

## **Grade 7, Theme Four**

### **Family Letter**

Dear Family,

We have come to the fourth theme of *Fully Alive*, our Family Life program. Because the partnership of home, church, and school is so important, this letter is written to let you know what we talk about in class and to offer some ideas for your involvement. For more information, please go to [www. acbo.on.ca](http://www.acbo.on.ca).

### **About Theme Four**

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

### **In Theme Four we will**

- discuss some of the feelings the students have about growing up and examine the relationship between freedom and responsibility.
- analyze and practise the process of making decisions.
- explore the connection between commitments and responsibilities and reflect on what it means to be authentic people and to create balance in their lives.

### **Working together at home and at school**

- Growing up and becoming an adult is hard work, and young people need family support. You can show this support by encouraging your child to make more decisions and by being patient when things don’t work out as expected. Learning from small mistakes is part of growing up. Young people also need the safety of limitations in areas in which they do not have the experience or maturity to make independent decisions.
- The virtue highlighted in Theme Four is perseverance. In class we will discuss perseverance as the virtue that allows us to overcome obstacles and patiently meet the challenges in our lives. Children need encouragement to persevere, not only because it is an important habit for the rest of their lives, but also to experience the pleasure of overcoming difficulties and to develop the confidence that comes from success.
- At school the students will be learning that there are no short cuts to maturity and that trying to grow up too quickly deprives young people of the experiences

and time they need to become fully mature. Our society puts a lot of pressure on children as young as 8 or 9 to assume the styles and behaviours of much older teens. It can be difficult for parents to resist this trend, but there are good reasons for doing so. It can result in preteens and young teenagers being exposed to situations that they do not have the maturity to handle.

- As children grow up they tend to be more private and share less of their day-to-day lives with their parents. There are times when they have problems that worry them, but are often hesitant to talk to an adult about their worries. This is particularly true if they have been involved in something they know their parents would disapprove of. It's important for young people to know that their parents are always ready to listen, and that even when they get upset or angry, their love for their children is not in question.
- The students will discuss a variety of responsibilities related to their commitment to being a family member. One of these responsibilities is an effort to understand the viewpoint of other family members. This is especially important for parents and young people, who often find themselves frustrated by arguments that seem to go nowhere. You might ask your child about this responsibility and how it applies to your family.

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Theme Four Topics**

*I have fought the good fight,*

*I have finished the race,*

*I have kept the faith.*

2 Timothy 4:7

This theme is developed through three topics. In the opening topic, the students examine the process of human development, the relationship of freedom and responsibility, and limitations that are placed on their freedom at this stage in their lives. Decisions are an important part of life, and Topic 2 presents a process for making thoughtful decisions. In the final topic, the students reflect on commitments and the responsibilities that are part of these commitments.

### **Theme Four Virtue**

The virtue in Theme Four is perseverance. This is the virtue that helps people overcome obstacles and patiently meet the challenges they have in their lives. Perseverance requires

self-discipline and dedication, two character traits that adults encourage children to develop. The virtue of perseverance, of course, is not just for young people, but is essential for everyone, throughout each stage of life. This is the reflection on the virtue of perseverance from the student text.

## **The Virtue of Perseverance**

“. . . we also boast of our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope . . .” Romans 5:3,4

Perseverance is the virtue that allows people to overcome obstacles and patiently meet the challenges in their lives. As small children, many people read a story about a little engine that pulled a train up a hill, despite its small size. “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can” the engine kept saying, and it did get to the top. The little engine didn’t accomplish this feat to prove it was as strong as a big engine, to show off, or to be praised. The little engine had an important goal — to deliver the toys on the train.

The story about the little engine is meant for young children, but it says a lot about the virtue of perseverance. We need to know what our life goals are, and commit ourselves to them. To persevere, especially when we face obstacles, requires self-discipline and dedication, two important character traits.

- John has tried a great variety of activities — soccer, hockey, scouts, swimming, piano lessons, and so on. He begins with enthusiasm, but as soon as it requires more effort to reach the next level, he drops out. “It’s boring,” is his usual explanation.
- Angela has some learning disabilities, and schoolwork is difficult for her. Every person who has taught her, however, describes her as an amazing example of perseverance. Her attitude is positive, and she has learned to see her limitations, not as roadblocks, but as challenges that can be managed.

When people develop the habit of giving up too easily, they never know the pleasure of committing themselves to work through difficulties, or the experience of satisfaction in a job well done. If people don’t test themselves, they miss the opportunity to discover just how capable they are.

