

Grade 5, Theme Four

Family Letter

Dear Family,

We have come to the fourth theme of *Fully Alive*, our family life program. Because the partnership of home, church, and school is so important, this letter is written to let you know what we talk about in class, and to offer some ideas for your involvement. For more information, please go to www.occb.on.ca.

About Theme Four

Theme Four of *Fully Alive* is called “Growing in Commitment.” Each one of us is challenged to grow in commitment to God and to each other. This is part of what it means to be fully human. Growth toward maturity is never a straight path. As children learn to make more decisions about their lives, they need to know that freedom is best understood as a freedom *for*, rather than a freedom *from*. Commitment is really the free gift of ourselves to being the best people we can be at each stage of our life.

In Theme Four we will:

- discover the importance of accepting responsibility for our actions, and of recognizing that actions have consequences for ourselves and others.
- explore the meaning of a commitment to ourselves, which is a commitment to be the person God created us to be.
- examine the commitments we have that involve other people: families, friends, being a student and a classmate, special activities, and our communities.

Working together at home and at school

- At school we will be talking about excuses, and why people make them. The most common reason for excuses is to avoid certain consequences. It’s good to talk to children about this issue when they aren’t feeling defensive. You might point out an example when your child accepted responsibility for something that happened, even when it was difficult. Accepting responsibility is a sign of growing up.
- The students will be reading a story about an e-mail that spreads false information. The point of the story is the responsibility to live up to our beliefs and refuse to participate in actions that are designed to hurt others. Bullying by electronic means (e-mail, instant messages) is an issue you may want to discuss with your child. You will find additional information about this topic in the Online Family Edition of *Fully Alive*.

Teacher: _____ Date _____

Theme Four Topics

I have fought the good fight,

I have finished the race,

I have kept the faith.

2 Timothy 4:7

This theme is developed through three topics. The students begin by discussing some common excuses people often make, and reflecting on why it is so important to accept responsibility for our actions. In Topic 2, the students identify some qualities of committed people, and, through a story, explore the meaning of a commitment to oneself. The final topic offers an opportunity for the students to examine their own commitments at home, with friends, in the classroom, in the community, and to their special activities.

Topic 1 — Responsible for Our Actions

We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing.

Others judge us by what we have done.

Henry W. Longfellow

Summary

This topic helps the students recognize the importance of accepting responsibility for their actions. The teacher and students discuss some of the reasons people make excuses for something they have done or have failed to do, and some possible consequences of people's actions for others and for themselves.

Main Ideas

- Making excuses is a way of avoiding responsibility.
- Our actions have consequences for ourselves and others, sometimes good and sometimes bad.
- We are responsible for our actions.

Family Participation

• As part of this topic, the students discussed the meaning of the word *consequences*. You could ask your child what this word means. (A consequence is the result or the outcome of something that happened.) Can he or she think of some examples of consequences, both good and bad. For example, what's the consequence of planning to meet a friend,

and then forgetting to show up? Of losing a library book? Of offering extra help around the house?

- Often, the only time parents talk about responsibility and consequences is when children have failed to be responsible, or are trying to blame others for something that happened. The best time to talk about learning to be responsible is when it's not an immediate issue, and your child isn't feeling defensive. You might ask your child to think of an occasion when she or he accepted responsibility for something that happened, even though it was difficult. You could also mention any new responsibilities your child has because she or he is growing up.

- Some children find it very hard to admit responsibility for their actions when they are wrong. If your child has this difficulty, there are several ways you can help him or her. If, for example, you are certain that your child broke a neighbour's window, then it's best not to ask, "Did you break her window?" since you are almost inviting a lie. Instead, make it clear that you know who did it, and ask, "How did it happen? What can we do about it?" When you aren't sure if your child is responsible, you might suggest that he or she take a moment to think about it before telling you what happened. It's important not to get too angry or to make the consequences too severe. Help your child walk back over the situation with you — how could he or she have avoided the problem, when did the situation go wrong, and is there something he or she could do to make sure it doesn't happen again? Sometimes children whose parents have very high expectations for them have difficulty admitting their failings. They need assurance that everyone makes mistakes and has faults. They also need to be reminded many times that their parents' love is always there for them, no matter what happens.

