you gossip? If so, do you tend to rationalize it (passing it off as a “prayer request,” for example)? How might this behavior influence your child?
- 2) How will you help your child grasp the difference between gossiping and tattling, and communicating vital information (preventing danger, for example)?

- 3) What “emotional payoff” is your child seeking by gossiping or tattling? How could you meet this need in a constructive way?
- 4) How often do you ignore or excuse your child’s gossip or tattling? When and why are you most likely to do so?
- 5) How does your child respond when you use Scripture to help correct behavior? Is your child open? Resistant? Interested? What does this tell you about your child’s spiritual condition?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you model godly communication and to discern the underlying need(s) behind your child’s gossip or tattling. Ask him to prick your child’s conscience when communication goes astray, mindful that “a troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends” (Prov. 16:28 NLT).

Harmful Habits and Addictions

Overview

As a parent, you want your kids to find pleasure in hobbies, food, fun, and wholesome entertainment. But what do you do when your child's once-harmless habit becomes hurtful? Depending on your child's age and the nature of the problem, you may be able to help without enlisting professional intervention. Or you may need expert help. Either way, educating yourself and facing the issue head-on is the best way to begin.

It's Been Said

"Foods that raise blood sugar even more than table sugar such as white flour, white potatoes and refined starch have what is called a high glycemic index, trigger a special region in the brain called the *nucleus accumbens* that is known to be 'ground zero' for conventional addiction, such as gambling or drug abuse."³⁰

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) How can you tell the difference between a pleasurable activity or avid interest and a harmful habit or addiction? What are some characteristics of each?
- 2) What specific signs lead you to believe your child has a harmful habit or addiction?

- 3) When and how will you follow up and get help?
- 4) How can you help your child identify and heal underlying pain that may be fueling a harmful habit or addiction?
- 5) Do you have a harmful habit or addiction yourself? If so, what is your plan to overcome it? How do you think it's influencing your child's behavior?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you discern addictive patterns that may be subtly encroaching on your child's life—or perhaps even your own. Ask him for insight to approach your child's harmful habit effectively, for a cooperative spirit in your child, and for deliverance—mindful of Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Homework Hassles

Overview

Children perform best when they feel they have some amount of control over their ability to learn, and much of that learning occurs at *home*, in the form of homework. That's why it's wise to involve your child in discovering what homework habits work best, to reward *effort* rather than *ability*, and to help eliminate obstacles and distractions. As you do, you'll pave a path for educational excellence.

It's Been Said

"If avoiding homework, procrastinating, whining, arguing, and so on result in delaying homework or getting her out of homework duties, then you shouldn't be surprised if [your child] begins to exhibit these behaviors often. You should expect it."³¹

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) What is your child's learning style: auditory, visual, kinesthetic, or some combination? If you're not sure, how and when will you find out? How can you match a homework routine to your child's learning style?
- 2) How much and how often do you help your child with homework? Does your level of input match the level of need? If not, what adjustments can be made?

- 3) Have you found yourself doing your child's homework? If so, what were the circumstances? How often does this happen? How and when will you allow your child to assume this responsibility?
- 4) Does your child have a designated space in your home that's conducive for doing homework? If not, when will you create such a space?
- 5) Have you established boundaries for when and how your child can use digital devices during homework time? If so, what are they? If not, when will you do so?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you instill a life-long love of learning in your child. Ask him for help creating a home environment that promotes learning, responsibility, and self-discipline. And to be aware that "an intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge" (Prov. 18:15).

Interrupting

Overview

Allowing a child to interrupt incessantly breeds a spirit of impatience and leads to more interrupting. But what could be more fascinating than your child's opinions, the sound of your child's voice, and your child's every thought and recollection? Quite a bit, actually. However, that important discovery can't be made until your child realizes the importance of taking turns to talk in order to *listen* and *learn*.

It's Been Said

"It is the province of knowledge to speak. And it is the privilege of wisdom to listen."³²

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) How often do you interrupt others when they talk? How would you describe your listening skills? How do you think your communication habits influence your child?
- 2) How would you describe your child's ability to delay gratification? If participating in the "Marshmallow Test," do you think your child would have eaten the first marshmallow? Nibbled an edge? Waited and received a second treat? Other?

- 3) What underlying causes may trigger your child's interruptions? How will you address each cause?
- 4) How often do you ignore or excuse interruptions? When and why are you most likely to do so?
- 5) Did you and your child try the "ball tossing" exercise (p. 150) to show how back-and-forth conversation works? If so, what were your observations? If not, would you be willing to try it?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to guide and equip you as you cultivate your child's communication skills—abilities that reflect his love, grace, and truth. Ask him to help your child develop a sincere interest in the ideas and welfare of others, mindful of Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

Lying

Overview

In the classic children's tale, a youthful marionette named Pinocchio dulls his conscience by telling a series of lies, each designed to camouflage the one before. Of course, lying is common in real life too, and not just among children. According to a recent *Reader's Digest* poll, 93 percent of those surveyed reported being dishonest at work or school, and 96 percent reported lying to close family or friends.³³ As lying continues to become more common in our culture, it underscores the need to help children learn the difference between truth and fiction and commit to truth telling, regardless of the personal cost.

