



Keys to Happy Family Living

Christian Living Series

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Lesson 12 – Supervision and Help

"...then watch yourself, that you do not forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Deuteronomy 6:12, NASB)

Parenthood is a big task. This course has been written to help you move in the right direction. Lesson 12 gives pointers on help and supervision and on your approach in handling children. This concluding lesson does not exhaust the responsibilities involved in being an adequate parent. However, this course has been designed to give you some important "Keys to Happy Family Living." As you apply the understanding derived from this study, you should be a better parent.

Helping Children to Learn

Help children keep limits

Do you remember the boy who was learning to share? It is important to handle an incident like this carefully. Here was a child who was just beginning to grasp a new idea. He still did not correctly understand it. He needed a little help. The teacher had to go to the boy and in a very gentle and firm manner say, "You must give it back. When he is through with the car, you may have it." The boy did not want to give it back, but his playmate also had his rights. The car was to be shared only after his playmate had kept it for a reasonable time.

Help in applying the rule

You can give a child a simple rule or a simple reason. You do not need to repeat that reason twenty times. What your child needs is a little help in applying the rule. In the case of the two small boys, this help meant taking the car from one boy and giving it back to his playmate. The offender in this situation did not need to be punished; he did need to be helped.

We must work with our children in the spirit of a helpful teacher. Remember that everything is not taught in one day. You have many years to train your children. This

necessitates understanding and consistency, gentleness and fairness. We adults are still struggling with some of these principles of right living. We cannot expect our children to become perfect overnight. It is easy for us to tell them to share their toys, but how freely in heart do we share our lawn mower or our automobile? Children value their possessions much as we do ours.

Help in accepting limits

All children need help in accepting limits. A four-year-old girl is an example of this. Her mother, in despair, said, "I am rearing a little delinquent." This was true. The child was the terror of the block. Today this child is developing normally because her mother learned from a friendly neighbor the secret of setting reasonable limits and helping the child observe them.

One day this little four-year-old was playing in the neighbor's house. She had scattered blocks all over the room. She decided that it was time to go home and went to the closet to get her coat. The neighbor said, in his firm way, "We should pick up the blocks before you go." "I'm not picking up any blocks," she responded. She proceeded to the closet. This little girl needed someone to help her take care of the blocks. Realizing the child's need, the neighbor, gently but firmly, led her back to the center of the room. The child wasn't going to pick up any blocks, and it was a real struggle for the neighbor to help her. With her hand in his, he picked up a block and put it away. He picked up the second one and the third one. She said, "Leave me alone. I'll do it myself." He left her alone, but the minute he released his hand, she darted toward the closet. He went after her and brought her back. She was very rebellious and needed some more external help. She did not need a scolding or a threat or a spanking. Those techniques had been tried unsuccessfully by her mother. The neighbor started over again with the child's hand in his. She did not like it. She protested, but they were getting the job done. He was not doing it for her. He was doing it with her. This is a very important principle. She was not just standing there watching him. Again she said, "Let me alone. I'll do it myself." He let her go. This time she stood there to watch him do it. He took her hand in his and started at the job again. Finally, the third time she said, "Let me alone." He let her alone, and she started doing it herself.

It is true that he did most of the work. It would have been easier for him to do it all himself, but this would not have taught the child what she needed to learn. He did not alienate that child; in fact, his house was her favorite spot for play. She knew that in his home there were definite boundaries, whereas she did not have the security of known limits in her own home. If she yelled, kicked, and screamed, in order to quiet her the parents would adjust the limits they had set up.

If a child screams in his rebellion, it is more important to see to it that he observes the limits than that his screaming be stopped. The issue should not be, "Stop your screaming." A child persists in screaming only when he gets the desired results. However, there does not have to be any conditional position in your own mind. If your request is fair and reasonable, then with all kindness help your child fulfill it. You will not make an invalid out of him. You will be teaching him.

Supervision is needed

Supervision is necessary wherever limits are set up. This is not only true for children, but also for adults. Most fathers are supervised on their jobs. Why do businesses and big corporations spend many thousands of dollars on supervision? It is normal for all of us to wander away from prescribed limits. This is graphically stated in Romans 3:12: "ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

Parents ought not to be disappointed if their children need supervision or help. This is the major task and privilege of parenthood. Consider Proverbs 29:15, 17:

"The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother. Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; He will also delight your soul."

Parenthood, therefore, involves a combination of setting limits and then supervising and helping our children so that the limits will be observed.