- Naturally parents want to protect their children from serious consequences. But it's good to let them experience smaller consequences that are the result of carelessness. This is the only way they can learn. Missing lunch one day after forgetting to bring it to school, paying a library fine out of his or her own allowance, or being left out of a school choir because of failing to attend after-school practices — these are consequences that children can handle and learn from.

- It's difficult for parents to know whether their children have too many responsibilities, not enough, or just about the right number. It depends, of course, on the child and on the

family situation. In general, however, Grade 5 children are capable of getting up with an alarm clock, keeping their rooms tidy (bed made, clothes hung up, odds and ends put away), making their own lunch, leaving the bathroom clean after a bath or shower, and keeping track of their schedule for any special activities.

At this age, it is important to begin giving children more responsibilities and allowing them to make more decisions for themselves. It is a way of helping them discover that growing up is exciting and challenging. It is also an important means of building their confidence and self-esteem. Several years from now when greater freedom and independence become a big issue, children are more likely to be ready for this new stage in their development if they have had opportunities to take on responsibilities, make some mistakes in the process, and learn how to make thoughtful decisions.

Topic 2 — A Commitment to Myself

Self-respect and honour cannot be protected by others.

They are for each individual, himself or herself, to guard.

Mohandas Gandhi

Summary

This topic helps the students recognize and appreciate the importance of the commitment they have to themselves — to be the people God created them to be. The teacher and students discuss a story about a failure to be faithful to this commitment that resulted in harm to another person.

Main Ideas

- Committed people try hard to live up to their responsibilities.
- We have an important commitment to ourselves to be the people God created us to be.
- Our commitment to ourselves is to try to do what is good, to avoid what is wrong, and to live up to our beliefs.

Family Participation

• You and your child may want to read the story, “A Message for Lucy,” which you will find at the end of this theme. You could ask your child what she or he thinks about the story. At school, some of the ideas the students discussed include: the difference between

deliberately hurting another person and accidentally doing so; the harm we cause to ourselves when we deliberately hurt another person; and the difficulties everyone has at times to be a loving person.

- The story in this topic is about the failure to be a loving person, and also highlights a serious form of bullying known as *cyber-bullying*. Cyber-bullying is a type of social bullying that occurs through electronic communication. Messages (for example, e-mails, text messages, postings on online sites) that humiliate people, make fun of them, threaten them, or spread false rumours about them are examples of cyber-bullying.
- Bullying of all kinds is an offence against the Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39). At school the student discussed the meaning of loving your neighbour as yourself: to care as much about what happens to other people as you care about what happens to you; to realize that other people have feelings just as you do; to treat other people as you want to be treated. As an opportunity arises (for example, an upsetting incident with a friend; unkind behaviour toward a brother or sister; teasing that becomes nasty) you could discuss these ideas with your child. A sense of empathy — the ability to identify with and understand another person’s feelings or difficulties — is an important key to developing a strong and good character.
- Grade 5 students, as well as many students in higher grades, appear to find it very difficult to grasp the difference between private and public information. In part, this is the result of living in a society in which private matters are often made public. Also, the limited life experience and maturity of children and young people affects their judgment of what should be appropriately shared with others.

The fact that all electronic messages can easily be sent on to a wider audience suggests that great care has to be taken both in creating messages and in considering the reliability of the receiver of the message. If your child uses e-mail or instant messaging, it is important to discuss this issue with him or her, and to review it at regular intervals.

- In general, girls use instant messaging more than boys, and enjoy “chatting” with friends. At times, however, this kind of online communication can lead to gossip, rumours, and bullying. Each member of the group eggs the others on, and before long

someone ends up with hurt feelings. In research studies, children admit that it is easier to insult or bully another person online than it is in person. When you cannot see another person's face, it doesn't seem that bad.

