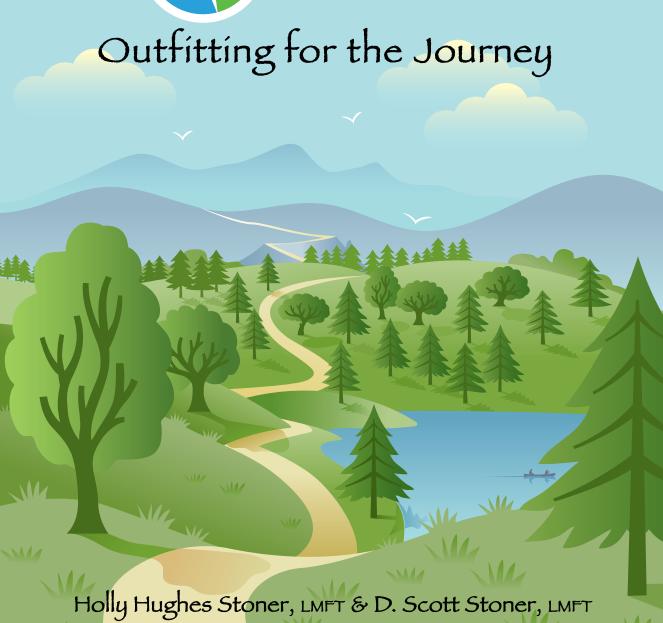
Parent Wellness CMPASS





Outfitting for the Journey

Holly Hughes Stoner, LMFT and D. Scott Stoner, LMFT

We have created a complimentary, downloadable *Companion Journal* pdf to accompany this book.

To find out more and to order: ParentWellnessCompass.org

Find us on the web: ParentWellnessCompass.org

Connect with us on Facebook and Twitter

Questions? Email us: holly@samaritanfamilywellness.org or scott@samaritanfamilywellness.org

We wish to make it clear that this book is educational and inspirational in nature and in no way constitutes mental health advice or therapy. If what you read in this book raises concerns for you that might best be addressed by a mental health professional or parenting expert, we recommend you contact a local family therapist directly or contact your physician for a referral. The website for the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (www.aamft.org) provides a helpful resource for locating a licensed marriage and family therapist in your area. Seeking help when needed is always a sign of strength, and shows healthy commitment both to the well-being of ourselves and our families.

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The Samaritan Family Wellness Foundation—a

foundation committed to supporting and enriching the

well-being of youth, parents, and families—was created

with a generous gift from Ab and Nancy Nicholas. While

Ab passed away in 2016, their generous support continues

to inspire us and make this resource possible.



Contents

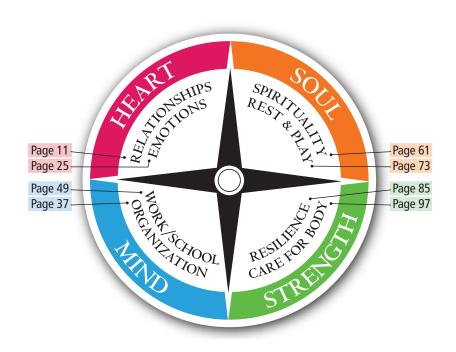
| | Around the Kitchen Table | . 1 |
|-----------|---|-----|
| | The Journey Begins: Finding Our Way in the Wilderness | . 2 |
| | A Compass and a Good Set of Maps | |
| | Who Will Benefit From This Book? | . 3 |
| | Creating a Village of Support | . 4 |
| | Ways To Use This Book | . 5 |
| | Parent Wellness Compass Companion Journal | . 5 |
| | Parent Wellness Compass: A Brief Overview | . 6 |
| | The Four Compass Points | . 6 |
| | Eight Areas of Parent and Family Wellness | . 6 |
| | Making it Personal | . 7 |
| | Listening to the Whispers | . 7 |
| | What is a NEXT Step? | . 8 |
| | How Do I Create a NEXT Step? | . 9 |
| CHAPTER 1 | Healthy Relationships | 1 |
| | Standing In Love | |
| | Voice Training for Parents | |
| | All In the Same Boat | |
| | The Best Time to Start a Conversation | |
| | NEXT Step Worksheets: Healthy Relationships | |

| CHAPTER 2 | Handling Emotions | 25 |
|-----------|---|----|
| | Rethinking Discipline | |
| | Inside Out: Feeling and Expressing the Full Range of Emotions | 28 |
| | Emotional Bank Accounts | |
| | Say What You Mean. Mean What You Say. And Most Importantly Making it Personal | |
| | NEXT Step Worksheets: Handling Emotions | 34 |
| CHAPTER 3 | Organization | 37 |
| | Learning Organization: The Hidden Curriculum | |
| | Organizing Our Family's Priorities | |
| | Do We Manage Our Schedules or Do Our Schedules Manage Us? Making it Personal | |
| | Your Money or Your Life? | 45 |
| | NEXT Step Worksheets: Organization | 46 |
| CHAPTER 4 | Work and School | 49 |
| | Putting Children and Parents in the Growth Zone | |
| | Who's Your Teacher? | |
| | Pay Attention to What You Pay Attention To | |
| | There is No One Who is More Youer Than You | 56 |
| | NEXT Step Worksheets: Work and School | |

| CHAPTER 5 | Spirituality |
|-----------|---|
| | Building a Cathedral62Making it Personal63 |
| | Your Spiritual Root System 64 Making it Personal 65 |
| | When the Student Is Ready, the Teacher Will Appear |
| | The Power of Vulnerability |
| | NEXT Step Worksheets: Spirituality |
| CHAPTER 6 | Rest and Play |
| | Playfulness as an Attitude, Not Just an Activity |
| | The Intersection of Screens and Families |
| | I Love To Watch You Play 78 Making it Personal 79 |
| | I'm Bored! 80 Making it Personal 81 |
| | NEXT Step Worksheets: Rest and Play |
| CHAPTER 7 | Stress Resilience |
| | Gradually, Then Suddenly |
| | The Wisdom of the "J" Curve |
| | The Importance of Timeouts |
| | Learning to Be "Response-able" 92 Making it Personal 93 |
| | NEXT Step Worksheets: Stress Resilience94 |
| CHAPTER 8 | Care for the Body |
| | Our Children Are Always Watching |

Contents viii

| | Me Want It, But Me Wait100Making it Personal101 |
|----|---|
| | Physical Education Teachers102Making it Personal103 |
| | Body Language.104Making it Personal.105 |
| 7 | NEXT Step Worksheets: Care for the Body |
| WJ | here To From Here? |
| | The Journey Continues |
| | What Next? |
| | Parent Wellness Compass Program |
| | A Closing Word of Gratitude |
| | About the Authors |
| | Parent Wellness Compass Companion Journal |



Around the Kitchen Table

If it were possible, we would invite each one of you to come over to our house to sit around our kitchen table. There we'd share a cup of coffee or tea with you as we discussed the joys and challenges of raising a family. We'd offer a conversation about parenting as fellow travelers, as people who have been on this journey of parenthood for over three decades. We would share with you what we have learned about life and about ourselves in the process, and we would be enriched by your sharing the same. We would also share with you some of the wisdom we have learned in our work as marriage and family therapists from the thousands of parents and families who have trusted us with their stories. A great deal of family life happens around the kitchen table, and so it's only fitting to share this as in image of where we would like to sit with each of you as we discuss together what matters most in our lives.

The kitchen table is also a good place to gather with our neighbors and with other parents—a place where we can both offer and receive support. We hope that the reflections in this book can serve as jumping off points for discussions within your family, and with other parents. We hope groups of parents will want to gather together and discuss the ideas presented in this book and how they can best be applied and lived out in their own families.

We gave up long ago any notion that there is such a thing as a perfect parent or a perfect child. What there are instead, are simply real parents with real children in real families who



are all trying to do the best they can. We have discovered that one of the greatest challenges we face as parents is not just raising our children, but raising ourselves into greater maturity. There is nothing like becoming a parent to call forth our own need to grow and mature into the kind of people and role models we want to be for our children.

We, along with our children, are sure to lose our balance or get off course more than a few times, but we will keep picking ourselves up, determined and committed to head in the direction we desire for ourselves and our families. Because, in the end, there is no greater gift in life than the joy and the journey of being a parent and living together as a family.

So, pull up a chair and let's get the conversation started. We are glad you are here.

Holly and Scott Stoner

The Journey Begins: Finding Our Way in the Wilderness

The first time we took our three children on a wilderness canoe trip, our son was thirteen and our twin daughters were ten. We had enjoyed car camping as a family, but this was our first camping trip by canoe. We used the services of a local outfitter to set us up with our canoes, food, and all the necessary camping equipment, including, most importantly, a compass and a good set of maps. We then entered the Boundary Waters Canoe Wilderness Area, located on the border of Northern Minnesota, a wilderness park only accessible by canoe.

It was a windy day and we worried about our canoes capsizing as we crossed the lake to our campsite for the first night. We made it safely across the lake, but as we pulled onto shore and stepped out of the canoes, those of us in the first canoe lost our balance, capsized the boat, and dumped the entire contents of our canoe. There is nothing quite like starting your children's first wilderness canoe trip with half the clothes, food, and sleeping bags soaking wet, but we all persevered.

Trying to put a positive frame around our misadventure, we told our kids that overcoming setbacks was part of the fun of a canoe camping trip. As you can guess, they weren't buying it. Fortunately, there were several hours of sunlight left in the day for us to have fun, and the winds remained high, which allowed most of our things to dry out before bedtime. Hot cocoa and roasted marshmallows around the campfire also worked wonders for our spirits.

That first wilderness canoe trip lasted three days. Over the years, our canoe camping trips became more adventurous and we went on longer trips into the some of the most remote sections of northern Minnesota and the Canadian wilderness of Quetico Provincial Park. We visited places where we saw more moose than people, and where we could drink the water right out of the lake without first filtering or boiling.

Our children are now adults, and we have been blessed to be grandparents to two little boys. We still take canoe camping trips into the Quetico wilderness in northwest Ontario, and are happy to report that it has been several years since we last capsized a canoe. Through the years our canoe trips have changed depending on who comes with us and how challenging a trip we want to take. Some trips have focused primarily on fishing, while others have focused on photography, reading, and just soaking in the spiritual refreshment of the natural world.

And while the trips have changed, one thing has remained constant: We always take a good compass and a good set of maps. There are no marked portages, campsites, or signs of any kind in the two-million-acre Quetico wilderness area, and without a compass and maps, anyone could easily get lost. In fact, on several of these trips, we were asked to assist others who had lost their bearings, weren't sure how to follow their compass, and did not know where they were on the map.

A Compass and a Good Set of Maps

In some ways, raising a family is like an extended journey in the wilderness. We never know exactly what we will encounter. There are always unpredictable challenges in life that can throw us off course, and some of them can be quite dangerous. There is unspeakable beauty and joy around every corner of the journey, as well. For those of us honored to be on this journey of raising a family, there is no greater delight in life.

As families outfit for this journey, encountering both unpredictable challenges and unpredictable beauty, they

encountering both unpredictable challenges and unspeakable beauty, they are wise to always have with them what we always have with us on our canoe trips—a good compass and a good set of maps. This is why we wrote the *Parent Wellness Compass* and this is what we offer you: A compass for parents and families, along with a good set of maps to help you navigate the joys and challenges of family life.



A compass and a set of maps are not substitutes for the journey itself. Just as each person who visits a wilderness will experience their own unique journey, so it is with families. Each of our journeys are unique, and yet all of our journeys will be enhanced by outfitting ourselves with the right tools to help us navigate.

Who Will Benefit From This Book?

Some of the people we think might find this book helpful include:

- **Parents.** And by this we mean *all* parents, regardless of the age of their children: biological parents, step-parents, foster parents, single parents, adoptive parents, and/or parents who are co-parenting with a spouse, ex-spouse, or partner.
- Expectant parents. Many expectant parents attend classes to help them prepare for the birth or arrival of their child. This book offers parents the chance to begin preparing for the social, emotional, and spiritual journey of parenthood that begins the moment their child joins the family.
- **Grandparents, aunt and uncles, and other extended family members.** Today, many extended family members are playing a big role in raising their grandchildren, nephews, and nieces.

Having multiple members of an extended family read this book can be enriching for everyone, and discussions about different approaches to parenting that emerge can help to avoid potential conflicts.

• Educators, parent groups within schools, non-profit leaders, community leaders, faith leaders, mental health providers, and all who work in their local communities with parents and families may find this book to be a valuable resource. Community leaders and organizations have a unique opportunity to create villages of support for parents, children, and families by using resources such as the *Parent Wellness Compass* as a foundation for programming in their communities.

We hope this book will be discovered and used by everyone who can benefit from it.

Creating a Village of Support

Most of us are familiar with the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." We think this concept is so important that we are extending it to parents and families, as well, because we also believe that it takes a village to support a parent and a family. Our families are not meant to live in isolation, separate from one another. All families have a better chance of thriving in the context of community when they can both give and receive support from one another. It seems that in no other area of life is this truer than in family life and parenting.

The paradox, though, is that often when we find ourselves struggling as a parent or family, unsure of what to do next, we pull away from others, trying to hide our struggles from our friends, our families, and others close to us. We once heard a parent say, "In my neighborhood, parenting seems to be a competitive sport. We are all trying to appear as though we have it all together and, sadly, we are all too quick to judge another parent who seems to be struggling." It is sad to us that at a time when parents need the support of a village of other parents, that village is so hard to find. We hope to change that.

Another of our hopes for this book is that parents, along with community organizations that care about parents and families, will use the *Parent Wellness Compass* as a tool for creating supportive villages of parents and other adults. We hope this book will help parents come together to be real with one another as they both seek and provide support for the challenging and rewarding work of parenthood. We hope that because of this book, fewer parents will feel alone with their concerns and worries and will, instead, be a part of a community of parents who care about and support each other in their endeavors to be more intentional about their family's life together. Non-profit organizations that serve families, schools, faith communities, and community centers are natural locations to provide villages of ongoing support for parents. We are discovering that while these villages of support seemed to form more naturally a few generations ago, today they need to be intentionally created.

Ways To Use This Book

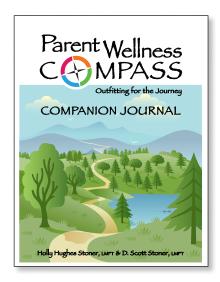
The material is designed to be read carefully and reflectively. Don't rush. Read it slowly at a pace that allows you to pause and reflect on what you are reading, and that gives you time to apply what you are learning.

More important than the pace you choose for reading is the mindset with which you approach this book. We encourage you to approach each reading with intention and purpose. Choose a time and place when you can give the reading your full attention. Setting aside a few minutes to sit and quietly read and reflect on your life as a parent is a gift to you, a gift your family needs and deserves. Additionally, you may want to use a journal (see below) or a notebook to write any thoughts you have as you read the reflections and respond to the questions in each chapter's "Making It Personal" section. These notes may be very helpful weeks and even months down the road.

There is no right way to use this book. You must discover the way that is right for you. Reflections can be reread over time, knowing that each time you read them you will be in a different place on your parenting journey, and they will mean something new to you.

Parent Wellness Compass Companion Journal

If you prefer not to write in this book, or find that you need more space, we have created a companion journal that you can download from our website: ParentWellnessCompass.org. This is a free, interactive, downloadable pdf that you can download and print, or fill out right on your phone, tablet, or computer. This journal contains all of the questions from the "Making it Personal" sections from every chapter, with plenty of writing space following each reflection question. We have also included NEXT Steps worksheet pages that you can use to create NEXT Steps (see following page to learn about NEXT Steps). If you have any questions, please contact us.



Parent Wellness Compass: A Brief Overview

The Four Compass Points

The "Compass" points toward the four dimensions of our being: *heart, soul, strength,* and *mind.* These dimensions are interconnected and our lives are intricately woven together. Much like an ecosystem, each area is affected by the other areas of the compass; therefore, whatever impacts one dimension of our lives (positively or negatively) impacts the other dimensions. A change in one area of our lives impacts the other areas.

Within the four points of the Parent Wellness Compass, we will provide a set of maps for understanding eight areas of family wellness. These maps will help you to better understand yourself as a parent while, at the same time, helping you to better understand your children and your family as a whole.

Eight Areas of Parent and Family Wellness

We are not compartmentalized people. The *Parent Wellness Compass* is based on the premise that parent and family wellness is a multidimensional phenomenon that requires us to take care of and nurture ourselves, and our families, in all eight areas identified on the compass. Here are the eight areas of wellness we address in this book:

- **Relationships.** The ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.
- Handling Emotions. The ability to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy way.

• Organization. The ability to keep track of and make good use of possessions, money, and time.

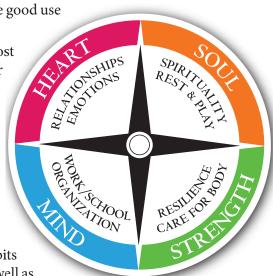
 Work and School. The ability to get the most out of employment, educational, and volunteer opportunities.

• **Spirituality.** The development and practice of a strong personal value system and a meaningful purpose in life.

• Rest and Play. The ability to balance work, school, and play and to renew oneself.

• Stress Resilience. The ability to deal positively with the adversities of life.

• Care for the Body. The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being, as well as the ability to end unhealthy ones.



Making it Personal

Following every reflection in each chapter is a section called, "Making It Personal." Here you will find questions to help you apply the insights from the reflection to your own wellness as a parent and as a family. As important as the information in each reflection is, what matters most is how it relates and applies to *you* and *your* family.

Listening to the Whispers

Whenever our lives get out of balance we get what we call a "whisper"—a small voice inside our head—that tells us that something isn't quite right, that something needs to change. And we are in the best position to listen to the whispers—that we may or may not be hearing—that are telling us that something needs our attention. For example, a whisper could be like any of the following:

- "There have been too many times recently when I don't like the tone of voice I am using with my child."
- "I feel a sense of emptiness, like something is missing in my life."
- "I think the amount of stress in my life is really starting to take a toll on me."
- "Lately I feel distracted by so many different things and feel like I am being pulled in too many different directions."

Yet, as important as the information coming to us as whispers is, that inner voice is easy to ignore. After all, it's only a whisper. When a whisper is ignored, though, it seldom goes away. The usual progression is that the whisper gets louder, and now our inner voice is starting to shout at us. If the shout does not get our attention, then something will usually happen, some negative consequence, so that we can no longer ignore what is happening.



The questions found in each "Making It Per-

sonal" section are designed to help you listen and respond to any whispers you may be hearing, *before* they turn to shouts. These questions are also ideal questions for you to discuss with other parents, be they family, friends, or a group reading this book together.

To support any changes you feel ready to make, we have created a NEXT Step worksheet for each reflection at the end of every chapter.

What is a NEXT Step?

A NEXT Step is just that, the next step you feel ready to take based on a goal you set, inspired by what you learned by reading the reflections, and any whispers you may be hearing. After reading each reflection, you may or may not feel the need to create a NEXT Step. You know better than anyone what you and your family need. We are simply offering an invitation to make a change if you feel the need to do so.