Help children by demonstration

Another example of this principle of help involves several children playing around a slide. One child had begun to use the slide, and then all the children wanted to use it. Each one wanted to be first, but children need to learn the principle of taking turns. A wise adult approached and gave help. He chose Mary at random and said: "Mary, you first; Johnny is next; and Sally is after Johnny. Tommy is after Sally," and so on. Soon these children understood the idea of taking turns. They merely needed help by means of a demonstration.

Follow up orders that are not obeyed

Distinguish between words and a real limit

Your children will make a distinction between words and a real limit at your house. You might say, for example, "Children, we are going to eat now." No one moves. You are in the middle of mashing potatoes and not ready yourself. Your family gets accustomed to your chatter as a worker gets accustomed to the noise in a factory. The noise is there, but they don't hear it. The same thing happens in a family if you just talk about limits but are not bound by them yourself and are not prepared to carry them through. You are wasting your time by yelling if you do not follow through. This confusion only creates an unwholesome atmosphere in your home.

Some children were playing in a neighbor's yard. A mother called from across the fence, "Johnny!" Johnny kept on playing. She called a second time and a third. One of the children heard it and said, "Johnny, your mother wants you to go home." "Oh, I don't have to go home yet." Finally, the mother called again with a much different tone and volume, "Johnny!" Some of us have two kinds of voices. There is the voice that means

"Hop to it this minute!" and there is the voice the child does not associate with action. A mother may wonder what's the matter with her child because he won't respond to her call. Often the reason is that she's not prepared to follow through. If she calls, she needs to be prepared to follow up. It is the intent to carry things out that makes a difference.

Another mother tells this story: "I want my daughter to take the garbage out. So I ask her in my most pleasant voice, 'Will you please take the garbage out to the bin?' The child does not move. I ask her again and again in a pleasant voice, but with no response. My question is, 'How long do you have to be agreeable before you can get angry?' Usually about the fourth time I am really irritated. I stop washing dishes, wipe my hands on my apron, and go see that she obeys me. When I do this, my daughter knows I mean business, and she does what I tell her. Why won't my child mind until I get angry?"

Enforce limits rigidly in kindness

There is an easy solution. The girl does not respond to her mother's request until about the fourth time because she has learned by experience that her mother does not intend to follow through until then. The mother is attempting to set up a positive limit; namely, that it is her daughter's job to take out the garbage; but the child knows that only the angry voice and not the pleasant voice means, "You must do it right now!" Could not the child just as easily learn by experience that the quiet voice carries the positive command as well as the angry voice? The simple solution is for mother to enforce her first and not her fourth request.

The secret of discipline is the setting of reasonable limits and enforcing them rigidly in kindness. If you say, "It is bedtime," set down whatever you are doing and in a kind but firm manner, help your child do what you want him to do.

Positive Approach in Supervision

Many times in a day your child will need your help with dressing, eating, playing, carrying out a task, obeying a limit. You will need to be continually redirecting an activity, resolving a conflict with another child, and the like. Many times in a day, an adult decision followed by appropriate action is necessary.

The positive approach

A little boy four years of age was in an ugly mood. He was looking for trouble. When his playmate came along, he knocked him down and was pounding him. His mother pulled him off. He was kicking, screaming, and yelling as she marched him into the house. He hissed: "Let me alone. I'm going to cut you up in pieces and throw you in the garbage can!" Mother replied: "I know you feel that way, but until you cool off you can't be out there with the rest of the children. I'll just wait here with you until you do."

She did not react negatively to his negative behavior. She was firm with him, and isolated him until he cooled off. This is what is meant by a positive approach. We can,

by God's grace, maintain a spirit of tenderness, kindness, and gentleness regardless of the child's behavior. Parents need not look at every incident that happens during the day as a crisis, but as part of a continuing learning process. Parents must remember that they are teachers. Accordingly, any incident should be viewed in the perspective of years of learning.

The following incident occurred in a nursery school, where the teachers were making good progress with a boy who had been accustomed to biting other children who resisted him. He had not bitten anyone for a long time. This day he came in sleepy and crabby. He wanted a tricycle that a playmate was using. The playmate refused to give it up, so the ill-natured boy bit him. As the teachers approached the children, both boys were in tears. One could see that the offender knew he had done wrong. One teacher hurried to his playmate to reassure him. The other teacher hurried to the crabby boy and took him into a corner. She said, "You forgot, didn't you?" "Yeah, I forgot," he answered. In this case, her approach was much more effective than if she had glared at him and said, "You little brat! I ought to whip the daylight out of you for doing that!" It was clear that he was sorry. The teacher went on to remind him that there were people who could help him get what he wanted. Soon he got up, went to one of the women and said, "Will you help me get a tricycle, please?"

