

Grade 1, 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.

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. The best way for children to learn about commitment is to grow up in a loving and committed family. Knowing that they can rely on the commitment of others helps children learn to be dependable, to keep their word, and to make wise choices.

In Theme Four we will

- examine how we depend on our families, and what it means to be dependable
- discover that *promise* is a special word that has to be used with care
- explore how we make choices and the meaning of consequences

Working together at school and at home

- In our classroom, we will be learning about being dependable, and how each person makes a contribution. Even young children can contribute at home with small chores — putting away toys, helping set the table, feeding the family pet. Let your child know that you rely on her or his help.
- Children often think that *promise* is a magic word. In our classroom, we will be talking about using this word with care. At home, you can encourage your child to save the word *promise* for something he or she has thought about and is sure can be done.
- We will also be discussing choices and their consequences. Young children need lots of opportunities to make simple choices — which t-shirt, what kind of sandwich — and to experience the consequences. Learning to make choices and to be aware of possible consequences is a long process. You can help by encouraging your child to think before choosing and to consider the possible consequences.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Theme Four Topics

In Grade One, this theme is developed through three topics. The first is about the children's experience of adult dependability in the normal events of daily life at home. Promises, which are closely related to the concept of dependability, are the subject of Topic 2. The final topic is about choices. Young children's choices are limited, but simple choices are a preparation for the more complex choices they will make later.

Topic 1 — We Depend on Our Families

The family is the indispensable environment for human personal growth.

Curriculum Guidelines for Family Life Education, OCCB

Summary

This topic helps the children understand how much they depend on their families in ordinary day-to-day ways. The teacher and children read a story about Joey De Souza, "Joey's Dream," and then talk about the many everyday ways families care for children. You will find the story at the end of this theme.

Main ideas

- We depend on our families in many ways — for food, clean clothes, a home to live in, and people to care for us.
- It's good to be dependable. It means that people can count on us.

Family participation

- You might ask your child to tell you about the story of Joey's dream. What happened? What happened when Joey woke up?
- Children thrive on routines and dependability. It is your day-to-day care (the meals, the clean clothes, the hugs, the chat or story before bed, bedtime prayers) that teaches children that the world is dependable. This early experience of security is an important foundation for their personal development. Without any words, our dependability as parents teaches our children that the world is safe and that they are important to us.
- Even young children can contribute to the family by helping with small tasks. They can help set the table, put clothes away, pick up toys, or feed the family pet. Often, the best way to teach them is to start by doing the jobs together. It's good to let your child know that you rely on this help.

Topic 2 — What is a Promise

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

Robert Frost, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”

Summary

This topic helps the children understand that *promise* is a special word, and that they need to think carefully before they make a promise. The teacher and children read a story about Joey De Souza and his brother Donny, “A Promise to Joey.” They talk about the meaning of the word *promise* and why it is a special word. You will find the story about Joey and Donny at the end of this theme.

Main ideas

- The word *promise* is a special word. It means we will keep our word and that we mean what we say.
- We should think carefully before we make a promise. We want to be sure we can do what we promise.

Family participation

- You might ask your child to tell you about Donny De Souza’s promise to his little brother, Joey. What happened? Did Donny keep his promise? You might also ask what would have happened if Danny hadn’t kept his promise. How would Joey have felt?
- Children first learn about promises from their parents. That is why it is important that we use the word carefully. It’s often better to tell your child that “I’ll try,” or “maybe” or “we’ll see,” when you aren’t quite sure that you can keep your word.

But sometimes parents make a promise that can’t be kept. This is hard for children to understand since they think that their parents can do anything. It’s important to give children an explanation when a promise must be broken so that they will realize that you are sorry to have to break your word. When too many promises are broken with no explanation, children learn that they cannot rely on adults.

- It’s not a good idea to use promises as bribes. Children do need some rewards for good behaviour, but it’s better that these rewards be unexpected. Also, when promises are used

as bribes, children tend to follow this example with friends. “I promise to be your friend if you share your snack.”

- Children learn very early that *promise* is a special word. They tend, however, to see it as magic, as if saying “I promise” makes the promise happen. Sometimes parents contribute to this kind of thinking by asking children to promise that they will do something (for example, come right home after school, clean their bedroom before dinner). It’s probably better not to use the word *promise* on these everyday occasions. Too many promises make the word meaningless. Children need help to see that they have to think before they make a promise and that sometimes, even when they think first, promises can be hard to keep.

Topic 3 — Making Choices

You can't eat your cake and have it.

Summary

This topic helps the children understand that even choices based on preference may have consequences. The teacher and children talk about preference choices, and what may happen when we make a choice.

