

Grade 5, Theme Two

Family Letter

Dear Family,

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

About Theme Two

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

In Theme Two we will:

- consider some of the ways that families are both unique and alike.
- examine the purpose of rules, and the role of family rules.
- explore some of the ways families change, and discuss the importance of family members helping each other during times of change.
- learn more about the qualities of true friendship, and examine possible solutions to friendship difficulties.
- discuss a story about bullying, and learn about the responsibility to help those who are being mistreated.

Working together at school and at home

- Your child will be designing a family coat of arms. Be sure to ask about this project. What symbols did your child choose to represent your family?
- When children are having friendship difficulties, they often mention them at home. At school we will examine the consequences of different solutions to these problems, and the problem of making bad choices when we're upset or angry.
- Ask your child to tell you about the story of Luke and the bullying incident. We will be discussing the responsibility of people who witness bullying to stand up for the victim, or to tell an adult about the incident. You may want to talk to your child about this. If bullying is a concern you have, please talk to me or to our principal.

Teacher: _____ Date

Theme Two Topics

This theme about relationships is developed through six topics. The first three topics explore aspects of living in a family, followed by two topics about friendship, ending with a final topic on bullying. The students begin this theme by looking at families from two perspectives: the uniqueness of each families and the common mission of all families. The next two topics focus on family rules and on changes that occur in families. The topics on friendship invite the students to look at the qualities of true friendship and to explore possible solutions to common friendship difficulties. The final topic features a story about bullying and explores the important role of those who witness bullying incidents and the choices they have.

Topic 1 — Our Families

Love is the most universal, formidable, and mysterious of cosmic energies.

Teilhard de Chardin

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that each family is made up of people with unique qualities and gifts, and has a unique history and traditions. At the same time, families are also alike in their task of creating loving communities that serve their members. The teacher and students explore some examples of both the uniqueness and the similarities of families.

Main Ideas

- Each family is unique in its history, tradition, and in the personalities, talents, and interests of its members.
- Families are alike because their purpose is to share love within the family, and help children learn to be loving people.
- Learning to love is the most important lesson people learn in their lives.

Family Participation

- At school the teacher and students discussed both the positive aspects of sharing life in a family and the demanding aspects. As children get older, it's important for them to

understand that each person has a contribution to make to the creation of a strong and loving family. This means sharing some of the household tasks, trying to be generous and open with each other, and being willing to compromise and forgive.

- One of the unique characteristics of a family is its history. At school the students learned about Lucy's family history, and her parents' experience leaving Portugal and making a new life in Canada. If people in your family have had that experience, be sure to share it with your child, as well as other events and people in your family's past.

Family history is a significant part of each person's identity.

- At school the students completed a family coat of arms. They were asked to choose four symbols that represented aspects of their family that were important to them. You might ask about the symbols your child chose.

- This topic ended with a special prayer for families. The students were given a copy of this prayer to take home to their families. You may want to say it together. You will also find it in the section *Fully Alive* Grade 5 Prayers.

Topic 2 — Families Have Rules

We are in bondage to the law in order that we might be free.

Cicero

Summary

This topic helps the students understand the importance and need for family rules. The teacher and students explore the meaning and purpose of rules, and consider some common family rules (for example, no television before homework is done), and the reason for such rules.

Main Ideas

- A rule is a statement that tells us how to behave or act.
- There are many different kinds of rules: family rules, classroom and school rules, safety rules, and rules for playing games.
- Family rules help keep us safe and healthy, encourage us to learn and try hard, and help us grow up to be good people.

