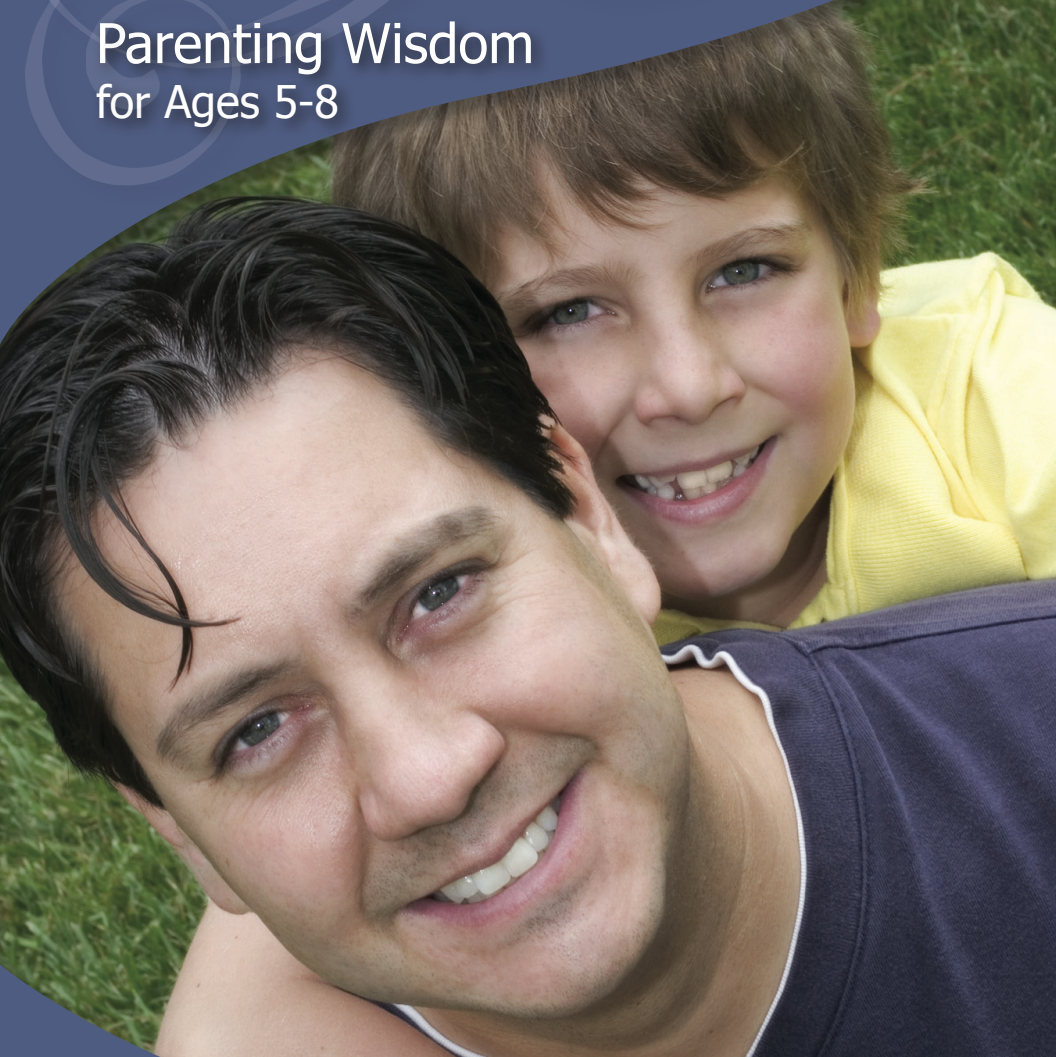


# Elementary *Foundations*

Parenting Wisdom  
for Ages 5-8



Dr. Scott Turansky  
and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN  
with Shannon Kulp



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To obtain a complete resource list or have Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller present their material live, you may contact the National Center for Biblical Parenting, 76 Hopatcong Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-4136, (800) 771-8334 or visit the website at: [www.biblicalparenting.org](http://www.biblicalparenting.org)

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You may email us at [parent@biblicalparenting.org](mailto:parent@biblicalparenting.org)

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## About the Authors



### **Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN**

Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN are the co-founders of the National Center for

Biblical Parenting. Their heart-based approach to parenting is revolutionizing families. Turansky and Miller are also the cofounders of Biblical Parenting University, providing parents with easy access to parent training through online courses. Scott Turansky is a full time pastor of Calvary Chapel Living Hope in New Jersey. He and his wife Carrie have five adult children and three grandchildren. Joanne Miller is a pediatric nurse, working at the Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital in New Brunswick, New Jersey. She and her husband, Ed, have two grown sons. Joanne also works full-time leading the National Center for Biblical Parenting.



