

Grade 6, Theme Two

Family Letter

Dear Family,

It's time for the second 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.acbo.on.ca.

About Theme Two

Theme Two of *Fully Alive* is called "Living in Relationship." God created us to live in relationship with others and to respond to each other with love. Living in relationship begins in the family, the setting in which people first learn about love. As children grow up, friendship becomes more and more important to them. In this theme we will be exploring both important relationships — family and friendship.

In Theme Two we will

- explore the need for relationships in our lives, especially with family and friends.
- discuss the importance of family histories and customs.
- examine some day-to-day stresses that all families experience and consider strategies to manage them.
- learn about common communication problems and ways to overcome them.
- analyze how friendships change as we grow up and learn more about how to handle stressful situations with friends.

Working together at school and at home

- The students will be doing an interview about friendship. Please share with your child some memories of the friends you had as a child or young teenager.
- The students will also be asking for some information about their family histories and customs. Please tell your child about some of the people, events, and customs that are important in your family's history.
- We will be examining day-to-day stresses and communication problems in families and among friends. You might ask your child about these topics and the strategies that were discussed for handling these normal difficulties.
- In the classroom, we discussed the important idea that learning how to be a good friend is a process that takes time. You could talk to your child about his or her friends and how these

relationships have changed over time.

Theme Two Topics

This theme about relationships is developed through six topics. The opening topic explores the value of relationships with family members and with friends. The next two topics examine two aspects of family life: the unique history of each family and its contribution to the identity of family members; and the experience of stress in families, which is a reality in all human relationships. In Topic 4, the students consider the importance of communication in their relationships with both family members and friends, and examine some common obstacles to open and honest communication. The final two topics focus on friendship. The students reflect on how their friendships have changed as they have matured and then explore the experience of stress in friendships and some strategies for handling it.

Topic 1 — Life Lines

*No one can develop freely in this world and find a full life
without feeling understood by at least one person.*

Paul Tournier

Summary

This topic helps the students deepen their understanding of the need for and the value of relationships with other people. The teacher and students read two stories, one about a family reunion and the other about an old friendship.

Main Ideas

- God created us to live in relationship with others; we all need other people in our lives.
- Our most important relationships are with our family members and our friends.
- Relationships are like lifelines; they connect us to each other and teach us how to be loving people.

Family Participation

• This topic features two short stories about relationships, “A Family Reunion” and “Maureen’s Dad and an Old Friend,” which you will find at the end of this theme. You may want to read these stories so that you can discuss them with your child.

- You could share some of your friendship memories with your child. Who is your oldest friend? How did you meet? What was the funniest thing you ever did with a friend? What are your happiest friendship memories?
- Your family may not have been part of a large family reunion like Don’s family, but all families have their own ways of celebrating. Getting together with relatives is important for children’s sense of family. Over time, celebrations of special occasions with extended family members build memories and a sense of belonging. It is also good for children to develop their own relationships with aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. For many adults, some of their fondest memories involve these relatives.
- In every family, there are some strained relationships. There are relatives we do not feel close to, or even like. But if we want our children to be free to develop relationships with all members of the family, it’s better not to share these feelings.

There are also situations involving a relative who has a serious problem (for example, with alcohol or drugs) or has chosen to live in a way that is in conflict with your family values. As children grow up, they become more aware of these situations. It is especially difficult for them if it is someone whom they care about. When this happens, it’s important to explain to children that we can continue to love people even when we do not agree with their choices.

Topic 2 — Family Histories

What are all histories but God manifesting himself?

Oliver Cromwell

Summary

This topic helps the students understand the great value of family heritage and customs. The students share their family histories with each other, and discuss three family histories in their book.

Main Ideas

- Our family histories have strong influence on our identity as people.
- Family customs and traditions are an important way in which a family expresses itself.

Family Participation

- A suggested activity for this topic is for the students to complete a brief history of their own families. As you help your child with this activity, you could suggest that he or she also talk to

other relatives to learn more about the family's history. Children enjoy hearing stories from their family's past.

- If your family has recently arrived in Canada, it's good to let your child know that it is good to keep your family customs and traditions, even as your family is learning new ones. Customs and traditions remind us of the people that went before us and are part of each family's heritage.
- Family customs and traditions are a powerful source of identity and memories for children. The way families decorate their homes at Christmas, the foods that are always made for holidays and birthdays, regular events like making popcorn on Saturday nights — these are the things that children remember forever.