A NEXT Step is based on an acronym that stands for *Needed*, *EXcited*, and *Time-specific*.

Needed means that you have a felt need to take this step. It relates to something you have wanted to do, something you know would be good for you and your family. **Excited** means that you are positively motivated to take this step—you want to take this step, as opposed to being motivated by a feeling that you "should" or "have to" take this step. **Time-specific** means that you will take your step right away or within the next several days. It's the difference between saying, "Someday I'm going to get our morning routines more organized," and "Starting tomorrow, I'm going to get up fifteen minutes earlier than usual and prepare a simple breakfast before the kids get up."

Needed...

... means the step addresses a felt need that you have.

For example: "For several months now I have been feeling the need to set a screen curfew on in our house, a time each school night when all screens are to be turned off."

EX EXcited...

... means the motivation for doing the step is positive—I "want" to do this rather than I "should" or "have to."

For example: "I am looking forward to our having more time to connect as a family, and also everyone getting to bed earlier."

Time-specific . . .

... means I will do my NEXT Step at this time, or within a specific time frame.

For example: "I am going to start the conversation about a nightly screen curfew tonight. We will discuss reasons and work out the details and for this new rule over the next several nights and then we will start the screen curfew Monday."

Sharing your NEXT Steps with one another is a great idea: another parent, a family member, or a friend. If you are reading this book with a group, share your NEXT Steps with each other. You will inspire and learn from each other as you do this, plus you will become a built-in support system for each other as you put your NEXT Steps into practice.

How Do I Create a NEXT Step?

Your journey toward enhanced wellness as a parent, and as a family, happens one step at a time. Research shows that in order to maximize your chances for making positive healthy changes, you need to set a *Goal* for the change you wish to make, and then break down that goal into small, concrete steps. Sharing those concrete steps with, and receiving support from, others is an important element in making and sustaining positive change. This process also involves exploring and identifying both the potential *Obstacles* that could get in your way, and possible *Solutions* that will bring you closer to your goal.

The *NEXT Step* process will help you identify those small, next steps you and/or your family are ready to take to help you reach your goals. Creating a NEXT Step is especially valuable when you are feeling frustrated because it can help you avoid feeling overwhelmed or daunted by the challenge you are facing. Instead, this process allows you to simply focus on the NEXT Step. By taking one step at a time, step-by-step, you will be able to create the change you want.

Area of Wellness: Organization

NEXT Step Worksheet

Parent Wellness CAMPASS

Date:

8/14/17

Reflection: Do We Manage Our Schedules or Do Our Schedules Manage Us?

Goal: Desire to free up more time together as a family.

Needed: We rarely get to share a meal together because of everyone's schedules.

EXcited: We all have been saying how much we enjoyed, and miss, the dinners we used to have.

Time-specific: For the summer, each person can choose one activity to be involved in.

Obstacles: I'll need to get everyone on board. Possible resistance to this suggestion.

Solutions: Have family meetings to discuss ahead of time.

NEXT Step: Schedule a family meeting this weekend to ask everyone in the family to select <u>one</u> activity to be involved in this summer.

(Download additional blank copies of NEXT Step worksheets at parentwellnesscompass.org, or use the Companion Journal.)



Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



10 • • • • • • • • • • Parent Wellness Compass: Outfitting for the Journey

CHAPTER 1

Healthy Relationships

Few things affect the quality of our lives more than the quality of our relationships, especially within our families. Being intentional about

nurturing those relationships is one of the most important investments we can make in our family's happiness and well-being. Everyone knows the benefits we gain from working proactively on our physical wellness. When we exercise and eat well, we have greater strength, flexibility, and a greater overall sense of well-being. The same is also true when we work proactively on our relationships.

This chapter offers an opportunity to pause and think about the quality of the relationships you currently have—with your children, the other parent (if you are co-parenting), and with other members of your family. Even healthy relationships can be enriched, and so we will offer some concrete tools wherever you currently are on the spectrum.

Parents often come to us because they are unhappy with the relational patterns they have with their children and with other family members. They often feel defeated and powerless to affect any change in themselves or others. Yet, no matter how distressed they feel at first, over the years, time and time again, we have learned that there is nothing more exciting than seeing a parent learn a new skill, gain a new perspective, or learn a new way of communicating that positively affects their relationships.

And these are just what you will find in this chapter: ideas, suggestions, and tools designed to strengthen your ability to affect positive change in the relationships within your family. Healthy relationships don't just magically "happen" any more than good health just "happens." Both require an ongoing commitment of time and energy in order to make more positive choices. With a new mindset and new skills, every relationship can be improved.



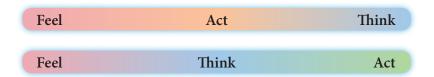
Standing In Love

There is a lot of emphasis on the feelings associated with love and new relationships. Falling in love gets all the attention, whether it is the romantic thrill of falling in love, the indescribable love felt around a newborn baby, the initial delight of making a new friend, or the excitement of starting a dream job. Everything tends to flow freely and easily in the initial stages of a relationship. Over time, however, as the initial "buzz" subsides, it is inevitable that imperfections, conflicts, and challenges will arise. This is when we have to shift our focus from "falling in love" to "standing in love."

What does it mean to stand in love? Most importantly it means that we realize that healthy relationships require conscious and intentional effort to remain strong and vital. Feelings ebb and flow in all relationships, so it is essential to remember that love is not just a feeling. Love is primarily a decision. When an exhausted parent gets up for the third night in a row to care for a sick child, that act of love is as much a decision as it is a feeling. Love is not just a matter of the heart, but also an act of the will. To stand in love means that we are able to remember how important the relationships are in our families, and then to act intentionally in ways that will grow and strengthen those relationships, no matter how we are feeling in any given moment or circumstance.

Standing in love means that we ground our relationships in the core values of trust, integrity, honesty, commitment, generosity, and kindness. We commit to act out of these core values at all times, not just when we feel like it. When our goal is to create loving relationships and to "stand in love," we are choosing to be intentional about how we relate with one another.

The graphic below illustrates a concrete way we can be intentional about allowing the belief that love is primarily a decision and an act of the will to guide us.



The first sequence: $Feel \rightarrow Act \rightarrow Think$ describes a reactive pattern in relationships, which will likely produce conflict, as any overtired parent who has "lost it" with their child well knows. In this pattern, we experience a strong feeling and immediately act or, more accurately, react. Only after hurtful comments or actions have occurred do we think about or realize what we have said or done.

The second sequence is the hallmark of healthy relationships: $Feel \rightarrow Think \rightarrow Act$. Here, when we experience a strong feeling, instead of reacting immediately, we hit our personal "pause" button to stop and think about the action we want to take. We can then choose a response that will both express our feelings *and* honor the relationship with the other person. This style of relating is based on thoughtful responding rather than impulsive reacting, and is a very important tool for building and maintaining loving relationships.

| With practice, we all can improve our relationship skills. One way to do this is to commit to relating out |
|---|
| of the "Feel \rightarrow Think \rightarrow Act" pattern within our families and in all of our relationships. When we com- |
| mit to practicing this, we are committing to "standing in love" and creating healthy relational patterns. |

Making it Personal



Voice Training for Parents

Singers have years of voice training to help them strengthen the capacity, expand the range, and improve the clarity of their voices, which gives them the ability to perform with more clarity and confidence.

It turns out there is another group of people for whom having a clear and confident voice is essential, and that's parents. Every day, parents make decisions—both big and small—about how to respond to their children and, over time, those responses become their voice. Any one interaction may not seem like much in the short run, but in the long run habits form, and our relationships are either strengthened or strained based on these routine interactions. Little things do mean a lot for us as parents.

Four Parenting Voices LOW CONNECTEDNESS HIGH walks the talk stable do what I say, not what I do STRONG accountable rigid skilled aggressive **FAITHful** power struggles delayed gratification know-it-all reliable CONTROLLING/ CONFIDENT/ **AUTOCRATIC** CONSISTENT absolutes quiding assertive fear-based predictable arbitrary "My way or the highway" self-dicipline BOUNDARIES dogmatic clear boundaries intolerant flexible immediate gratification neglectful divided indulgent isolated cold pampering lenient exhausted detached appeasing the child's the boss DETACHED/ PASSIVE/ DISENGAGED **PERMISSIVE** naive spoiling no boundaries or rules roles not clear absent child leads & parent follows disengaged child's friend depressed boundaries unclear

The responses and corresponding relationships we develop over time generally fall into one of four types of parenting voices. These voices are: confident/consistent, controlling/autocratic, passive/permissive, and detached/disengaged. Each of these voice patterns (depicted in the graphic) falls into a different quadrant as it relates to two continuums: connectedness and boundaries. The horizontal axis shows the connectedness continuum, which describes the strength and stability of the emotional bond between parent and child. The vertical axis shows the boundaries continuum, which relates to the expectations and standards that parents communicate to their children.

Research shows that children raised with a confident/consistent voice are more likely to demonstrate strong social skills and high self-confidence. They feel emotionally cared for and know what is expected. These children will usually integrate their parent's confident and consistent manner into their own lives, showing those traits themselves.

Children raised in a controlling/autocratic home may demonstrate high achievement, but show lower self-confidence than might be expected, and they don't necessarily get along well with others. These children may be successful in terms of achievement, but often at the cost of feeling driven to be perfect. Not surprisingly, children raised with this type of parenting are likely to grow up to be controlling and autocratic themselves, and may struggle to form close interpersonal relationships.

Children raised in a passive/permissive home often demonstrate self-confidence, but find it hard to set and reach goals. When these children grow up, they often get frustrated and impatient when they find out that other adults expect more from them than their parents did.

Children raised in a detached/disengaged home will struggle the most with self-confidence, achievement, and social skills. It is very difficult for a child to mature emotionally in an environment where the parents are detached and disengaged. These children will often seek out other adults—teachers, pastors, coaches, or extended family members—for the boundaries and emotional connections that they crave and desire. They may also attempt to fill their emotional needs from the missing parental connection through friends or dating.

Singers gain confidence and strength in their voices through practice and commitment, and parents strengthen their voices in the same way. It is important to note that the voice our parents used with us is likely a part of the voice we use with our own children. And if our children choose to become parents themselves, our voice will become a part of our children's voice with their children. With intention, patience, and perseverance, the effort we make to develop and strengthen a confident/consistent voice will be a gift, not only to our children, but to future generations.

Making it Personal

| Do you recognize one of the four parenting voices described here as your primary voice as a parent? If so, are you comfortable with your voice? |
|---|
| Sometimes parents shift to a less nurturing and effective parenting voice when things are stressful. How does your parenting voice shift when you or your child are stressed? |
| If you are parenting your children with another parent, you may find that you have different parenting voices. This is not uncommon. Talking about parenting voices and being intentional about what message you want to send to your family is important. What could you two do to work more closely together? |
| Can you identify your parent's voice in your voice with your children? Are you satisfied with that? Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now around your voice as a parent? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 21. |

All In the Same Boat

We love to spend time in the wilderness. A few years ago, we were canoeing in Quetico Provincial Park in northwest Ontario, a remote park that is only accessible by canoe. One summer day as it was getting late, we were canoeing across a large lake and looking for our next place to set up camp. We were in the middle of the lake with a fully loaded canoe and were somewhat anxious about finding portage to the next lake. Suddenly, the sky grew dark and the temperature began to drop just as we saw a storm approaching. There was lightening in the distance, and we both knew at that moment that we did not want to be in the middle of a large body of water.

So, what did we do? We did what any two people often do in such a situation. We started to argue. It went something like this. "I told you there was a chance of a storm and that we shouldn't have come out here today!" "Why aren't you paddling harder?" "Don't paddle on the left, paddle on the right!" "Don't you know how to read the map?" "Don't head for that part of the shore—go in this direction!"

After several intense minutes of this, we lapsed into silence, which gave us both a chance to regroup and understand what was going on and to feel our desire to work together to get to safety. Safely on land, we both started to laugh as we realized that we were not mad at each other at all. The storm had scared us so much that we had reacted by turning against each other. The storm was the culprit and yet, in the midst of our stress, we had temporarily made each other the problem.

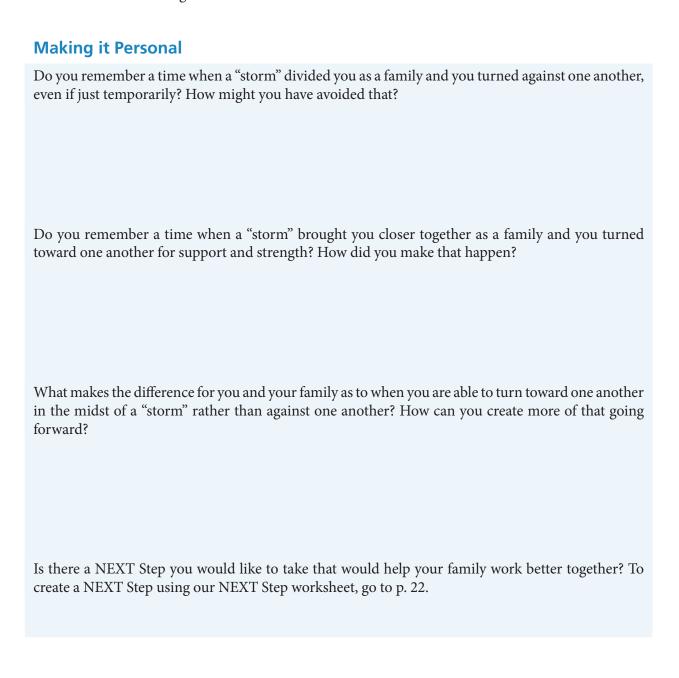
Just as we temporarily turned against each other in the canoe that day, families can do the same when they are going through stormy, stressful times. When we talk with families who are expe-

riencing conflict, one of the first things we ask about is whether there has been a major change or recent stressor. Common "storms" can include work pressure, finances, a recent move, health issues, school problems or pressure, or any kind of abrupt change or loss. Often this turns out to be exactly the case and the family members have an "Aha!" moment that brings immediate relief and understanding about the true source of the stress that they have been feeling. They are then free to refocus their energy toward the stressor, rather than toward each other.

One way we explain this concept to younger children is to use a sports analogy. We ask them, "When is a team more likely to turn on each other and be mean to each other—when



they have won a game or when they have lost a game?" Children quickly understand that if we are not careful, we can easily take out our struggles, worries, or disappointments on each other. What we want to teach and model for our children is that the very time we are most stressed or unhappy is the very moment we need to turn toward one another for support and comfort. As it turns out, that is just what we learned on that Canadian canoe trip; things work better when we remember we are all in the same boat—together.



The Best Time to Start a Conversation

Early in the process of counseling, clients almost always begin by saying something like, "We should have started this conversation years ago. We have known this was a problem for a long time and were hoping if we ignored it, it would simply go away or get better on its own." The "this" to which they are referring is the issue that brought them to counseling. The "this" will vary, but often will be these types of issues: a growing tension or distance in a relationship, unhappiness at work, concern about a drinking or drug problem, issues related to sleep or eating, worry about a child's performance at school or with friends, a health or financial concern that has been ignored, or sometimes even a growing spiritual crisis.

According to a proverb we like to share, "The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago; the second-best time is today." It also seems to be true that the best time for any of us to begin a difficult conversation within our families is several months or years ago, at the moment when we first became aware of a difficulty that needed to be talked about. The second-best time to begin that difficult conversation is today.

An excuse often given for avoiding difficult conversations within families, and one we have heard ourselves say, as well, is some version of, "I just don't want to rock the boat." The interesting thing about this comment is that it is almost always said at a time when the boat is already rocking. "I would prefer not to acknowledge how significantly the boat is rocking," is probably a more accurate statement of what the person, couple, or family is thinking and feeling. In this case, fear is guiding our thinking, and clouding our ability to help our families.

No matter what excuse we may find ourselves using to avoid difficult conversations, the results are almost always the same. The original concern or issue grows when unaddressed, and having the conversation we need to have becomes even

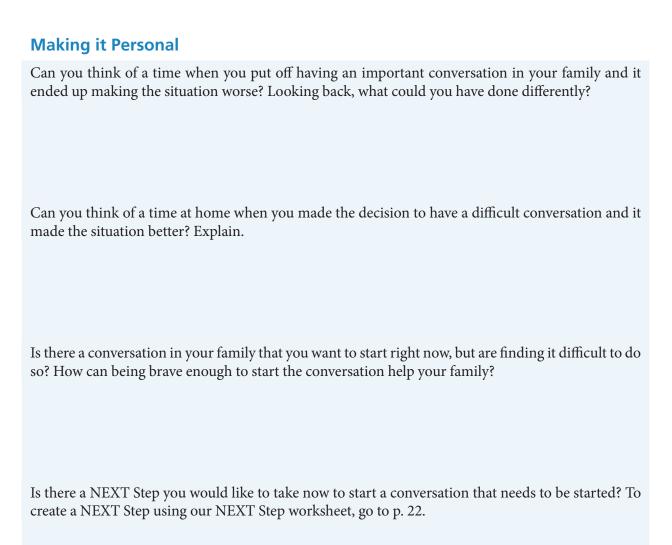


more challenging. Then, quite often, the original concern has the potential to escalate into a problem or crisis, and it is the crisis that requires us to finally have the difficult conversation we have been avoiding.

So why do we avoid difficult conversations? There are, no doubt, many reasons, but we believe one primary reason is that there is great vulnerability when having these conversations. As long as we can avoid a conversation, we can pretend either that there really isn't a problem, or we go unchallenged

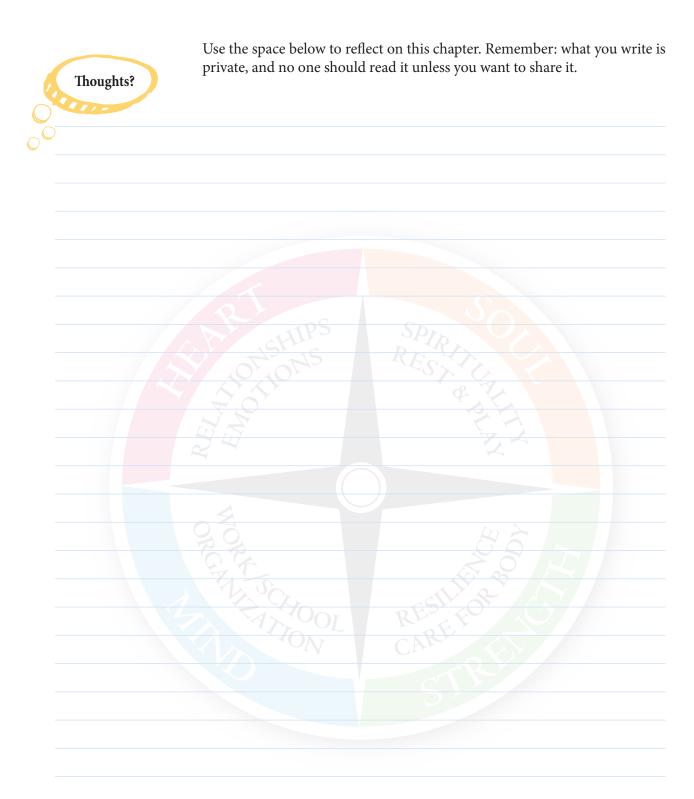
in our belief that we are right and the issue is the fault of someone else. Choosing to have a hard conversation means that we may find out an uncomfortable truth, or that the other person has a considerably different perspective on the issue and that they believe it is we who have some important changes to make.