Family Participation

- At school, the teacher and students discussed some examples of family rules — no television before homework is done; no name-calling; no violent computer games; and computer time has to be balanced with time playing outside. For each of these examples, the students were asked to think of the reason for the rule. You could ask your child to choose one of your family rules and think of the reason for it.
- This topic provides an opportunity to reflect on your family rules. Are there too many of them? (If there are too many, it's difficult to remember them, much less to get children to obey them.) Are they primarily for the good of the children, or mainly for your convenience? Do the children understand the reason for a rule, even though they may disagree with it? Are you open to having a family discussion about the rules?
- It is the responsibility of parents to make rules for their children, and quite normal for children to disagree with some of them. Most parents find that it's important to be consistent about rules. When children are doing a lot of complaining and nagging about everyday situations (for example, bedtime or regular chores), it is usually because they know that if they keep it up long enough, mum or dad will give in. Also, some parents find it very difficult to withstand their children's anger or crying. No one enjoys being called "mean" or "unfair," but part of loving our children is creating reasonable rules and being firm and consistent in applying them.

Topic 3 — Families Change

One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life: that word is love.

Sophocles

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that all families change over time. Children get older, new babies are born, or the family moves to a new home. The teacher and students explore four examples of changes in the families of Lucy, Joseph, Sarah, and Paul: unemployment; moving to a new city; new responsibilities at work that have an impact on the family; and the separation of parents. For each situation, the focus is on the feelings of individual family members and how the change is affecting the family.

Main Ideas

- Change is part of family life.
- Big changes can be very challenging, and members of a family may not all have the same feelings about the change.
- It's important for family members to help each other and to share their feelings when there is a big change in the family.

Family Participation

- Children tend to like things to stay as they are, and so they find most major changes stressful. It's important to encourage them to talk about their feelings, and let them know that it's natural to feel angry, upset, or worried about the change. At the same time, you need to let your child know that these feelings do pass in time. If you have had a major family change in the past, you might ask your child to think about how her or his feelings have changed since that time. For example, maybe your child was very worried about moving and going to a new school. But after a while, she or he made new friends and the worried feelings passed.
- Some children find it difficult to articulate how they are feeling. Instead of saying, "I feel sad" or "I'm worried," they get stomach aches, refuse to go to school, or start fighting with their friends. They need their parents' help to talk about what's bothering them. Sometimes a book about someone who is going through a similar situation (for example, moving, or an illness in the family) encourages the child to talk about his or her feelings.
- The separation of parents, which is one of the changes discussed in this topic, creates major stress for all family members. No matter how carefully and lovingly children are prepared for this change, they experience deep feelings of loss, and a sense of dislocation. Because parents are in a painful situation, they do not always recognize or have the energy to meet their children's needs. It is also difficult to acknowledge that adult decisions have caused children pain.

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

for children when they are forced to take sides, or when they are expected to assume an adult role and listen to their parents' difficulties.

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

- Since separation and divorce are more common than in the past, most children have some questions about this topic. These are some examples of the questions they may ask:

What is a separation?

Sometimes parents make a very serious decision not to live together any more. They decide to separate and live apart. This is a difficult decision, and it affects all of the family members.

If people are separated, do they get divorced?

After people are separated for a while, they sometimes get a divorce. But sometimes they may decide to live together again.

Why do parents stop loving each other?

Everybody has difficulty being loving sometimes. People aren't perfect; they make mistakes and they fail. We all need God's help to be loving people. When people live together and can't get along with each other and find a way to settle their differences, it's a very unhappy situation. After a while, it seems as if all the love they had for each other is gone. But in one way, no matter what happens, the love is never really gone. Children are a sign of the love parents had for each other. And even when parents no longer live together, they continue to love their children.

Do parents sometimes separate because of something their children did that made them unhappy or made life difficult for them?

Children sometimes believe this, but it's not true. When parents separate, it is for reasons between them, not because of anything children did or didn't do. It is very difficult for children to understand grown-up problems, which is why they sometimes feel guilty. They think they must be the problem that caused their parents to separate. Children aren't the problem, and they shouldn't feel guilty.

- **If you pray really hard, will God make your parents get back together again?**

God doesn't *make* us do things. God created us to be free. We are responsible for what we do. But parents always need our prayers, especially if they are having difficulties. We can ask God to guide them, and help them do what is right.

Topic 4 — Friendship

The best mirror is an old friend.

George Herbert

Summary

This topic helps the students understand the meaning of friendship, and the qualities of a good friend. The teacher and students examine these qualities and discuss the attitudes and actions of a person who is trying to be a good friend.

