

Parenting: Strengths and Love with an Emotional Focus

Session 4: Developing Intimacy

Prayer

Good and Gracious Heavenly Father, we invite you into this moment with us. As we gather to reflect on the beauty of parenthood, we ask that you open our hearts and minds to that beauty. Make us ever attentive to your Spirit. Help us be aware of the ways in which you speak to us, the ways you come to us, and the ways we reflect your love to others. As we learn more about developing intimacy, we thank you for your intimacy with us. We thank you for the intimate ways you come into our lives and shine forth through us in our families. Finally, we thank you for the gift of our children. Draw us deeper into the realities of parenting. Help us to see how truly beautiful it is to shine forth your image to our children, and shape and mold us to do that better each and every day. Amen.

Reflection

Parenting, like the priesthood, changes our identity for all eternity. While my spouse and I are not married for all eternity, we will forever be our children's parents. You have all eternity to make things right!

For Parents Who are Married or In Relationships

1. **Our Love Came First!** The best way to love your children is to truly love your spouse; to be an example of what true love looks like.
2. **Children are social learners**, they learn to love not just through experiencing love, but also by seeing what authentic love looks like. Loving your spouse is the surest sign that they will learn how to love each other.
3. **The family is the school of love**, it is the school of forgiveness, and it is the school of prayer.

Three Practical Ways to Show Your Spouse Love

1. **Building your partner's love map**¹ = the importance of knowing your partner, discovering your partner, and building the friendship.
 - When we feel known and loved, we love better.
2. **Know your partner's love language**²
 - "How did you feel loved today?" exercise and prayer.
3. **Family Structured Prayer Exercise**

¹ Gottman, *The Marriage Clinic*.

² Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2004)

- Blessings and Gratitude.
- New Spiritual Information or Insight: What did I learn about God today?
- Spiritual Puzzles: Share spiritual struggles and questions.
- What actions can we take?
- Request Divine Intervention: Pray!!
- What are our desires? How can I be more like Christ?

Quick Points on Parenting

1. **Foster opportunities for your child to use his/her strengths**
2. **Routinely love your child using his/her love language**
3. **Be vulnerable (within reason!)**
 - Learn how to say “I’m sorry.”
 - We are all still learning, and we are going to love through it.
 - Reflect on one thing we would have done if we could go back and change an interaction.
 - Modeling imperfection is not a bad thing, it’s a human thing. We all mess up, this actually provides an opportunity for greater intimacy because it allows for opportunities of forgiveness, and it demonstrates to your child that it is ok to make mistakes. The key is also showing them how to get back up!

The Family Meal³

Families that eat dinner together 5 times a week have...

1. Better academic performance
2. Higher self esteem
3. Greater resilience
4. Lower substance abuse, teen pregnancy, depression, development of eating disorders, obesity

Can't do dinner? Find a way to eat together 5 times a week!

Potentially Problematic Interactions⁴

1. Identify the behavior and describe how you feel about it
2. Validate feelings = *Children's experiences are much more intense, greater (i.e. hunger, pain, fear, etc.) – validate their feelings*
3. Trust the child to develop and let them solve their own problems

³ The Family Dinner Project, “Benefits of Family Dinners” <https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/about-us/benefits-of-family-dinners/> (Accessed April 3, 2017)

⁴ Gottman, *Emotion Coaching: The Heart of Parenting*.

4. Grant in fantasy what you can't grant in reality
5. Don't jump to say "no" instead ask, "why not" or "what do you think?"

Closing

We hope you enjoyed this program! Don't forget about the 2 additional, optional courses on *Internet Safety* and *Parenting Through and After Divorce*