It's Been Said

"If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything."³⁴

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) What's the difference between a lie, a half-truth, deception, and a white lie?
- 2) Do you lie, tell half-truths, or deceive others? Do you plan to stop? Do you consider "white lies" harmless? How might your views and habits influence your child?

- 3) Of the reasons mentioned on page 153, which ones most often trigger your child's lying? Are there others?
- 4) Which would concern you more: your child's lie or efforts to conceal the lie?
- 5) Are you more apt to catch your child doing what's right and reward the behavior or to catch your child doing what's wrong and deliver discipline? Which approach is most beneficial?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to show you why your child lies and how best to stop the deception. Ask him to motivate your child to *determine* to be totally honest, *discern* areas of personal temptation, *depend* on Christ for the strength to change, and *delight* in speaking truth, mindful that "the integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them" (Prov. 11:3).³⁵

Mealtime Tussles

Overview

Kids learn early that—unlike so many other things in their lives—they, alone, have ultimate control over what they chew and swallow. Short of uncivilized means, you can lead your little ponies to water, but you can't easily *make 'em* drink! What you can do, though, is set mealtime boundaries that take the “pay off” out of pint-sized power struggles and reward thoughtful conversation, mannerly behavior, and good-faith efforts to eat what's served.

It's Been Said

“What you and your children eat bears directly on the nature and number of discipline problems you will have around your home.”³⁶

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Describe your ideal family mealtime. What would it look and feel like? What concrete actions could you start, stop, and keep taking to help make your vision a reality?
- 2) How would you describe mealtimes when you were growing up? Did your parents require you to eat everything on your plate, even when you were full? If so, what were the short- and long-term effects? Do you require your kids to eat all that's served? Why or why not?

- 3) On average, how many meals does your family share each week? How many would you like to share? If a gap exists, how will you bridge it?
- 4) How would you describe your family's typical mealtime conversations? How can you use mealtimes to help your children develop socially, physically, emotionally, and spiritually?
- 5) How knowledgeable are you about what's in the foods your kids eat regularly? Their nutritional requirements? The link between certain foods and misbehavior? If you desire more understanding, how will you acquire it?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you use mealtimes as an opportunity to nourish your child's body, soul, and spirit, and to create meaningful family bonds that will last a lifetime. Ask him to allow your family to “live in harmony with one another” (Rom. 12:16)—especially at mealtime.

Media Mania

Overview

Oftentimes “children are more comfortable, knowledgeable and literate than their parents about an innovation central to society [cyberspace]. . . . School officials are grappling with the reality of students often being far smarter on cyber-issues and new ways of learning than the teachers. . . . Corporations wonder what these kids will be like as employees since they are accustomed to very different ways of working, collaborating and creating, and they reject many basic assumptions of today’s companies.”³⁷ For these reasons and more, bonding with your child through *media* boundaries has never been more important.

It’s Been Said

“When my son was 17.5 months old, he could operate the television remote control, and activate my smart phone by swiping the lock key from left to right with his finger. Similarly, he knew how to use the iPad’s touchscreen with his ever-handly finger—swiping the screen, pressing on the relevant applications, even pressing the Home button to exit an application. I was convinced then that before long, he would be programming his own software.”³⁸

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Is time spent online, watching TV, listening to music, etc., detracting from your child’s grades, communication skills, health, or relationships? If so, how will you respond?
- 2) How would you rate your child’s media/online expertise compared to yours? Compared to peers? Compared to teachers?
- 3) How carefully do you monitor your child’s media and online activities? Is your vigilance effective? Why or why not? If you don’t know, how could you try to find out?
- 4) Has your child accessed inappropriate content (pornography, violence, etc.)? If so, how often? What was your response and how effective was it? If you haven’t yet responded, how and when will you respond?
- 5) Do you have effective Internet filters on every digital device in your home and in your child’s possession? If not, when will you add them?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you bond with your child through wise, effective media boundaries. Ask him for divine wisdom and guidance as you seek to protect your child from harmful media influences and to grant your child a deep desire to guard his heart and mind—especially when curiosity is high and peer pressure is great. Beseech the Lord to use today’s expanding digital access as a force for good in your child’s life, mindful that “for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

Money and Materialism

Overview

In a 2015 survey, more than 40 percent of parents expressed reluctance to discuss financial matters with their kids.³⁹ Buck that trend! “Start by simply answering your kids’ money questions. Get a feel for what they already know and what additional information they need. Once they realize you’re open to these discussions, they’ll be more comfortable coming to you.”⁴⁰ In turn, you’ll have an opportunity to train them up in the way they should go (see Prov. 22:6) in this vitally important area.