Significant growth and change requires risk and vulnerability from everyone involved. The good news is that when we are willing to have those difficult conversations, real change, or conversion, can occur. The word conversation, and the word conversion come from the same root words: con, which means "together," and versatio, which means "to turn." This serves as a good reminder that authentic conversations have the capacity to change us.



| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of | Wellness: Healthy Relationships | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
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| Reflection: Standing In Love | | C | Oate: |
| Goal: | | | |
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| | Area o | | CEMPASS |
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| NEXT Step Worksheet Reflection: Voice Training for Parents | Area o | | CEMPASS |
| NEXT Step Worksheet Reflection: Voice Training for Parents Goal: | Area o | | CEMPASS |
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| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area o | of Wellness: Healthy Relationships | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
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| Reflection: All In the Same Boat | | | Date: |
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| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area o | of Wellness: Healthy Relationships | Parent Wellness CMPASS |
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Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



24 • • • • • • • • • • Parent Wellness Compass: Outfitting for the Journey

CHAPTER 2

Handling Emotions

Families constantly find themselves swimming in a sea of emotions. There are the emotions of the parents, the emotions of the children, and the emotions of the family as a whole. Because few things stir up stronger emotions than raising a family, both parents and children feel and deal with the full range of emotions every day.

Just because we experience many emotions doesn't mean that we are dealing with them well. In fact, if we are not mindful, we may find that we are reacting in ways that are habitual and unconscious, often in patterns—good or bad—that we learned from the adults who raised us. We may react emotionally without first thinking.

A commitment to emotional wellness begins with regularly stepping outside of ourselves and our emotions to reflect on how well we are handling our own emotions. Are we able to feel and express the full range of emotions in a way that is constructive? Are we teaching our children to do the same? What are we modeling for our children around emotional wellness?

In this chapter, we will help you answer these questions as you become more aware of some of the qualities of emotional wellness for parents and families. The way we handle our emotions with our children has a direct effect on our children's well-being, and so when we take steps to nurture and strengthen our own emotional wellness, our children benefit, as well.

As with all of the areas of wellness explored in the *Parent Wellness Compass*, we simply are seeking to make progress, not perfection. When you find



yourself overwhelmed by the emotional challenges of raising a family, know that you are not alone. We will provide concrete tools that will help you feel more confident in managing your emotions, as well as those of your children, and to help you to be a good role model in this area of your life together.

Rethinking Discipline

Years ago, Holly was involved in a discussion with some fellow teachers about how to handle student misbehavior. The discussion turned into a debate over which punishments would be most effective for certain recurring offenses. One teacher wisely pointed out that their primary job as educators was to teach, which is what discipline really means. In fact, she explained, the word "discipline" comes directly from the Latin word *disciplina*, which means "instruction given, teaching, learning, and knowledge." This meaning was new to many of the teachers and this increased awareness began to shift their thinking.

In the end, the group agreed that their real goal was to teach the children to be self-disciplined and this meant more emphasis on instruction, and less on punishment. They decided as a staff to switch their thinking and discussion from what punishments were most appropriate to how they could best teach their students the following: the rules, why they were important, what good behavior looked like, and

how they could be successful by following the rules. The teachers, of course, would still have consequences for misbehavior, but their main energy would go into teaching positive behavior. That shift in thinking was very helpful for Holly as a teacher, and for us both as parents.

Somewhere along the way—to almost everyone: teachers, parents, and to most of the world—discipline came to mean "to punish." In the history of child-rearing, this was the norm. When a child did something wrong, they were



punished with the hope that they would learn not to (or be afraid to) repeat the undesirable behavior. Thus, over time, many began to think the words were synonymous. Unfortunately, there were unintended negative consequences for thinking this way. Children withdrew from adults out of fear; they did not see adults as people to whom they could turn when they needed help. And, they did not learn what *to do* instead of what *not to do*.

Today we know so much more about children and what is positive and healthy for them. We know that children need respectful guidance, as well as to be loved and nurtured, to thrive, and they need boundaries to keep them safe. And they also need discipline. They need to be taught a million different things in order to live safely in the world, and they will learn best when they are taught what to

do, rather than merely how to avoid being punished. With this new understanding of discipline in mind, following are some key skills that we have learned through the years that we think are wise to develop in order to effectively teach/discipline our children.

Watch for opportunities to teach; they are everywhere. It is helpful to think of the difficult moments with your children as teachable moments. These opportunities can come up anywhere, including challenges at school, difficulties in sports or other activities, relationship struggles with other children, or relationship issues with family members. We want to talk with our children about what they can learn from these experiences, and encourage them to consider better ways to handle similar situations going forward.

Talk with your children when both you and they are calm about your beliefs and expectations and why they are important to you. Talking calmly about what matters to you early on creates an optimal environment in which to cultivate trust, and to teach through thoughtful and honest conversation. This will save many headaches and heartaches down the road when you need to rely on the bonds and understanding you have already established with your children.

Be a disciplined disciplinarian. Do not attempt to discipline when you are emotionally flooded. Call a timeout for yourself when needed, and then re-engage with your children. This way your teaching will be consistent and responsive, rather than impulsive and reactive. When you make a mistake, apologize. This is one of the most powerful ways you can model for your children how to learn and grow in a healthy way.

Making it Personal

How could a shift in thinking about discipline influence the way you deal with a particular unwanted behavior you are seeing in your children? Be specific.

What teachable moments have you already taken advantage of? Give some examples.

Initially, teaching can take more time and intention than punishing. What benefits can you see for you as a parent, and for your children, if you take the time to teach right behavior rather than simply punishing misbehavior?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now in the way you approach discipline? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 34.

Inside Out: Feeling and Expressing the Full Range of Emotions

Imagine your emotions existing on a continuum, or a scale from zero to ten. Think of the emotions on the bottom end of the scale, zero to five, as the difficult or unpleasant emotions, such as fear, worry, anger, and sadness. Now think of the emotions at the top end of the scale, six to ten, as the pleasurable emotions, such as joy, laughter, love, and excitement. Right in the middle, at number five, is considered the neutral point, where we don't really feel much of anything, pleasant or unpleasant.

Here is an important insight: There is a strong connection between the degree to which we are comfortable feeling and expressing unpleasant emotions, and the degree to which we feel and express pleasurable emotions. Difficulty feeling and/or appropriately expressing unpleasant feelings

usually means we will, perhaps surprisingly, have difficulty feeling and expressing positive feelings. While we know that we all have the full range of emotions, it is when we either tamp feelings down or let them explode that we get into trouble.

The best example we have of those who are comfortable expressing the full range of emotions is young children. Observe them at a playground: one moment they are shrieking with delight as they come down the slide, and the next moment they are sobbing loudly because they have fallen and skinned a knee. A moment later and



we might see them angry at a child who will not share, and in another moment hugging that same child. It is easy and natural for children to live into all of their emotions.

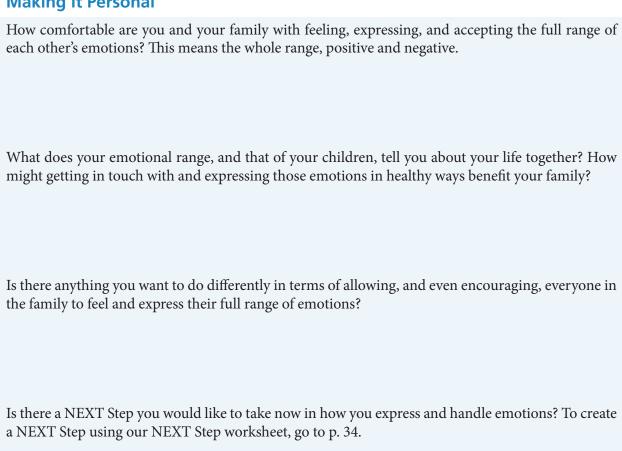
There is a wonderful animated movie from Pixar, *Inside Out*, that depicts a young girl learning to handle the full range of her emotions. Eleven-year-old Riley is having a hard time when her family uproots itself from Minnesota and moves to California because of her father's new job. Riley becomes quite sad and angry because she misses her friends, school, and hockey team back in the Midwest. Riley's well-meaning parents don't like seeing her upset and so they repeatedly encourage her to "focus on the positive" and try to act happy even when she is not feeling that way on the inside.

The brilliance of this film is its portrayal of Riley's inner emotional life. Through the magic of animation, we are able to "see" inside Riley's brain where five characters representing five emotions—Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust—take turns controlling the "keyboard" of Riley's brain. Riley's

parents want Joy to be her prominent emotion and Riley clearly wants to please her parents. So we see Joy doing everything she can to control and stifle all the other emotions, especially Sadness, so that Riley experiences only joy. Of course, this doesn't work and, in the end, it is only when Joy accepts and welcomes the presence of Sadness that healing occurs, and Riley begins to accept, adjust, and embrace her new life.

Inside Out reminds us that all of our emotions are important and need to be heard and accepted, because all of them serve to tell us something important about our world. Our emotional well-being will be enhanced when we allow ourselves to both feel and express the full range of our emotions in healthy ways. Our sense of well-being will be diminished when we try to block or deny any of our emotions. It is important to remember that allowing the expression of all of our emotions brings openness and provides space for connectedness, healing, and growth.

Making it Personal



Emotional Bank Accounts

When you make a deposit in your checking or savings account, you receive a receipt that shows the current balance of your account. You can also go online and check the current balance of any accounts you have. If you have been making more deposits than withdrawals, then your balance will grow, but if the withdrawals are outpacing the deposits, the balance will decrease and could even become overdrawn.

The relationship between deposits and withdrawals is a principle at the core of the idea of emotional bank accounts, and an idea that is very helpful and important for parents and families to understand. Stephen Covey introduced this idea in his business book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and we find it to be a helpful concept in maintaining emotional wellness in families, as well.

Think of your children as each having an emotional bank account. One of the most significant ways you can enhance a child's well-being and your relationship with that child is to make regular deposits in their emotional account. Deposits are positive things we do to let a child know we care.

A deposit could be a kind word, a promise kept, a loving action, a gentle touch, a meaningful gift, a special meal, or quality time spent together. Making a deposit in your child's emotional bank account makes them feel special and helps strengthen your relationship with them.

Of course, there are times when we need to critique our child, or allow them to deal with the consequences of dangerous or undesirable behavior. When we do this, our child might very well see this as negative and experience it as a withdrawal from their emotional bank account. We also make withdrawals when we lose control and say or do things that we regret. This, however,

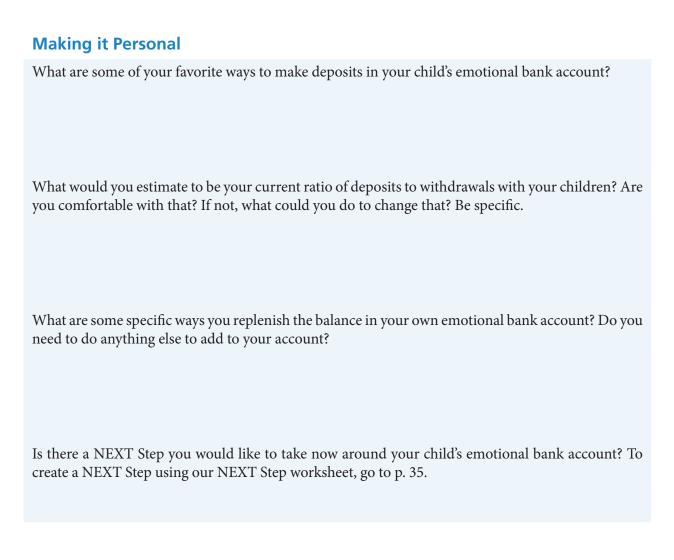


won't turn into a lasting problem if we are willing to apologize and also make plenty of regular deposits. These deposits can be showing love and concern, listening to feelings, and enjoying our child's company on a regular basis. Deposits will usually more than cover the withdrawals if they are regular and sincere. If, however, we have not been making adequate deposits, we run the risk of "overdrawing" the relationship account with our child and, over time, could potentially bankrupt the relationship.

We'd like to offer one important guideline suggestion when it comes to a child's emotional bank account. To create a healthy, thriving connection between parent and child, a ratio of five deposits for every one withdrawal is recommended. If we maintain a five-to-one ratio of deposits-to-withdrawals in our relationship with our children, both our relationship and our children will have a better chance of thriving. This ratio holds true for children of all ages, so never underestimate how much our teens need us to

make deposits in their emotional accounts, too. We may not be able to hug them as easily or as often as when they were little, but we can still embrace them every day with our words of love and appreciation.

Children are not the only people with emotional bank accounts. Parents have them, too, and an essential aspect of wellness for parents is being sure that they are paying attention to the current balance of their own accounts. It is nearly impossible to give to our children what we ourselves do not have. There is a saying, "You can't pour from an empty cup." If we are not proactively caring for our own emotional well-being, we are vulnerable to turning to our children in hopes of getting deposits from them, or blaming our children if we are overdrawn. While our children clearly bring much joy and love into our lives, it is not their role to take care of our emotional wellness, nor is it our children's fault if our cups are empty. It is our role to care for our children's emotional wellness and to work to build a healthy emotional environment in our homes.



Say What You Mean. Mean What You Say. And Most Importantly . . .

Good communication is a key indicator of, and a key factor in, creating strong emotional and relational wellness, and so it should be no surprise that it is vital in family wellness, too. One piece of communication advice that we feel is particularly helpful is: "Say what you mean and mean what you say." A few years ago, we learned a third phrase to add to this already great advice: "Don't say it mean."

"Say what you mean. Mean what you say. Don't say it mean." There is much wisdom for parents and families in those three short sentences. Like a lot of great sayings, it takes a moment to memorize, but a lifetime to master. We feel this sums up a healthy approach to discipline: the need to be clear and consistent with the boundaries we create for our children while, at the same time, being respectful and keeping a consistent emotional connection with them. Let's further reflect on this sage advice.

"Say what you mean" captures the importance of communicating boundaries and expectations to our children. Discussing family rules and expectations with our children gives us a great opportunity to connect these boundaries and expectations with our core values and beliefs. It is in everyone's best interest to confidently and consistently say what we mean when it comes to sharing with our children what matters most.

"Mean what you say" speaks to another key aspect of effective parenting: parents need to "walk the talk." It would not be effective, for example, for a parent to tell their child to express anger in a respectful manner if that same parent "goes off" in an angry tirade against the child or anyone else. This type of behavior is confusing to the child and undermines any potential lesson. The best way to teach our core values and beliefs is to pattern our lives in such a way that others can see our values through our words and actions.



"Don't say it mean" often is the most difficult advice for many of us to follow. Somewhere along the line, it seems we got the idea that we could increase our power by raising our voices in anger. Yet, we now know that attempting to increase our power by raising our voices actually has the opposite effect: the loss of both power and respect. When we yell at our children, they may feel shame and humiliation and, over time, will gradually stop listening. It is never appropriate for us to shame or humiliate our children, as it tears down self-esteem and hurts the relationship. When we find ourselves emotionally

flooded as a parent, it is wise to call a timeout, and wait until we are sure we won't say or do something we'll later regret. When we have calmed down, we are better able to "say what we mean, mean what we say, and not say it mean."

It takes a lifetime to master this wisdom. Any of us, at times, can and will "say it mean." It happens and so we need to be careful not to shame or humiliate ourselves. We simply need to apologize, learn from what happened, and grow from the experience. And this is exactly what we want to model for our children.

Making it Personal

| Which of these three sentences do you find hardest to do right now: |
|--|
| \square Say what you mean. \square Mean what you say. \square Don't say it mean. |
| When was the last time you "said it mean"? What happened? What did you, or can you, learn from that experience? |
| |
| Teaching this saying to others in your family and committing to practicing it together could create more positive emotions in your home. How might that change the emotional tone in your house? |
| Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now in how you speak to your child? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 35. |

| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Handling Emotions | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
|--|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Reflection: Rethinking Discipline | C | ate: |
| Goal: | | |
| Needed: | | |
| EXcited: | | |
| Time-specific: | | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: | |
| NEXT Step: | | |
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| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Handling Emotions | C@MPASS |
| Reflection: Inside Out: Feeling and Expressing the | Full Range of Emotions | ate: |
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Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



36 • • • • • • • • • Parent Wellness Compass: Outfitting for the Journey

CHAPTER 3

Organization

The area of *Organization* in the *Parent Wellness Compass* focuses on how we organize our schedules, money, and priorities in our families. **The holistic**

approach to wellness taught in this book emphasizes that all eight areas are interconnected. For example, we know that being disorganized can be a cause and a symptom of stress, or of relationship trouble, or can result in a lack of time for rest and play. We see this both in our lives as adults, and in the lives of our children.

One of the themes running throughout this book is the importance of raising our families with intention and purpose. These values are so important because our children are watching us, and learning from us how to organize their lives, spend their time, spend, share and save money, and how to determine priorities. As parents, we serve as a model and a compass for our children and how we organize our time, money, and priorities will have a strong influence on them.

Stress arises in many families when they allow outside pressures to influence their decisions about how to organize time, money, and priorities. Of course, sometimes this is unavoidable, such as when an unexpected crisis happens that affects everyone. It is also common for families

to find themselves overextended because they have agreed to too many time and/or financial commitments. The cumulative effect of overcommitting creates a burden on the family to stay organized and centered.

The information and examples in this chapter are meant to encourage families to remember that more is not always better, and that learning to be more intentional about organizing our priorities will go a long way toward enhancing the well-being of each member of the family.



Learning Organization: The Hidden Curriculum

Many years ago when teaching kindergarten, Holly discovered that with children that young, much of her time was spent helping to teach them the discipline of cleaning up after themselves, and of keeping track of their things. She kept the coat room organized so that each child had a specific hook for hanging their coat, and a place to put their boots, hat, and backpack. Keeping things organized was truly a group effort.

Every day during playtime, the children got out blocks, paints, and other toys and played to their hearts' content. Then came time for everyone to pitch in and clean up, which was a large part of the kindergarten "hidden" curriculum. The children learned that if everyone helped clean up, they could walk around without stepping on toys, find things more easily the next time they wanted something, and could move on more quickly to other fun activities.

She loved working alongside her students as they straightened up the room because she knew that—above and beyond the obvious positives they noticed—the children were learning an important lesson about being responsible. She saw a strong connection between young children learning to be organized and learning to care responsibly for their own things, as well as those of others.

