

Grade 3, Theme Three

Family Letter

Dear Family,

We are ready to begin Theme Three 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 for families, please go to www.occb.on.ca. If you have any questions, please contact me.

About Theme Three

Theme Three of *Fully Alive* is called “Created Sexual: Male and Female.” God made us male and female, and all of God’s creation is good. In the early grades, this theme is presented through a continuing story. The message of these stories is that we begin life as a result of the love our mothers and fathers shared. No matter what happens later, nothing can change that. It is part of God’s plan that we grow and are sheltered in our mother’s body before birth. After we are born, it is our family that loves and cares for us.

In Theme Three we will:

- read a story about the Carson family, who have four children, and learn more about life before birth, and how all of a baby’s needs are met in the uterus.
- discover that life begins at the moment of conception as a single cell.
- explore the amazing growth and development of babies in their first year of life.

Looking Ahead

Terms used in Grade 2 (*sperm, ovum, cell, sac, umbilical cord*) are reviewed in Grade 3, and the term *conception* is introduced. The students are given a brief explanation of how babies are born. Next year, in Grade 4 the student book introduces the term *sexual intercourse*, but does not include a physical description. The teacher book has a simple explanation of sexual intercourse that may be presented by the teacher to the students, depending on the readiness of the class. This information is not included in the student book until Grade 5.

Working together at school and at home

- Ask your child to tell you about the Carson family. What was your child’s favourite part of the story? What did he or she learn?
- The children will be taking home several information sheets about important events in the life of their parents, their birth, and their first year of life. Please help your child complete these sheets.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Theme Three Topics

In Grade 3, this theme is developed through five topics. The first four topics are presented through a story about the Carson family. The students have already met the Carson children — Pamela, Shane, Beth, and Donna — in Theme Two. The content of the first four topics includes a review of what the students learned about life before birth in Grades 1 and 2, and some additional information about conception, life in the uterus, and the birth of a baby. The final topic introduces the students to the remarkable growth and development that happens during a baby's first year of life.

Talking to Children about Sexuality

Most parents want to talk about sexuality with their children, but many find it difficult. They feel shy or unsure of themselves because they are not “experts” or teachers. It's important to remember that the exact words you use don't matter. It's letting your children know that you are happy to answer their questions that is important.

Here is something else to remember: Your child does not have all of the grown-up feelings that you have about sexuality. When you try to explain sexual intercourse to your child, you are thinking about a very intimate activity that has deep meaning for you. But your child doesn't have any of these feelings. Your child is simply wondering how the sperm from the father gets together with the ovum (egg) from the mother. From the child's point of view, it's not too different from questions about how skyscrapers are built or how astronauts get to the moon. This does not mean, of course, that sexual intercourse should be explained in the same way that you might explain skyscrapers or rockets. Children need to know how special this expression of love between wife and husband is.

There are many good opportunities for talking to children. For example, maybe your family is expecting a new baby. This is a wonderful time to talk about how the new baby develops. This program also provides you with a natural opportunity. There are many books for children about how new life develops inside the mother. It's always a good idea to look through these carefully before you read them with your child. It's important to make sure that the book has the same message about sexuality that you want to give.

Biological information in the *Fully Alive* program has been carefully selected for each grade level in order to give parents the opportunity to be the first people to talk to their

children. In particular, information about sexual intercourse is not included in the school program until Grade 4 so that parents can introduce this intimate subject. When you tell your child about sexual intercourse and speak about God's special way of bringing new people into the world, you are creating a climate of trust. Your child learns that it's all right to ask you anything. An atmosphere of trust and open communication begins when children are very young and becomes more and more important as they grow older.

In the suggestions given for each topic, relevant information that is not in the school program at this grade level will be mentioned. As well, you will find a number of answers to the questions children often ask about sexuality. You may be more comfortable with your own words, but you may find that the information in the suggested answers is useful.

Like all questions that children ask, questions about sexuality don't come in any particular order or at the times that you might expect. For this reason, you might like to look ahead and read through this theme before your child begins these topics in school. In this way you will know what your child will be learning and be prepared for any questions he or she might ask.

You should also be aware that children differ in the amount of information they can handle or want. Some children ask a lot of questions about how babies begin, develop, and are born. Others ask few, although their lack of questions does not necessarily mean that they do not have any. Some children like detailed, scientific answers, while others are not interested in too many facts.