It’s Been Said

“Children need their parents and their parents’ love more than they need ‘more’ things. It is difficult to keep your children on your team if you are never with them.”⁴¹

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) What place does money occupy in your life and priorities? Your child’s? Would you be proud if your child grew up to manage money the same way you do?
- 2) How do you define materialism? On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your level of materialism? Your child’s?
- 3) Are you equipped with a plan to teach your child about key financial principles including tithing, borrowing/lending, saving, etc.? If not, how will your child learn God’s heart on money and materialism?

- 4) Why do you think money and possessions are the second-most mentioned topic in Scripture?⁴² How can you help your child learn to rely on, and be sincerely grateful to, God for every provision—financial and otherwise?
- 5) Do you model sound biblical stewardship in your daily life? What are your top strengths and areas for improvement? How might these influence your child?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help your children recognize him as their ultimate *Source* and everything else as simply a *resource*. Ask for divine wisdom to help your kids think biblically about money and to “use *things* and love *people*” rather than the other way around. Ask him to build into your children an overflowing spirit of gratitude and a lifelong commitment to biblical stewardship, mindful that “much will be required of everyone who has been given much” (Luke 12:48 HCSB).

Music Matters

Overview

With headphones in place, your child may think no one else hears the music, but even if *you* can't hear it, God can—and does. Music choices may telegraph important information about your child in terms of maturity level, the condition of the heart, and interests and desires. Music doesn't simply go in one ear and out the other. It effects the spirit and soul. Helping your child make wholesome music choices—and monitoring those choices—is an important part of parenting.

It's Been Said

"Trying to listen to bad songs without hearing the words would be like trying to watch a video with your eyes closed. It can't be done."⁴³

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) What place does music occupy in your life and priorities? Your child's?
- 2) As a parent, is it acceptable to listen to unwholesome music, even if you think your child can't hear it? Why or why not?
- 3) Do you feel it's necessary to monitor and control your child's music choices? If not, why not? If so, are you equipped? If you're not equipped, what steps will you take to prepare yourself?
- 4) How often do you ignore or excuse your child's questionable/poor music choices? When and why are you most likely to do so?
- 5) How will you help your child learn to evaluate music critically, according to biblical principles? When will you begin?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you cultivate in your child a lifelong love of *good* music. Ask him to help you train your child to choose music that's good for the soul *and* spirit. And to build up the character strengths necessary to be self-governed, resist social pressure, and guard the heart—mindful that Proverbs 4:23 says, "[Watch over] your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."

Occult Fascination

Overview

As a parent, it's important to proactively help your child find a godly *balance* between being ignorant about the occult and being lured into it. C. S. Lewis brilliantly explains why: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves [the devils] are equally pleased by both."⁴⁴

It's Been Said

"The person drawn into the occult is like the addict drawn into drugs: Both are dependent on a destructive deadly source."⁴⁵

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) How do you define "the occult"? Where does your definition come from?
- 2) Have you ever been involved in any occult practices? If so, could your involvement influence your life, home, and family today? Why or why not?
- 3) Do you engage in occult practices today (horoscopes, séances, magic charms, etc.), perhaps thinking they're harmless fun? If so, why? Do you know what the Bible says about these activities? How do you think your attitude will influence your child?
- 4) Do you feel equipped to answer your child's questions about spiritual warfare and the occult? If not, how will you become prepared?

- 5) Do you currently monitor your child's reading, viewing, and musical content, screening for occult influences? Why or why not? What steps would you take if you learned your child was involved in the occult?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to guide you and your child toward a biblical balance between acknowledging the occult's existence and being protected from its deception. Ask him to help you discern the difference between evil and godliness so that you can train your child to love, enjoy, and obey the Father. Ask God to expose areas where you—innocently or intentionally—have opened doors to spiritual darkness. Trust him to empower you to close those doors and, in the process, experience his forgiveness and healing—mindful of James 4:7, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Peer Pressure

Overview

As your child matures, expect peers to have a growing impact. Peer “influence begins at an early age and increases through the teenage years. It is natural, healthy and important for children to have and rely on friends as they grow and mature. Peers can be positive and supportive. . . . However, peers can also have a negative influence.”⁴⁶ As a parent, help your child cultivate friends who share the same values and spiritual priorities, and instill the strong character needed to withstand negative peer pressure when it occurs.

It’s Been Said

“Bad company corrupts good character.”⁴⁷

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) As an adult, has peer pressure led you to compromise or camouflage your values? If so, what were the circumstances? What, if anything, would you do differently today if you could?
- 2) Given temperament and age, how susceptible do you think your child is to peer pressure? If peer pressure is already at work, when did it begin? Do certain areas of your child’s decision making seem more vulnerable to peer pressure than others? If so, which ones?