### **Shannon Kulp**

Shannon Kulp and her husband Jeff have three sons, Patch, Caden, and Nolan. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Child Development from California State University Northridge. She is also a Level III certified educational therapist by the National Institute of Learning Development. Currently Shannon serves as an educational therapist at a private classical, Christian school in Santa Clarita, CA.



[biblicalparenting.org](http://biblicalparenting.org)  
[biblicalparentinguniversity.com](http://biblicalparentinguniversity.com)  
[parent@biblicalparenting.org](mailto:parent@biblicalparenting.org)



## Introduction

Have you ever waited in line with much anticipation to ride a roller coaster? We're not talking about one of those roller coasters in "kiddie land" that move about five miles an hour. Think about the big ones. You know the type. Even the names given to these huge roller coasters are daunting: "Cyclone," "Beast," or "Megaphobia." These are the ones that put a lump in your throat as you're slowly dragged up the steep hill in preparation for the drop at such an intense speed that your stomach gets left behind.

Roller coasters do a great job at taking the rider through a variety of feelings and emotions, much like the job of parenting. Some moments provide thrills and excitement while others challenge us with discouragement and disappointment. As you encounter each day, your role as a parent can take a swift turn at any time. Sometimes, like the roller coaster, you can plan for what lies ahead and prepare yourself for how you'll deal with a particular situation. Yet there are other times in parenting when you feel as though you're being dropped from the top of the coaster, heading straight down at full speed with no warning at all.

Whether you have the time to plan for what lies ahead on your parenting journey or you're being thrust into a situation with no advance warning, the Lord promises to be right by your side. In fact, you'll likely experience many

of the emotions that the Israelites faced as they entered the Promised Land to conquer it. To prepare them for the task, Moses reminded them of God's presence with them always. He encouraged them with these words from Deuteronomy 31:8, "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." The same promise given to those early pioneers is the one God gives to us as we face the ominous task of parenting. The Lord wants to walk alongside you as you parent each and every day. He wants to be there when you have the time to think through a particular situation and when you feel as though you're riding down the coaster at full speed.

This book is designed to help you understand and enjoy the ride. The elementary years are a fascinating time of learning and growing. Your child will develop intellectually, learning how to read, solve problems, and communicate ideas. Emotional development will require a plan for dealing with anger, disappointment, and sadness. Social skills open new doors for building significant relationships like never before. Physical growth builds coordination and strength, increasing opportunities for things like sports, chores, and helping out in meaningful ways. Spiritual eyes are opening with questions about God and the ability to experience personal faith. As you work with your elementary age child you're developing foundations for future growth and maturity. It's during these very important years that children learn the building blocks to be responsible members of society. Sure, they have lots more to learn, but the work you do during these years is essential.

During the next few months and years you'll make some very important parenting decisions. You'll decide



how you'll handle electronics in your home, how to integrate spirituality into daily life, what to do with all of the entertainment choices, how to develop good habits for work including homework and chores. Your child will learn more about money, other authorities, how to choose friends, and what it means to be responsible. So much will happen in the next few years, you may feel like you're bouncing to the left and right just like a roller coaster ride. You'll want to make sure that you are securely seated in the roller coaster in order to maximize your enjoyment of these years.

Strap yourself in with healthy doses of prayer, Bible study, and support from others who are trying to raise their children from a Christian worldview. This book will help you understand the developmental stage of the early elementary years. It will give you tools to use with your children to do the daily work of parenting. But most importantly, we trust that you'll develop a strong reliance on the Lord for his grace and mercy to meet your needs each day.

Every morning when you get up you'll want to start by inviting God to be actively involved in your life—training, leading, comforting, and guiding you. You might wake up in the morning and pray a prayer like this one.

Dear Lord,

As I try to be a good parent today, I know that you're right by my side every step of the way. I ask that you guide me through each and every circumstance that I encounter today. Help my words to be honoring to you even when I'm feeling overwhelmed. Please give me strength to take a stand when it's necessary, and to show mercy and grace when opportunities present themselves. Walk with me, as I so desire to raise my child to love you with all of his heart,

soul, mind, and strength. Amen.