- There is a great deal of information for parents about safe use of electronic communication and of the internet: books, articles, and websites. The government of Canada has a internet site (Safe Canada) with information for families. Another helpful organization is the Media Awareness Network, which also has an internet site. Some general guidelines for safe online communication are:

- Children should not give out any personal information online without their parents' permission.
- When online, children should use a nickname that does not reveal whether they are a boy or girl.
- Children should never reveal their user name or password for e-mailing or instant messaging to anyone except their parents.
- Children should never agree to meet someone they met online unless their parents know about the person and will also be present.
- Children should not open e-mails, messages, files, or other links from people they do not know.
- If children receive a bullying message they should not respond, and save the message and show it to a parent or other trusted adult.
- It should be made clear to children that sending insulting or rude messages, or circulating rumours and gossip that would be hurtful to another person is unacceptable.
- If children are using instant messaging, parents should know who is on their child's list, which should include only trusted people the child knows in the "real world."

Topic 3 — A Commitment to Others

Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance.

Samuel Johnson

Summary

This topic helps the student examine the commitments they have in their lives to their families and friends, to being a student and member of a classroom, and to their activities and their communities. After the teacher and students discuss these commitments, the students complete a sheet, “Commitment Check-up,” to see how they are progressing in becoming a committed person.

Main Ideas

- We all have important commitments in our lives.
- Keeping some parts of our commitments is difficult, but we have to try to keep on trying even when we feel discouraged.
- Becoming a committed person takes time, practice, and perseverance.

Family Participation

- You might ask your child about his or her family commitments. What does your child think these are? Most children answer this question by listing the chores that they are expected to do at home. You could point out that family commitments are much more than chores. Getting along with each other, enjoying being together, and showing that we care for each other by the way we act are important commitments for all families.
- You can help your child learn to be a committed friend by showing an interest in his or her friends, and by being ready to listen to the difficulties all children experience with friendship. For example, if you know your child has had a disagreement with a friend, you might ask about it. What could be done to solve the problem? How could each person compromise? Perhaps it’s a problem that doesn’t have a solution, and you may want to encourage your child to forget about the difficulty and get on with the friendship. You can also encourage your child to stick up for friends, to avoid gossip, and to forget about past quarrels.
- You can also strengthen your child’s commitment to school work by showing your interest, insisting on a regular time for homework, and by letting your child know that you have confidence in her or him. This is especially important for children who find school learning difficult. When you see your child making a real effort, tell her or him how pleased you are. You could also let your child know that you find some work difficult or boring, but there is satisfaction to be found in perseverance.

- At this age, children often want to try many different activities, but they may find it difficult to remain committed over a long period of time. They begin with good intentions, but after a few months they decide that it's boring to practise the piano, or that soccer games interfere with something else they want to do.

Most parents think that children should complete something that they have started. If you have been in this situation with your child, it helps to remember that there are many things children would never do without a push from their parents. Very few children, for example, practise a musical instrument without a lot of encouragement, reminders, and resolve from their parents.

- We are also part of a faith community, and our children need to know that we take this commitment seriously. The most important way in which we demonstrate our commitment is by participation in the celebration of the Eucharist each week. Grace before meals, which can include a special intention from each member of the family, also shows our recognition that we are members of a faith community that is bound together through prayer and service to each other.

Theme Four Stories

Topic 2: The teacher and students read this story about Lucy, who received a hateful e-mail.

A Message for Lucy

Thursday evening at Sarah's home

Sarah ate very little, and she was unusually quiet. After dinner, she went to her room and closed her door. Her mother knew something was wrong, but she waited until Sarah was ready to talk.

Finally, Sarah called to her.

"Mom, can you come here. I need to tell you something."

When her mom opened the door, Sarah was curled up on her bed, clutching her old teddy bear. Her eyes were red, and her face was tear-stained.

"Whatever it is, it can't be that bad," her mother said. "Tell me what happened."

Sarah told her mother that last weekend, a girl in the other Grade 5 class at St. Thomas More School had sent an e-mail to some of her friends. The e-mail said some mean things about several students, including Lucy Silva. It made fun of her clothes, and said that everyone was talking about Lucy. Before long, the e-mail was sent to other people, including Sarah.