The virtue of perseverance is necessary throughout our lives. We need to develop this habit for our own growth, for our relationships with others, for the work we do, and for our relationship with God. We are made in God’s image, and God never gives up on us. To be fully human, we cannot give up either.

## **Topic 1 — Developing People**

*In this world, things that are naturally to endure  
for a long time are the slowest in reaching maturity.*

St. Vincent de Paul

### **Summary**

In this topic the students are encouraged to understand that human development is not just for children and adolescents, but for all people. People continue to learn throughout their lives. Adolescence, however, is a unique stage during which young people prepare to be adults. The students also explore the relationship of freedom and responsibility, and the goal of becoming self-directed adults who make thoughtful decisions.

### **Main Ideas**

- Growing up is a process. Adolescence is a unique stage of development in which people learn how to be adults.
- Growing up is not a race. It involves a series of steps through which people become more independent and learn to be responsible.
- Freedom and responsibility go together. To be free and independent means making your own decisions and accepting responsibility for the consequences. Young adolescents have limitations on their freedom in order to give them time to mature and gain experience.

### **Family Participation**

- This topic begins with the question: How do you feel about growing up? Naomi, Jim, Corry, and Curtis, the four imaginary Grade 7 children, responded to this question, and will find their answers at the end of this theme. You might ask your child which of the four answers is most like his or her feelings about growing up.
- **Growing up and independence** — Not all Grade 7 students experience an inner drive to be independent. Some would like their life to continue exactly as it is. For most, however, their attitude is one of ambivalence; they have positive and negative feelings about growing up, and they need to be reassured by their parents that this is a normal way to feel. Their uncertainty may come from their recognition that being free to make decisions about their lives involves big responsibilities, responsibilities that they are not yet ready to assume

There are, however, some young people who want to be independent as soon as

possible, to skip the stage between the end of childhood and adulthood. In class, the students discussed some the drawbacks of growing up too quickly. Adolescence involves a number of important experiences that prepare people for the future:

- friendships that become more mature
- guidance from other people
- the opportunity to learn how to make good decisions
- the time to develop the strength to persevere in the face of difficulties
- the time to grow in virtuous habits and in commitment to their faith.

• **Learning how to be a adult** — Adolescence is the stage in which developing people learn how to be adults, not just physically, but emotionally, socially, intellectually, and spiritually. Becoming a mature person is hard work, and young people need their parents' support during adolescence. This support can be shown in a number of different ways — by encouraging them to make more decisions, by letting them make mistakes in minor matters and learn from these mistakes, and by keeping a strong safety net under them in the form of clear rules and encouragement. It's not always easy to be the parent of a young teen-ager, and to achieve the right balance of involvement and distance. Most parents find it helpful to talk to other parents about common concerns, and to learn from each other's experiences.

• **Freedom and responsibility** — In class, the students discussed the relationship between freedom and responsibility, and the role of new responsibilities in helping young people become more self-directed and dependable. Parents face the difficult task in determining the amount of responsibility their growing children should accept. To some extent, it depends on the child. Some children handle responsibilities well; others need more time to become realistic about what they can manage. It also depends on the family. In some families, children are expected to take on small responsibilities around the home when they are quite young. In others, children have little experience of assuming responsibilities.

• **Limitations on freedom** — The students also discussed two kinds of limitations on their freedom. These two limitations are related to each other. The first one comes from outside young people — the restrictions adults, and especially parents, place on them. The second limitation comes from the inside. To make important decisions independently

requires some life experience and maturity, and it is for this reason that adults limit their freedom.

Adolescence is the period of time during which the balance of these two limitations begins to shift. Young people begin to make more decisions on their own and accept responsibility for their actions. They will make some mistakes in the beginning, but the job of parents is to ensure that these will be small mistakes. There are many steps in the process of growing up, but the ultimate goal for both parents and young people is the emergence of thoughtful and self-directed young adults.

## **Topic 2 — Decision Makers**

*The self is not something ready-made,  
but something in continuous formation through choice of action.*

John Dewey

### **Summary**

This topic introduces the students to a process for making practical decisions, and encourages them to examine options and possible consequences when faced with a decision. After discussing the process, they apply it to a decision they would like to make.

### **Main Ideas**

- Everyone is a decision maker. As people grow up they have to learn to make thoughtful decisions.
- Some steps for making a complicated decision are to identify options, the pros and cons of each option, and possible consequences of each option. The final step is to choose the best option and evaluate your decision at a later time.
- A practical decision-making process isn't appropriate for deeply personal decisions. Young people often find it hard to talk to parents when they have a troubling personal problem. Asking for help when it is needed is a sign of maturity.