Sometimes when children ask a question about the beginning of life, they are not even looking for a biological answer. They may be wondering about something much deeper. As a rule, the shortest, simplest answer is probably the best one. If you have answered a question and your child isn't satisfied with the answer, he or she will usually ask another question or look puzzled. For example, when your child first asks, "Where did I come from?" you might reply, "You came from God. God gave you to our family." If he or she says, "But where did I come from? Where was I before?" then you know that a fuller answer is needed. At this point, you might explain how a baby grows inside its mother. Whatever information you decide to give your child, and at whatever age, however, it should be true. When parents

make up stories about cabbage patches or storks, eventually they have to admit that these stories aren't true.

One way to figure out what children understand or want to know when they ask a question is to ask them: "What do you think the answer is?" When adults listen carefully, they can usually tell what the child understands, and where the child might be confused or need additional explanations. It's good to remember that the key to teaching and understanding children lies much more in listening than in talking. This is true not only when children are little, but throughout their growing years.

In the years to come, your children will be exposed from many sources to ideas about sexuality that are not Christian. If you have never talked about sexuality with them, they are unlikely to confide in you. That is why it is so important to begin to talk while they are young.

It is almost impossible to shield children, even when they are young, from information about abuses of sexuality. These abuses appear regularly on television and in the newspapers and magazines that come into our homes. You can, however, try to limit what children see and hear. Families choose different ways to do this. A few families have decided to eliminate television; others restrict it quite carefully.

The evening news probably provokes more questions from children than any other program. Questions like, "What does rape mean?" or "What is abortion?" are difficult to answer when children are young. Ideally, abuses of sexuality should not have to be explained until the child has a basic understanding of the Christian vision of sexuality. It's a good idea, however, to try to answer your child's questions in some way. If the child is very young and asks about rape or abortion, for example, you might say, "It is something that people do that is wrong. It is not what God wants us to do. It hurts people. When you're a little older, I'll explain more about it to you."

This is, however, an important responsibility to protect your child from sexual abuse. All children need to know that, with a few exceptions (for example, if the doctor needs to examine them or you are helping them bathe), no one is allowed to look at or touch the private parts of their bodies. They should also be told that they should not look at or touch the private parts of another person's body, even if that person asks or tells them to. They

should say no and tell you right away. It's important to reassure children that if someone is touching them in a way that makes them uncomfortable, or acting in a way that worries or frightens them, they can always talk to you and you will know what to do.

Parents who have found it difficult to talk to their children about sexuality, are usually pleasantly surprised when they begin. Once started, it gets easier. And if your child asks a question that you don't know the answer to, just say so. You can always ask someone else or look it up in a book, and then give your child an answer. Your child doesn't need an expert. Your child needs a parent who cares and is willing to talk and listen.

Topic 1 — Special Events

Christian spouses have promised to share with each all that they are and all that they have. It is the most audacious contract that exists, the most marvelous one too!

Pope John Paul II

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that human life begins with the love of parents. The teacher and students read the first part of a story about the Carson family, and discuss three important events in the life of Mr. and Mrs. Carson. The students are given a sheet to complete at home about important events in the lives of their families. You will find all of the stories featuring the Carson family at the end of this theme.

Main Ideas

- When a man and woman marry, they ask God to bless them and help them to be a good husband and wife.
- One very important way husbands and wives share their love is by becoming parents.
- We are here because of the special love of our parents and because of God's love.

Family Participation

- You and your child might enjoy reading the first part of the story of the Carson family.
- Help your child complete the sheet from school about three special events in your family's life. The teacher has encouraged the children to return these sheets to school so that the children may share what they have learned.

- If you have a wedding album, or photographs from various anniversaries, you might like to look at these with your child. Children enjoy hearing stories about how their parents met, what they thought about each other, and how they decided to get married.
- It is important for all children to know that their lives began because of the love of their parents and of God. This is especially true when the family has experienced a separation or divorce. If you are in this situation, you may find it difficult, but it is important to let your child know that there was love between you and your spouse in the beginning, and that both parents continue to love their children.
- If your child is adopted, be sure to share the excitement of that special event. You might talk about how eagerly you waited, and how exciting it was when your child finally arrived.
- Foster children also need to know that no matter what has happened, their lives began in the love of their parents. If you are a foster parent, be sure to let your child know how happy you are to have had the opportunity to welcome him or her into your family.