- 3) Is your home an activity hub for your child’s friends? If not, why isn’t it? How well do you know your child’s friends? If you don’t know them well, how and when will you get to know them?
- 4) Could you envision your family using the “test” on page 189 to help make tough choices? Why or why not? What modifications, if any, would make the test more useful to you?
- 5) Who are your real-life champions of integrity—people who did the right thing, despite great pressure to the contrary? Have you shared their stories with your children? If not, when will you do so?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you develop in your child the strength of character to do what’s right in God’s sight, even when no one else is looking. Ask the Lord to give you special insight into your child so that you can address areas of vulnerability. Also, ask him to help you instill ethics and integrity in your child, enabling him to stand in a crowd—even alone if necessary—mindful that “if God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

Procrastination

Overview

Have you noticed a pattern of procrastination developing in your child? If so, it's time to identify the inner avoider that lies in wait hoping to derail your slow starter through perfectionism, poor self-worth, fear of judgment, lack of motivation, or feelings of being overwhelmed. As a parent, you can help chart a course to successful completion by working with your child to overcome patterns of procrastination.

It's Been Said

"By overcoming my pattern of procrastination . . . I will gain the *reward* of results, I will lose the *repercussion* of guilt, and I will better my *relationship* with God." ⁴⁸

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Which pattern(s) of procrastination, if any, have you observed in your child?
- 2) What do you think would move your child from passive procrastination to confident completion?
- 3) Has your child exhibited any characteristics of "learned helplessness"? Describe where you've seen this behavior and what you can do to reverse it.

- 4) Does your child underestimate how much time it takes to complete a job? Do you? How can you learn together to set more realistic schedules to achieve your goals?
- 5) Why is it important to praise your children's efforts, not just their accomplishments? How have you seen this work with your child?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to show you the best way to help your child—and you—overcome recurring procrastination patterns. Ask him for perseverance, keeping you ever mindful of the prize of peace that awaits you: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Cor. 9:24 NIV).

Profanity and Name-Calling

Overview

Most children, sometime during childhood, experiment with language that is indecent or vulgar, or blurt out insulting names aimed to wound. As parents, resist the urge to overreact or shame your child. Rather, make it your goal to set a good example by demonstrating that words are important—they have the power to tear others down or build them up—and that others will determine what kind of people we are based on the words we speak.

It's Been Said

“The child who has been calling his mother a big stinker (or worse) for six or seven years is unlikely to yield to parental leadership during the storms of adolescence.”⁴⁹

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) What is your first impulse when you hear your child use bad words or call someone an offensive name? What's your first priority?
- 2) Do you ever use disrespectful or dishonoring words in the presence of your child? Can you think of a time when you heard your child copy what you said? What was your response?
- 3) What may be the underlying cause(s) of your child's using bad language or name-calling? How will you address these behaviors when they occur?
- 4) How will teaching your child good language skills now prevent problems from developing later?
- 5) Are the words you speak to your child encouraging, corrective, instructive, and hope filled? If not, how can you foster this type of communication in your home?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you use your words to encourage, admonish, instruct, and provide hope for all those who are part of your world—especially your child. As you begin each day, pray aloud the words of Psalm 19:14, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.”

Sexual Curiosity

Overview

Just as children reach important physical and emotional milestones—like learning to walk or talk— young kids hit important milestones in how they recognize, experience, and feel about their bodies. The human body, including its reproductive parts, is an expression of God’s marvelous creativity and design. By reacting appropriately to your child’s sexual curiosities—and not treating them as shameful or embarrassing—you can help nurture a healthy sense of self-acceptance as a foundational teaching that the sexual relationship is a special gift from God for husbands and wives.

It’s Been Said

“By being open to your young child’s questions about bodies, babies, love, and sex, you set the stage for continued conversations and openness when puberty begins.”⁵⁰

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) At what age did your child first begin to explore and ask questions about bodies, babies, and the sexual differences between boys and girls? How prepared were you to answer questions in an age-appropriate way?
- 2) How much did your parents teach you about love, sex, and marriage?

- 3) What fail-safes have you built into your child’s world as protection from invasive, sexually explicit pictures, words, and music that are prevalent in today’s culture?
- 4) What Christian resources have you found to help teach your child about sex in age-appropriate ways?
- 5) What are you teaching your child about sex and morality both by what you say and by what you do?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to show you how to instill in your child a heart of sexual purity and help you model the same. Pray, too, that he would protect your child from the harmful sexual influences of today’s world with a reminder to always “pursue what has God’s approval. Pursue faith, love, and peace together with those who worship the Lord with a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22 GW).