Do you see the underlying principle here? It is not suggested that you let your children run wild. That must be emphasized. You can deal with your child's most obnoxious behavior in a gentle but firm way. There is a difference between gentle firmness and hostile firmness. A basic tenderness for the child, no matter what the behavior at the moment, is an important invisible help in training children. The boy who was pounding his playmate was handled very differently from the boy who bit his playmate. In either case, the key to the situation was the manner of the adults involved. Kindly and firmly insisting that children behave is far more effective than indulging them, letting them run wild, or allowing them their every whim. A positive approach toward the boy who bit his playmate helped him learn to overcome frustration.

The key to a positive approach is an overall kind feeling for children, not a reaction to what they do at the moment. It takes many years for a child to become an adult. Parents need to be consistent. As parents "train up a child in the way he should go," they can rejoice in the promise of the Word of God that "when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Dealing with the unpredictable

Over and over again, parents are faced with unexpected incidents involving the child, incidents which give endless variety and humor to the task of parenthood. It is at such moments that the basic spirit of the parent is on trial. A positive approach is needed at these unexpected moments if it is ever needed. There are, of course, those times when you can carefully weigh all sides of a matter, when you will discuss it and plan carefully what you will say and do. However, the snap decision and the way you react to it really set the tone in your home.

The following illustration clarifies what is meant by the unexpected incident:

One morning a mother of three children walked into the kitchen. She was humming happily to herself as she entered. The three boys were grouped around the kitchen sink chattering good-naturedly. She thought to herself that they were getting along agreeably together. Then to her consternation she saw what they were doing. On the drainboard by the sink was a pile of a dozen eggshells and in a bowl were the dozen eggs. The mother was enraged and proceeded to give the boys a angry lecture, telling them that for the rest of the day each must stay in the house and be isolated.

This is what the boys were doing: one had gotten the idea that he would poke a hole in the end of a raw egg, empty the shell, and as a joke throw it at his mother. Emptying the contents of the egg proved to be a very interesting experience, so they did it to another egg. They enjoyed it so much that they went through the whole dozen.

After her angry tirade, the mother began to think more rationally. Here she was, enraged, spoiling her day for herself and for her children over a dollar's worth of eggs. She was ashamed, repented before God, called her children, and confessed that she had acted in a very inappropriate way. Then she made it plain that their deed was not to be repeated. Permission to do such things was needed from her. Everyone was relieved. That noon they all enjoyed scrambled eggs--and later on scrambled egg snacks.

Points to ponder

When you must do something about an incident involving your child, you need to remember some specific helps as you approach him in a positive manner.

1. Physical and verbal approach

When there is a disturbing incident among children, you must go to the scene in person. Such incidents are seldom a life-and-death matter. You need to arrive at the scene in a relaxed, casual manner. You can move rapidly without appearing hurried or upset. You seldom need to get there at top speed, with your hair flying and all out of breath.

Give thought to your first words. Even if the children are screaming and hitting, you can take a few seconds to consider what you will say or do when you get there. Tone of voice and choice of words are important. You can speak firmly, but in a kind way.

Get eye-to-eye contact. It helps to be on the same level with the person to whom you are talking. You need not stand over your children, looking down on them and they up at you. Scoop them up in your arms, or get down to where they are.

2. Attitudinal approach

What led up to the situation? Often parents bear down on children with no plan of approach. If you are to be helpful, you need to know what happened. As you drew near the group, you may have seen the whole situation or you may not have. It is equally

important that you know what was said between the children. Parents tend to ignore the words exchanged between children. If you do not know what happened, your first task is not to say, "You kids, quit your fighting!" No doubt they want to quit as much as you want them to quit. Rather, your first task is to find out what led up to the situation. This need not be a cross-examination. If everyone talks to you at once, or if there is disagreement over what happened, you simply will not get the facts.

Remedy the situation. You will need to take action with or without the facts. If you can get the facts easily, you will be fortunate. If you lack information, be aware of your lack. Perhaps the children were too loosely supervised in the first place. There was no one around to see what was happening until the outburst occurred. Be slow to judge or to fix blame. Keep your questions to a minimum. Remember that your firm, kind manner will be the key to the situation. Never give a choice unless you are prepared to accept either choice. The children may need help through positive, firm adult action. You can try distraction, channeling their activities in another direction, isolation, retiring disputed equipment, kind physical restraint.