Parenting is one of the greatest spiritual growth experiences you'll ever have. If you walk with the Lord each day, you'll learn how to rely on him, trust him, and watch small miracles take place in your child's heart. God will reveal himself to you in new ways as you search the scriptures, apply biblical principles in your home, and seek to love him fully.

God is good and he knows your weaknesses and limitations. He delights in working through your challenges with you. Don't be discouraged because of your own personal weaknesses. Give them to the Lord. It's very possible that he'll bring healing into your life and strength into your character as you raise your son or daughter.

After all, God uses the picture of the family to describe his church and to articulate what he wants our relationship with him to be like. He comes to us as a father. We can never be perfect parents, but we do know the perfect parent and we can go to him for guidance and counsel, love and comfort. Being close to the Father can make the ride feel a bit more safe. So, enjoy the roller coaster, invite God to be your travel partner, and take on the challenge. It's a big one but the rewards are great.



## The Adventure of the Early Elementary Years

The early elementary years provide the foundation you'll build upon for years to come. When your child was younger, you spent a great deal of time teaching right from wrong, self-control, cooperation, and responsiveness to authority. As you walk through the next few years, you'll build on those principles to extend your child's maturity. You'll also identify weaknesses that need work, and now's the time to dig in and do the training necessary to develop responsibility in your child. You'll likely identify areas of weakness in your child, or feel as if you missed something earlier on. Don't be discouraged. It just means that you need to make a parenting shift and address that weakness now.

In fact, much of your work in the elementary years will focus on developing strengths, exploring interests, and identifying weaknesses that need attention. As you spend time praying for your child, God will reveal new areas to emphasize. You may see your child's budding interest in music and begin guitar lessons, or recognize some leadership gifts and enroll your child in a scouting program. You

may also discover that your child is developing a bad attitude whenever work is necessary and you'll make a plan to address that as well.

These are important years to look at a child's heart. The heart contains a person's passions. That's why it's commonly said, "Put your heart into it." The heart also contains interests, causing Jesus to observe in Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The heart contains desires (Psalm 37:4), temptations (1 Kings 11:4), convictions (Deuteronomy 6:6), emotions (John 14:27), and beliefs (Romans 10:9-10). Much of your work during the next few years will focus on the heart of your child, encouraging internal strength and character.

After all, maturity is a heart issue. The child who is internally motivated to keep his room clean or turn in his homework is demonstrating responsibility. The child who can receive correction and apologize for an offense is practicing humility. And when your daughter graciously accepts no as an answer, she's learning to live within limits. The heart qualities your child develops now will produce significant growth that will extend into adulthood.

One way to help strengthen your child's heart is to look for adult solutions to the challenges your child currently faces, and then break those solutions down to a child's developmental level. You want your child to grow into mature answers to life's problems, rather than simply growing out of childish ones. For example, if your child has an anger problem, it's probably unwise to teach him to punch a pillow. Venting anger like that isn't an adult solution. It's better to teach your child self-control in ways that a five or six-year-old can understand. Then, as he grows up, he'll have tools to address the challenges anger presents.

Virtually all the problems that children experience have adult counterparts. We all know adults who whine and complain when they don't get their way. Grownups sometimes have trouble completing tasks without being reminded or procrastinate instead of getting things done. In the same way, it's not just children who have trouble living within limits. It's a challenge we all experience at times, illustrated by the difficulty of staying within a budget or on a diet. Your work with your child now is for the long term. You're helping your child during these next few years develop life skills to use both now and later in life.

Focusing on the heart means you think in terms of strategy. Look at the bigger picture and consider what you're trying to teach for the long term. Correction isn't simply to bring justice to a situation or to punish a child in order to balance the scales. You're teaching how to respond more effectively in life.

Remember that the goal of discipline is a changed heart. Discipline means to teach. It's different than punishing for some kind of offense. Discipline looks forward to the right solutions for next time. Punishment focuses on the past. Discipline focuses on the future. Punishment is negative. Discipline is positive. Punishment is often motivated out of anger. Discipline is motivated out of love. Maintaining the bigger perspective in child training can go a long way to see significant improvement in your child's progress.

Remember that your goal is to teach your child how to approach life. Be careful that you don't get so focused on the tasks that need to be done that you miss the way that those things are accomplished. For example, correcting your child's choice of mismatched clothes isn't just about getting the colors right. It's about how one responds to cor-

rection and advice. Talk about color coordination, but also discuss the attitude your child has when corrected. Both are important.

