

Introduction and Overview

Fully Alive would be incomplete without resources for families. For although *Fully Alive* is a school Family Life program, the participation of parents is essential for its success. It is often said that parents are the first and most important teachers of their children. No place is this statement more true than in the areas that are introduced and explored in *Fully Alive*.

Parents, however, do not teach in the same way that classroom teachers do. Their teaching is informal rather than formal. It is a normal part of raising children. Meal time, grocery shopping, setting the table, a special trip, family prayers, a hug and a kiss after an argument, looking at a book together, bedtime chats — all of these are occasions when parents are teaching and children are learning. In fact, there is very little that happens within the family that does not provide a lesson of one kind or another.

Parents have always sought advice from others as they raise their children. Grandparents, aunts and uncles, older sisters and brothers, neighbours, and friends can be wonderful sources of information and common-sense guidance. There are also many books on raising children, as well as large numbers of professionals with whom parents may come in contact. Advice from any source can be useful, but it should be seen as just that — advice. What may work for one parent may not work for another. For in the end, no one knows children better than their parents.

This *Fully Alive* Online Family Resource is another source of advice, and parents who follow the program will likely find some of its suggestions more useful than others. Each parent is different and each child is different. Parents will bring to *Fully Alive* their own talents and experiences, and will adapt and use this Online Family Resource in their own way.

The suggestions included in this Online Family Resource are the work of a small group of Catholic parents who shared their talents and their experiences in raising children. They

carefully examined the *Fully Alive* Teacher Guide and Student Book, and gave suggestions about what they would do at home with the program. As they worked through the various topics, they often mentioned important ideas that they thought should be included in the introduction. These ideas include:

- *Fully Alive* creates special opportunities for parents to talk to their children about the things that matter. In particular, it encourages parents to talk about their faith, and about God and prayer, in the natural setting of the family.
- Intimate talks between parents and children create an atmosphere of trust. Children learn that they can talk to their parents about anything.
- It is important for parents to pick the right time for special talks — when the occasion comes up naturally, and when parents and children are relaxed and not distracted by other matters.
- Parents should have faith in themselves. They are better able than anyone else to talk to their children about many of the topics in *Fully Alive*. Their special relationship and their deep understanding of their children and of their children's lives make parents the true experts.
- Many of the topics in *Fully Alive* can be explored more deeply at home than at school. This is because of the number of children in the classroom, and also because teachers are concerned to respect the privacy of the home. It is the great hope of the parents who worked on this material for families that the parents and children who follow the program will enjoy the experience.

The *Fully Alive* Online Family Resource is closely tied to the school program. In Grades 1 – 4, the resources used at school are:

- **Student Book:** The books for the students have many illustrations, photographs, stories, and poems. Stories, which are an important part of *Fully Alive*, create a shared classroom experience that the students can reflect on and discuss.

- **Teacher Guide:** The *Fully Alive* Teacher Guide has full descriptions of the five themes and the topics in the themes, introductory material for each topic to help the teacher prepare, and lesson plans for the topics. Many topics have accompanying Blackline Masters (BLMs), activity sheets that the children complete as part of the lesson. For some topics, they may bring an activity sheet home before the lesson so that parents can help them complete it. Most topics also include a Family Connections sheet that summarizes the main ideas in the topic (information that you will also find in this Online Family Resource). It is not expected that teachers will send home all of these Family Connections sheets, but will make a selection among them.

- **Big Book for Grades 1 - 3:** The Big Book, which is for use in the classroom, is a collection of large illustrations of some of the important pages from the Student Book.

- **Picture Charts for Grade 4:** Like the Big Book, the picture charts are large illustrations of some of the important pages from the Student Book.

If you are interested in seeing any of these resources, please talk to your child's teacher.

The *Fully Alive* Online Family Resource follows the school program, and is organized by grade level. For each grade, you will find a section for each of the five themes that includes:

- A copy of the theme family letter that teachers are asked to send home.
- A brief description of the topics in the theme.
- For Theme Three, Created Sexual: Male and Female, some additional material on talking to children about sexuality.
- A summary of the main ideas the children are learning.

- Suggestions for family participation.
- Stories and poems from the theme.

At the end of the five themes, you will find a final section with prayers from *Fully Alive* for that grade.

The information provided for each grade allows families to be aware of what is being taught from week to week and to be full participants in the program. This is particularly important for the topics about human sexuality in Theme 3. It is the special right and responsibility of parents to teach their children about God's plan for the beginning of new human life, and about the human body, which is part of God's creation. For this reason, any parents who believe that the program is not right for their child have the right to withdraw their child from it. Arrangements for withdrawal must be made with the child's teacher and the principal of the school.

The *Fully Alive* Family Resource includes many suggestions in Theme Three for families, including some examples of the kinds of questions children ask, and some possible answers to these questions. It also gives parents information about what will be taught in the classroom well ahead of time, including a summary of what will be presented in following school year.

Fully Alive offers Catholic parents and teachers a special opportunity to work together as partners in Family Life education. The parent's special understanding of the child enriches the teacher's understanding. The teacher's experience with the child in the classroom deepens the parent's understanding. Each group needs the other. And children need the guidance of their parents and teachers in order to grow in wisdom and understanding.

In *Fully Alive*, the family is always presented as an opportunity and an invitation to love.

This remains true even when families experience serious difficulties. Learning to be a good parent is both a great joy and a great challenge. It demands an unending supply of patience, unselfishness, and love. A sense of humour and the ability to forgive oneself for the mistakes that are part of every parent's experience are also important. And, finally, parents need faith — in themselves, in their children, and in God who is always with them.