Sexual Storms

Overview

At almost every turn, today's kids are being exposed at an early age to the adult world of sexuality. Girls are tempted to grow up too fast, and boys are enticed to prove their masculinity by becoming sexually active far too soon. Your home is the best place to shield your child from sexual misinformation. As parents, you are the first and most-qualified teachers to share open and honest conversations about what God says in his Word about love, sex, and marriage. As you embrace and teach God's plans for healthy sexuality, you will help keep your child safe and sexually pure.

It's Been Said

"Your child is learning how you will respond if she is honest and open with you. Your response now may dictate whether your child will be honest with you in the future, when she may need you even more."⁵¹

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) What stage of sexual development would you say your child is in at present: still enjoying the "age of innocence"? Becoming more "sexually savvy"? In the eye of a "sexual storm"? How comfortable are you with your child being at this stage?
- 2) In what ways have you seen the current sexual culture and disintegration of morality impact your child's thinking about sex? What can you do to combat the world's negative influence?

- 3) Does your child feel free to have an open and honest conversation with you about the opposite sex, body image, sexual feelings, and marriage? Why or why not?
- 4) If you were developing a sex-education program specifically for your child, what would it include?
- 5) What can you do practically to help your child better understand and embrace the truth that our true identity is found in Christ?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer thanking God for your child and the miracle of conception that brought your child into the world. Ask him to protect your child from the negative influences of today's hyper-sexualized culture and to give you the right words and the best counsel when your child has questions about sex or is faced with the need to "flee from sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 6:18).

Sibling Rivalry and Selfishness

Overview

While some kids become “best friends” with brothers and sisters, it’s not uncommon for siblings to experience struggle and strife. Sibling rivalry can even begin during a second pregnancy and continue as kids grow and compete for everything in their world—from toys to attention. Children long to live in a home where they are treasured as individuals and treated with kindness and respect. When handled effectively, there is hope for healing from sibling rivalry as your children mature. Establishing boundaries is the key to creating this type of happy home.

It’s Been Said

“Our kids want the best of both worlds. They want to be sure that brother or sister doesn’t get more than they do, but at the same time they want to be treated differently—as someone special.”⁵²

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Did you experience sibling rivalry growing up in your family? How did that affect the relationship you have with your siblings today?
- 2) Have you ever favored one of your children over another, or compared one to another? What was the result of doing so?

- 3) What methods have you used effectively to teach your children to share? What do they most often resist sharing and why?
- 4) In what ways are your children different? In what ways are they alike? How can you use this insight to foster a greater sense of appreciation and love between them as siblings?
- 5) Role-play helping your children work through a disagreement. What can you say to help them resolve it? What must they do to work through it?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer thanking God for each of your children and the unique characteristics and talents they bring to your family. Ask him how to increasingly make your home a place where your children feel treasured as individuals and are consistently treated the way Ephesians 4:2–3 describes: “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.”

Sportsmanship Spats

Overview

How often do you hear, “I won! I won! I won!” accompanied by a victory dance? Is your child determined to win—no matter what? Kids can be competitive by nature, be it sports, board games, or getting dressed in the morning. And while some competition isn’t necessarily a bad thing, if your natural-born athlete develops a win-at-all-costs attitude, it may be time to stop the play, call a time-out, and issue a reminder that winning isn’t everything. With life lessons more often “caught than taught,” step up to the plate and score a home run for good sportsmanship.

It’s Been Said

“A college swimming coach was summarizing his team’s achievements at the annual athletic banquet. ‘Well, we didn’t win any meets,’ he conceded, ‘but we all had a good time, and nobody drowned.’”⁵³

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Are you a good sport? How do you behave when you lose a game, are overlooked for advancement, or disagree with a decision your boss makes at work? If a competitive spirit has damaged a significant relationship in your life, how did it happen and what did you do?
- 2) How competitive is your child? What would curb a win-at-all-costs attitude and reinforce the value of learning to handle wins and losses with grace, humility, and dignity?

- 3) What books and movies about good and godly athletes can you use to help your child see the qualities and value of good sportsmanship?
- 4) Have you ever “lost on purpose” when playing a game with your child? What did you hope to achieve? Did it work?
- 5) What does Christlike character look like when facing favorable decisions? Unfavorable ones? Wins and losses? What would help your child internalize these character qualities?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to develop in you, and your child, a spirit of humility by keeping you focused on the eternal prize described in 1 Corinthians 9:25–27, “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”

Stealing

Overview

Have you ever found unfamiliar objects in your preschooler's pockets and wondered, *Where did these come from?* It's not uncommon for young children to handle items of interest and immediately take possession—believing, because they found it, it's theirs to keep. But before concluding you're harboring a future felon, take a step back and take a deep breath. First, determine why your child steals and how you'll handle it. Separate emotionally from your child's actions and explain that stealing displeases the Lord—and you. With time and God's help, your child will eventually learn to control impulses, delay gratification, and respect the rights and property of others.