Or, when you ask your child to pick up the towel off the floor in the bathroom, don't just focus on the task's completion, look at how the job is done. Scrunching the towel in the rack isn't what you had in mind when you gave the instruction. Completing a task is important but so is the way that you do it. The first gets the job done. The second focuses on character.

Your child needs guidance throughout the early elementary years to understand many important principles about life. You'll likely teach those in a number of ways. Correction, giving instructions, and saying no to children provide plenty of opportunities to teach character development. As you focus on heart qualities in your child, new areas of maturity will develop in ways that bring joy to your heart.

Parenting is hard work. Kids don't tend to raise themselves. They need help. Some people believe that children are like flowers, and all they need is attention and nutrients to grow up to be mature, responsible adults. Unfortunately, that view of children doesn't take into account the fact that kids have a sin nature that's often selfish, looking for the easy way, not the best way. It's better to think of your child as a garden with a number of strengths in the form of flowers and plants but also several weaknesses in the form of weeds that need to be removed. Weeds can be stubborn as can the challenges some children face. But continued work in the heart, coupled with God's grace in that child's life, can produce the beautiful garden he intends.

A large, light gray decorative swirl graphic that frames the number 2. The swirl starts on the left, loops around, and ends on the right, with a smaller loop on the right side.

## 2

# What about Rewards and Punishment

**D**o you find yourself scrambling for new incentives to motivate your child to do the right thing? Gaining cooperation from your preschooler may have been simple compared to the challenges of the elementary years. A piece of candy or the promise of a walk outside doesn't motivate your child the way it once did.

One deceptive mistake parents make when trying to motivate change in a child is to rely too heavily on rewards and punishments. In fact, some parents are in such a habit of external motivation with their kids that they hardly instruct or correct their children without some form of behavior modification. "Clean your room and then you can go out and play," or "finish your homework and you can watch a video." It becomes such a routine that parents often don't realize the danger of what they're doing.

An overemphasis on reward and punishment appeals to the selfishness in a child. Kids then start asking the wrong questions in life. When children are motivated with too many behavior modification techniques they learn to ask the question, "What's in it for me?" or, "What am I going to

get out of this?" Children would do better to ask the question, "What's the right thing to do in this situation?" But that requires that they learn about convictions, values, and develop a strong work ethic. That happens when parents are intentional about the way they instruct and correct their kids. Parents often have to change the way they parent if children are going to change the way they live.

We're not saying that behavior modification is wrong. It's just incomplete. It was developed as a motivation system to change behavior with animals and made popular by Ivan Pavlov in the early 1900's. He observed that he could teach a dog to salivate by ringing a bell at the same time he gave food. Over time, just the ringing of the bell started the dogs salivating. He had taught them something using a trigger and a response.

It wasn't long before behavior modification was practiced on people and became a major method used to modify behavior. Smoking cessation programs and weight loss programs turned to behavior modification to achieve their success. Unfortunately, then teachers and parents began to rely on this external motivation system to train children. The problem is eventually revealed when behavior is changed but the heart remains the same.

Behavior modification is based on a humanistic model. Those who believe in creation recognize that God created people to be different than animals. Although people can change using behavior modification, it's an incomplete strategy. God created people with hearts, and that means that parents and teachers have a whole new bucket of resources for change.

The heart contains convictions, beliefs, emotions, and desires. Therefore, other parenting tools are necessary to



help children make lasting changes. Furthermore, the heart is where God chooses to live. Ephesians 3:16-17 says, "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." And, 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 says, "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." In the first verse we see that Christ makes his home in the heart and in the second we see that the Spirit of God is placed there as well.

Of course, some children haven't yet experienced salvation and personally invited the Lord into their lives. That decision is an important one that will further enhance their ability to mature and grow. But don't let the fact that they haven't made a personal commitment to God hinder your understanding of his work in their lives. Jesus described the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life who is not yet a believer when, in John 16:8, he says, "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." God works in the heart of a person whether they have accepted him yet or not. Of course, having Christ in one's life allows the Spirit to work much more completely.

When you use a heart-based approach to parenting, you're working alongside the God of the universe to touch your child's heart. Understanding what God says about the heart provides many new tools for parenting. You'll be able to change what children believe and help them develop new tendencies when facing challenges. If you think in terms of the heart you'll be able to help your child develop integrity and character, not simply behavior change.