Main ideas

- Sometimes it’s easy to make a choice, but sometimes it’s hard.
- After we make a choice, we may want to change our minds. Sometimes we can’t.
- It’s a good idea to think before we choose. Choices have consequences.

Family participation

- Children need lots of opportunities to make choices. They find it easier, however, if they don’t have too many options. So you might say, “Do you want your red socks or your blue ones?” “Do you want apple juice or milk.” In other words, we put some limits on the choices young children can make, but we give them the opportunity to make choices they can understand and that are within their experience. At the same time, we don’t offer them a choice when there isn’t any. We don’t say, “Would you like to go to bed?” when we have already decided that it is bedtime.

- Children also need to experience the consequences of their choices. It may be as simple as not being able to have one thing because they chose another. Or it could be that if you choose to wear your favourite t-shirt today, it won't be clean for the class party tomorrow.
- It's good to encourage your child to think before choosing. You might ask questions that will help your child think about the consequences of a choice. And when he or she makes a poor choice and regrets it, you could ask, "What can you do next time to make a better choice?"
- At this age, children's sense of right and wrong is based on obedience to parents and teachers. Being good is obeying; being bad is disobeying. When they get into trouble, they often say, "He (she) made me do it!" or "But I didn't mean to." The way we respond to them is important. You can help your child understand that other people don't make us get into trouble, although they may make it harder for us sometimes. When your child says, "But I didn't mean to," you might say, "I know you didn't mean to. But you just didn't think. Next time, try to stop and think first."

Theme Four Stories

Topic 1: In this story, which is about depending on our families, the children meet Joey De Souza again.

Joey's Dream

One night, Joey had the strangest dream. This is what happened.

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Joey dreamed that he woke up and looked around his room. My goodness it was messy! There were clothes and books and toys piled all over. He could hardly get out of bed, there was so much mess.

He found some clothes to wear but they were dirty. He couldn't find his shoes anywhere.

"Mom!" he shouted. But she didn't answer.

"Dad!" he shouted. But he didn't answer.

He went downstairs and his big brother Donny and his sisters, Loretta and Katy, were in the kitchen. They didn't look very happy.

The kitchen was a sight! The refrigerator was open and there wasn't one single thing in it. All of the dishes were dirty and they were all over the kitchen.

"What's going on?" Joey asked. "Where are Mom and Dad?"

"I guess they're away," Loretta said.

"And they didn't tell us," Donny added.

"I want some breakfast," Katy whined.

"Gee, if Mom and Dad aren't here, then I won't have to go to school," Joey said. "Besides, I can't go. I can't find my shoes."

Joey went to look for his shoes on the front porch. The porch was filled with garbage bags but no shoes. And weeds were growing all over the grass.

Joey heard Katy crying so he went inside to see what was wrong.

"I scraped my knee," Katy cried. "I want Daddy to put a Band-Aid on it."

"I don't think we have any," Donny said.

“I’m really hungry,” Loretta said.

The four children looked at one another. What were they going to do?

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And that is when Joey woke up. He opened his eyes. His room looked pretty tidy. He remembered that his dad had told him to clean it yesterday.

“Mom!” he shouted and she answered.

“Dad!” he shouted and he answered.

“Whew! I’m glad that was just a dream,” Joey said and he got out of bed.

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Topic 2: This story is about promises, and features Joey and his older brother, Donny.

A Promise to Joey

Joey ran all the way home from school. He was very excited. Donny had promised to take him to a soccer game. It was an important game. The team that won would be playing Donny’s team next week. Joey could hardly wait.

When Joey got home, his dad was there, and Joey asked him, “Is Donny home yet?”

“Not yet,” his dad said, “but he should be along very soon. Why don’t you get washed and have a snack while you’re waiting?”

Soon it was 4:30 and Donny still wasn’t home.

“Dad?” Joey asked. “What time is it now?”

“Five minute later than the last time you asked,” his dad replied. He smiled at Joey and said, “Don’t worry. He will come.”

“But what if he doesn’t?” Joey said and he looked out the window to see if Donny was coming.

“Donny promised to take you. He wouldn’t have promised if he didn’t mean to keep his word,” his dad said. “He won’t disappoint you.”

Suddenly, Joey shouted, “Here he is! He didn’t forget!”

And there was Donny running up the street. He burst in the door, panting.

“I had to stay after school,” Donny explained. Then he said to Joey, “Well, are you ready? Do you still want to go to the game?”

Their dad laughed. “No,” he said, “I think Joey’s changed his mind. You don’t want to go, do you?”

“Oh, Dad,” Joey said. And he and Donny went off to the soccer game together.

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