Topic 3 — Family Stress

*Have a heart that never hardens, and a temper that never tires,
and a tongue that never hurts.*

Charles Dickens

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that all families experience some stress, and that there are helpful ways to deal with the stress of daily living. The teacher and students explore several examples of strategies for handling normal family stress.

Main Ideas

- Stress is the stretching and straining in our lives; everyone experiences stress.
- All families experience some stress — disagreements, disappointments, and irritations.
- Some strategies for handling family stress are: a sense of humour, the virtue of patience, the ability to compromise, and a sense of perspective.

Family Participation

- This topic features four short stories to highlight the four strategies for managing family stress. You will find these stories at the end of this theme. You may want to read them so that you can discuss these strategies with your child.
- In class, the students learned that some stress is good for people. It is an opportunity to develop their character — to stretch themselves to be more mature and unselfish, and to develop greater self-discipline. You might ask about some of the situations your child finds stressful at home.

How do these stresses help him or her to develop? What are the best ways to handle these stresses?

- All children have days when there is just too much stress. Things aren't going right at school or at home. When this happens, they need someone to listen sympathetically, and to remind them that a new day often brings a new outlook. But if your child is having a lot of bad days, there may be too much stress in his or her life. Does the problem lie at home or at school? You may want to talk to your child's teacher, a family member, or a close friend who knows the child well.
- Many parents experience a great deal of stress in their lives, especially with both parents working outside the home. When adult stress begins to have a bad effect on our relationship with our children, we need to think about what we can change. What are our priorities? Is everyone in the family contributing in the way he or should? Are we or our children involved in too many activities?
- A major source of stress for all family members is the separation of parents. No matter how carefully and lovingly children are prepared for this event, they experience deep feelings of loss, and a sense of dislocation. Because parents are in a painful situation, they do not always recognize or have the energy to meet their children's needs. It is also difficult to acknowledge that adult decisions have caused children pain.

Children have feelings of sadness, guilt, confusion, and anger when parents separate, and these feelings have to be shared. They need to be reassured that they are not responsible for their parents' difficulties, that both parents love them, and will continue to love them. It is also important for parents to be aware that it makes it much more difficult for children when they are forced to take sides, or when they are expected to assume an adult role and listen to their parents' difficulties.

Extended family relatives and close friends can offer much needed support during such difficult family changes. This is why it is so important for all parents to talk about this subject. The entire Christian community has a responsibility to help those who are experiencing the pain of family breakdown.

Topic 4 — Communicating with Family and Friends

*Speech is civilization itself. The word, even the most contradictory word,
preserves contact — it is silence which isolates.*

Thomas Mann

Summary

This topic helps the students to identify common communication problems and to appreciate the value of honest communication. The teacher and students explore some of the ways in which people communicate, communication difficulties, and some strategies to overcome these difficulties.

Main Ideas

- Our relationships depend on communication; communication allows us to share our feelings, thoughts, opinions, and experiences.
- Some common communication problems are: sharing feelings in a disrespectful way; choosing the wrong time to communicate; and not listening to the other person.
- It takes two people to communicate, and each person has to think about the other person.

Family Participation

- You might ask your child about the communication problems that were discussed at school. Can he or she think of times when these difficulties have happened at home? What could be done about them?
- Brothers and sisters often have difficulty communicating with each other. Most frequently, this is because they're too busy trying to win an argument instead of really listening to each other. Depending on the issue, they want their parents to decide who's right and who's wrong. When this happens in your family, you might suggest that they sit down together, listen (without interrupting) to what the other person has to say, and talk to you only when each of them can explain the other's person point of view. Then ask them to decide on a solution together.
- When your child chooses the wrong time to talk to you (for example, when you're very busy, tired, or upset), you can let him or her know that it isn't a good time. But it is important to find times when you can give your child your full attention. An occasion when you are doing something together (for example, folding laundry, going for a walk, in the car together, cooking) is often a good time for a talk.