Main Ideas

- Everyone needs friends; God made us to need other people in our lives.
- Some important qualities of true friendship are loyalty; willingness to share your thoughts and feelings; co-operation; readiness to forgive; sensitivity to the feelings of others; and genuineness — being yourself.

Family Participation

- Some children appear to have a natural gift for friendship, which is mainly a result of their temperament, most likely outgoing and adaptable. Others have more difficulties with the give and take and the ups and downs of young friendships. Also, some children have a wide circle of friends, while others have one or two friends. These are natural differences.
- In previous grades, the students discussed the importance of learning how to be a friend in order to have friends. In this topic, this idea is further developed: to be a friend is to be yourself. At school the teacher and students discussed this quality of friendship — being yourself — and explored some of the reasons people might pretend to be someone they're not, or show off and brag in order to get attention. You might ask your child about this discussion.
- It's important to know your child's friends. You will hear a lot of talk about them —

what this one did, what that one said — and it helps when you know the cast of characters. Friends become more and more important to children as they grow up, and as a result, difficulties with friends are more upsetting. Advice from parents is sometimes helpful, but most of all children need a sympathetic listener. Children’s problems may seem so small compared to those of adults, but they are not small for the child.

- You may also have noticed that at this age there seems to be much more gossip about friends, particularly among girls. Let your child know that gossip is the enemy of friendship, and can become a habit that is hard to break. You can explain to your child that gossip is not only disrespectful, but can often be very hurtful. Your example with your own friends and family members is also important.
- It is good for children to see their parents with friends, and to know how much we value our friendships. Your example of concern, interest, forgiveness, and sympathy, especially when there has been a disagreement or a friend is in trouble, teaches your child important lessons about friendship.

Topic 5 — The Ups and Downs of Friendship

*God evidently does not intend all of us to be rich or powerful or great,
but He does intend us all to be friends.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that all friendships have some difficulties. The teacher and students explore several examples of these difficulties, and analyze some possible solutions. They discuss the tendency of people to make poor choices when their feelings are hurt or they are angry.

Main Ideas

- Everyone has some friendship difficulties while growing up. We all have to learn how to solve them in the best way.
- When we have a problem with a friend, it is best not to do anything about it until we are feeling less upset.

Family Participation

- At school, the teacher and students discussed some qualities and actions that lead to friendship difficulties, for example, not wanting a friend to play with others; refusing to make up after a fight; suddenly ignoring a friend; or telling other people about things your friend confided in you. You have probably heard about some of these difficulties at home. They are all part of learning how to be a good friend, and parents can play a role in this process by listening to children's concerns and encouraging them to find realistic and fair solutions to friendship problems.
- At school the students examined some possible solutions to friendship difficulties, and discussed the idea that people often don't make good choices when they are angry or their feelings are hurt. Their feelings get in the way of their thinking, and they may do or say something that makes the problem worse. This is a topic you may want to discuss with your child if he or she has a problem with a friend and is feeling hurt and angry.

Topic 6 — A Time for Reflection

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

Genesis 4:9

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that they have a responsibility to support other students who are being mistreated. The teacher and students read a story about Luke, who was bullied during recess. They discuss some of the reasons that people who witness a bullying incident don't do anything, and consider some ideas that would give them the courage to stand up to a bully.

Main Ideas

- Bullying is a serious problem.
- We are responsible for each other, which means that we have to help people who are being bullied.
- It takes courage to speak up and do something to stop bullying.