You'll want to use a heart-based approach and apply it in practical ways. Kids need to know exactly what to do to put principles and character into practice. Sometimes that means that you'll give them the exact words to say. Other times you'll help them wrestle with ideas and develop their own suggestions. It's amazing what children come up with when they're challenged.

This book contains many practical strategies for helping children change. As you look at the techniques, be sure to explain them to children in terms that reflect the heart. At this age your child can understand the concept of the heart, so it's time to talk about it. For example, when your son gets upset and starts yelling you might send him to take a Break with words such as, "Go take a Break, change your heart, settle down, and come back and see me when you're ready." Children then learn that yelling is a symptom of anger in the heart and the solution isn't simply to be quiet, but also to work on internal change.

Take some time and listen to yourself work with your children. If you tend to talk about the motivation for a child to complete a task by describing the next reward or activity, you might want to make some changes. The reality is that maturity is defined in part as doing something because it's the right thing to do, not just so that I can go play a video game or watch a movie.

When you use a heart-based approach with your child, you are developing a foundation to build upon, both now and in the next stages of childhood. You'll start to teach about convictions instead of just rules, taking initiative instead of waiting for someone to prompt you, and doing what's right even when parents aren't around. Those things, and many more, are learned when parents focus on the heart.



## Raising a Leader

The early signs of a budding leader are often things like determination, resourcefulness, and persistence. Unfortunately, some children demonstrate these qualities in ways that create conflict and resistance. They often argue relentlessly, have their own agenda, are stubborn, and expect others to do what they want. Budding leaders are often known for their ability to see how others, including parents, should fit into their goals and objectives. Although those qualities will serve them well over time, the lack of maturity and character often makes these children difficult to work with.

Sometimes called “strong-willed” kids, these children must learn the basics of good leadership. For example, all good leaders need to learn how to follow. They also need to learn to consider the desires of the people they’d like to lead. Determined children benefit from strong-willed parents who can teach them important life skills. That doesn’t mean facing off with your child with anger. It means training your child to have the good qualities necessary to be a strong and thoughtful leader instead of a tyrant.

Trying to teach his disciples about good leadership,

Jesus told them in Matthew 20:25-26, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.” Several qualities must be part of a child’s life in order for strong leadership to be a positive asset.

Give your child a vision for his strengths by discussing the leadership traits you see. You might say, “I can tell that you’re going to be a leader someday. You have courage and strength. Sometimes though, I see that you misuse those qualities and they appear more like stubbornness or defiance. I’m going to be looking for ways to help you bring some balance to your leadership so that you can be most effective as you grow and develop.”

Look for ways to make the boundaries clear. Leaders sometimes cross the line of what’s appropriate in order to get their way. You’ll realize this because you feel violated or angry. Don’t use your anger to solve the problem, but rather use it as an indicator that your child has strayed beyond what’s appropriate in relationships. In the same way that a car stays in the lane in order to be successful on the road, there are certain limits to a child’s initiative and determination. Violation of the relational “lane lines” often appears to other people as being overbearing, rude, inconsiderate, demanding, and stubborn.

When you see that your child has crossed the line and is being demanding, use the situation as a teaching opportunity. Children often don’t understand where the lines are and some are unskilled at picking up on social cues. Take time to teach your child where the line is.

For example, continuing to argue after you’ve said no is rude. Bossing another child around is demanding. Regu-

larly telling a parent to wait while he gets to the next level in the video game is self-centered. Each of these demonstrations of poor leadership needs firm boundaries and careful discussion to provide greater wisdom for the child. Setting up clear boundaries affords your strong-willed child the structure needed to learn how to use self-control and determination appropriately.

When you're dealing with a particular situation and correction is required, avoid getting into a yelling match with your child. It's not uncommon for children with a strong personality to grow frustrated and angry when things don't go their way. Don't allow yourself to jump into the battle. Children quickly learn how to push their parents' buttons, so it's important that you remain calm and don't engage in a conversation that's out of control.

Be willing to discipline even in awkward situations. One of the hardest times to deal with a discipline issue is out in public. Unfortunately, both strong-willed children and compliant children alike have a tendency to test the boundaries in public. Although it's usually inconvenient, it's often important to address the situation when your child has crossed the line, even if that means leaving the area or event.

Parenting a child with a strong will is challenging! It requires a great deal of commitment and intentionality. Setting up clear boundaries for your child will help create a sense of stability and training as you move through day-to-day routines. It's important to find situations where you can encourage your child's strengths. Remember that God can use your child's determination and strong will to do a mighty work in his kingdom, and he has chosen you to help mold your child's heart along the way.