It's Been Said

"You have truth, trust, and integrity when you have Christ living inside you. Thus, when you steal from others, you steal from yourself the very character of Christ."⁵⁴

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Were you ever caught stealing as a child? What did you steal and why did you steal it? What were the consequences of your actions?
- 2) How would you respond if your child came home from a friend's house carrying a new cell phone and told you, "I didn't steal it! I'm just borrowing it?"
- 3) Why is it important for a child who's caught stealing to make restitution? How do you determine what kind of restitution is needed?
- 4) Proverbs 22:1 underscores the value of having a "good name" or reputation. How is reputation established, and in what ways does stealing destroy someone's reputation?
- 5) Role-play explaining to your child, in easy-to-understand language, what it means to have Christ living inside you.
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to empower you as a parent so the life you live demonstrates to your child what it means to have Christ living inside. Pray, too, that your child would choose to set aside selfishness and learn to care genuinely about the needs of others. Ask God to keep you honest and faithful in every area of your life, mindful that "one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much" (Luke 16:10).

Substance Abuse

Overview

The statistics are shocking: one out of four children take their first drink before age thirteen. Three million twelve-year-olds have tried an illicit drug.⁵⁵ *Impossible?* No! Sadly, it's entirely *possible* even within Christian families. To prevent substance abuse from finding a foothold in your family, know what signs to watch for and how to prepare and protect your children from falling prey to the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Good, godly, parental role modeling, open lines of communication, and a home environment where children feel loved, significant, and secure are three of the strongest deterrents to substance abuse.

It's Been Said

"Typically, parents begin to see a downward spiral in their child's personality—a precipitous drop in grades, truancy, and association with previously unknown 'friends.' Therefore, parents who see these signs are absolutely justified in searching rooms and personal belongings."⁵⁶

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Did you experiment with or use alcohol, tobacco, or illegal or prescription drugs before age twelve? What made you try any of these substances? How does your experience influence your attitude toward substance abuse?
- 2) What factors do you believe most contribute to substance abuse? Which ones are most likely to prevent it?
- 3) Would you be able to tell if your child was using drugs or alcohol? Why or why not?
- 4) What is the difference between drug use and drug abuse? At what point does drug abuse become an addiction?
- 5) Has your family been affected by substance abuse? If so, how? If substance abuse were to become an issue in the future, how would you confront it in a healthy way?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to keep your children from being lured into substance abuse. Ask him to help you overcome any naiveté or denial that would keep you from seeing the problem for what it is and getting the help your family needs. Thank him for the full assurance that no habit, addiction, or temptation is too much to handle through the power of his strength, as 1 Thessalonians 5:24 affirms: "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it."

Tardiness

Overview

Even the brightest and most successful children can struggle with chronic tardiness. Teaching punctuality involves more than just getting somewhere on time—it requires training your child to respect others and their time and fostering an “I care” attitude. The sooner your “slow starters” learn the value of being on time, the more likely they are to succeed in school and in life. Your own good example of punctuality will go a long way toward ensuring that this happens.

It's Been Said

“One always has time enough, if one will apply it well.”⁵⁷

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Are you someone who is always on time or, even better, early? Or are you someone who tends to be late for everything? What is the source of this pattern in your life?
- 2) Children often follow the example set for them by their parents. How good are your time management skills, and what does your life say to your kids about the value and virtue of being punctual?

- 3) Have you noticed a particular time of day when your children tend to be pokier? Can you determine what may be causing this slowdown?
- 4) What routines have you implemented to help your children get up and moving in the morning and to settle down for the night? If you have more than one child, what differences do you see in each child during these times?
- 5) What, if any, correlation do you see between orderliness and timeliness?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in “What Could You Do?” which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you discern the most effective ways to teach your children to be on time, respect others and their time, and instill in them an “I care” attitude. If punctuality is something you struggle with, humbly admit it to God and seek his help to change. At the start of each day, pray this short prayer based on 1 Corinthians 14:40—“Lord, help me to do whatever comes today in the most timely and orderly way.”

Temper Tantrums

Overview

Kicking, screaming, fist flinging, and flailing—few things unnerve a parent more than a temper tantrum. And one word triggers a tantrum faster than any other: *no*. Whether it's about a toy at the store or an extra bedtime snack, *no* can unleash a temper tantrum like nothing else. *Detachment* is central to resolution. It has the power to defuse tantrums and put an end to embarrassing spectacles. Knowing how to detach from the behavior without detaching from your child is an acquired skill, one learned over time with patient persistence.

It's Been Said

"Temper tantrums, however fun they may be to throw, rarely solve whatever problem is causing them."⁵⁸

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) Adults are not immune from having temper tantrums. What does an adult tantrum look like, and when was the last time you saw one? Have you ever had a temper tantrum? What was it about and how did it end?
- 2) What feelings surface when you observe a parent trying unsuccessfully to neutralize a toddler's temper tantrum? What is it about tantrums that can so easily unhinge an adult?