- Some children communicate more easily than others. They find it easy to share their feelings, and let others know what is going on in their lives. Others are more private, and need more encouragement to talk. A regular chat at bedtime can be helpful because the child knows that he or she can count on some time alone with mom or dad.
- It is easy for family members to get into bad communication habits. Because they live together and know each other so well, they tend not to listen carefully to each other, and are often less respectful than they would be with people outside the family. Trying to maintain good communication within families — paying attention, respecting the feelings of family members, avoiding personal attacks, being open and honest — is not easy, but it is essential for the well-being of families.

Topic 5 — The Growth of Friendship

*Those friends thou hast and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to your soul with hoops of steel.*

William Shakespeare

Summary

This topic helps the students understand the changes in friendships that take place as people develop. The teacher and students look at friendships at different stages of life, and the students identify some of ways in which their ideas about the meaning of friendship have developed since they were small children.

Main Ideas

- We are not born knowing how to be a friend. We learn what it means to be a good friend from our families and from our early friendships.
- True friendship is based on a deep sense of mutual acceptance and respect.

Family Participation

- A suggested activity in this topic is to have the students develop a class chart on friendship with the words, “A true friend is some who . . .” by completing this sentence with their thoughts about what a true friend is. You might ask your child about this activity. What does he or she think is the most important quality of a true friend?

- In class the students discussed how their friendship relationships have changed since they were small children. If you have old photos of your child with friends from kindergarten or earlier, you may want to bring them out. What does your child remember about these friendships? Are some of the children in the photos still friends?
- Parents have an influence on children's friendships. They can make it easier for friendships to develop by inviting friends along for special activities, or simply by making their children's friends welcome in their home. Having friends is very important to children of this age, and this concentration on friendship continues throughout the early years of adolescence.

Topic 6 — Stress in Friendship

*Once the realization is accepted that even between the closest human beings
infinite distances continue to exist, a wonderful living side by side can grow up.*

Rainer Maria Rilke

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that some stress is unavoidable in all relationships, including friendships. The teacher and students examine several examples of situations that cause stress in friendships and identify some of the reasons friendship difficulties are more stressful as children get older.

Main Ideas

- Friendship changes and develops as we grow up and learn how to be a true friend.
- Everyone experiences some friendship stresses; part of growing up is learning how to handle these difficulties.
- When people have a big friendship problem, it can be helpful to talk to a trusted adult.

Family Participation

- In class, the students discussed three stressful friendship situations — feeling left out, being exploited, and hurt feelings because a friendship seems to be coming to an end. You might ask about these situations. What does your child think is the best way to handle these kinds of situations?
- As friendships become more and more important to children, difficulties with friendships become more stressful. Learning the lesson that not all relationship problems have easy solutions is a painful but necessary part of growing up. Being able to confide in a trusted adult — a parent,

another relative, a close family friend — can make a big difference to a child who is have a friendship difficulty. The stress of having a problem with a friend doesn't seem quite as hard to handle when there is a sympathetic listener.

- We do not choose our children's friends, and it is natural that we will like some more than others. There are times, however, when parents become worried about a friendship. We worry that certain friends will lead our children into trouble or that a friend is taking advantage of our child.

If you are worrying about the influence a friend may be having on your child, you may want to stop and think about his or her strengths and weaknesses. Is your child easily led by others? Does your child have a poor sense of self-esteem? If your answer is yes to these two questions, then your child is vulnerable to peer pressure. You may want to arrange some new activities so that your child will have the opportunity to be successful in a new area and develop greater self-esteem. New activities also involve new people and the opportunity for new friendships.

Theme Two Stories

Topic 1: These are the two short stories about relationships.

A Family Reunion

Plans for the family reunion went on for weeks. Ninety-five people were coming. The oldest was Don's great-uncle Joe, his grandmother's brother. He was 82. The youngest was Laura, the daughter of one of Don's many cousins. She was four months old.

The reunion began with mass at St. John's, Don's family's parish. Don did one of the readings, and the pastor of the parish, Father Cahill, offered some thoughts about the gift of family love. After mass, he joined the family in the parish hall for dinner.

Before long, the hall was filled with sounds of laughter and talking.

"Oh, look at Helen and Rick's baby! Isn't she beautiful!"

"Mom, is everybody here my cousin?"

"It's so good to see everyone. I can't believe how fast these children are growing."