Topic 2 — Beginning Life

*Where there is life, there is the spirit of God the Creator,
there is his stamp, there is the seal of his love.*

Pope John Paul II, 1980

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that it is part of God’s plan that each human life begins at the moment of conception. The teacher and students continue the story of the Carson family, and talk about how each human life begins as a single cell. The student learn that this tiny cell starts to divide, and before long, the baby’s body begins to develop. To end the topic, the class says a prayer together, thanking God for the gift of life. You will find this prayer at the end of the five themes for Grade 3.

Main Ideas

- We begin life as a tiny cell inside our mothers.
- Conception is the moment when a tiny part from the father (called a sperm) and a tiny part from the mother (called an ovum, or egg) join together inside the mother and become a single cell.
- Conception is the beginning of a new human life. This life comes from God and from the

mother and father.

Family Participation

- You and your child may enjoy reading the second part of the Carson story.
- At school, the students learned a new word for the beginning of human life — *conception*. You could ask your child to tell you about this new word. Asking a child to explain something is a good way for an adult to discover what the child understands, and where he or she might have some confusion.
- This topic provides you with an opportunity to answer questions your child may have and to continue to teach him or her about the beginning of new human life. At school, if the children want to know how the sperm got inside the mother, the teacher is asked to have the children bring that question home. *This is because, ideally, children should receive their first explanation of sexual intercourse from you.* If you have not already given your child a simple explanation of sexual intercourse you may want to look at the various answers provided for this question at the end of this topic. They are just suggestions. but they may help you to find the right words.
- If your child seems interested and has questions about where the sperm and ovum come from, this would be a good time to answer. Explain to your child that the father's sperm is made inside his *testicles*. The testicles are inside the scrotum, which is a sac of skin under the penis. The mother's ovum comes from her ovaries, which are inside her body, near the uterus. If your child is a boy, you could tell him that when he is older, his body will start to make sperm so that when he is grown up, he could be a father. If your child is a girl, you might tell her that when she is older, her ovaries will begin to ripen ova (ova is the plural of ovum) so that when she is grown up, she could be a mother.
- This topic also provides an opportunity to talk about adoption. All children, whether they are adopted or not, at some point ask why the mother and father didn't keep their baby. The following suggested answer may be helpful: "A mother gives up her baby for adoption because she believes that it is best for the baby. Perhaps she is very young and she and the baby's father cannot look after a little baby. It is a very hard decision to make. The parents who adopt the baby are grateful and happy to share their love with the child." Obviously, if

your child is adopted, this question has deep personal significance and your special understanding of your child will help you to answer it in the best way.

Questions And Answers

In this section, you will find some examples of questions young children often ask and a number of suggested answers. When there is more than one answer to a question, the first answer is the simplest, and the last is the most detailed. You may want to begin with the simplest answer, but you should expect that your child will ask the same questions again as the months go by. In this way, you will have several opportunities to provide your child with a more detailed answer.

It is hoped that these answers will give you some ideas about what you would like to say to your child. They are, of course, only suggestions to be used in any way that suits you and your child.

Questions about where babies come from:

- Where did I come from?
- Where was I before I was born?
- Where do babies come from?

Suggested answers:

- You came from God. God knew that we wanted a baby and we were so happy when you were born.
- You came from a special place inside my body. This is the way God makes new babies. They grow inside their mothers until they are ready to be born.
- A baby starts growing inside its mother when a tiny part from the father and a tiny part from the mother join together. This is God's special plan for creating new babies. The baby grows and grows inside the mother until it is ready to be born.
- God has a wonderful plan for creating new people. A baby starts as a tiny cell and it grows in a special place inside the mother. This special home for a baby is called the *uterus*. Only women have a uterus. It takes a mother and a father to begin a new baby. A tiny part from the father, called a *sperm*, and a tiny part from the mother, called an *ovum* (egg), join together inside the mother's body and become a single, tiny cell, which grows and grows. And that's the beginning of a new baby.