## Rise and Shine

The very words “Rise and Shine” can raise a parent's anxiety level. Keeping your child moving from the time she wakes up until the time you get out the door or start your day can be a huge task, especially when you have yourself to manage as well. But a few changes in the morning can provide you with a new opportunity to develop heart qualities in your child. Instead of relying on you to get her through the morning, she can learn how to manage herself. Seem unreasonable? We'll show you how. The fact that some children resist your morning routine or require parental prompters to get through their tasks is often an indication that some training is necessary.

The first step is to clarify reasonable expectations by defining the plan. The list of tasks to complete in the morning usually only has 5-10 things on it. You might even list them on a piece of paper so that your child can actually see the things she's responsible for. You can break the list into two groups, separated by breakfast. The first list might include get up, make your bed, get dressed, put pajamas away, and come down for breakfast. The after-breakfast list might include an additional five things such as put your

shoes on, comb your hair, brush your teeth, get all your day's things by the door such as backpack, coat, and lunch, and "the honor task" (to be discussed later).

The second step is to implement specific strategies to work the plan. These strategies differ for each child. Some children just need the task list and they can demonstrate responsibility on their own and simply report back that they're on track. Other children need a bit more structure. For the child who needs a lot of guidance in the mornings, start with a vision meeting that defines responsibility. You might say something like, "We've got a new plan for mornings that's going to reduce my nagging and increase your responsibility. This is going to be great. It's a way that we can work together as a team to get all of our jobs done in the morning. I created a list of tasks that you usually need to get done from the time you get up until the time we leave the house. Can you think of anything we need to add to that? I'm looking forward to partnering with you."

After a vision meeting, you'll want to give specific instructions such as, "Here's the list. Each time you complete one of the items on the chart, you report to me and I'll check it off." As children mature you may reduce the reporting back to two times, once before breakfast, and the other after the list is complete, but some children need a lot of accountability at first because they are easily distracted. It's the need to report back that increases the uncomfortable internal feeling that turns into responsibility.

Notice that the parent is still quite involved at this point by requiring the child to report back and keeping things moving. However, the child should be taking initiative to report back. If you have to go find your child or discover that your child is playing a game instead of staying on task,

you may have to increase the motivation level to build responsibility.

In that case, you might say something like, "In order to help you be internally motivated to move forward in the morning, I'm going to set up checkpoints. The first four things need to be done by 7:00 am and the other five things need to be done by 7:25 am. It's your job to report to me that they're done. If you meet the checkpoints then you'll have a bit of extra time to play before we leave at 7:30 am. However, if you don't check in at the checkpoints then you'll have to go to bed earlier so that you have more energy in the morning to do your work."

Galatians 6:2-5 presents an interesting principle about life that can be applied to the family. Verse 5 says, "Each one should carry his own load." Verse 2 says, "Carry each other's burdens." Morning is an excellent time to teach this concept. At the end of your child's list you might include one undefined task called "the honor task." This task requires a child to look for something extra to do that helps others out. It might be to load the dishwasher, help a younger child, or take out the trash. If your child can't think of something, he can always come to you, but the goal is to teach children to take initiative to help others and carry someone else's burden, not just their own.

Some families find that doing some evening preparation for morning is helpful. Setting clothes out, packing lunches, or preparing the backpack for the next day can all make the work of morning run more smoothly. Planning ahead is part of organization and is a great life skill taught at home.

Be sure to plan a bit of margin into the schedule to accommodate those unexpected challenges. Finding a lost



shoe, cleaning up a mess, and just getting a bit behind are common, and a little extra time planned to address these surprises is helpful. You might schedule the last check-point to be completed five minutes before you're to leave the house. If everyone accomplishes their jobs by five minutes early, it gives you a few minutes of affirmation time to celebrate your success as a team. It's great to send children off on their day with a positive note and an encouraging smile.

As with any new routine, work diligently over time to develop healthy patterns. Character development often takes work and your investment will not only bring sunshine into your morning, but it will also build significant responsibility in your child.



## The Value of Fun, Humor, and Games

Parenting takes work, but in the midst of all of the challenges, save some energy to have fun. Playing with your kids not only strengthens relationships, but it also teaches children valuable things like how to win, how to lose, how to show mercy, and how to take turns. Kids learn through play, and your gift of time for play, now and then, can have a significant effect on your child's development.