“Remember when Sabrina was here on Tuesday?” Sarah said to her mom. “That’s when someone sent me the e-mail. Sabrina and I read it, and, Mom, I feel so bad about this.”

“You didn’t write the e-mail, Sarah,” her mom said. “You didn’t do anything wrong by reading it. You didn’t know what it said.”

“But, Mom, Sabrina and I laughed when we read it. It said all kinds of stupid things about people, and it just seemed so dumb, and we laughed. We never thought Lucy would see it.”

“Someone sent it to her?” her mom said. “That was terrible.”

“It’s even worse, Mom. Lucy doesn’t have e-mail. Yesterday, someone put a copy of it in her desk. And today she didn’t come to school. Mr. Talbot says we should have told him about the e-mail, but we never thought she would see it. I wish I had never seen it!”

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Thursday morning, in the principal’s office

On Thursday, Lucy didn’t come to school, but her father did. He told the principal and Mr. Talbot what had happened, and showed them the e-mail.

“Why would anyone do such a thing to my daughter?” Mr. Silva said. “She never did anything to them. The girl who wrote this was always teasing Lucy. I thought it had stopped, but look at this!”

“Mr. Silva,” the principal said, “I will take care of this. It will not happen again.”

“And I will talk to my class,” Mr. Talbot said. “I am so sorry this happened to Lucy. Please tell her that we want her to come back.”

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Thursday, in Mr. Talbot’s Class

“We need to talk about what happened,” Mr. Talbot said to his students. “I know that no one here was responsible for the e-mail. What bothers me is that some of you knew about it, and didn’t tell me.”

“Mr. Talbot,” Sabrina said, “we didn’t think Lucy would see it. She doesn’t have e-mail.”

“Sabrina, that e-mail was sent to so many people, it was certain that Lucy would see it eventually.” Mr. Talbot said. “That’s what happens with e-mail and instant messages. Once you send a message it can be passed on to other people. Whatever you wrote can easily become public.”

“I think person who wrote it wanted lots of people to read it,” Paul said.

“It’s called cyber-bullying,” Joseph added. “My dad told me that.”

“Your dad is right,” Mr. Talbot said. “Cyber-bullying happens when a person uses e-mail, instant messages, or cell phone messages to hurt another person — spread rumours, humiliate and embarrass the person, and sometimes even make threats. It’s very serious.”

“That’s awful!” Sarah said. “Why would someone want to hurt Lucy? She’s very quiet and she never bothers anyone.”

“Maybe that’s why,” Sabrina said. “The person who wrote the e-mail thought Lucy wouldn’t tell, but she did. She showed the message to her parents.”

“And that was the right thing to do,” Mr. Talbot said.

“What can we do now?” Sarah asked in a small voice. “We want to do the right thing.”

“Sarah, I don’t know the answer. And when I don’t know the answer, I pray, and ask God to help me. Maybe that’s what we all need to do right now.”

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Friday morning at Sarah’s home

When Sarah got up the next morning, her mom had something to tell her. “Sarah, I talked to Sabrina’s mother last night, and I’m going to meet you and Sabrina right after school. Don’t be late.”

“Where are we going?” Sarah asked, and she looked confused.

“We’re going to visit Lucy,” her mom said. “I talked to her mother and

father last night, and they're expecting us after school."

"What!" Sarah said.

"Sarah, honey, you can't change what happened, but you and Sabrina can try to make things better. Remember what you told me last night? That you asked God to help Lucy not feel so sad? I'm just helping God answer your prayer."

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Lucy did come back to school after the weekend. Sarah and Sabrina made a special effort to be friendly with her. Lucy was shy at first, but slowly they got to know her. They were really surprised to discover how funny she could be. She invented words that made them giggle, and told them jokes in Portuguese, which made them laugh, even though they didn't understand a word she said. When Mr. Talbot saw the three girls laughing together before class, he smiled.

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