### **Family Participation**

- You might ask about the decision your child analyzed using the process for making a practical decision. Was the process helpful?
- **Option and consequences** — The students begin this topic with two examples of a practical decision: 1) a boy who has a social studies project due in a few days, and has

not yet been able to make up his mind about which topic to choose from several options;  
2) a girl who receives some money for a birthday, plans to buy some boots when she has saved some more money, but spots two CDs she wants and buys them.

These examples highlight two difficulties young people have with practical decisions. They get overwhelmed when there are a number of options, and they often act on impulse, especially if they don't have a definite plan or they ignore the possible consequences. What appears obvious to adults — consider your options and the possible consequences, and then make a choice — is often confusing and frustrating for young adolescents. In part, this is because they are developing intellectually and are aware of more options.

• **Process for making a decision** — In class, the students discussed a process for making practical decisions. This process involves a number of steps:

*Step 1:* Find a time when you're not busy and can concentrate on the situation that requires a decision.

*Step 2:* Describe the situation that needs a decision.

*Step 3:* What are your options?

*Step 4:* Evaluate your options. What are the pros and cons? What are the possible consequences? Are these consequences acceptable to you?

*Step 5:* Consider the options and choose the one that seems to be best.

*Step 6:* Some time later, review your decision. Was it a good decision? Are you happy with it? If not, can you change it?

• **Helping young people with decisions** — When young adolescents are struggling with a decision, one of the most helpful strategies parents can adopt is to ask questions: Have you thought about this? What would happen if you did that? How would you feel about it? Is there another option? When you ask your child these kinds of questions, you are encouraging thoughtful decision-making.

• **Important personal decisions** — The process for making a practical decision the students discussed is not appropriate for decisions involving questions of right and wrong. It is also not appropriate for decisions that are deeply personal and involve significant relationships.

In class, the students discussed a story about Jim Bernard, who had a difficult

personal decision involving his need to have some time alone with this father. You will find this story at the end of this theme.

• **Asking for help** — Young people may avoid talking to their parents about personal issues for a number of reasons:

- They believe they should be able to handle their own difficulties, and that it's a sign of immaturity to ask for help.
- They don't know what to say. The problem seems too complicated, and they're already convinced there is no solution.
- They think their parents will be upset with them, which will just make things worse.

Most often, parents are aware when something is bothering their children. If parents push too hard to find out what's wrong or react by getting angry, young people become more convinced that can't confide in their parents. Often, the best approach is to let the child know that you have noticed she or he is worried about something, and that you would be glad to listen, and to help in any way you can.

An important point in this discussion, one that the students considered, is this: It is a sign of maturity to ask for help when we need it. We live in relationship for an important reason: we depend on each other, especially in times of difficulty.

### **Topic 3 — Committed People**

*Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance,  
but to do what lies clearly at hand.*

Thomas Carlyle

#### **Summary**

The students examine the responsibilities that are part of all commitments and the need to learn how to balance these responsibilities in their lives. They also explore the idea of being authentic people — to be who they say they are — students, Catholics, family members, friends, and young adolescents.

#### **Main Ideas**

• To be a committed family member, friend, student, and member of a faith community, we have to accept the responsibilities that are part of these commitments.



- The responsibilities connected to our closest relationships — family and friends — include loyalty, helpfulness, and willingness to make an effort to understand the viewpoint of these people.
- We also have a commitment to be authentic, well-balanced people who are trying to be the people God created us to be.

### **Family Participation**

- **Commitment and responsibility** — The students began this topic with a discussion of the connection between commitments and responsibilities. All commitments involve responsibilities, especially relationship commitments.

The first area of commitment the students examined is their commitment to themselves to be the people God created them to be. Some of the responsibilities that are part of this commitment are:

- treat themselves as valuable persons whom God loves
- develop their talents and share them with others
- recognize their faults and try to overcome them
- look after their relationships with family and friends
- strengthen their relationship with God through prayer and the sacraments

The responsibilities of a commitment to oneself are not just for young adolescents, but for all people. When each person in a family tries to be loyal to this commitment, together they are accepting the responsibility of being persons whom God created out of love.