Holly knew that being responsible and organized was key to a child's success, both in school, and eventually in the workplace and in the larger world. When children learned to take responsibility for cleaning up and keep-

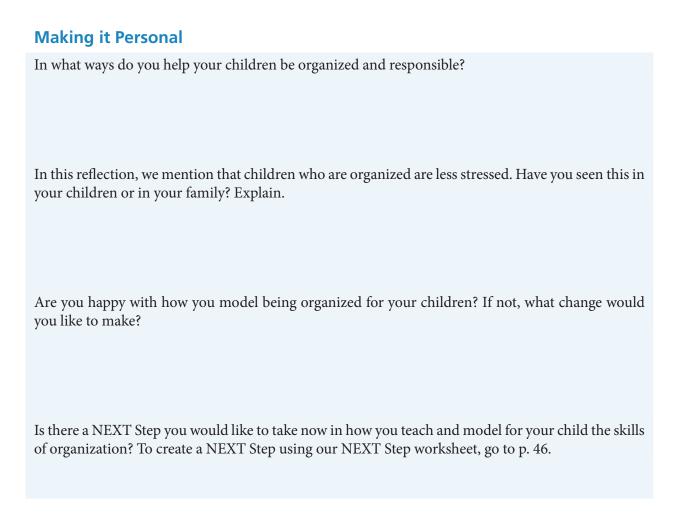
ing their things in order, she noticed that they tended to set goals, plan ahead, get things done, be careful with their things and, ultimately, they experienced less stress. It also created more time for fun.

Developing these positive habits was important for success at all levels of school and life. This was verified years later when she taught high school and again saw how essential having good organizational skills and being responsible were for the students. She invested time teaching her students how to get and remain organized, but now at a more advanced level. Being organized doesn't always directly correlate to greater learning and success, but it is nearly impossible to have the latter without the former.

As in the classroom, teaching responsibility and organization is an important "hidden curriculum" for parents, as well. Yet, in order for them to really stick, organizational skills need to be taught consistently

and then reinforced over time. We can't assume that our children—no matter what their age or how smart we think they are—know how to get or stay organized, so we need to both teach them and practice consistently ourselves. We also need to give positive support and reinforcement, and to have a lot of patience. Yet, we can trust that the time we devote to helping our children learn the skill of caring for and organizing their things and their time will be well worth the effort in the long run.

"Practicing what we preach" is as important here as in any other part of life because our children learn as much from us by listening to our words as they do by observing how we live. If our children see us taking care of our things, keeping things orderly, and being on time, they will learn that this is important. If Holly, as a teacher, was unorganized and kept her desk piled high with papers and books, allowed clutter in the classroom, and was always running late, her students would have picked up on that and would not have respected her efforts to help them be organized. Setting an example was her first step in teaching them to value organization.



Organizing Our Family's Priorities

A story is told about a nonprofit that conducted a phone survey of parents, asking them to rate on a scale of one to ten how important was being a good and loving parent. They asked one particular man and he replied, "I don't think I am the best person to answer that question. I will go and get one of my children and you can ask them because they would know best."

This wise man realized that he could say whatever he wanted to the surveyors and they would have no way of knowing if being a loving parent was truly a priority for him. By telling them to speak to one of his children, he was holding himself to a higher standard. His children would know whether or not his actions and decisions consistently demonstrated that being a thoughtful and loving parent was a high priority.

This story is illuminating for us as we reflect on the ways we order priorities, in our lives and in our families. It is one thing to say that family is one of our most important priorities; it is another thing to reflect that priority in our day-to-day choices. If asked if our family priorities are aligned with our deepest values and beliefs, we need to pause and reflect on our lived reality. We need to consider

honestly how we order our lives, not just how we think about, or say we order our priorities. We need to be real with ourselves and, if our children are old enough, to involve them in the conversation.

The word "prior" refers to that which comes first or before. This definition makes it clear that when we talk about family priorities, we are talking about those things that are of first or utmost importance in our families. How are we doing with putting each other first? Our home? Our jobs? School? Activities? Community involvement?



Friends and neighbors? Extended family? Connection with a faith community? Often without even realizing it, every family defines who is it by the way they order their priorities. They reveal what is most important, both in short- and long-term decisions, day in and day out.

In his book, *The Leadership Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*, Patrick Lencioni, a well-respected author of several books on leadership, talks about the difference between the core values and aspirational values of an organization. Core values are the actual values of an

organization that guide its finances, staffing, sales, marketing, and all operating decisions. The core values serve as a compass for all other decisions within the organization. Aspirational values, on the other hand, are values that an organization aspires to live into, but have not yet accomplished.

Families are organizations, too, and also have a mixture of core values and aspirational values. For example, a family may have an aspirational value of having a sit-down family dinner four nights a week. While the children hear their parents say that this is a strong value, the lived reality is that the busy schedules the family has developed over time do not honor this value. Here we would say that this family has an aspirational value of having regular family dinners together that has not yet become a core value. We can learn much about the core values of a family by observing how the parents let everyone spend their time, handle their money, and care for their possessions. What is less obvious are a family's aspirational values.

To honor and live into shared values as a family, it is wise to have regular parental discussions, and also to have family meetings to discuss and make clear the values that the parents identify for their family. With thoughtful discussions about these important topics, any family can make wise decisions and feel good about where they are headed. And as a bonus, everyone will also learn the important skills of careful listening, problem-solving, and learning to respect differences.

Making it Personal

What would your children say takes priority or comes first in your family? Are you comfortable with that? Asking them might be helpful.

What are a few core values of your family? What are a few values that you aspire to? Do you have any aspirational values that you would like to turn into core values? How might you do that?

Have you ever had a sit-down family conversation about values and priorities? What might the value of such a conversation be in terms of organizing your family's time, money, and possessions?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now in the way you organize your priorities and those of your family? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 46.

Do We Manage Our Schedules or Do Our Schedules Manage Us?

Have you ever felt overwhelmed by all the things you have to do? The answer for most people, especially parents, is, "of course!" While it may seem like we don't have much of a choice but to be overwhelmed by life's demands, author Greg McKeown believes otherwise. McKeown is the author of *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*, a thoughtful book for busy people and families. The following questions come from a promotional web page for this book. If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, you might find this book helpful.

- Have you ever found yourself stretched too thin?
- Are you often busy but not productive?
- Do you feel like your time is constantly being hijacked by other people's agendas?

This is not another book about organizing time, money, or stuff. It is a book about organizing our priorities, about deciding what in our life is essential and life-giving. According to McKeown, organizing our priorities requires us to focus our energy on determining what is most essential to us and doing only those things. The following from the book helps make this point.

"Essentialism is not about how to get more things done; it's about how to get the right things done."



This, then, is the real question. What are the right things to get done? Each parent, each family, has to answer this for themselves. Of course there are many things that must be done on a regular basis to keep a family running: laundry, grocery shopping, jobs, meal preparation and clean up, baths and bedtime rituals, homework, paying the bills, and cleaning the house, to name a few. All of these tasks are necessary, but many of the other things we do are not mandatory, and so we must examine those things and decide if they are right for us. How do our extracurricular activities fit in? Are they enhancing our lives or are they stretching us too thin? Which of our other activities truly enhance our lives, and which ones drain time and energy away from what matters most?

I don't know about you and your family, but in the past, we have been prone to saying "yes" to too many activities, making commitments, and then finding it challenging to fulfill all of them well. We

have had a habit of doing this in both our professional and family lives. And we are happy to report that we have been intentionally practicing essentialism for over a year now and are getting much better at saying "yes" to the things that matter most in our life. This also means that we are getting better at saying "no," which may be the hardest part of the disciplined pursuit of less because we know we will disappoint others. As a result of our doing less, we are finding that we have renewed energy and are more fully present for the things we do commit to doing.

The easiest part of reading any self-help book is just that, reading it. The hard part always lies in the disciplined application of the important truths that the book contains. We appreciate the fact that the subtitle of McKeown's book is, *The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*. He is well aware that reading his book will make little difference if it does not lead to disciplined action by its readers, and that doing less is something we can work toward and pursue over time. The reward for families who commit to the hard work of doing less is frequently less stress, more time together, and more time to rest and renew themselves. These, and many other benefits, make it well worth the effort it takes to implement needed changes.

Remembering that the word "discipline" means "to teach" reminds us that this counter-cultural practice of the "disciplined pursuit of less" is something that we will need to teach and re-teach ourselves—and our families—on a regular basis.

Making it Personal

Do you think your family ever does too much for its own good? What contributes to that feeling?

What would you like to eliminate in order to practice the "disciplined pursuit of less"? What could you say "no" to?

How might doing less help your family be healthier and happier?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now around your schedule and/or the schedule for your family? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 47.

Your Money or Your Life?

A popular cultural assumption about money is that there is a positive correlation between happiness and money, that money = happiness. Left unexamined, this assumption can create great stress for us and for our families. Many people are surprised to discover that research on this topic reveals that once a family's basic security needs are met for food, shelter, healthcare, and safety, there is no direct correlation between how much money they have and the degree of self-reported happiness they experience. As parents, it is good for us to explore how much we have bought into the assumption that money and happiness are connected, and to examine the stress this assumption may be causing us.

The lack of correlation between money and happiness (after basic needs are met) runs counter to what we are taught to believe by our consumer-driven culture. We have been led to believe that greater happiness is tied to greater financial resources and the accumulation of possessions. Parents and families around the world have a variety of financial mindsets—some that are life-giving and some that are not, some that bring happiness, and some that do not. Each parent must decide for themselves whether or not the relationship with money they are modeling for their family is serving them well.

We need to examine what our children are learning about money and the role it plays in their lives. Teaching them to respect what money can do is important as they learn to save it, spend it, and share it with others. Helping your children keep these three things in mind and find the right balance between them will help them grow up with a healthy relationship with money.



In our work with families, we find that there are a few primary areas of stress related to money that seem universal. The first is when a family gets caught up in the consumerism of our culture, stuck on the treadmill of always wanting and thinking they need to have more, not realizing the toll this is taking on their family's overall well-being. We have worked with many families who, when they finally reach a state of exhaustion from trying to have more, are able to come together and make some new, simpler choices. They begin making conscious choices, sometimes bold new choices, around money by using a different compass, a guide that is healthier for everyone in the family.

Another area of stress that we see in families regarding finances is the difficulty in communicating effectively about money. Money is a sensitive topic because it often brings up all kinds of issues that

are related to values. When adults in a family have different values, it takes listening empathically, being honest about feelings toward the spending, saving, and sharing of money, and being patient and respectful toward each another as they discuss their differing ideas. It is important to practice these good communication tools regarding finances on a regular and proactive basis, and not wait until trouble arises. Weekly, monthly, and annual family discussions, regardless of children's ages, about budgeting, saving, and how much to share with others through charitable giving, are helpful to maintain financial wellness in the family.

The education that we provide our children regarding money is largely influenced by the behaviors and mindset that we model in our own lives around the role and importance of money and possessions. We invite you to take time regularly to examine your own relationship with money and decide if you think it is life-giving for you and for your family. As with all other areas of wellness, the behaviors we model speak much more clearly than anything we say.

Making it Personal

Have you or your children ever become wound up in the "we don't have enough" mindset when, in reality, you did have enough?

Every family seems to have some stress around money. How does your family's relationship with money cause you stress? How comfortable are you talking about it?

Saving, spending, and sharing are three things you can do with your money, individually and as a family. Do you feel like your family has the right balance between these three?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now regarding the ways you and your children think about and/or use money? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 47.

| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Organization | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
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| Reflection: Learning Organization: The Hidden Curri | culum | ate: |
| Goal: | | |
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| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Organization | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
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| | | COMPASS |
| Reflection: Organizing Our Family's Priorities | | COMPASS |
| Reflection: Organizing Our Family's Priorities Goal: | | COMPASS |
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| Reflection: Your Money or Your Life? | | Parent Wellness CMPASS Date: |
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Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



48 • • • • • • • • • Parent Wellness Compass: Outfitting for the Journey

CHAPTER 4

Work and School

Any educator will tell you that children do best at school when there is a strong alliance between school and home. When parents support and

reinforce what children are learning at school, everyone benefits. Both school and home go better when the other is honored and respected. Creating a strong alliance between parents, children, and educators is essential for our children's well-being. And it is still important for parents of older children and teens to continue to stay involved and available to help them negotiate the increasing stress they face to perform academically, fit in socially, figure out the world of peer relationships, and navigate the dizzying array of increasingly greater expectations everywhere they go.

We have included work in this section as everyone in the family has a role to play and work to do: adults at their place of employment and/or at home, teens at school and often work, and children at school and/or at home. Acknowledging and honoring these roles are important for the well-being of the whole family. The challenge is how to balance all of these roles and responsibilities.

When our son was three, Scott was outside painting when he fell off a ladder and into some bushes. Our son rushed over and asked him what happened. Scott explained that he had lost his balance. A

few minutes later, he saw our son looking around under the bushes. When Scott asked him what he was doing, he said, "I'm looking for your balance, Dad!"

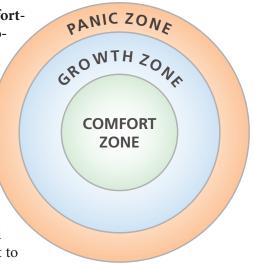
Wouldn't it be nice if someone could actually help us find our balance between work, school, family, and the rest of life simply by looking under a bush? Instead, balancing the demands of work and school for our families is an ongoing process. The ideas presented in this chapter are meant to serve as a guide to help us as parents in our search to find the balance that is right for us and for our families.



Putting Children and Parents in the Growth Zone

All personal growth involves being willing to be uncomfortable as we move out of our Comfort Zone in order to promote and allow for growth, but not so far that it causes us to move into the Panic Zone. This process is true for parents, and children, too, no matter their age.

As we help our children grow through the school years—preschool through high school and beyond—many of us will find this concept of the three zones quite helpful. All children will face myriad challenges during their school years. These challenges may include academic, social, emotional, and/or physical. Add to this extracurricular activities of all kinds, and our children need even more of our thoughtful guidance and careful support to help them learn and grow.



This is where parenting becomes an art. There are no hard and fast rules about when it is helpful to encourage our children to try reading a more difficult book, to go away to camp, or to try out for a school production or team. We always need to balance what we know about our individual children and their strengths and vulnerabilities, and what experiences we think will benefit them. For example, it is an art to know the difference between when a mediocre grade demonstrates an honest best effort, when it is an indicator that our child needs extra support, or when our child is disengaged for some reason. It is also an art to figure out how best to help them.

All of these situations are opportunities to help our children move into the growth zone. The tricky part is doing this with care and empathy without moving them into the panic zone and possibly creating more stress. We need to recognize when they are stuck in a comfort zone, one that could be potentially unhealthy for them in the long run, and what could help them choose to move into a growth zone without tipping over into the panic zone. It is our job to help our children leave comfort zones behind, trusting that it will be worth their while if they are willing to risk the initial discomfort as they move into the growth zone. The growth zone is where learning happens and where we want to encourage our children to live.

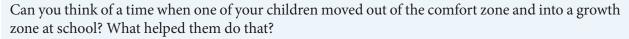
These three zones are equally helpful for parents. It is wise for parents to move into growth zones as often as possible to learn new and effective skills to respond to ever-new issues at home, at work, and in the world.

Imagine a parent who is very uncomfortable talking to their teen about sensitive topics, such as drugs, alcohol, or sexuality. Such a parent might be tempted to stay in their comfort zone and avoid such

discussions, or overreact out of anxiety and enter the panic zone when they can no longer be silent on these issues. Wise parents put themselves in the growth zone in all parts of their lives by seeking out trusted resources, such as other parents, books, and programs to help prepare themselves for situations they consider challenging.

Parents who regularly move out of comfort zones and into growth zones, while avoiding panic zones, serve as ideal models for their children. Actions really do speak louder than words. Yet words are also very important. Talking with your family about these three zones can be empowering to everyone because it provides a common language when discussing challenges that inevitably come up in all areas of family life.

Making it Personal



What might be a sign that your child is stuck in an unhealthy comfort zone that impacts his or her school life? What about a panic zone? What could you do to encourage them to move from that zone into the growth zone?

Is there an area in your life right now where you would like to move out of the comfort or panic zones and into the growth zone? What could help you make this move?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now to help yourself, your child, or your family move into a growth zone? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 58.

Who's Your Teacher?

When children head back to school toward the end of summer, there is one question commonly on their minds: "Who will my teacher or teachers be this year?" Parents hope that their children get teachers they like, teachers who will understand and connect with them. They know that their child's teachers will have a big impact on everyone's school year. We would like to invite you to reflect on this same question, "Who's Your Teacher?" as both an adult and as a parent.

As adults, we may no longer formally attend school, but we will always continue to learn. Life is our classroom and the lessons all around us are limitless. We learn about life and people at work, in our communities, and from our families. We learn what is healthy and life-giving and what is not through our

connections and what happens in these places. As you reflect on your own life right now, who or what are you learning from, and what is influencing you? There is an old saying that when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. What, in life, do you think you need to learn more about right now? From whom could you learn that?

In this classroom called "Life," we are all lifelong learners, and we are all teachers. We turn to our friends, family members,



colleagues, religious leaders, coaches, therapists, and others, to be our teachers. Along the way, others may turn to us to be their teachers, as well. The way we live our lives also teaches our children a great deal about what we value most in life.

We often turn to someone with particular experience to be our teacher. Often this is someone who has already been where we are going or has been doing the job longer than we have. Parents often turn to other parents, especially those with more experience, to learn from their wisdom. People who want to learn yoga will find a yoga teacher and/or a class from which to learn. People wanting to deepen their spiritual life turn to a spiritual leader and/or spiritual community to teach them. And people often turn to leaders in their line of work or place of employment to learn more. Turning to others to learn is a good practice to have for both children and adults.

When we were school children we did not have a great deal of say about who our teachers were, but as adults, we get to choose our teachers. Will it be our modern culture, ancient wisdom texts, the way

we were brought up, nature, our children, a combination of these, or something else? Choosing our teachers carefully is very important, and just as important is being humble enough to acknowledge that there is always more for us to learn.

All parents graduated from a school of parenting: our childhood home. We did not get to choose the school of parenting that we attended, the one that taught us how adults and children behave. We may have learned positive lessons and habits, ones that we want to carry on in our own parenting, or we may have learned things that we do not want to repeat with our children. Most likely we have learned some of both. No matter how much we know about effective parenting, there is always more to learn when it comes to the subject of raising our children.

We play many roles in the lives of our children, most especially that of teacher. Our children will have many teachers in their lives, but none more important than us as their parents. In a sense, every child is home-schooled, learning at home most of the important lessons in life, such as values, ethics, how to view and treat others, and how to be a good citizen in the world. Other teachers in our children's lives reinforce these types of lessons, but we are the ones who will always be our children's most important teachers.

Making it Personal

What kind of parenting school did you attend? What did you learn that you want to teach your children? What would you like to do differently?

Who or what are some of your important teachers about life? How does that impact your family? How did you choose them to be your guides or teachers?

Good teachers work on improving their lessons and skills in order to better serve their students. Is there anything you would like to do to improve your skills as a teacher of your own children?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now knowing that you are your child's most important teacher? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 58.