Trial and error on the part of the adult are involved. Your first attempt may or may not be successful. No one makes perfect decisions always. The final result may not mean happiness for all concerned. You may need to help a child accept frustration. This is often done best in silence. To illustrate, your child might tearfully sob, "I want that truck." But he can't have the truck just now. Within you, silent acceptance and sympathy for his desire are in order. This is no time for a lecture on sharing. This is the time for a demonstration.

You need to accept children's negative reactions in a tense moment, but you need not give in to them. Remember that, in the perspective of a year of living, this is just an incident and that you are the steady, dependable influence. You never know what your children will do next, but they ought to know what you will do next. When the incident is over, cease talking about it.

Conclusion

Parenthood is a full-time job. To qualify, you need to be a person of inner peace--the peace that passes understanding, given by God, and evidenced in the unexpected, unprepared for, unwanted twists and turns of life. This inner peace, then, makes life a fascinating, pleasant journey, wherever it may lead. Parenthood, to be successful, requires a partnership of two people dedicated to the task of blending their bodies, souls, and spirits into a unit that is dedicated to serving God and pleasing Him.

Parenthood requires an acceptance of the task, the desire to understand it, the willingness to be as diligent in preparation and performance as the most accomplished artist, business leader, or professional.

Conflicts and problems will arise. These can lead you to ever higher levels of accomplishment as you demonstrate the power of God through them. To identify problems and solve them is to find success. To cover them up or pretend they are not there is to taste defeat. Each partner should be ready and willing to see his part in any

decision or task and do it as a dedicated servant of God.

There is nothing magic or accidental about living a life of happiness, peace, and joy. Building a happy family requires that you abide in Christ. There is nothing easy or automatic about it.

Guiding children implies a purpose and a goal. You need to know where you are going. You need to assume responsibility for influencing your children. Your influence for good or for ill will probably count more than any other in the lives of your children (Proverbs 22:8). You must work hard to make learning wholesome and effective for your children.

Parenthood is a twenty-year-long job. If you do your work well, you will lose your children. They will leave to attend to their own careers and families. Therefore, it is important that you should be effective partners, that you should keep in touch with each other and stay friends. You will reach your later years just as you started--only the two of you facing a new and glorious life together. You ought to train your family with this goal in mind: that when the day comes for you to say "Godspeed" to your children as they begin to plan for their own families, it will be a joyful day for both of you, with memories of happy years gone by. Then you can look ahead with a keen anticipation because you have trained your child in the way he should go (Proverbs 22:6). Then you and your partner can look deep into each other's united souls and anticipate the time when the risen Lord will say to you, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Meanwhile, with mutual consent you can say, "Bring on our new life together and let us make it a fruitful one for the glory of God."

Study Assignment for Lesson 12

1. Illustrate an incident when a child should be helped, not punished.
2. What is the meaning of enforcing the setting of limits by giving help to a child?
3. What is included in the use of this positive approach?
4. What is the significance of unexpected incidents?
5. List as many helps as you can find to the positive approach to children's behavior.
6. Write a short review of the conclusion of this course.

This course will be helpful to you if you apply its teaching to your personal life. Keep your materials in a place where you can pick them up in your spare moments to refresh your mind on the areas you need to apply to your own life.

Self-Check Test 12

In the space provided, mark the following statements "True" or "False."

- _____ 1. The only thing required in teaching a child a simple rule or a simple reason is to repeat it many times.
- _____ 2. All children need help in accepting limits.
- _____ 3. Supervision is necessary wherever limits are set up.
- _____ 4. Children will make a distinction between words and a real limit.
- _____ 5. The secret of disciplining is the setting of reasonable limits and enforcing them rigidly in kindness.
- _____ 6. Parents need to look on every incident that happens during the day as a crisis.
- _____ 7. The key to a positive approach is an over-all kind feeling for children.
- _____ 8. When an unpredictable situation arises, the basic spirit of the parent is on trial.
- _____ 9. When correcting a disturbing incident, eye-to-eye contact and a parent's first words are both of supreme importance.
- _____ 10. Parents need to be looking ahead to the time when their children will have grown up.

Visit <http://biblicalcounselinginsights.com/keys-to-happy-family-living-series/answers/> for the answers to these questions.

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