

Grade 2, 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:

- learn more about being dependable by exploring the commitments of community workers.
- examine what it means to keep our word and why it is important.
- analyze situations that involve making decisions.

Working together at home and at school

- We will be discussing the many people in our community upon whom we depend, like mail carriers, bus drivers, garbage collectors, and street cleaners. You could ask your child what our community would be like without these people. What would happen?
- Last year the children learned about promises, and why “promise” is a special word. This year we will explore the importance of keeping our word. Take this opportunity to talk to your child about this topic. Sometimes, because of circumstances, family members can’t keep their word. It’s a good idea to explain why so that your child knows you don’t break your word without a good reason.
- One of the decision-making situations that the class will explore involves a choice between right and wrong. When this kind of situation comes up at home, you might explain to your child that knowing what is right doesn’t make the choice easy. But the more times people choose what is right, the easier it becomes.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Theme Four Topics

In Grade Two, this theme is developed through three topics. In Grade 1, the children examined some of the ways they depend on their families. Now, in Grade 2, they consider their experience of adult dependability in their community. Topic 2 explores keeping one's word, which is a key part of being dependable. The final topic is about making decisions, and the importance of taking responsibility for our decisions.

Topic 1 — Some People We Depend On

Let not loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them about your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.

Proverbs 3:3

Summary

This topic helps the children understand that they depend on the commitment of many different people in the community. The teacher and the children look at some illustrations of what would happen if people weren't dependable. They identify some of the people in the community who care about them and examine what it means to be a dependable person.

Main ideas

- There are many people in our community who care for us.
- We can count on them to help us. They are dependable.
- The world is a better place when people can depend on each other.

Family participation

- While they are at school or travelling to and from school, the children were asked to see how many people they notice in the community that we all count on. You might ask your child what people he or she noticed, for example, police officer, crossing guard, school caretaker, ambulance driver, school bus driver, etc.
- This topic gives you an opportunity to talk about dependability in the family. Let your child know that you depend on him or her. You might talk about the ways everyone in the family helps and contributes, and how each person is important and needed.

- Although children do depend on adults in the community, the adults they count on the most are their parents. Their sense of security lies in the family, and it is through their parents that they learn the value of dependability. It is also in the family that children learn to depend on God.
- At this age, it is important for children to have small chores around the house that they do regularly. It helps if you are consistent about this and the chores are part of a routine. It's more difficult for children to learn to be dependable if sometimes they're expected to do something and other times they're not. It's also a good idea to let your child know that being dependable is part of growing up. You might compliment your child on how grown-up and dependable he or she is becoming.
- Nagging children to get their chores done happens in almost every family. It gets to be a habit, but unfortunately it doesn't really work. Children come to expect to be nagged, and therefore they ignore it. Parents feel frustrated. Yet nagging is a difficult habit to break. If this is a problem for you, you might want to think about some changes. Some questions you might think about are: Do I frequently change my mind about what I expect my child to do? Do I assume my child will be a willing helper? Or do I assume that I will have to force him or her to help? (A positive attitude helps.) What happens if my child doesn't get the job done? Have I often let my child know how valuable his or her help is to the family?
- Chores at home are not the only area in which children can learn to be dependable. If your child plays on a sports team, or belongs to a group like Brownies or Cubs, these activities are another opportunity for learning to be dependable. Let your child know that other people are counting on him or her. Children can't make these commitments alone so they rely on their parents to be dependable. They can, however, share the commitment by making sure they are ready on time, and by helping to organize what they need for the activity.

Topic 2 — Keeping Our Word

Words pay no debts.

William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*

Summary

This topic helps the children understand the importance of keeping their word. The teacher and children talk about situations in which people broke their word, and discuss some of the reasons that this happened. The children learn that there are some circumstances in which people have to break their word.

Main ideas

- When we keep our word, people can trust us and depend on us.
- We have to think before we give our word. Sometimes we mean to do what we say, but then we forget.
- Sometimes people have to break their word. Something happens that they can't help.
- When we break our word, we should try to make up for it in some way.