Pay Attention to What You Pay Attention To

In our practice, we spend a lot of time talking to families that are hurting. Over time we have noticed that one symptom—and perhaps a cause of hurt—in families is a tendency to focus on the negative with other family members. During a negative cycle, an encouraging word is nowhere to be heard. One of our favorite sayings for this is: "Pay attention to what you pay attention to."

In the context of families, we become fully known to each other. Our deepest longings and vulnerabilities are revealed in a way that the rest of the world seldom sees. Our endearing qualities, along with our annoying habits, are transparent in our families.

We know better than anyone our children's strengths and vulnerabilities. We know what at school is fun and challenging: socially, emotionally, and academically. We also know which subjects are easy and which are hard, if they are having trouble with friends, or if they are worried or sad.

Our children also learn important things about us. They know if we like our jobs or find them a challenge. They know if we resent having to earn a living to support them, or if we think of it as a privilege in order to better care for them. They know if our jobs take up most of our time and energy, or if family life is just as important.

This full knowledge of one another in the context of a family is a given. The choice becomes what we will pay the most attention to, and what we will emphasize most in our interactions with one another. What will we notice



most about our children? **Wise families focus on intentionally lifting and celebrating the positive in one another.** Other families do just the opposite, focusing instead on each other's shortcomings. Over time, what we choose to pay attention to about each other greatly influences the level of happiness within our families.

The habit of paying attention to what we pay attention to is very important in terms of our children's school life, as well. We can focus exclusively on grades and achievement, or we can also give equal attention to nurturing the joy of learning in our children. If our children are challenged in some areas of school, we need to be careful to not always pay attention to that. By intentionally lifting them up

where they are doing well, we will give them the confidence to address the areas of school that are more challenging. In addition to paying attention to our children's academic achievements as school, we are wise to pay attention to them socially and emotionally, such as how they treat other children, and how they are treated by others. At the same time, we also want to help them find a life passion, a purpose, and a way to better the world with their unique qualities.

What we pay attention to ultimately reflects our own core values. If, for example, we focus on winning or achieving at all costs, then that reflects that winning and achieving are our most important values. If, on the other hand, we balance this focus with a focus on character development, working well with others, and fostering values like perseverance, integrity, and honesty, then we are expressing a different set of core values.

When it comes to anything in life, including work and school, no one is good at everything. We all have strengths and weaknesses. If we pay attention to family members' shortcomings, that will be the way we see them. If, instead, we choose to focus our attention on their strengths, that will positively shape how we will see each other.

Lifting up strengths while helping others to overcome challenges will be considerably more productive than focusing on shortcomings alone, and will contribute in an important way to the happiness we will experience in our homes.

Making it Personal

What about your child as a student do you pay the most attention to? Is that serving your child well? Is it serving you well? Explain.

What healthy values do you have around work and school that you want to pass on to your children? Is the way you are currently interacting with your child around school and work teaching those values?

What one positive thing about your child's life at school would you like to pay more attention to? How could you do that? How would that help your child?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now around what you pay attention to within your family, or where your child is concerned? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 59.

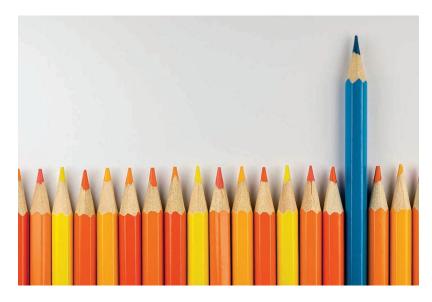
There is No One Who is More Youer Than You

Today you are you. That is truer than true. There is no one who is more youer than you. —Dr. Seuss

This quote reminds us that our job in this life is simply to show up as the fullest and most authentic version of ourselves. And, as parents, it is our job to nurture the unique spirit and expression that is within each of our children.

When we talk with parents we sometimes hear about the conflicts they have when their child is not turning out to be the person they dreamed of or wanted their child to be. "I was so hoping my child would be good at sports like I was, but they have absolutely no interest in sports." "I thought my daughter would be a really good student, but it has become clear to me that she doesn't have the same desire or interest in academics that I had." "My child hates to read but has more friends than I can count. I don't know how to handle this."

We have a responsibility to guide and direct each of our children but, in the end, it is about helping them grow into the person they are meant to be. A birch tree seed does not grow into an oak tree, no matter how much guidance and direction it gets, and an oak tree will never grow into a pine tree. There is no feeling more satisfying than showing up in the world as your true self, something we all continue to work on our entire lives.



We remember when our children first began to love picking out their own clothes and then going out in public in the most creative outfits imaginable. At such moments, after taking a deep breath, it was easy to look at them and think, "There is truly 'no one who is more youer than you!" Most young children do not look to others for approval of their style; they know what they like and what makes them feel good, and that's that.

And, it's not just two-year-olds who like to put together creative outfits, as any parent of a teen knows all too well. Teens are also trying to express their "no one is more youer than you" identity by literally trying on different ways of presenting themselves to the world. There are limits to what parents may allow in terms of how their adolescent dresses, but if we can be generous with those limits and not get

too reactive when those limits are tested, these young people can continue to safely explore this part of who they are and how they want to be seen in the world. They can be free to be who they truly are.

Something happens to all of us, though, as we grow older. We want to fit in and be like others in order to be accepted and liked by others, and so it becomes more difficult to trust and express our unique voice. That voice is always within, but we need to be more intentional about listening to that inner voice and then expressing it.

If you ever watch any of the popular singing competition shows on television, you know that one of the most common critiques judges give contestants is, "You sang that like you were just trying to imitate the original version of that song. There was no originality in your performance; it was totally karaoke." The consistent feedback that judges give to the singers is that they need to make the song their own—they have to bring their own unique voice, talent, and passion to the song in order to make it memorable.

So, the next time you feel a little challenged as a parent because your children are surprising you with a passion, ability, or identity you didn't expect, remember Dr. Seuss's reminder: "Today you are you. That is truer than true. There is no one alive who is more youer than you."

Making it Personal

In what particular ways did you express your individuality as a child, teen, or young adult? Were your parents supportive of what you did, or did it create a conflict between you?

How do you see your children trying to express their individuality right now? Are you handling it in a way that will enhance their well-being?

How are you living as "no one more youer than you"? How does your family benefit from that?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now to greater support your child in being who they are discovering themselves to be? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step form, go to p. 59.

| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Work and School | Parent Wellness CMPASS |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Reflection: Putting Children and Parents in the Gr | owth Zone D | ate: |
| Goal: | | |
| Needed: | | |
| EXcited: | | |
| Time-specific: | | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: | |
| NEXT Step: | | |
| | | |
| | | Parent Wallage |
| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Work and School | Parent Wellness CMPASS |
| NEXT Step Worksheet Reflection: Who's Your Teacher? | | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
| | | CEMPASS |
| Reflection: Who's Your Teacher? | | CEMPASS |
| Reflection: Who's Your Teacher? Goal: | | CEMPASS |
| Reflection: Who's Your Teacher? Goal: Needed: | | CEMPASS |
| Reflection: Who's Your Teacher? Goal: Needed: EXcited: | | CEMPASS |

| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Work and School | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Reflection: Pay Attention to What You Pay Attenti | on To |)ate: |
| Goal: | | |
| Needed: | | |
| EXcited: | | |
| Time-specific: | | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: | |
| NEXT Step: | | |
| | | |
| | | Parent Wellness |
| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Work and School | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
| | | CEMPASS |
| NEXT Step Worksheet Reflection: There is No One Who is More Youer The | | Parent Wellness COMPASS Date: |
| Reflection: There is No One Who is More Youer The | | CEMPASS |
| Reflection: There is No One Who is More Youer The | | CEMPASS |
| Reflection: There is No One Who is More Youer The Goal: Needed: | | CEMPASS |
| Reflection: There is No One Who is More Youer The Goal: Needed: EXcited: | | CEMPASS |



Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



60 • • • • • • • • • Parent Wellness Compass: Outfitting for the Journey

Spirituality

The word *Spirituality* comes from the same root as the word "breath." Spirituality is that which gives us breath, that which animates our lives. In the metaphor of a compass, our spirituality is how we define "true north" for ourselves and our families. Our spirituality gives our life direction and purpose.

Spirituality is not the same as religion. A person may or may not express their spirituality through a traditional set of religious beliefs and practices. If you are familiar with twelve-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, you will have heard of the concept of a "higher power." All twelve-step programs are deeply spiritual and ask those in their programs to identify their higher power. That higher power might be the good of humankind, or it might be a traditional expression of religious belief. The point is that everyone has a higher power or a true north that helps orients the important decisions in their lives. Spirituality is what grounds our core values and beliefs, as well as our moral and ethical standards.

An essential job for parents is to teach their children values by which to live. Parents, through the actions they model and the lessons they teach their children, provide answers to spiritual questions such as, "How should I treat others who are different from me and from my family?" "How should I treat others who are less fortunate than me?" "How should I care for the earth and the natural world around me?" "How should I give back to the world?" Some families express their spirituality through volunteer work or community service. Some participate in important spiritual traditions that are central to a family's identity and have been passed on from one generation to the next.

Parenthood is itself a spiritual journey where we clarify and strengthen our own core values and beliefs. It connects us with the spiritual side of life, offering both miracle and vulnerability. The reflections in this chapter are offered to help you more deeply explore the role of spirituality in your own life, and in the lives of your children and family.



Building a Cathedral

As the story is told, several hundred years ago in a small town in Europe, a large group of men were building a cathedral. These men were the laborers for the project and so their work was often tiresome and tedious. One day, a visitor to the town had a chance to ask two of the laborers about their work and received two very different responses.

The first man the visitor questioned had a cart full of rocks that he was straining to pull. He looked tired and harried. The visitor asked the man what he was doing. The man paused, looked up at the visitor, and snapped, "What does it look like I'm doing? I'm hauling rocks! Every day, that's all I do. I haul rocks from morning until night."

A few minutes later, another man came along, also working on the same building. He, too, was straining to pull a cart full of rocks. This man, though, had a happier look on his face and his attitude



seemed quite different from the first laborer. When the visitor asked him what he was doing, this man smiled and said, "I'm helping to build a cathedral. And it's going to one of the most beautiful cathedrals in all the world!"

This is a story of two men doing the exact same task. The first man is exhausted and irritated because he sees what he is doing all day as a never-ending grind of hauling rocks from place to place. The second man is toiling just as hard as the first man, but feels a spirit of excitement and pride in what he doing. In his mind, he is not merely hauling rocks, he is building a cathedral. It is the mindset each chooses that makes all the difference.

The power of mindset is captured in a quote from Henry Ford, who said, "Whether you think you can, or whether you think you can't, you are right." To paraphrase this quote as it applies to parenting, we could say, "Whether you think parenting is just an exhausting grind of hauling rocks day in and day out, or whether you think parenting is the sacred opportunity and privilege to help build a beautiful cathedral, you are right."

There is no doubt, at times, that parenting can be a grind. There are times when it is exhausting and feels like all we are doing is hauling rocks from place to place. If we get stuck in that mindset, that

parenting is only that and nothing more, then we likely will miss out on the true spiritual gifts that parenting has the capacity to offer.

We both remember a discussion we had with other parents about what it was like for their houses be the gathering place for all the neighborhood kids. One parent responded that he didn't like it when there were kids at his house, complaining about how loud they were and how much food they ate. Another parent responded in a completely different way, saying how much he loved it when their children had friends over because it gave them a chance to really get to know their children's friends. He added that it was also a chance to model for their children how to be good hosts and practice hospitality toward others. Here again, we see the power of mindset, as we have two different parents describing the same thing from two vastly different outlooks.

The truth about mindsets is that we do not so much see the world as it is, but rather we see the world as we are. Our spirituality and our values are influential determinants of our attitudes and have a powerful effect on how we see the world. As parents, our mindsets have a strong influence on how we view our children, and on how we experience the day-to-day job of parenting. It will determine whether we experience our work as parents as simply hauling rocks, or as building cathedrals.

Making it Personal

When are you most likely to feel that parenting is like hauling rocks? Explain. How might that be impacting your family? What could you do to change that?

When are you most likely to feel that parenting is building a cathedral? Explain that, too. How does that affect your family?

What do you think of the idea that "we do not so much see the world as it is, but rather we see the world as we are"? How does this relate to you and your family?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now about your mindset around being a parent, with all of the work that role both requires and offers? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 70.

Your Spiritual Root System

Recently, an eighty-year-old elm tree had to be cut down in our front yard. Shortly after the tree was cut down, our street was dug up in order to work on the sewer system. This afforded us a view of just how deep and wide the root system of our tree had been. We all know that large trees have correspondingly large root systems, nourishing them and giving them an anchor and stability. But because we rarely have the chance to observe these roots systems, it is easy to forget.

People are no different from trees; they also need a vigorous root system in order to grow strong to weather the inevitable storms of life. This is true for us, and for our children. One of the greatest responsibilities in life is becoming a parent, and so this is an ideal time to nurture, strengthen, and deepen the roots of what grounds our lives. It is also an important time to examine our values and think about how we want to pass those on to our children.

One way to think of spirituality is that it is the root system that grounds our lives. Just as a tree draws strength, stability, and nourishment from its root system, we too can draw strength, stability, and nourishment from our spiritual lives, even though others cannot directly see it. Parenthood is often a natural time for us to deepen our spiritual lives.

It is not uncommon for new parents to join a faith community, even if they have not been part of a faith community for a long time, or perhaps ever. The reason often stated



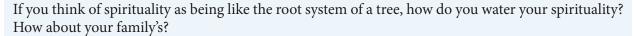
for seeking out a faith community is because parents think it would be good to give their child a strong spiritual foundation. We think there is an additional reason why parents often seek to connect with a faith community. Many parents recognize a need to deepen the spiritual foundation of their own lives as they take on the awesome responsibility of raising a child. It does indeed take a village, and not just to raise a child, but to raise and support a family, as well. Faith communities can be important villages for families.

As we mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the word "spirituality" comes from the same root as the word "breath." Knowing this helps us to understand the power that spirituality can have in our lives. Spirituality gives us breath. It animates our lives. Spirituality is the source of all that gives us joy, creativity, and love. And it is as close to us as our own breath.

It is easy to take our breath and our spirituality for granted. Both are always there, whether or not we are actively aware of them. It is interesting to note that most spiritual traditions have different practices aimed at helping people to slow down and become mindful of their breathing. These various forms of breath prayers and meditations all serve to help people become more mindful of that which is the source of life. We intuitively recognize the power and wisdom of this when we say to someone who is feeling overwhelmed or stressed, "Slow down and take a deep breath—it's all going to be okay." Slowing down and reconnecting with what matters most helps us to stay calm amidst the often-chaotic moments of parenting.

Parenting stretches us in ways we never could have imagined. As we look back over our lives, we often see that the times that stretched us the most were often the times where we experienced the greatest spiritual growth. A strong root system helps us to prevail in the inevitable storms that occur during our life with our children. One dependable way to keep our spiritual root system strong is for everyone in the family to keep things in perspective, to slow down, take a breath, and remember that everything is going to be okay. And helping our children develop a spiritual root system for themselves is a gift they will have for the rest of their lives.

Making it Personal



What practices do you have or could you develop as a family to grow your common spiritual root system?

Have you ever tried the practice of sitting quietly for a short period of time and just focusing on your breath as a way to center and calm yourself, a way to keep things in perspective? Might you consider teaching this practice to your children, as well?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now to nurture your family's spiritual root system? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 70.

When the Student Is Ready, the Teacher Will Appear

When a person is ready to grow, or to learn something new, it is common to find a teacher who can assist with the learning process. If a person wants to become more proficient as a singer, they will often work with a voice teacher. If a person wants to increase their abilities as a basketball player, they will often work with a mentor or coach who really knows the game. If a person wishes to grow spiritually, they might find a spiritual teacher from whom they can gain deeper insight into spiritual wisdom. Such a spiritual teacher might be an author, a retreat leader, a spiritual director, or a clergy person.

There are many spiritual teachers from whom we can learn important lessons, including those listed above. In addition to these spiritual teachers, there is one more teacher from whom we can learn a great

deal of spiritual wisdom: our child. While children are certainly always learning from us, there is a great deal of spiritual wisdom that we as parents can learn from our children, as well.

Here, then, are a few of the spiritual lessons that we can learn from raising our children.

Live fully in the present moment. All wise spiritual teachers talk about the importance of living in the present moment, letting go of past regrets, and avoiding getting caught up in worries about the future. Young children are masters at living in the present moment. They can be laughing one moment, then



a few moments later be frustrated because they can't do something, and then just a few moments after that be delighted because they see a bird out the window. Children by nature live in what many spiritual teachers refer to as the "eternal now."

Laugh and play, and don't take ourselves too seriously. There is great spiritual wisdom in learning to live more lightly, taking ourselves less seriously. Humor and joy are truly fruits of a spiritual life. Children by nature are playful and love to laugh. They bring this spirit of playfulness out in adults, as is obvious when watching an adult making funny faces and funny noises as they interact with a young child. Children give adults permission to engage the life-loving spirit of their own inner child.

Take time to rest. For the most part, children have two speeds: on and off. When they are on they are full of energy and activity. When they become tired, they can fall asleep anywhere: in the car, on

your lap, or on the floor. Older children may resist and deny their need for sleep or their need to go to bed at a certain time, but eventually they succumb to that need and sleep deeply. Like children, when we are overly tired, we can become irritable, cranky, and not much fun to be around. We are wise to remember the importance of these rhythms of activity and rest for all members of the family.

Love our neighbor. A core teaching of all spiritual traditions is that of loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. We as adults sometimes struggle with this, finding it easy to love people we like and agree with, but harder to love people who are different from us. Small children have a way of breaking down the walls that adults create. They have an innate ability to love everyone and to see others through eyes free from the filters of judgment and hurt that often affect how we adults see our neighbors. Let us learn this from our children.

Our children have a great deal to learn from us, and we have a great deal to learn from them, often in the day-to-day things they say without meaning to be profound. Children, through the seemingly small things they say and do, actually help us remember what they already know about what is important. Things which, in the midst of the many distractions of life, we may have forgotten. Parenting is an ongoing spiritual adventure where we can be both teacher and student.

Making it Personal

Did any of the spiritual lessons we might learn from our children listed above connect with your experiences as a parent? How is that?

What other spiritual lessons have you learned, or are you now learning, from your children?

What other spiritual teachers do you have in your life right now? How does that enrich your life as a family?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now to be more open to learning spiritual lessons from your child? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 71.

The Power of Vulnerability

Many of us were raised with the idea that showing vulnerability was a weakness to be avoided whenever possible. We may have been taught that if we were ever feeling vulnerable, it was best to hide this from others. Thankfully, we are now realizing that this mindset does not serve us well. There is extensive research to support the idea that a key to living well, a key to living a wholehearted life, is the ability to feel and express vulnerability. Not surprisingly, many faith traditions also have taught us to accept our vulnerability as the first step in acknowledging our need for a power higher than ourselves.