- 3) Have you mastered the art of detachment, knowing how to detach from your child's actions without detaching from your child? How did you do it and what were the results?
- 4) What key actions for defusing tantrums did you find most practical in this chapter? Have you had an opportunity to try them with your child? How have they worked?
- 5) What is at the heart of your child's temper tantrums? Why is it important to deal with tantrums head-on?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer asking God to help you apply the concepts of this chapter whenever your child throws a temper tantrum. Confess any inadequacies you feel about appropriate detachment. And ask God to imprint on your heart the necessity of dealing effectively with temper tantrums, found in Proverbs 25:28, "A man [or child] without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls."

Whining

Overview

Like nails on a chalkboard, whining is one of those sounds that quickly catches your attention and instantly rattles your nerves. The good news is, as your child ages and communication skills improve, whining will often lessen. Meanwhile, circumvent the stormy waters of whining by teaching your child to communicate in a healthy way and accept your loving authority. By establishing these boundaries, you chart a course necessary to ensure your tiny whiner doesn't grow up to be a chronic complainer later in life.

It's Been Said

"Whining is not exclusive to children. We all whine from time to time, and it does not go unnoticed by your kids. . . . Think about the things you say and how they are said. Your kids are learning how to behave from you."⁵⁹

For Reflection and Discussion

- 1) What is your first response when your child uses whining or begging to try to reverse a decision you've made? What is at the heart of a child's whining?
- 2) What physical and emotional factors often play into a child's choice to whine?

- 3) What parenting techniques have you used in the past to stop your child's whining? What worked? What didn't?
- 4) How can you use Scripture and prayer to support what you're teaching your child about communicating wants and needs in a healthy way and accepting your parental authority?
- 5) Have you ever found yourself whining to God or complaining to others when life wasn't going the way you expected? What concepts in this chapter would help you overcome whining if you applied them to your own life?
- 6) Of the ideas listed in "What Could You Do?" which three do you think would be most effective with your child? What other options could you implement?

Going Deeper with God

Write a prayer confessing to God the times and ways you've grumbled or complained because you felt he wasn't listening to you or didn't care about your needs. Thank him for loving you unconditionally and for providing all you need in life to be complete and fulfilled. Affirm his lordship in your life—and your child's—renewing your commitment to "do everything without grumbling or arguing" (Phil. 2:14 NIV) and to help your child do the same.

Study Suggestions for Individuals or Couples

If you choose to do this study individually or as a couple, consider the following suggestions.

- **Select the chapters** you wish to study or go through the book in its entirety; the choice is yours.
- **Study separately** and come together to discuss as a couple.
- **Record your notes** and thoughts in a journal or notebook so you can review them later.
- **Pray** with and for each other. (Writing down your prayers can be a benefit for later review to see how God has answered.)
- **Encourage one another** to practice the lessons you learn.

- **Remember**, as parents, you are on the same team, and the objective—individually and as a family—is for each person to grow and mature into Christlike character.

To know wisdom and instruction,
to understand words of insight,
to receive instruction in wise dealing,
in righteousness, justice, and equity;
to give prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth—
Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain
guidance. (Prov. 1:2–5)

Group Leadership Tips and Techniques

If you decide to lead a group, the following guidelines may be helpful.

- **Be prepared.** Complete the lessons and study the Scriptures before your group meets. You do *not* have to be a preacher, a graduate of college or seminary, or an expert in theology to lead a small group effectively.
- **Be genuine.** A small-group leader is a warm-hearted, sincere Christian who cares about people and about their spiritual needs.
- **Be yourself.** If you are comfortable with people, you will be able to inspire others. Your role is to direct the discussion by using the guidelines and questions provided.
- **Be spiritually sensitive.** Listen to the inner promptings of God's Spirit. For example, God may lead you to ask fewer questions and to spend more time in prayer.
- **Be responsive.** Your role is to facilitate group discussion, not to teach the lesson. Listen to and engage everyone in the group.
- **Be encouraging.** Invite different points of view and discuss different opinions, all with a respectful tone and in a loving, Christlike spirit.

[It] is Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. (Col. 1:27–28 NIV)

Before You Meet

- **Pray.** Ask God to bring into your group the people of his choosing.
- **Determine the size of your group.** The optimal group size is generally eight to twelve members. When a group has more than twelve members, it would be beneficial to divide into two groups. People tend to share more freely and to develop genuine intimacy in smaller groups.
- **Know the structure of the study.**
 - Plan on each lesson taking approximately thirty to sixty minutes to complete at home (including reading the chapter).
 - The recommended length of time for group discussion is one hour.
 - You may want to schedule an introductory session in order to give a brief overview of the study and allow your group to get acquainted.
- **Schedule dates and times.** Contact group members far enough in advance so they can plan their calendars accordingly. Be sure to send out a reminder postcard or e-mail a few days prior to the first meeting. Include:
 - Dates the study is to begin and end.
 - Address where the group will meet and a contact telephone number.
 - Length of time expected for lesson preparation and group discussion.