Family participation

- Parents are an important model for children as they learn to keep their word. You might let your child know that sometimes you have difficulty keeping your word. For example, if you have agreed to do something that you don't really want to do, you could mention this to your child. Children tend to assume that adults only do things that they want to do. You might say, "Well, I don't really feel like doing this, but I said I would, so I'd better do it."
- You can help your child distinguish between situations in which people don't keep their word because they forgot or didn't intend to keep their word, and situations in which something happens that makes it impossible to keep their word. If you have to break your word to your child, be sure to give an explanation. You can expect that your child may still be upset, since children don't easily understand that there are some matters that adults can't control. But when you give an explanation, you are letting your child know that you don't break your word without reason. If it's possible, you can plan with your child some way in which you can do whatever it was you were going to do at a later date.
- Children often think that because they did not intend a particular outcome (for example, they said they would clean up their bedroom before leaving for school, but then forgot) they are not responsible for it. You can help them begin to assume responsibility for keeping their word by pointing out the need to be realistic and the effort that is required.
- When the occasion arises, help your child to think before giving her or his word. You might ask, "Will it be hard for you to keep your word?" or "What could you do to help

remember?” If it’s something about which the child has a choice, you could also ask if it’s something that she or he wants to do.

Topic 3 — Making Decisions

*First say to yourself what you would be;
and then do what you have to do.*

Epictetus

Summary

This topic helps the child understand that making decisions can be difficult. The teacher and the children discuss two situations in which children have to make decisions, “Jean’s Decision” and “Susan’s Decision.” The first situation involves a choice between two good things, and the second involves a choice between something right and something wrong.

Main ideas

- Some decisions are hard because we have to choose between two good things.
- Sometimes we have to decide between something right and something wrong. Even though we know what we should do, it can still be hard.
- We have to be strong and think for ourselves when we make a decision.
- We can ask God to help us when we are trying to choose what is right.

Family participation

- If your child seems interested, you might read together the two stories about difficult decisions with your child. What decision would your child make if he or she were Jean and Susan? You will find the stories at the end of this theme.
- You might ask your child what would happen if Susan did go into the school and then said, “Jan made me do it.” Would that be true? Help your child to understand that other people can make it harder for us to do what is right, but we have to be responsible for our own decisions. Sometimes a little humour helps children to understand this. If your child says, “She (he) made me do it,” you could respond by asking, “Did she tie you up first? Would you do it if she asked you to jump off a building? Could she make you jump out of an airplane?”
- All children need to learn that knowing something is right or wrong doesn’t make it that much easier to choose what is right. You will want to teach your child that what makes it

easier is practice. You might tell them, “The more times you make the right decision, the easier it becomes.” Children also need to know that it works the other way. When we make many bad decisions, it gets harder to make good decisions. They should also know that they can always ask God to help them make the right decision. If your child is preparing for the sacrament of reconciliation (penance), this would be a good opportunity to talk about the sacrament, and why we all need the special grace of forgiveness. You could explain that at times everyone has difficulty doing what is right and needs God’s help.

- The way we respond as parents when children do something wrong is important. We can’t ignore it, but we have to be careful not to get too angry. Children won’t admit that they have done something wrong if they are frightened. If you want your child to talk to you in later years about decisions they are finding difficult, the habit of confiding has to begin now. So if your child has done something wrong and admits it, you might say, “I’m proud of you for admitting it,” before you say anything about what he or she did. Then you could ask about what went wrong, and what he or she might do to make a better decision in the future.
- Help your child learn to pay attention to the feelings that happen when he or she has done something wrong. You can point out that feelings, like being uncomfortable, wishing you could change what happened, feeling bad, are a special way of telling us that we have done something wrong.

Theme Four Stories

Topic 3: These two short stories, which the teacher and children discussed at school, highlight the two kinds of choices: choosing between two good options, and choosing between something right and something wrong.

Jean’s Decision

Jean has just been invited to a friend’s birthday party. He is very excited. A magician is going to come to the party and do tricks. Jean loves magic tricks.

Then the telephone rings. It’s Jean’s uncle. He has tickets to the hockey

game. Would Jean like to come? The game is on the same day as the birthday party.

“What should I do?” Jean asks his mother.

“What a hard decision,” his mother says. “You’ll need to do a lot of thinking before you decide.”

What would you do if you were Jean?

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Susan’s Decision

Jan and Susan are playing in the schoolyard after lunch. Jan says, “I’m thirsty. Let’s sneak into the school and get a drink of water.”

“No,” Susan says. “We’re supposed to stay outside. We’ll get in trouble.”

“Come on!” Jan says. “You’re my best friend and I don’t want to go by myself. No one will see us.”

Susan didn’t know what to do. She really didn’t want to go, but Jan was her best friend.

What would you do if you were Susan? Why?

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