Dr. Brené Brown, a professor at the University of Houston and the author of several best-selling books and eCourses, is the leading writer and researcher on the topic of vulnerability. There is a great chapter on parenting in her book, *Daring Greatly*, and she is featured in the one of the most-watched TED talks ever. Additionally, she consults regularly with both nonprofit leaders and leaders of Fortune 500 companies on the topic of vulnerability.

Through her research, Brown has discovered that while blocking or numbing feelings of vulnerability may help us in the short run, in the long run it prevents us from learning the ability to form meaningful connections with others. It turns out that science can now prove that the old advice—that we should hide feelings of vulnerability in order to protect ourselves—is not at all helpful. Instead, learning to express vulnerability is a key to experiencing happiness and joy. She even goes as far as to say in Daring Greatly that being vulnerable and real with our children has more positive influence over our children than any other thing we know about parenting.



Here is a concrete application of what Brené Brown is teaching. Imagine you lose control of your emotions and overreact to a mistake your child makes by losing your temper and yelling. Now imagine it's the next day and your child comes to you and says that they didn't like it when you yelled the night before. At this point you have a choice: to be vulnerable ... or not.

If you choose not to be vulnerable, you might respond to your child in a way that inadvertently says to them, "I don't care about your feelings." Responding this way hurts your child a second time and increases the likelihood that they will no longer risk sharing their true feelings with you.

If, on the other hand, you choose to be vulnerable with your child, you could apologize and ask for their forgiveness, taking full responsibility for your inappropriate behavior. You might share with them that you have been under an extreme amount of stress (not as an excuse for losing your temper, but a way to help your child know that you are going through a vulnerable time). Such sharing will most likely draw you and your child closer, restoring and strengthening the bond that had been weakened the day before. You would also be serving as a model for your child of how to be vulnerable and apologize when our behavior hurts someone.

Vulnerability is similar to another core value that is part of all spiritual traditions: humility. As the example above confirms, we have lots of opportunities to practice both vulnerability and humility in our life as parents. While Dr. Brown's research on vulnerability may be counterintuitive to what many of us have believed in the past, we can trust that putting the results of her research into practice will help us experience more humility, authenticity, and joy in our families.

Making it Personal

What messages were you given about being vulnerable as a child? How did that work for you and your family?

How comfortable are you apologizing to your children when you realize you have made a mistake that has hurt them? How might apologizing affect your relationship?

How might you practice and teach the importance of vulnerability and humility in your family right now? Think of some concrete ideas.

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now as you think of modeling vulnerability in your family? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 71.

| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Spirituality | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
|--|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Reflection: Building a Cathedral | | Pate: |
| Goal: | | |
| | | |
| Needed: | | |
| EXcited: | | |
| Time-specific: | | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: | |
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| | | Parent Wellness |
| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Spirituality | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
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| Reflection: Your Spiritual Root System | | ••••• |
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| Reflection: Your Spiritual Root System Goal: Needed: | | ••••• |
| Reflection: Your Spiritual Root System Goal: Needed: EXcited: | | Parent Wellness CMPASS Date: |

| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Spirituality | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
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| Reflection: When the Student Is Ready, the Teacher W | Till Appear | Date: |
| Goal: | | |
| Needed: | | |
| EXcited: | | |
| Time-specific: | | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: | |
| NEXT Step: | | |
| | | Parent Wellness |
| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Spirituality | C@MPASS |
| Reflection: The Power of Vulnerability | 1 | Date: |
| Goal: | | |
| | | |
| Needed: | | |
| Needed: EXcited: | | |
| | | |
| EXcited: | Solutions: | |



Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



72 • • • • • • • • • Parent Wellness Compass: Outfitting for the Journey

CHAPTER 6

Rest and Play

This chapter focuses on an area of wellness that is often overlooked in our current fast-paced culture and, at times, even neglected: *Rest and Play*.

Most parents we talk with report that their families don't have enough rest and play in their lives, and we believe that unless they are intentional about making it a priority, it won't happen.

The word "recreation" literally means "re-creation," the state of creating anew. Recreation rebalances our lives and recharges our batteries; it renews us. Yet not all forms of modern recreation are truly re-creative, and so we need to be mindful about choosing activities for ourselves and our families that truly renew and revitalize us.

While it can be challenging to make time for recreation, the good news is that we have built-in playmates and role models when it comes to rest and play—our children. Children are experts at playing and we simply need only to allow ourselves to be reminded by them just how important and refreshing it is to make time for laughter and fun.

Recreating as a family is an important element in building family bonds and strengthening relationships. If you ask someone what are some of their favorite memories from childhood, most will

share a story about a time their family had fun together, such as a family trip, vacation, or a fun activity they did together. Recreating as a family provides a wonderful opportunity for children to see us relaxed and having fun, as well a time for them to have fun, too.

There is no doubt that parenting is serious business. The reflections in this chapter, though, are meant to remind us that parenting can also be a great deal of fun, and that rest and play are an essential part of every family's sense of well-being.



Playfulness as an Attitude, Not Just an Activity

When our son was three, he discovered a stirring stick for paint in a bag we had brought home from the hardware store. He took the stick out of the bag and his mind sprang to life with all the possible things the stick could be. He immediately lifted it to his lips and pronounced that the stick was a trumpet as he busily fingered the valves of the make-believe instrument. The paint stick was soon a violin, a guitar, and a flute. Then a golf club, a necktie, a fishing rod, and a tree. Before the afternoon was over, it had also become a baseball bat, a diving board, a spoon, a fork, a knife, a popsicle stick, a teeter totter, a giant pencil, and a magic wand.

What we remember even more keenly than all the creative uses he discovered for a stick designed to stir paint were the shrieks of joy and laughter. With each new announcement, he would exclaim, "That

is so silly!" As with all young children, this depth of joy and laughter seems to burst forth from every cell in their bodies, and because his laughter was so contagious, we both were laughing out loud with him every step of the way. We continue to be so grateful for this experience, along with all the other similar experiences our children offered us because they remind us of the importance of taking time to be silly and just play.

Author George Bernard Shaw once wrote, "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing." Some studies have found that children laugh an average of three hundred times each day, while adults



only laugh an average of ten to fifteen times a day. All of us adults could benefit greatly by following the playful example given by children and raising our daily laugh quotient.

Some might be wondering how adults could possibly laugh more, with all the serious issues they have to address, things children know little about. We believe that laughing and being playful are choices, and not simply choices about whether we engage in playful activities or laugh at funny things. More important, playfulness is an attitude, an outlook on life, that we can choose. In many situations and endeavors, we can choose to bring either a serious or a playful energy and outlook to the situation. The attitude we bring to any conversation or interaction has a direct impact on everyone around us.

Let's say, for example, we need to talk to our children about not picking up after themselves. We can approach this conversation either in a serious and tense manner, or we can approach it in a playful and lighthearted manner. The tone or attitude we choose will make all the difference in the outcome of the interaction. One will likely create a tense and serious reaction, and the other will likely create a more positive and helpful response, and we will have a much better chance of gaining our children's cooperation.

Mother Teresa once wrote that people should not worry about whether they are doing many great, heroic acts of love in their lives, but rather they should focus on doing all the little things they do in life with great love. This wisdom also applies beautifully to the importance of play. Let's not wait for the big, special moments to play. Let's find ways to bring playfulness to all of the little things we do each day. Of course, some things we do and some situations we encounter are very serious. But most of time, there is room for us to bring a greater spirit of playfulness into our lives and into our relationships with our children, as well as with others.

We choose to let our memory of our son's vivid imagination with the paint stick remind us to be playful in our approach to life and parenting. We believe that any family will benefit from being a little more imaginative and playful as they try new and creative ways to interact with each other.

Making it Personal

Was there a playful attitude in your home when you were growing up? Give some examples.

Would your children describe you and your home as playful? Why or why not? Are you happy with your response?

If you wanted to be more playful with your children, what would you do differently from what you are currently doing? What difference might it make in your family if you were more playful?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now regarding your thoughts and attitudes about play and your child? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 82.

The Intersection of Screens and Families

Holly recently led a Parent Wellness Circle at our local high school. During the class, many of the parents admitted—now that their children were in high school—that they felt somewhat alone and were looking for genuine connection with others. She invited them to work in groups as they each took a simple self-assessment of their lives, identifying which areas of wellness they felt good about, and which areas needed more of their attention. Most discovered that they wanted to work on connecting more meaningfully with their teenage children, and to spend more fun time with them. Many spoke of experiencing an increasing distance from their children, and a desire to recapture some of the playfulness they experienced with their children when they were younger.

Upon examining more deeply their common concern, they agreed that part of the challenge in making connection with their children was the barrier created by screens. Parents expressed their frustration with their children's attraction to all kinds of screens and how this had become a real obstacle to having time together as a family. They complained that their kids were watching television and movies online, constantly texting or checking social media on their phones, or playing video games, frequently in their bedrooms behind closed doors. They just couldn't seem to pull their children away from their screens.



One parent asked a question that changed the direction of the conversation. He asked the group what their relationships were with screens when they were at home. Everyone got quiet as each began to examine their own behaviors. Many told stories about having to answer work emails in the evenings. Others admitted that too often they spent time checking social media updates rather than paying attention to their families. Several realized that in order to unwind in the evenings, they also liked retreating to their bedrooms to watch movies on their laptops. They came to the shared conclusion that if they wanted their teenagers to change their pattern of relaxing and unwinding by going off on their own somewhere and sitting in front of a screen, they would have to change what they were doing, as well. They would have to lead the way and set the example. It would be a change of routine for everyone.

In response to their honest and vulnerable conversations and conclusions, each parent decided to set a goal for themselves. One was going to have a family meeting to discuss how they were letting screens take over and that family time was on the decline in their family. She hoped to create some new ground rules together regarding the role technology would play during their time together. She also had an idea to take a trip across town to her daughter's favorite ice-cream shop as a fun treat, but no phones allowed. One dad committed to wait until after dinner, cleanup, and helping with homework to use his computer and phone in the evenings. Others had similar goals, vowing to be much more intentional about their use of electronic devices while their children were around. They were, instead, going to focus more undivided attention on their children and be more available during their time together.

Few doubt that modern technology enhances our lives and the lives of our children in many ways. And, there is little doubt that modern technology can also be distracting and even harmful to relationships. Children of any age who are exposed to inappropriate media available to them through these channels can be hurt or exploited. We also know for sure that the ubiquity of the internet and the increasing amount of time spent in front of screens impacts the way families spend time together. This is not going to change. What can change is that we become more intentional about discussing this issue with our families, deciding what we want our children to have access to, and what we want to model by our own use of technology.

Making it Personal

What effects do you see screens and the use of technology having on your family? Do you feel good about this? If not, what could you do to change the patterns in your home?

Our use of screens can isolate us from one another, but there are also ways that we can enjoy screen time as a family. Can you think of some specific ideas for how your family could create some stronger connections through the use of technology?

Rest and play, by their very nature, are meant to renew us and be fun. Can you think of new things you could do together that do not involve screens?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now about screens and how they are influencing your family's life together? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 82.

I Love To Watch You Play

As family therapists, an issue that comes up frequently in our work is that of helping parents determine how they can best respond to their children's involvement in extracurricular activities—whether it is sports, music, dance, chess club, voice, debate, theater, art, or mock trial. As children participate in these types of activities, parents have several options for how they can show interest and give feedback. Our feedback can potentially be helpful and enhance our children's enjoyment of extracurricular activities. And, if we are not careful, our feedback can unintentionally hurt our children.

It is fairly obvious what types of things parents can say or do to hurt their children in such situations, such as expressing disappointment, offering unsolicited advice or criticism, losing control emotionally and yelling, or not showing interest. Few things are more painful than watching an adult—whether parent or coach—say shameful or hurtful comments to their child, thinking this is going to motivate the child to perform at a higher level.

What is less clear is what parents can do after watching their children participate that is honest and, at the same time, will build connection. Several years ago, we read an article by Bob E.



Brown and Rob Miller of Proactive Coaching, LLC. These two men speak to athletes and their parents at all levels of competitive youth sports, from grade school through college. Based on their years of experience with student athletes, and having asked them over the years what they most liked hearing from their parents after a competition, they reported that they got a simple response, repeated over and over from the athletes: "I love to watch you play."

One thing young people are yearning for are relationships with adults who are not assessing them.

-Sarah Robbins-Cole

"I love to watch you play" is powerful, both in its simplicity and in its positive affect on children. It is the role of coaches and other youth leaders to give thoughtful critique and feedback when needed, and it is the role of parents to be their child's greatest fans. The beauty of "I love to watch you play" is

that it celebrates the fun of watching a child do something they love. Whether our child played well or struck out, sang beautifully or off key, remembered their lines or froze in the spotlight, won or lost, this response keeps the focus on the courage the child has summoned to put themselves out there, and the joy in watching that unfold.

The measure of success and value that is lifted up in "I love to watch you play" transcends the value of merely performing well. It celebrates the passion, discipline, commitment, dedication, and courage of anyone who is willing to put themselves out there to participate and compete in any way. It celebrates the long hours of practicing, studying, memorizing, listening, making new friends, and the joy and fun needed to participate in the chosen activity.

If you are a sports fan, you know that in almost every team sport, teams always have a higher winning percentage at home games than away games, even when they are playing the same team. This is not a coincidence. The home fans come out in greater numbers and stay to root them on, even when they are not performing their best or are being outplayed. Our children need us to be their "home team" fans, always rooting for them and cheering them on, always having their best interests foremost in our minds and hearts.

In our competitive, win-at-all-cost culture, our children do not need more attention focused on whether they win or lose. Instead, our children need our admiration, encouragement, and unconditional love. And they need to play and have fun! And that is what all of these activities are really all about, isn't it? When we watch our children, do we hope they do well? Of course we do. But whether they win or lose, let's make sure we let them know that we "love to watch them play!"

Making it Personal

Do your children like their activities and find them enjoyable and fun? Why or why not? What could you do to help them find more joy in their activities?

What kind of attention do you give to your children's activities? Is it healthy for everyone?

How can you more fully express to your children that you "love to watch them play"?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now regarding your child's activities or interests? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 83.

I'm Bored!

At some point every parent gets tired of their children saying, "I'm bored!" It might happen in the middle of summer or in the middle of a long car ride, but whenever it happens it can grate on our nerves. Sometimes it seems that no matter how many structured activities we provide for our children, they are still prone to periods of boredom.

When we talk with parents, we often hear them wonder if the very fact that they structure so many activities for their children actually has an unintended side effect of creating the "I'm bored" response from their children. They wonder if their children struggle to come up with their own ideas because they seldom have to do so. What we tell parents is that this is not an "either/or," but a "both/and." Structured activities are important for children, as is unstructured free time where children get to create their own

fun and activities. They are both essential for a child's growth and development. Structured activities help children learn how to socialize and then collaborate with others and to follow directions. Unstructured time, especially if it is alone time, helps a child to become comfortable with solitude and with their inner thoughts and feelings, as well as allowing them space for imagination and dreaming.

Children are not the only ones we hear saying, "I'm bored." We talk with adults who often say, "I'm bored in my work," or, "I'm bored in my marriage," or, "I'm bored as



a parent," or, "Overall, I'm just bored with my life." The parallel between expressions of boredom by both children and adults is the perceived helplessness to do anything about their boredom. "I'm bored and I don't have any idea of what I can do to change this feeling," is what they seem to be expressing.

We can all agree that parenthood can be boring at times. Laundry, grocery shopping, making meals, and cleaning up after our children can become tedious. So, like our children, it's not a question of *if* we will experience boredom sometimes, but rather a question of *how* we will deal with it when it happens.

An important dynamic that keeps us feeling stuck in a state of boredom is that we think we need an external solution to our boredom. We want someone or something else to interrupt our boredom, distract us, or fill up the emptiness that often accompanies these thoughts and feelings.

What is essential to teach our children, and to remind ourselves as adults, is that boredom is best resolved by a two-step process.

The first step is to be patient and accept it. Boredom is a natural state of mind and not something we need to frantically avoid feeling.

The second step is to turn inward and look deeper within ourselves for creative ways to revitalize our time, our work, our relationships, and our lives. A deeper resolution of boredom is an "insideout" job, not an "outside-in" job.

When a child says, "I'm bored," we are wise to resist the urge to find a solution for the child. A good response would be something like, "I understand. That's a natural feeling that we all feel sometimes. I guess it means you haven't yet figured out something fun that you want to do or create. Be patient and I'm sure something will come to you, and I'd be happy to talk with you to help you figure something out." Providing children with opportunities to grow a sense of agency in their lives—a clear sense that they can create and recreate meaning and purpose in their lives—is one of the most important skills to develop in our children. Come to think of it, it's a pretty important skill to develop in ourselves, as well.

Making it Personal

How do you respond when your child reports that they are bored? Are you comfortable with that?

When do you most often feel bored as a parent? When are your children most apt to say they are bored?

When you do feel bored, either as a parent, or in other areas of your life, how do you respond? Are you satisfied with how you respond or would you like to develop other, more creative responses?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now to help your child (or yourself) better handle

boredom? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 83.

| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Rest and Play | Parent Wellness CMPASS |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Reflection: Playfulness as an Attitude, Not Just an Act | tivity D | ate: |
| Goal: | | |
| Needed: | | |
| EXcited: | | |
| Time-specific: | | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: | |
| NEXT Step: | | |
| | | |
| | | Parent W.II. |
| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Rest and Play | Parent Wellness |
| | | Parent Wellness CMPASS Pate: |
| | | C MPASS |
| Reflection: The Intersection of Screens and Families | | C MPASS |
| Reflection: The Intersection of Screens and Families Goal: | | C MPASS |
| Reflection: The Intersection of Screens and Families Goal: Needed: | | C MPASS |
| Reflection: The Intersection of Screens and Families Goal: Needed: EXcited: | | C MPASS |

| | | Parent Wallness |
|--|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Rest and Play | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
| Reflection: I Love To Watch You Play | D | ate: |
| Goal: | | |
| | | |
| Needed: | | |
| EXcited: | | |
| | | |
| Time-specific: | | |
| | | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: | |
| NEXT Step: | | |
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| | | P |
| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Rest and Play | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
| NEXT Step Worksheet Reflection: I'm Bored! | | Parent Wellness C MPASS |
| | | •••• |
| Reflection: I'm Bored! Goal: | | •••• |
| Reflection: I'm Bored! | | •••• |
| Reflection: I'm Bored! Goal: | | •••• |
| Reflection: I'm Bored! Goal: Needed: EXcited: | | •••• |
| Reflection: I'm Bored! Goal: Needed: | | •••• |
| Reflection: I'm Bored! Goal: Needed: EXcited: Time-specific: | D | •••• |
| Reflection: I'm Bored! Goal: Needed: EXcited: | | •••• |



Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



84 • • • • • • • • • Parent Wellness Compass: Outfitting for the Journey

CHAPTER 7

Stress Resilience

The word "resilience" means "to bounce back," so when we talk about *Stress Resilience*, we are talking about the ability to bounce back from, and recover

from, all kinds of stressful situations. Recent research has shown that resilience is not something a person or a family either has or doesn't have, but rather is something that can be learned with practice and knowledge. In fact, some of the most resilient families are those who have persevered through times of great stress, calling on healthy skills and habits they learned and nurtured along the way.