Through games, children can explore different interests. Putting together a puzzle requires thinking and problem-solving skills, drama and charades require communication, and board games often utilize strategy. Playing games strengthens particular parts of the brain and also provides opportunities to practice character development. This is the time in your child's life when he's beginning to discover who God made him to be. Your child will learn what types of activities come naturally and what areas require a little more work. These years provide an amazing opportunity for you, as a parent, to help mold and develop your child's gifts and abilities. Invite fun into your family and take advantage of this time in your child's life to dis-

cover, build, and grow your relationship together.

Playfulness itself is a good quality. Laughing, teasing, and telling jokes together are a fun way to strengthen relationship. Furthermore, they teach children that humor has its limits and that if you carry it on too much, then people become irritated or hurt. This is a major area of maturity in which most children need help. Teasing, for example, is usually fun for a time but can easily cross the line to become hurtful if one isn't careful. Telling jokes makes people laugh, but when the joke makes fun of a person, then it's dishonoring and damages relationship. Humor is a way to get attention, but when it becomes mean or annoying, then one's reputation is weakened.

These early elementary years are a good time to teach about the limits of humor. For example, there are some things we don't laugh about even if they're funny, because of the seriousness of the situation. Humor about bodily functions or toilet talk is inappropriate, and it's unwise to make light of sin or to laugh at evil. Proverbs calls the person who laughs at sin a "mocker." Proverbs 9:12 says, "If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer." Laughing at sin is not only unwise but the mocker suffers in the end. It's also dangerous to tease or joke when someone's upset. Kids can learn the limits of humor, and now is a great time to start the lessons.

Games and activities are a helpful way to introduce children to different skills and to explore new interests. A pick-up game of basketball, tennis, or jump rope can provide children with a wider base of experience and increase confidence in new situations. Children learn how to take risks, try new things, fail, laugh at themselves, and try again.

Some games involve competition, trying to win, accomplish the goal faster, or better. Keep in mind that children between the ages of five and eight often have a hard time with competition. Because they think concretely, they look to the here and now, and winning and losing often lack perspective. That's why some children overreact to a loss, take it personally, and get so upset. You may need a lot of extra time to teach these children how to think and, in the end, may choose to move to more cooperative games until they grow into the next developmental stage.

Competition can be good for some kids. It can help them develop healthy attitudes about winning and losing and learning how to deal with disappointment. Competition can encourage growth and push a child to excel. It helps kids set goals, develop strategies, and increase competence. Being competitive often involves quick decision-making, self-control, discipline, and maturity. It's a very strong motivator at times and can stimulate kids to do their best.

However, losing is serious business for the child who wants to win. Some children compromise values like honesty, kindness, or integrity to get ahead. Thus games become a helpful way to teach valuable lessons about life. Don't bend the rules to create a winner. Although you might allow a child to win when playing a game, don't allow your child to win by lying or cheating. Ethics are learned by sticking to the rules even when you fail.

In the same way, boasting is inappropriate. Learning humility by saying, "You did a good job too," or "Thank you for playing with me," are good suggestions for the child who tends to magnify his own success without thinking of the other person's feelings.

Non-competitive games can foster a sense of commu-

nity and cooperation. Of course, some children even turn cooperative games into a competition because they tend to make winning an evaluation of their self-worth. The problem comes when children begin to define their worth by comparing themselves with others. "I can run faster than Rudy," or "I'm smarter than Caitlin." Children need to learn that one's identity isn't determined through competition and comparison with others. Adults even have this problem sometimes. That's why it's so important to establish good thinking patterns about competition early.

Team games and activities focus on working together. If you sense that competition is getting carried away in your home, you might want to emphasize the value of competing with oneself instead of competing with siblings or friends, or focusing on the fact that, when we all work together, then we're all winners.

To help kids work as a team you might encourage their use of the term "we" instead of "I" and complimenting others who work hard as well. Children can learn to rejoice in the group's success and point out the strengths of others who participated.

Fun, humor, and games contain rich opportunities for developmentally appropriate teaching. Having fun as a family doesn't have to take a lot of time out of your regular weekly routine or cost a lot of money. Relationships grow stronger, lessons come to life, and children develop confidence when they're taught to play games well. Games aren't just entertainment, but they also provide a huge opportunity to enhance a child's character development. Enjoy your family and look for ways to teach in the process.