- **Commitment to family** — This commitment requires generous participation in the work of the home, but also includes other important responsibilities. In the classroom, the students discussed these signs of family commitment:

- being open with each other
- listening to each other
- enjoying being together
- participating in activities together
- depending on each other,
- resolving conflicts
- making a consistent effort to understand the point of view of each family member

This last responsibility — trying to understand each other’s viewpoint — is especially important for parents and young people. There will be areas of disagreement during adolescence, and parents have a responsibility to set limits and to insist on rules. But it’s important for teenagers to feel that they are listened to, and to be given reasons for decisions, even though they may not agree with them. At this stage of life, both parents and children have a responsibility to handle their changing relationship with patience, fairness, respect, loyalty, and a sense of humour.

• **Commitment to friends** — Most young people don’t think of responsibilities when it comes to friends. They enjoy doing things together, having fun, and confiding in each other. Friendship, however, does have important responsibilities like loyalty and faithfulness. Unlike younger children’s friendships, which are often based on who’s available to play, young people’s relationships with friends are more personal. For this reason, serious disagreements between friends are more upsetting.

A friendship responsibility the students discussed is to resolve disagreements, and make an effort to find a mutual solution. In general, female friendships at this age are more intimate than those of males. As a result, conflicts or betrayals are very upsetting. Parents may hear about these difficulties from their children, but there is little they can do except to listen with sympathy, and encourage them to try to find a solution.

In class, the students read a poem, “My Friend.” You will find a copy of it at the end of this theme.

• **Authentic people** — In class, the students reflected on what it means to be an authentic person — to be who you say you are, to be true and trustworthy. They examined some examples of people who say who they are, but, in fact, they are not:

“I am a Grade 7 student, but I never study.”

“I am a Catholic, but I don’t pray very often or go to church.”

“I am a son, but I don’t talk to my parents more than I absolutely have to.”

“I’m 12 — that people think I’m 15 or 16. I’m going out with a guy whose in high school.”

As the students learned, becoming an authentic person is a life-long challenge, and adolescence is an important time for learning about this challenge. It is a time in life when young people begin to figure out who they are and what they want to do with their

lives. Parents do have some influence on this process. They can encourage, listen, confront when it is necessary, and, most importantly, let their young people know that they have parents who believe in them.

• **Balancing responsibilities** — Young people sometimes feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities — school, friends, family, activities — especially since adults expect more from them than when they were younger. In class, the students discussed the need to learn how to be a well-balanced person, someone who gives time to all areas of his or her life. They also reflected on some questions about balancing themselves:

- Are you developing all aspects of your life — physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual?
- Do you spend some time alone, some with family members, and some with friends?
- Do you give yourself fully to whatever you are doing — school work, talking to a friend, helping out at home, after school activities, teams, clubs, and hobbies?
- Do you spend some time in prayer alone and with the parish community for the celebration of the Eucharist?

Many adults have difficulty achieving balance in their lives, so it is not surprising that this is a challenge for young people. Parents may find the questions the students discussed helpful as they reflect on their children's development. At school, the students completed an activity about their responsibilities related to their commitments, and identified the responsibility they found the easiest to meet and the one they found the most difficult. You might like to ask your child about this activity.

## **Theme Four Resources from the Student Text**

**Topic 1:** These are the responses of Naomi, Jim, Corry, and Curtis to the question: How do you feel about growing up?

**Naomi** —It's going to happen no matter how I feel about it, but I guess it will be okay. There are some people in my class who act like they're a lot older than they really are, but I'm not one of them. It seems phony to me. Who knows? Maybe I'll start to be a phony next year! Right now I'm thinking about the summer, turning 13 in July, and visiting my grandparents in Montreal. It's going to be so much fun.

**Jim** — In some ways, I can't wait. I want to be able to make my own decisions, to live where I want to live, and things like that. But I know it's still a long way off. I

have no idea what I want to do when I'm an adult, or what kind of person I'll be. I'll just have to wait and find out.

**Corry** — I sometimes think I'll never grow up. My dad thinks I'm still a little girl, even though I'm 13 now. I look more like a 10-year-old, but I'm really hoping that starts to change soon. When I grow up I'd like to be an archeologist and explore ancient ruins in places like Africa or South America. I'd get to see the world and it would be really interesting.

**Curtis** — I would like to be my own boss, and that happens when you're grown up. I know that adults can't do anything they want, but they do have a lot of freedom. I think high school is going to be great, although my mother keeps telling me that I'll have to work a lot harder than I do now. That's probably true, but I'd also like to have some fun.

**Topic 3:** This is the poem about friendship.

**my friend**

my friend is  
like bark  
rounding a tree

he warms  
like sun  
on a winter day

he cools  
like water  
in the hot noon

his voice  
is ready  
as a spring bird

he is  
my friend  
and I  
am his

Emily Hearn