"You're look so much like your father did at your age."

The family members lined up for a buffet dinner, and then there was dancing. Several members of the family played instruments and had organized a small band.

Just about everyone joined in the dancing. Older cousins helped little ones and whirled them around. The children shouted, "More, more!" Grandfathers danced with little granddaughters, and great-aunts with young nephews.

In between the dances, there was a huge birthday cake with 80 candles for the guest of honour — Don's grandmother. Her children and grandchildren and great-

grandchildren shouted, "Speech, speech!" But all she could say was, "I think I need some help to blow out these candles. There are so many!"

There were also family stories that made everyone laugh, like the time Aunt Annie got so mad at Uncle George she chased him out of the house with a broom. Such memories. Such laughter. There were also a few tears for family members who were no longer there.

As the evening ended, the youngest family members were sound asleep.

"What a wonderful party! Let's do this every year."

"It's so good to be together."

"We wouldn't have missed this for anything."

"Take good care of yourself, Uncle Joe. We'll be over to visit you soon."

"Good night, everyone."

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Maureen's Dad and an Old Friend

When Maureen's dad was growing up in Sault Ste Marie, his best friend was Dan DeMarco. He hadn't seen Dan for many years, although they kept in touch with a few phone calls and Christmas cards. Last summer, Dan came to visit. Since Mr. Bouclin had often talked about him, his children were eager to meet him.

"Dad says you two had a lot of adventures together," Maureen said. "We want to hear about some of them!"

"Yeah," Andy said. "And don't leave out the good parts."

"What have you been telling your children?" Dan said. "We were angels! Well, maybe not angels. Remember the time we put "Our of Order" notices on all the washrooms in the school and signed them with the principal's name?"

"Oh, yes," Mr. Bouclin said. "I remember the detentions, too!"

"How about the time we skipped class and went to the movies, and your mother and her sister were there and they saw us?"

"You skipped class?" Dennis said. "Wow!"

"Do you remember our first day of high school?" Mr. Bouclin said. "We were both so nervous, but we had to pretend to be cool."

"We were so cool," Dan said, "we couldn't even find our classroom. And every time a girl talked to your dad, he blushed."

The Bouclin children sat and listened to Dan and their dad, enjoying every minute. They hadn't heard their dad laugh so much for a long time.

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Topic 3: These are the four short stories about strategies for handling family stress.

A Sense of Humour

Maureen's youngest brother, Peter, drives her crazy. He pesters her, goes into her room without her permission, and starts fights with her for which she gets in trouble. One day, as she was complaining about him to her dad, he replied in a serious voice, "I can see you have a problem. What would you like me to do? We can ask the neighbours to keep him until he's grown up, or perhaps he could live

in the garage.” Maureen stared at her dad for a moment, and then she started to laugh. “The garage isn’t a bad idea,” she giggled.

The Virtue of Patience

Elizabeth’s life is very stressful at times. Because her mother is disabled, there are many things Mrs. Boychuk cannot do for herself. Elizabeth helps her mother dress in the morning, which seems to take forever. This is a stress that Elizabeth has to learn to handle. When she gets irritated and tries to hurry her mother, things only get worse. She is learning not to think about how long it takes, but to try to spend the time with her mother talking about school and her friends.

The Ability to Compromise

Don’s room is a disaster area and the cause of frequent arguments between Don and his father. In Don’s opinion, it’s his room and, if he closes the door, no one can see how messy it is. In his dad’s opinion, Don is being lazy and uncooperative by refusing to clean it up. They are both feeling frustrated and angry. In order to lessen this stress, they will need to listen to each other’s viewpoints and agree on a compromise. What kind of compromise might they reach?

A Sense of Perspective

Martin is not getting along with his parents as well as he used to. He thinks they are too strict. He’s not allowed to play computer games until all his homework is done, and even then, only for one hour. Both Martin and his parents are feeling stressed. “He argues about everything, and it wears me out,” his mother says. “No one has parents as unfair as mine,” Martin thinks to himself. Without a sense of perspective, this normal family tension could become bigger and bigger. His parents need to remember that Martin isn’t always difficult and to recognize that he is growing up. Martin needs to remember that his parents love him, that he owes them respect, and that he will not be twelve forever.

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