Stress is inevitable in the lives of all parents and families. The question is not whether we will face stress as a family, but how we will respond to it. When we proactively cultivate healthy habits, we will be better able to respond to stress from a place of strength. With that comes a much greater chance

that we will be resilient and able to bounce back from whatever is stressful to us, instead of simply reacting to it.

When we work with families who are experiencing some type of stress, we always begin by asking them if there have been any significant changes in their lives in the last few years. We estimate that nine times out of ten people respond with a "yes," and then talk about some kind of significant change, such as a move, a change in job, a marriage or divorce, an illness or death, someone leaving home, a



new baby, change of school, financial challenges, or changes in the surrounding community. Often this conversation creates an "Aha!" moment when families come to the realization that the reason they are struggling is related to the fact that they are in the midst of a major change. This insight alone helps people become more patient with themselves, and with the others involved. They can then work together to address and integrate the change that is having such a large impact on their lives.

In this chapter, you will learn some essential skills and habits that can help you and your children strengthen your resilience. It is important to remember that learning any new skill or creating a new habit takes time, and we need to be patient with ourselves and with our families. And, as with all areas of wellness, what we model for our children around how we handle stress significantly influences how they learn to handle it, too.

Gradually, Then Suddenly

Strangely enough, we can learn something about how stress can creep up on us from frogs. You may have heard that if you put a frog in a pot of cold water, put the pot over a flame and gradually heat the water, the frog will not jump out. Eventually, the frog will allow itself to be boiled to death, unaware of the danger created by the heat slowly building around it. On the other hand, if you drop a frog into a pot of hot water, it will immediately jump out to save its life.



People and families can be much like frogs when it comes to recognizing and reacting to stress. When stress heats up around us gradually, we may fail to notice the way it is affecting us. Yet if something extremely stressful happens very suddenly, it gets our attention and we are more likely to deal with it right away. When stress comes on gradually, we may miss the warning signs because it may first show up as simply a whisper (more on "whispers" on p. 7). Whispers about stress might show up in our families as stomachaches or headaches, trouble sleeping, arguing, change in school performance, changes in our children's friends, or pulling away from each other. Whispers sometimes show up in our emotions, such as moodiness, sadness, worry, or just plain crankiness. If whispers aren't listened to, and the stress is ignored, things may suddenly "boil" over.

In Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, a character by the name of Mike Campbell is asked how he went bankrupt. He answers, "Two ways. Gradually. Then suddenly." Had he been paying attention to his money problems, his bankruptcy would not have seemed to come suddenly and could possibly have been avoided. The same is true for us and for our children. If we pay to attention to the whispers in our family life or in each member's individual life and notice when things are heating up, it will be much easier to correct things and avoid difficult surprises that can cause additional stress.

The three simple things you and your family can practice to help you recognize stress and help you figure out how to deal with and diminish it are: trust, feel, talk.

Trust. Trust is a day-to-day byproduct created by honesty, loyalty and integrity. It is the bedrock of family life because when trust is present, family members feel safe and know they can be honest with each other, sharing both concerns and joys. When people feel safe they are more apt to be vulnerable and share feelings of stress and worry.

Feel. A home where everyone is encouraged to feel and share all of their feelings—which are a natural and normal part of life—reduces stress for everyone, children and parents alike.

Talk. Also important is that we teach and model how to talk about feelings so that the whole family can positively deal with, and diminish, stress.

When everyone is encouraged to trust, feel, and talk, you will enhance your family's well-being, and that will make for a more relaxing, healthy life. This will also help you to learn to recognize and name when the water around you is heating up, and to do something that the frog in the hot water cannot do—get out of the pot and figure out how to turn the heat down!

Making it Personal

Are you seeing signs in your family life that might indicate that the water around you is heating up? What changes might you need to make to turn down the heat?

What wisdom do you draw from the answer Mike Campbell gave in *The Sun Also Rises* about how his bankruptcy happened "gradually, then suddenly"? How could you apply that wisdom to your family life and the whispers you might be hearing about the ways in which stress is affecting your family right now?

How is your family doing now in terms of practicing the key habits of "trust, feel, and talk"? Is there anything you would like to do differently to enhance these three habits in your family?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now as you think about stress and your family? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 94.

The Wisdom of the "J" Curve

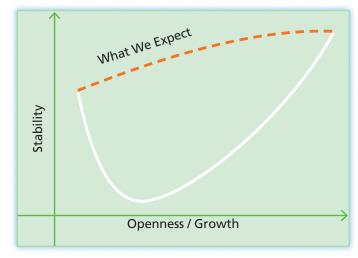
Change tends to come in one of two ways: planned or unplanned. It is a given that unplanned changes will be stressful. A surprise job loss, an unexpected diagnosis for ourselves or our child, an accident, the sudden death of a friend or loved one, the sudden end to a relationship, or a sudden change at your child's school or your work. All are stressful. And because no one ever plans or chooses these, they always catch us off guard and unprepared, which only adds to the stress already created by the change.

What is perhaps not as well understood is that even planned changes—change we choose for positive reasons and happily anticipate—can also be stressful. Starting a new job, blending a family, moving to a new community, adding a baby to the family, or beginning a school year. While planned and chosen, each comes with its own share of stress because they bring with them significant changes to all areas of our lives.

The "J" Curve is a helpful concept we often use to explain how change evolves, both planned and unplanned. As you can see from the graphic, the "J" Curve has a vertical axis that represents stability and a horizontal axis representing openness and growth. The dotted line shows the trajectory most of us would like to follow when facing change, especially when we want it and have planned for it. We

expect that this change will put us on a path where life will be even better tomorrow than today. The reality is that all change, even planned, initially creates a period of instability. The "J" Curve illustrates this. It also shows that most of the time things get better with patience and steadfast forward movement.

The wisdom of the "J" Curve shows us that we need to avoid wasting energy wishing we could go back to what was and instead, invest our energy in moving forward until we eventually begin to recognize growth and experience a new sense of stability. The key to being resilient is



finding a way to go forward and to accept the "new normal" in our lives. One thing that can give us confidence as we face changes is to remember that we have all gone through—and successfully navigated—many previous changes. We know that we all can and will, with time, intention, and the support of others, get through the "J" Curves of our lives, both planned and unplanned.

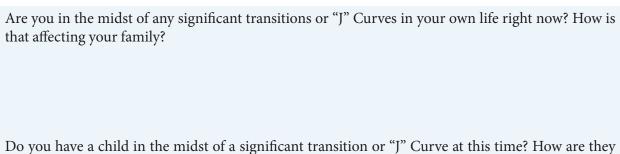
The "J" Curve can also be a very helpful tool for understanding our children when they are going through times of change and transition. Any time our children experience a significant change in

their lives they, too, will experience the "J" Curve. Changes, such as the beginning of a new school year, moving, joining a team, a death in the family, parents splitting up, or the blending of families. Children of all ages need our help to negotiate these often-difficult changes until a new normal is established.

For example, one way to think about adolescence is as one prolonged "J" Curve for both teens and parents. Both are letting go of a previous level of connectedness and working their way toward a new, greater level of independence. It can be helpful to remember that while, on the one hand, it may feel to the parents that things are falling apart, in reality things are starting to come together in a new and different way. This understanding helps us develop the patience and perspective needed to move through these challenging times of transition.

Making it Personal

adjusting? How could you help?



What most helps you and your family to manage stress in the midst of transitions, in the midst of "J" Curves?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now that would help you or your child get through a change that you or your family is going through? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 94.

The Importance of Timeouts

We both love being active, so it's no surprise that sports were and are a big part of our children's lives, as well. Through the years, we saw first-hand how our children's involvement in sports provided many valuable life lessons for them. One that stands out is the importance of knowing when to call a timeout. Timeouts are a key part of any good coaching strategy, and the art of knowing when to call one is a gift that all great coaches possess.

So what constitutes a well-timed timeout in sports? When a game is getting out of hand and a team is on the edge of falling apart, they need a timeout. The players might be tired, flustered, confused, or emotionally heated, and it will get in the way of their playing a good game. This type of a timeout gives the coach a chance to help the team calm down, regroup, and make a new plan.

The importance of well-timed timeouts is as important in family life as it is in sports. Whenever you or your children find yourselves getting tired, flustered, confused, or emotionally heated because—for whatever reason—life is getting out of hand, it's time to call a timeout. A parent who is stressed by work, worried about bills, or their child's grades, and is about to say

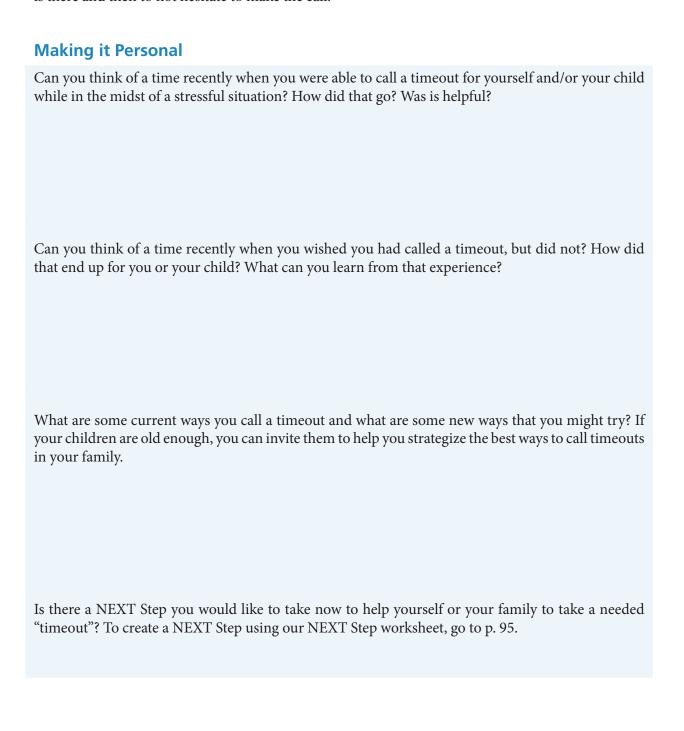


something they are going to regret will benefit from a timeout. Children who find themselves flooded with emotion also need to be taught about the power of taking a timeout. These timeouts do not ignore the pressures and emotions that are present, but give everyone a chance to calm down, regroup, and a devise a new plan for expressing themselves and solving the problems at hand.

Frustration, anger, jealousy, sadness, and grief are all emotions that can signal a need for a timeout. We like to think of emotions as being like the ocean. Oceans, like emotions, can get stormy and a person in the water can easily get tossed about or pulled under if they aren't careful or don't know how to swim. For this reason, it is imperative that parents teach their children how to swim through all of the emotions that come their way, *before* they have to know how.

Learning when and how to take a timeout to regroup is one of the first lessons for successfully swimming through emotions. If emotions are getting the best of anyone in the family, it is a good idea for that person to practice waiting a few minutes, take a few deep breaths, and then to think about more productive ways to talk about the upsetting issue.

| Coaches have a limited number of timeouts they can call each game. But the good news for us is that |
|---|
| we have no such limits. As the coaches of our families, we are free to call as many timeouts as we |
| need, and to encourage our children to do the same. The important thing is to realize when the need |
| is there and then to not hesitate to make the call. |



Learning to Be "Response-able"

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

—Viktor Frankl

The above quote is from Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist who survived being a prisoner in a concentration camp during the Holocaust. The key word for us here is the word "choose." When stress arises in our families, we can choose—and this is a very important distinction—to either react or respond. When we simply react, it is likely an indication that our emotions have taken over and when this happens, we may later regret what we have said or done. When we overreact with our children, we oftentimes are tempted to blame our child for our overreaction. While it may be true that we would not have overreacted if our child hadn't done what they did, we are still the ones responsible for our behavior.

Responding, on the other hand, means we are able to choose the response we wish to make. To respond is to be thoughtful and controlled before we speak or act. It is optimal when we choose to respond thoughtfully to our children rather than thoughtlessly reacting because they are always watching and learning from us.

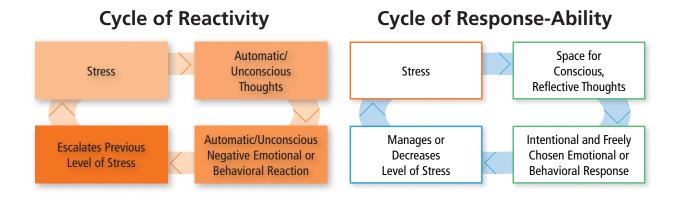
It is not uncommon for us—and our children, too, for that matter—to lose our perspective from time to time. It is also not uncommon for us to get "hooked" and find ourselves caught in a cycle of reactivity with our children. The challenge then is to become aware of when we are in such a reactive cycle, take responsibility for our part of that cycle, and then to learn from what has happened.

Blaming others, including our children, for our reactivity will not help us regain our balance, and will only prolong the cycle of reactivity. We will regret that we reacted too quickly and too impulsively because it hurts everyone. Instead, we need to remember to pause and take some deep breaths, put on our own oxygen masks first, so to speak. We will never regret that we paused and took some time to think about how to respond in the midst of an emotionally stressful situation. And our children will learn an important lesson, as well.

This reminds us of a time when Scott was refereeing a youth soccer game. One of the coaches was yelling at his ten-year-old players so harshly that Scott felt the need to talk to him at halftime. After discreetly pulling him aside, Scott gave him some clear, but gentle feedback about his demeanor and how it was affecting not only his team, but everyone involved in the game. The coach immediately reacted and said, "I know I yell at my players, but it's only because they never listen to me!" Scott didn't say a word and waited to see if the coach would notice the irony of what he'd just said. He did and added quietly, with a knowing look, "Maybe if I didn't yell all the time they might listen more often." Scott was glad that the coach could see that his reactive style was diminishing his power to positively influence his players. The second half of the game was much quieter and after the game, the

coach came over, shook Scott's hand, and thanked him for the honest feedback. In a matter of minutes this coach was able to move from a cycle of reactivity to a cycle of response-ability and Scott greatly admired him for being able to do that. At the same time, everyone else was able to enjoy a much more pleasant soccer experience.

The diagram below shows the difference between a "Cycle of Reactivity" and a "Cycle of Response-Ability."



Making it Personal

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response." How do you think this quote from Frankl relates to your family life? How could the practice of carefully choosing your responses to your children impact your family's well-being?

Think of a time recently when you or someone in your family reacted rather than responded. What factors do you think contributed to this? Now think of time when you were able to deal with a stressful situation by responding rather than reacting. What helped you to do this? What can you learn from this?

Children often react rather than responding thoughtfully. Part of growing up is learning to think before acting or speaking. How could you help teach and model this skill in your family?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now in how you handle yourself when stressed, or in how you teach your child to do the same? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 95.

| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Stress Resilience | Parent Wellness CMPASS |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Reflection: Gradually, Then Suddenly | 0 | ate: |
| Goal: | | |
| Needed: | | |
| EXcited: | | |
| Time-specific: | | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: | |
| NEXT Step: | | |
| | | |
| | | Parent Wellness |
| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Stress Resilience | Parent Wellness COMPASS |
| | | COMPASS |
| NEXT Step Worksheet Reflection: The Wisdom of the "J" Curve Goal: | | Parent Wellness CMPASS Date: |
| Reflection: The Wisdom of the "J" Curve | | COMPASS |
| Reflection: The Wisdom of the "J" Curve Goal: | | COMPASS |
| Reflection: The Wisdom of the "J" Curve Goal: Needed: | | COMPASS |
| Reflection: The Wisdom of the "J" Curve Goal: Needed: EXcited: | | COMPASS |

| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Stress Resilience | Parent Wellness CMPASS |
|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Reflection: The Importance of Timeouts | D | ate: |
| Goal: | | |
| Needed: | | |
| EXcited: | | |
| Time-specific: | | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: | |
| NEXT Step: | | |
| | | |
| | | Parent Wellness |
| NEXT Step Worksheet | Area of Wellness: Stress Resilience | Parent Wellness CMPASS |
| NEXT Step Worksheet Reflection: Learning to Be "Response-able" | | COMPASS |
| | | Parent Wellness CMPASS ate: |
| Reflection: Learning to Be "Response-able" | | C MPASS |
| Reflection: Learning to Be "Response-able" Goal: | | C MPASS |
| Reflection: Learning to Be "Response-able" Goal: Needed: | | C MPASS |
| Reflection: Learning to Be "Response-able" Goal: Needed: EXcited: | | COMPASS |



Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



96 • • • • • • • • • Parent Wellness Compass: Outfitting for the Journey

CHAPTER 8

Care for the Body

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in the past 30 years, childhood obesity has more than doubled in children and quadrupled

in adolescents. For adults, the American Heart Association projects that we will be spending \$800 billion dollars annually to treat heart disease by the year 2030. Similarly, experts predict that by 2020, Type II diabetes will cost Americans \$500 billion annually. It is important to note that while not all of these conditions are completely dependent on lifestyle alone, the daily choices we make do have a great impact on our well-being. How we *Care for our Bodies*, and how we teach our children to do the same, truly matters.

We share these statistics because they are an indication of the vast number of people in our country who are struggling to be healthy. Out of deep concern and compassion, we need to look at what we each can do to change things, beginning in our own homes. The intent here is never to shame or judge, but to invite all

of us into a meaningful conversation about how to address the health challenges that face our families each day. We are in this together and we are all, in one way or another, affected by the choices that we collectively, as a culture, are making regarding how we see and how we care for our bodies.

We live in paradoxical times when it comes to attitudes and habits regarding our physical well-being. We know more than any other generation about what good nutrition looks like and what constitutes a healthy diet. We know how important movement and exercise are in maintaining physical wellness. At the same time that we have all of this clear information and guidance on healthy ways to live, we as a culture continue to struggle with growing health problems, ones that are, in large part, attributed to our unhealthy choices. Obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and



diseases associated with alcohol and other drug use, and other so-called "lifestyle" diseases are on the rise—not because of a lack of knowledge about what factors increase the likelihood of these diseases occurring, but because of health choices we all make day in and day out. In this complex cultural climate, it is indeed an awe-inspiring and sometimes overwhelming path before us as parents.

We hope that as you read this chapter you feel supported in your commitment to make taking care of your body a high priority so that you can sustain the endurance and energy needed to meet the many demands of raising a family.

Our Children Are Always Watching

Wherever we turn, we see and hear advice about caring for our physical well-being—what to eat, the importance of exercise, getting enough sleep, and being aware of the effects of chronic stress on our bodies. Most of us know what we should be doing to care for our physical well-being, as well as for our families. Yet, in the midst of the busyness of our lives, what we know is easily neglected. It is easy for us to overlook the day-to-day healthy decisions that are required to care for our physical wellness because, after all, the choices we make on any one day don't really matter all that much, or so we tell ourselves.