Questions about how the baby got started:

- How does the baby get into the mother?
- How does the father's sperm get into the mother?

Suggested answers:

- When mothers and fathers are alone and loving each other very much, they hold each other very close in a special way just for husbands and wives. The sperm from the father goes into the mother's body. If the sperm joins together with the mother's ovum, a new baby begins to grow. This is a special gift that God gave mothers and fathers. They can help God create new people.
- When mothers and fathers are alone and loving each other very much, they hold each other very close in a special way just for husbands and wives. God made their bodies so that they fit together. The father's penis fits into the mother's vagina. Then the sperm leave the father's body and go into the mother's body. If a sperm joins together with the mother's ovum, a new baby begins to grow. This is a special gift that God gave mothers and fathers. When they are loving each other in this special way, they can help God create new people. This special way of loving is just for married people and it is called sexual intercourse.

Topic 3 — Our First Home

Blessed is the fruit of thy womb.
Luke 1:42

Summary

This topic helps the students learn more about how all of the baby's needs are met in the safe, protected environment of the uterus. The teacher and students continue the story of the Carsons, and discuss the beauty of God's design for sustaining human life inside the mother.

Main Ideas

- The uterus is a very good home for a baby.
- The baby gets food and oxygen from the mother's body through the umbilical cord.
- Waste from the baby's body goes through the umbilical cord into the mother's body. When the mother goes to the bathroom, the baby's wastes are also passed from her body.

- The baby floats in fluid inside a sac in the uterus. The fluid protects the baby.

Family Participation

- You and your child may enjoy reading the third part of the Carson story, and discussing some of the reasons the uterus is such a good home for the baby.
- Children enjoy hearing about what they were like when they were inside the uterus. They particularly like the idea that they turned somersaults, got the hiccups, and sucked their thumbs. If you have funny stories about how active your child was, be sure to share them.
- This topic, or any of the other topics in this theme, may result in your child asking questions about miscarriages. You might want to answer this question by saying, “Yes, sometimes a baby growing inside its mother dies before it’s ready to be born. This makes the mother and father and the other members of the family very sad.”
- Another question that some children ask is whether people can have a baby if they’re not married. You could answer this by saying, “Yes, sometimes people who aren’t married have a baby. God knows and loves this baby just as he knows and loves you. But God’s plan is for babies to have a mother and a father who are married.”

Topic 4 — Welcoming the New Baby

*Each child is sent into this world by God with a unique message to deliver,
a new song to sing, a personal act of love to bestow.*

John Powell, S.J.

Summary

This topic helps the students understand how babies are born and the special care they need after birth. The teacher and students read the last part of the story of the Carson family. At the end of the topic, the students are given a sheet to complete at home about their birth. They are asked to bring the sheets back to school so that they can share what they learned with the class.

Main Ideas

- The uterus is a large muscle. When it is time for the baby to be born, it starts to push on the baby.
- The bottom of the uterus begins to open, and after a while the baby can move through the opening. The baby moves into the birth canal (vagina), and out into the world.

- New babies need lots of care and love after they are born. They drink milk from the mother's breasts or from a bottle.

Family Participation

- You and your child may enjoy reading the last part of the story of the Carson family.
- Help your child complete the sheet, *Presenting Me!* about his or her arrival in your family. The teacher has encouraged the students to bring these sheets back to school to share with the rest of the class.
- Children enjoy hearing stories about their arrival in the family. Were they early or late? Quiet or noisy? What did their parents say when they first saw them? What did their brothers and sisters say? If you have a copy of your child's birth announcement or the little hospital bracelet she or he wore, your child would enjoy seeing these items.
- Children often have many questions about the birth of a baby. One question they frequently ask is whether it hurts when the baby is born. It's not a good idea to talk a lot about the pain of childbirth in front of children, but you might answer by saying, "Yes, it hurts when the baby is being pushed out. But after the baby is born the mother and father are so excited that the pain is forgotten."
- Your child may also ask about Caesarian section. You can explain this procedure by saying, "Sometimes a mother has difficulty when her baby is ready to be born. The baby might be very large, or in the wrong position to be born. The parents and the doctor don't want the baby or the mother to get hurt. The doctor makes an opening in the mother's abdomen, takes the baby out through this opening, and then sews the opening closed. This operation doesn't harm the mother or the baby and the mother recovers in a little while."
- It is important for children to understand that having a baby is not like being sick. You could explain that some mothers and fathers choose to have the baby be born at home, and others choose to have the baby be born in a hospital. At home or in a hospital, there is almost always a doctor and nurse or a midwife helping the mother and baby.