- **State expectations.** Share the details:
 - When they will receive their books (if provided); cost of book if not prepaid.
 - What is expected to be completed (if anything) before the first week.
 - What supplies to bring each week: a Bible, copy of the study guide, notebook, or paper, pen, or pencil.
- **Arrange the room.** Casual seating around a table or in a circle helps encourage conversation.
- **Make introductions.** If the members in your group aren't already well acquainted, allow time for everyone to introduce themselves and provide nametags for the first few meetings.
- **Share refreshments.** Jesus often gathered together with his disciples at mealtimes. With busy schedules, full meals are often too much, but a simple dessert or healthy snack with a soft drink, coffee, or tea enhances fellowship.

Leadership Tips and Techniques

- **Use “icebreakers” to get better acquainted.** You may want to begin the first meeting with questions such as, “Why did you decide to join this group?” or “What do you expect to receive from this study?” Or you may want to ask everyone to tell something about their background or family when introductions are made.
- **Pray for individual members of your group throughout the week and before each meeting.** Acknowledge your dependence on the Holy Spirit and trust him to penetrate hearts with biblical truth.
- **Begin and end on time.** Be respectful of the group members' personal time.
- **Explain the question/answer format of the meeting.** Reassure members that they are not expected to share anything if doing so makes them feel uncomfortable.
- **Be a facilitator, not a teacher.** A teacher presents information in a clear, understandable way. A facilitator leads the group to discuss what they have learned. By asking questions, a facilitator helps the group personally discover ways to apply the truths revealed in God's Word. Be *real*. Be vulnerable.
- **Pace the meeting to fully cover the lesson in the allotted time.** This task is one of the most difficult aspects of leading a group. Keep track of how long each question takes. Some will be covered more quickly than others. However, keep in mind that if time runs out, the question you leave out may be the very one somebody needed to discuss most.
- **Encourage interaction.** When you pose the suggested questions, some will be interpretive. Other questions will prompt individual members to consider their own circumstances. There can be multiple responses to each question. Encourage discussion around each one's observations.
- **Respect the group's answers.** Since application questions do not have right or wrong answers, whatever group members say should be respected and appreciated. Show this by saying, “I appreciate your thoughts.” Or, “I can tell you have been thinking about this subject.” If someone presents a controversial opinion, you might say, “I've never thought of it that way. Does somebody else have another opinion?” or, “Would anyone like to express a different point of view?”
- **Moderate those who dominate the discussion.** Offer a noncondemning statement such as, “Your thoughts are very interesting. Does anybody else want to share an opinion?” If there is someone in the group whom you know on a more intimate level, you may want to ask them privately if you may call on them for an opinion when or if necessary.
- **Focus on relationships.** Your relationship with group members is important, an opportunity to offer support and encouragement.

- **Try to include everybody in the discussion.** Some people are shy and hesitate to talk. Others may have problems that they cannot talk about openly. Be sensitive to their unspoken needs and to those who are reserved.
- **Remember you are not responsible for the spiritual growth of group members.** Spiritual growth takes place as the Holy Spirit works in the life of each person. It does not occur at the same rate for everyone. You may notice that one group member seems to be “getting it,” while another remains unsettled or even confused.
- **Learn to be comfortable saying, “I don’t know,” if that is the case.** You might say, “I don’t know the answer, but I will try to find out before next week.” You may also suggest other resources or books that apply. (Hope For The Heart ministry has written *Biblical Counseling Keys* that address more than one hundred topics as well as other books and resources that may be obtained through our website at <http://www.hopefortheheart.org>.)
- **Be the last one to share your answers.** Your answers to the discussion questions are equally as important as the answers of any other group member. However, it is usually best to share your opinion after others have a chance to express their ideas.
- **Be comfortable with silence.** When you ask a question, give group members time to think. Wait quietly for several moments while others in the group decide whether they want to respond.
- **Try to rephrase the question if there is no response.** You might say, “Let me put it another way.” Occasionally you may drop the question entirely and move on to the next inquiry. You might also ask someone to read a particular verse to encourage participation.
- **Determine how best to handle prayer requests.** Since your small-group study is not primarily a prayer group, be discerning in the way you handle requests. For example, ask for requests related to the lesson or share requests for group members to pray for during the week. Be willing to share your own needs.
- **Encourage individual study.** Before the meeting ends, encourage the group members to press on in their individual study of the material. Remind them of the next meeting time and place.
- **Contact those who were absent.** Express your concern and affirm that they were missed. Encourage them to complete their study for the coming week.

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