Every day we face a dizzying array of options: at the grocery store, at the movie refreshment counter, at the mall food court, at restaurants, and take-out delivery orders phoned in or texted. And those are just some of our choices related to food. Then there are the other choices we make, for ourselves and for our families: getting outdoors or watching TV; staying up late or going to bed on time; having just

one more alcoholic beverage or choosing a glass of water. The list is endless. And we can bet that none of our decisions are going unnoticed by our children. Taken in isolation, these decisions don't seem to be that significant, yet it is precisely the accumulation of those small, daily choices that ultimately affect our physical well-being, as well as the well-being of our children.

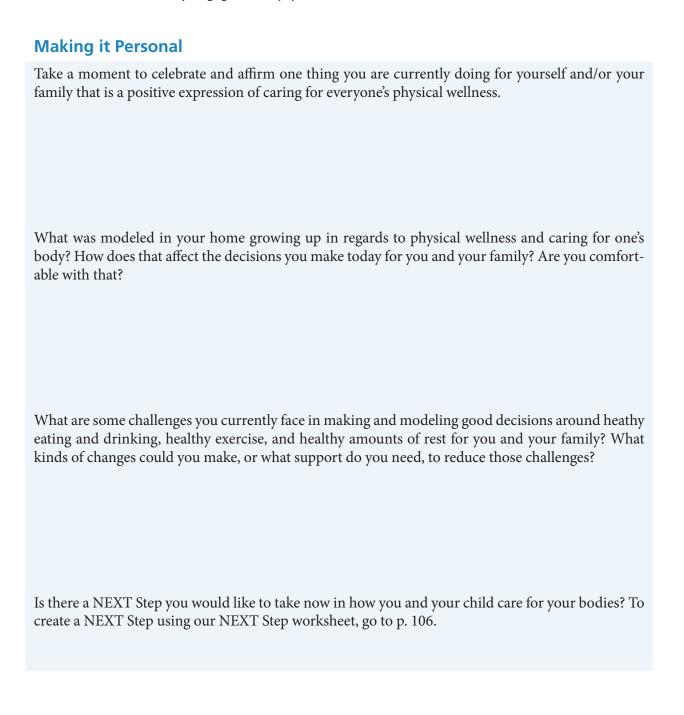
Those daily choices we make for ourselves and our children regarding diet, rest, and exercise become the foundation on which we and our children build long-term habits—healthy or unhealthy. We all want our children to grow up to be happy and healthy and, in large part, that will depend on the habits we teach them as children.



Our children see images of people obsessing over having perfect bodies, as well as people who neglect or abuse their bodies by eating poorly, not getting enough sleep, abusing drugs or alcohol, and smoking. It is up to us to model healthy habits that counteract the often-unhealthy lifestyle choices our children witness.

As with all aspects of parenting, it is important to remember that whether or not our children seem to be listening to us, they are *always* watching us. Parents are clearly the primary teachers of what children think they should eat and drink, and about the importance of sleep and exercise. What children learn at home about how to treat and care for their bodies will continue to influence the

decisions they'll make when they are grown and on their own. For this reason alone, it is wise for us to honestly examine the self-care decisions we are making and modeling, remembering that we want our bodies— and those of our children—to run as smoothly as possible, for as long as possible, so that we all can more fully engage and enjoy life.



Me Want It, But Me Wait

The award-winning television show *Sesame Street* has long been a favorite of young children and parents alike. Just thinking about Big Bird, Cookie Monster, Snuffy, Elmo, Grover, Oscar, as well as Bert and Ernie, will most likely bring back happy memories of watching this delightful show, either as a child, as a parent, or both.



One of the factors that has kept *Sesame Street* relevant for so many years is that the show is always evolving to both include and address changes in the culture. A few years ago, the show expressed a desire to respond to what early childhood educators said was a growing problem with young children: struggles with impulse control and self-regulation.

Which of the favorite Muppets do you think the creators of *Sesame Street* chose to teach children about the importance of learning to delay gratification? Cookie Monster! Cookie Monster is, of course, well known for his insatiable desire to consume cookies any chance he gets. The show decided to have Cookie Monster reform his ways, coming up with a new motto to help him teach children about waiting: "Me Want It, But Me Wait!"

The creators of *Sesame Street* did a very smart thing. They created parody videos that were aimed at parents. The goal of these videos was to draw in the parents as well as the children, so that the parents could help model and reinforce the importance of their work in teaching their children to delay gratification. The *Sesame Street* creators seem to know that when it comes to creating healthy habits of any kind, parents are their children's primary teachers.

"Me Want It, But Me Wait" is a great motto for all parents who are teaching their children. No matter what our children may want—a cookie before dinner, not completing homework, or to stay up late on a weeknight—learning to wait is a key to wellness for all ages. Learning to wait can be as simple as waiting until a healthy meal is served, waiting for a special occasion to have a soda, or waiting until the weekend to play a video game. None of these are in any way meant to be punitive, but are simply subtle ways to teach self-control. Cookie Monster isn't punishing himself or saying he will never have cookies; he is saying he is learning to wait until the time is right. He is learning to make healthier choices about having cookies, choices that will serve him better in the long run.

It is important to note that this same principle is also true for parents because wellness in all areas of our lives is closely related to our own self-regulation and impulse control. Our bodies will suffer if we simply eat every "cookie" that comes our way. If we eat the "cookie" of late night movies, or work into the wee hours of the morning when we need to get up early and we don't get enough sleep, we will eventually burn out. If we eat and drink whatever we see, rather than making thoughtful choices, our bodies and emotions will suffer. If we consistently choose to eat the "cookie" of lounging on the couch rather than getting out for some exercise, our bodies will get sluggish. Creating healthy self-care habits for ourselves and for our children is something none of us will ever regret, and a key step for us in this important process is learning to wait by using self-control.

| Making it Personal |
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| What "cookies" are you as a parent tempted to eat when you shouldn't? What is that teaching your children? |
| One of the keys to physical wellness is learning to delay gratification. How does your family teach "Me Want It, But Me Wait"? Give some examples. |
| How can you better handle pushback when your children don't like the self-care limits you set, such as a regular bedtime, brushing teeth, and eating healthy foods? |
| Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now to model and teach your child healthy self-control? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 106. |

Physical Education Teachers

As a teacher for many years, Holly had the opportunity to work with many Physical Education teachers. She noticed that children looked forward to gym class because it was their chance to run around, talk more freely with other kids, and play fun games. And yes, this was true even with high-school students. It is easy to understand why kids of all ages love gym class, given that they can be active during otherwise fairly sedentary school days. Sadly, many school districts are cutting back on their physical education programs.

While we can appreciate the difficult financial realities that many school districts face, we know children and youth need daily exercise. Studies have consistently shown that children who get exercise during the school day, and who are physically active outside of school, perform better academically

and are both happier and healthier (obesity and diabetes rates are at a record high). Knowing all of this, it is even more imperative for families to encourage and model healthy habits regarding physical activity.

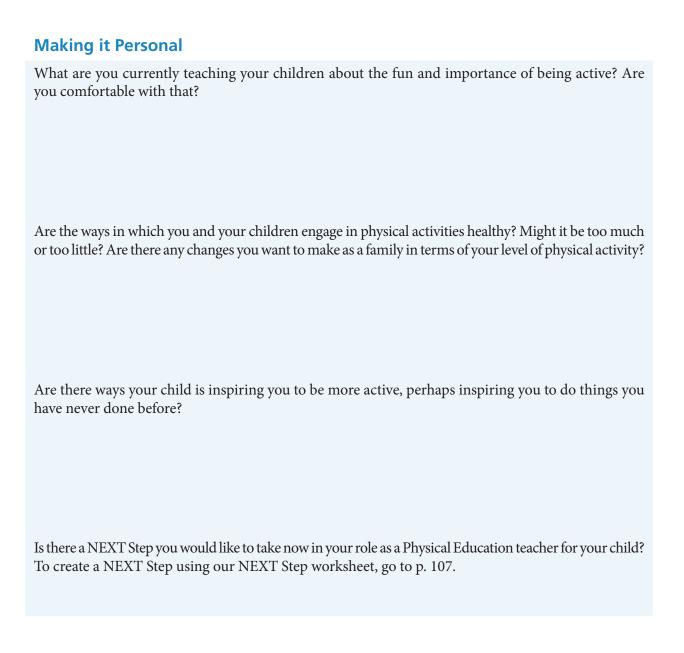
You may have never thought of yourself as a Physical Education teacher, but that is exactly what you are as a parent. In fact, whether or not your children have such teachers at their schools, you are their most important PE teacher. You don't need a license to be your child's PE teacher, but you do need a commitment to model and encour-



age physical activity for yourself and for your children. While parents can help their children to be more active, it is also true that children can serve as inspiration for their parents. Family trips to the playground or gym, hiking, biking, walks around the block, or practicing a sport with your child, can motivate everyone to become more active.

Even though neither of us played soccer growing up, all of our children loved playing soccer. So when Scott started coaching our children's soccer teams, he soon realized that if he wanted to coach at more advanced levels, he was going to have to learn to play the game himself. He found an adult beginners team and began playing. It's been many years since he coached our children, but he continues to take great delight in playing soccer, and plays with that same team to this day. Without the motivation of our children, he may have never discovered soccer and would very likely have missed out on all the great fun and exercise he has enjoyed over the years.

The biggest challenge you will probably face in this role will be pressures related to busy schedules. Add to that the amount of time both parents and children spend in front of televisions, video games, computers, tablets, and phones, and you have a mighty obstacle. Yet, it is our responsibility as parents to limit screen time and other sedentary activities that can stifle our children's inborn desires to be active, and lead the way in showing them how much fun being active can be. Don't let these challenges stop you! Just remember how valuable exercise is for your body and your spirits, and that it can be great fun, for you and for your family.



Body Language

The study of body language is the study of how people communicate non-verbally with their bodies. For example, crossed arms usually reveals that a child or parent is not open to an idea that is being discussed. The eye roll of a teen communicates that their parents are annoying or embarrassing them in some way. A warm smile communicates love and acceptance without saying a word. Our bodies and those of our children are always communicating, even when we are not fully aware of this fact. It is natural and important for us to watch the non-verbal clues from our children as they give us critical clues about their well-being.

We would like to invite you to think about body language in a little different manner. Rather than simply thinking about it as communicating non-verbal messages to the world, we invite you to listen to what your body, and the bodies of your children, may be telling you right now about everyone's overall sense of well-being and life balance.

Bodies always tell the truth. They never lie and are always speaking to us. Our bodies, and those of our children, reveal a great deal about



the level of stress we are currently experiencing. Our bodies also reveal a great deal about the day-to-day choices we are making about food, alcohol and other drugs, exercise, sleep, and how, in general, we are caring for our bodies.

Take a moment right now and listen to what your body is telling you. Is your body feeling refreshed or exhausted? Are you feeling relaxed or tense? Is there a pain in your body that is trying to tell you something? Are you feeling weighed down or energized? Is your breathing deep and slow, or shallow and rapid?

Listening to our bodies regularly, and teaching our children to do the same, is a good practice to develop. If we don't, we may find that the only time we listen to our bodies is when they are "shouting" at us because we have neglected or exhausted them. If you notice that you are feeling tired much of the time, your body might be telling you that you need to rebalance some things in your life. It might be telling you that you need to sleep more, exercise more, change your eating habits, or reduce the amount of stress you are carrying. Learning to listen and responding to the "whispers" from our bodies is always preferable to getting a "shout" later on from more severe symptoms or a disease.

One of the core understandings of the *Parent Wellness Compass* is that every area of wellness in interconnected with the others. What happens in one of the areas of wellness affects the other areas, for good and bad. When our bodies are run down, for example, it will inevitably affect our emotions, our relationships, and most other areas. When we take good care of our bodies, this will have a positive effect on other areas of wellness, too. Effectively managing stress in our lives will positively affect our physical wellness, the relationships within the family, and how we handle our work life. Everything is connected.

So listening to our bodies—and teaching our children to do the same—and caring for them with intention not only helps with our physical health, that wellness will ripple out to other areas of our life, as well. Listening to our bodies and responding in healthy ways is well worth the time and effort it takes.

Making it Personal

Take a few moments to listen to what your body is saying to you right now. What did you learn? What would you like to hear?

Regarding the idea that all areas of wellness in the *Parent Wellness Compass* are interconnected, can you think of an example of how this is true for you and/or your family?

Our children's behavior, no matter what their age, is a non-verbal way of telling us something. What behaviors do you observe that might indicate they need to take better care of their bodies? What could you do to help?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now to better listen to your own body, or to teach your child to better listen to theirs? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 107.

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Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



108 • • • • • • • • • Parent Wellness Compass: Outfitting for the Journey

Where To From Here?

The Journey Continues

By now it is likely that you have read most, if not all, of this book, reflected on your life as a parent, and perhaps created some NEXT Steps for yourself and your family. In doing so, you have demonstrated a strong commitment to your well-being, as well as the well-being of your family. You have helped your family in ways that may already be apparent, or in ways that will become more so over time. It takes courage to engage in honest self-reflection, and we congratulate you on what you have committed to and what you have accomplished.

You certainly know now that wellness is a journey, not a destination. Like parenting itself, each of us, our children, and our life together, are always changing. There always will be more to teach our children, and always more to learn ourselves. And there is always more that we can do to strengthen and expand our own villages of support, and those of the parents and families in our communities.

What Next?

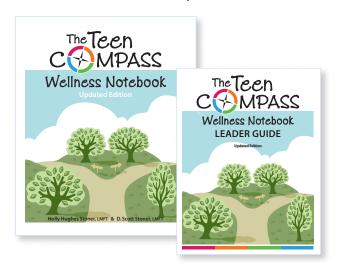
Now that you have begun to develop a habit of self-reflection, you will most likely want to find ways to continue this practice. It is strongly recommended that children and adults get an annual physical exam to make sure they are healthy, and to catch anything that might be developing that could threaten their health and well-being. Following that same line of thinking, you may want to refer back to the **Parent Wellness Compass** at regular intervals as a way to check up on everyone's well-being. While the material will be the same, you will not be. You and your children will be older and undoubtedly facing new challenges, as well as celebrating new joys. You will have an opportunity to identify NEXT Steps based on where you find yourself and your family at that time.

Now that you are familiar with the concepts in this book, you might want to invite other parents to read through the book together, with you as the facilitator and guide for the discussions. Our hope is that this book and the **Parent Wellness Compass Coaching Program** (see below) will be catalysts for parents to gather, talk, reflect, and make adjustments in their habits, if needed. These honest conversations, and the support parents will receive from one another, will build stronger families and communities of support for all.

109

Knowing that teens are a unique and sometimes vulnerable population—they are living in a family but are looking ahead toward their adult lives—we have also created a book very similar to the *Parent*

Wellness Compass, called The Teen Compass. It introduces the same eight areas of wellness, teaches about healthy practices in each area, and encourages teens to make SMART goals in each area. These books are being used in schools, youth centers, by therapists, and within faith communities. Used in tandem in communities where parents are also using the Parent Wellness Compass can create new spaces for conversations that otherwise would probably not happen between parents and their teens. Go to TheTeenCompass.org to find out more.

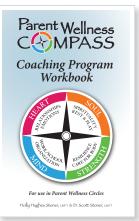


Parent Wellness Compass Coaching Program

In addition to this book, we also offer a **Parent Wellness Compass Coaching Program**, a six-week parent coaching program that we have created based upon the principles in this book. In the program, parents gather with a trained facilitator in a **Parent Wellness Circle** to set goals, share thoughts, and support each other as they work on parent and family wellness NEXT Steps. The **Parent Wellness Compass Inventory**, a signature part of this coaching program, is completed during the first session and serves as a guide to help parents identify and create their NEXT Steps.

While we encourage parents to gather together to read and discuss this book, the **Parent Wellness Compass Coaching Program** requires a trained facilitator. The facilitator, along with the other parents participating in the wellness circle, creates a safe space for parents to say "yes!" to the journey toward parent and family wellness.

We regularly offer facilitator trainings for leading a **Parent Wellness Compass Coaching Program**. If you have an interest in becoming a trained facilitator for the **Parent Wellness Compass Coaching Program**, please contact us. You can stay up to date on this program and our trainings through our website: ParentWellnessCompass.org.



A Closing Word of Gratitude

Please know that we travel regularly to speak to groups of parents, teachers, clergy, and youth leaders about the principles covered in this book. We speak at schools, community centers, health facilities, youth organizations, faith communities, and other non-profit organizations—any place where groups of parents, and those who support them, gather for support and growth. We welcome the opportunity to assist you and your community in growing a stronger parenting village in your area. Please let us know if you'd like us to come work with you to grow **Parent Wellness Circles** in your community.

Thank you for being a parent who is committed to your own wellness and the wellness of your family. Thank you for being vulnerable and sharing your thoughts and feelings with others. You have strengthened your own village of support with other parents and families by being authentic and by growing in relationship with one another.

It has been an honor to walk with you on your journey of parent and family wellness. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to support you as you do the most important work of all—raising a family.

For more information, you can reach us by email or through our website:

- Holly Hughes Stoner: holly@samaritanfamilywellness.org
- Scott Stoner: scott@samaritanfamilywellness.org
- ParentWellnessCompass.org



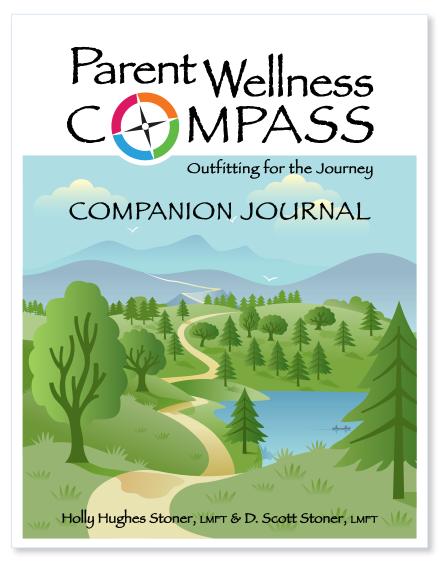
About the Authors

Scott and Holly Stoner are the Co-Executive Directors of the Samaritan Family Wellness Foundation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They are both Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs) with a combined sixty-five+ years of experience helping parents and families. They are the creators of both the *Parent Wellness Compass* and *The Teen Compass*.

Holly has worked with many families and children as a teacher at both the grade-school and high-school levels. Scott, too, has worked with many families and children when he served as a pastor of an Episcopal church.

Married for more than 40 years, they have three adult children and two grandchildren. For both, personally and professionally, family has always been what is most important in life.

• 111



A free, interactive, downloadable pdf that you can download and print, or fill out right on your phone, tablet, or computer. This companion journal contains all of the questions from the "Making it Personal" sections from every chapter in the *Parent Wellness Compass*, with plenty of writing space following each reflection question. We have also included NEXT Steps worksheet pages that you can use to create NEXT Steps.

To download, go to: ParentWellnessCompass.org



ParentWellnessCompass.org