Questions about how the baby is born:

- How does the baby get out?
- How are babies born?

Some suggested answers:

- A doctor or midwife helps the mother when it is time for the baby to be born.

- There is a special opening in the mother's body and the doctor or midwife helps the baby come out through that opening.
- There is a special opening at the bottom of the mother's uterus. The opening is called the vagina or sometimes the birth canal. When the baby is ready to be born, the uterus starts to contract and push on that opening. The opening starts to stretch and then the baby can move into the birth canal and into the world. The mother helps push the baby out. The doctor (midwife) is there to help and to make sure that the mother and baby are all right.

Topic 5 — We Grow and Change

Love lights the lamp of human development.

Thomas Lickona

Summary

This topic introduces the students to some of amazing changes that take place during the first year of a newborn's life. The teacher and students discuss a chart showing some of the accomplishments of babies, like rolling over, sitting, walking, and saying their first word. The teacher gives the students a sheet about their first year for them to complete at home. They are asked to bring the sheets back to school so they can share the information with the class.

Main Ideas

- Babies grow and develop very quickly during the first year of life.
- At the end of their first year, most babies weigh three times as much as they did when they were born, and are about half again as tall.
- We have done a lot of growing, changing, and learning since we were born and there is much more to come.

Family Participation

- You could ask your child to tell you some of the things babies start to do in their first year of life.
- Help your child complete the sheet about his or her first year of life. When the students bring the sheets back to life, they will share the information about their first year.
- Children love to hear about their early development: their first word, when they walked, what toys they liked, some of the funny things they did. If your child has a baby book,

take this opportunity to look through it together.

- Although growth and development in children does follow a generally predictable timetable, it is also true that each child has a unique pattern of development. It is important for children to understand that their pattern will not be exactly the same as their brothers or sisters or friends. Although comparisons are normal, it is important that such comparisons do not assume too much importance. Biggest, fastest, smartest do not measure the value of the person, only a particular set of skills.

Theme Three Stories and Poems

Topics 1 – 4: Theme Three features a continuing story involving the Carson family. The story has four parts, one for each of the first four topics in Theme 3.

Part 1: Special Events

Mr. and Mrs. Carson have been away for the weekend. They were celebrating their wedding anniversary. The children were very glad when their mom and dad came back. They all talked at the same time.

“Did you bring me anything.”

“Did you have a good time?”

“Will you take us next time?”

“Are you going again next year?”

“We really missed you.”

Their dad answered all their questions at once. “Yes, yes, maybe, and I don’t know. And we really missed you, too.”

“We sure did,” Mrs. Carson said, and she gave them each another hug.

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That night Beth and Shane had some homework to do. In school they were learning about families. They had a special topic to discuss: Ask your mom or dad to tell you about three important events in their lives.

“Shane and I figured out one important event,” Beth said to her mother.

“Your anniversary.”

“That is a big event,” her mom said. “But we wouldn’t have an anniversary unless we got married. So that’s my first event. My second is when all of you were born. And my third is when we moved from Barbados to Canada. You were just a baby, Pamela.”

“What about you, Dad?” Shane asked.

“Well, mine are the same as your mother’s,” he said. “I remember that day we arrived in Canada. It was so cold! But I have a fourth important event to add to the list. I’ll bet you no one in your class will have this event.”

“What is it?” Shane asked.

“It’s something that happens every night. Suddenly, it gets nice and quiet around here. Can you guess why?” his dad teased.

“I know,” Beth shouted. “It’s because we’re all asleep!”

“Oh, Dad,” Shane said.

* * * * *

Part 2: Beginning Life

The next day at dinner, Mr. Carson asked Beth and Shane, “Did you talk about the three important events in class?”

“We did, and a lot of people said getting married and having children, the same as you and Mom,” Shane said.

“I’m not surprised,” his dad said. “Getting married and having children is great.”