Family Participation

- You and your child may want to read the story about what happened to Luke, which is called “At Time for Reflection.” You will find it at the end of this theme. What are your child’s thoughts about what happened to Luke?
- Bullying among children and young people is a serious concern, and is an important topic to discuss with your child. Bullying can be physical (e.g., hitting, kicking), verbal (e.g., threatening, name-calling), or social (e.g., deliberately excluding someone, spreading negative rumours). A more recent type of bullying involves e-mails, instant messages, or messages and photos on social internet sites (e.g., Facebook) that are designed to harm another person. Using electronic communication to cause harm to others is known as cyber-bullying.
- Bullying is not an occasional disagreement among children involving name-calling or pushing and shoving. It is usually a repeated activity involving someone more powerful against someone who is weaker, and, most importantly, the intent is to harm the other person. Bullying involves three groups of people: those who bully, those who do the bullying, and bystanders. Almost all children have been in the position of being a bystander.
- The main goal of this topic is to encourage children to be more than passive bystanders, to imagine themselves in the place of the victim, and to think about what they would want from the people who were watching. At school the teacher and students explored some of the reasons bystanders don’t help: fear that the bully will target them; not wanting to draw attention to themselves; not wanting to be called a snitch; or fear that people won’t like them if they speak up. They also discussed some actions bystanders could take: talk to the teacher on duty if the bullying happens in the schoolyard; speak to their own teacher if someone in the class is being bullied; or convince some friends to join them in standing up to the bully. You could discuss these suggestions with your child.
- If your child has been the target of bullying at school or has been involved in bullying other children, you need to talk to your child’s teacher or the principal of the school about what is happening, and what you can do. If you are interested in learned more about bullying, there are many helpful resources, including books, articles, and websites.

Theme Two Stories and Poems

Topic 6: The teacher and students read this story about the consequences of an incident of bullying, involving Luke.

A Time for Reflection

Mr. Talbot's students came back to the classroom after lunch. They hung up their jackets quietly. Some students whispered to each other, but very softly. They sat at their desks and found some work to do. A few of them were brave enough to sneak a look at Mr. Talbot. He was standing at the front of the room, but he was staring out the classroom windows.

Finally, he turned, and looked at the class. "I am really troubled," he said. "And in case you're wondering why Luke isn't here, it's because he's at the hospital with his mother."

"Is he really hurt?" Sarah asked.

"He's going to need stitches," Mr. Talbot said. "It's not a serious injury, but what happened is serious."

"Are you going to yell at us?" Lucy asked, and she looked as if she might cry.

"No, Lucy. People don't listen when someone is yelling at them, and I want all of you to listen. I don't know who started teasing Luke, or how many of you were involved, but I know that some of you were."

"I wasn't," Joseph said.

"I wasn't either," several other students said.

"And did any of you try to stop the teasing, or did you stand there and watch?" Mr. Talbot asked.

No one answered.

"You all know how frightened Luke is of wasps," Mr. Talbot said. "Remember what happened when a wasp got into our classroom last month? Luke was frantic until I got rid of it. And even then, it took him a long time to calm down."

"I know it was mean to tease him, but no one thought he would hurt himself," Sabrina said.

“That’s just it. No one thought of the consequences. Students are running around Luke, making buzzing noises like wasps. Luke got frightened and upset, and he banged his head on the brick wall of the school! That’s a pretty big consequence.”

“You’re starting to yell, Mr. Talbot,” Lucy said in a soft voice.

“Sorry, Lucy. I didn’t mean to, but I am upset. What happened to the rule of respect? What happened to respecting your classmates and standing up for them? I know some of you didn’t participate in the teasing, but you were bystanders. You saw what happened and you didn’t try to stop it. And it ended with Luke hurting himself.”

“Mr. Talbot, what can we do to make things right?” Paul asked.

“That’s a very good question, Paul. I want you all to think about it. What are we going to do?”

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Mr. Talbot and his students had a long discussion about what happened. They talked about each person’s responsibility to try to help when someone is being bullied. They talked about how frightened Luke was. They also talked about how they had failed to live up to their commitment to respect each member of their classroom. By the end of their discussion they didn’t feel a lot better, but they knew what they wanted to do. The class wrote a letter to Luke. This is what it said:

Dear Luke, We are very, very sorry for what happened to you. We hope your head doesn’t hurt too much. Do you have a lot of stitches?

Please forgive us for not treating you with respect. You are part of our classroom, and we want you to come back soon. We will all try very hard to make up for what happened. We really are sorry.

From your classmates.

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