

## **PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO BUILDING A CULTURE OF FAMILY**

How do you build a strong family? By paying attention not only to individual family members but to the family as a group.

A cooperative and interdependent family will not usually come into being if a parent centres most of his or her attention on individual children when part or all of the family is together.

### **Leading Your Family as a Group**

Leading the family as a group is completely different from merely raising children one-by-one, ignoring the family as a unit.

Think of the coach of a football team. He must focus on how the various members of the team relate to one another, work together, carry out the plays, etc. Whereas the quarterback coach is concerned with very different things: an individual's performance and morale.

Parents must be both kinds of coaches. What usually happens is that they just operate like the quarterback coaches, helping one individual at a time and leaving out teaching their families to work together and help one another.

Therefore, the successful parent has the family in mind, talks to the family as a whole, analyses how the family is developing and what it needs to do

together to go further, gives the family work to do, and helps with a host of other family-centred concerns.

There are some basic principles that will help you create a family within which each member can grow spiritually, emotionally, and relationally - which will help you build the healthy, happy family God wants you to enjoy.

Here's how you can be a healthy and happy family:

**Be there.** Your children regard your very presence as a sign of caring and connectedness. It's crucial for you to spend as much time as possible with them. Keep in mind that your job as a parent is a calling from God - more important than any other work you do, including the job you get paid to do - and your influence on your children will be your greatest legacy. Ask God to help you make whatever sacrifices you need to make to free up your time and energy to be there for your children often. Be available to talk with them, help them, attend their events, and cheer them on in their various pursuits. Your children crave your presence, and nothing can make up for your absence. Be creative about how you can spend time with your children one-on-one regularly, from going on a hike to playing a board game together.

**Express affirmation, warmth, and encouragement.** Parents who practice loving parenting, as opposed to shame-based parenting, will create

a home where children and spouses feel more secure. So avoid shame-based parenting, which is performance-oriented and approval-focused, using words and actions that cause children to think that they aren't loved or valuable. Instead, aim to make your children feel accepted, appreciated, listened to, and loved. Give your children confidence by letting them know that you believe in them, value them, and enjoy them. Say "I love you" to them often, and give them plenty of physical affection like hugs, kisses, and back rubs. Rather than just jumping into their to-do lists with them, share some relaxed conversations with them after they get home from school and before they go to bed. Let go of unrealistic expectations for them. Encourage them to pursue their areas of interest.

**Build healthy morals and values.** The decisions that children make today will often affect them for the rest of their lives. Talk openly and honestly with your children about sex, alcohol, and other drugs from when they're young, all the way through their teen years, answering their questions and discussing issues **in age-appropriate ways**. Get to know what your children watch on TV and in the movies, what websites they visit, what music they listen to, and what video games they play. Watch and listen together with them as often as possible, and talk with them about the content to help them learn to think critically about it. Restrict their access to vulgar media content.

**Discipline with consistency.** When you clearly express expectations and consistently follow through, you'll produce responsible children. Keep in mind that consistent discipline takes lots of time and energy. Set and clearly communicate healthy boundaries about doing homework and chores, telling the truth, talking to your children respectfully and follow through with consequences when your children make poor choices. Help your children decide what consequences they should get for various infractions. Stay calm - not angry - when you're disciplining them, refrain from nagging, choose your battles wisely, and show empathy. Your willingness to be the parent they need - not merely a friend - will give them security and confidence.

**Ruthlessly eliminate stress.** The unbalanced life will not be kind to the areas you neglect. Don't neglect spending lots of time with your family for anything, including your career. Make whatever sacrifices you need to make so you can enjoy plenty of relaxed family time together. Get enough sleep and exercise regularly, and make sure that your spouse and children do, too.

**Communicate well.** Positive communication is the language of love for your children. Make a habit of listening carefully to your children whenever they share their thoughts and feelings with you. Also figure out what other ways you can best express your love for your children in ways that each of them will receive well. Apologize to them when you've made a parenting mistake. Allow the conflicts you experience with your spouse and children to

be a path to deeper communication by helping you all understand each other better and work as a team to solve problems.

**Love your spouse.** If you're married, work on your [marriage](#) regularly and invest in it through activities like frequent dates, since a loving marriage brings hope and security to your children. If you're a single parent, build relationships with others at your church who care about your children and are willing to invest in their lives.

**Remember that the best things in life aren't things.** Healthy stewardship and sound financial decisions produce positive family priorities. Follow a budget to live below your means, avoid debt, and save regularly. Modelling these healthy financial practices will teach your children valuable practical and spiritual lessons.

**Energize your family's spiritual growth.** Your greatest calling in life is to leave a spiritual legacy for your children. So make your relationship with God through Christ your top priority. Pray for and with your children in a regular family devotional time, write a family constitution that describes your family's values, and talk about God often as you go through your everyday activities together.