“Michael’s mom told him the most important event was when he was adopted,” Beth said. “She said that the night before he was going to arrive, she and his dad couldn’t sleep. They were so excited that they were awake most of the night.”

“What’s adopted?” Donna asked.

“You know how babies grow inside their mothers?” Mrs. Carson said.

Donna nodded.

“Well, sometimes a mom and dad can’t look after a baby. But they want the baby to have a good home. So they let another mother and father adopt the baby.”

“Am I adopted?” Donna asked.

“No, you grew inside Mom,” Pamela said. “You started from a tiny cell, right Mom?”

“That’s right.”

“Then how did she get bigger, like a baby?” Shane asked.

“Here, I’ll show you on this piece of paper,” Pamela said. She drew a single cell, then two cells, then four cells, then lots of cells, and then a baby.

“That’s a good drawing,” Mrs. Carson said. “There’s a special word for when that one cell begins — conception.”

“What does that mean?” Beth asked.

“Well, it’s the very moment when a tiny part from the mother and a tiny part from the father join together and become one cell,” her mother explained.

“We learned about conception at school,” Pamela said. “And there’s all sorts of information in that one little cell. The colour of your eyes and hair, if you’re going to be tall or short, if you look more like you mom or more like your dad.”

“That’s true,” her mom said. “Now, let’s get this table cleared.”

“I want to talk some more about before babies are born,” Beth said.

“We will,” her mother said, “tomorrow.”

* * * * *

Part 3: Our First Home

The next day Mrs. Carson showed Beth and Shane a book about babies before they are born.

“See,” she said, “here’s the cell dividing, like the picture Pamela drew. And look at this picture. Now it looks like a baby.”

“Doesn’t the baby get too big to fit inside the mother?” Beth asked.

“There’s lots of room,” her mother said. “You know, you and Shane grew inside of me at the same time, and there was plenty of room. The uterus just stretches and stretches as the baby gets bigger. That’s the way God made women.”

“How does the baby eat?” Shane asked.

“Let’s look at another picture,” his mother said. “And then I can show you.” She turned to a page that showed a baby in the uterus, just about ready to be born.

“Do you see how the baby is attached to the mother by a cord? It’s called the umbilical cord,” Mrs. Carson explained. “The baby’s food comes from the mother’s body, through the umbilical cord to the baby.”

Beth looked at the picture. “How does the baby go to the bathroom?” she asked.

“The same way,” her mom said. “The waste from the baby’s body goes through the umbilical cord and into the mother’s body.”

“And then it comes out of her body when she goes to the bathroom?” Beth asked.

“Yes, that’s right,” her mom said.

“How does the baby breathe?” Shane asked.

“Well, the baby gets oxygen through the cord. Babies can’t begin to breathe the way you do until after they are born.”

Beth and Shane looked at the picture. Then Shane said, “I think the baby has a very good home.”

* * * * *

Part 4: Welcoming the New Baby

Beth and Shane had lots of questions as they looked at the book.

“How does the mother know when the baby’s ready to come out?” Beth asked.

“Look at this picture. The uterus is a big muscle and it can push on the baby,” Mrs. Carson explained. “When the mother starts to feel the uterus pushing, she knows that it’s time for the baby to be born. Then she and the father go to the hospital. Or she might have the baby at home.”

“Then what happens?” Shane asked.

“Well, the uterus keeps pushing and the bottom of it opens. Then the baby’s head can fit through the opening.”

“And then the baby comes out through here,” said Beth, pointing at the picture.

“Yes, through the mother’s vagina. It’s also called the birth canal because the baby moves through it to be born,” her mom explained.

“Oh look,” Mrs. Carson said, and she pointed at a picture. “A brand new baby, just born!”

“It’s so little, Shane said. “Was I that little?”

“I think it’s cute,” Beth said. “I wonder if it’s a boy or a girl.”

“That’s the first question most people ask,” her mom said. “Is it a girl or a boy?”

“Well, when we were born, you got both!” Shane said.

His mother smiled. “Wasn’t I lucky,” she said. “But you know, it really doesn’t matter. Girls are wonderful and so are boys.”

“I’d rather be a girl,” Beth said.

“And I’d rather be a boy,” said Shane.

“And I’m glad you’re both happy!” their mother said, laughing.

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