

A FAMILY VALUES EXERCISE

This exercise will help your family answer the question, “What does our family stand for?” It emphasizes relationships over rules, giving all family members input and ownership of family decisions. This helps our children internalize healthy values—values which remain with them after they leave home.

Although beginning this process when your children are young and revising it regularly as they grow is best, the exercise can help a family become closer and manage challenging or rebellious behavior at any stage.

The exercise has three main components:

- 01.** Development of a Family Mission Statement, or Family Creed
- 02.** Development of family guidelines and rewards
- 03.** Development of boundaries and consequences

DEVELOP A FAMILY MISSION STATEMENT

To be successful, every family member must have equal input: the children’s ideas are just as important and valued as the parents’ ideas. The process takes time, ideally over several days.

Set up your family for success: be sure everyone is rested and fed! Make the sessions fun and light. Play some music, have some fun snacks, and take breaks if necessary. Parents, you are the ones who will set the tone—be upbeat and positive.

Step 1: Create a Collage

Yes, it’s that old elementary school activity! Get some magazines, scissors, glue, and construction paper—or create a virtual collage. Have everyone make their own collage that expresses what they want their family to look like or values they want the family to stand for.

Step 2: Identify Your Values

Everyone gets a chance to share their collage and to explain what’s important to them about the family. Have one person in the family (doesn’t have to be a parent!) be the note-taker for this part, writing down the values that are expressed in the collages on a piece of poster board. Remember, every value is important, and should be written down on the poster board. No editing!

Your family values list may include such things as:

- ➔ Unconditional love
- ➔ Loving God
- ➔ Integrity
- ➔ Happiness
- ➔ Respect
- ➔ Express feelings
- ➔ Communication
- ➔ Responsibility
- ➔ Having fun

Step 3: Write Your Family Creed

Give everybody some sticky dots, foil stars, or stickers and have each member of the family “vote” for 5 to 10 values on the poster board that they think are the most important for the family to adopt as part of the mission statement. Circle the values that get the most votes.

Voila! Now you have the basis for creating your mission statement! Write it together, and then post it somewhere visible and important in your home. Make it as artistic and appealing as you can.

Using some of the ideas above, a Family Mission Statement, or Family Creed, might look like this:

In our family, we love God, love each other no matter what, tell the truth, keep our word, help others, practice forgiveness, choose joy, have fun together, and remember who God called us to be.

FAMILY GUIDELINES AND REWARDS

Out of this Family Creed, we can now identify those behaviors that support our mission. Instead of “rules,” they become expressions of our connection to the family. It’s about our relationship as a family, not about control. The family can now work together to develop a list of behaviors that will support your family values—behaviors which all members of the family, adults as well as children, will adhere to.

Some examples might be:

- ➔ We communicate respectfully.
- ➔ We finish our chores.
- ➔ We complete our homework on time without complaining.
- ➔ We eat dinner together as a family; no cell phones at the table!
- ➔ We don’t take our cell phones or computers to our bedrooms at night.
- ➔ We have devotional time.
- ➔ We follow through on promises.
- ➔ We are on time.
- ➔ We spend time together as a family.
- ➔ We respect each others’ personal space
- ➔ We are honest

It’s important to be intentional about spending quality time together as a family. Make it a commitment to your family to set aside time for fun, and take ideas from all family members about what “fun” can look like. Mix it up: some will be small, daily or weekly activities while other will be bigger things to look forward to. Schedule family fun time into everyone’s calendars—if you don’t schedule it, it won’t happen.

Some examples include:

- ➔ Dinner out
- ➔ Bike-riding
- ➔ Hiking
- ➔ Roasting marshmallows
- ➔ Ice cream
- ➔ Late bedtime
- ➔ Game night
- ➔ TV time together
- ➔ Going to a movie
- ➔ Camping with family
- ➔ Go on family vacation

BOUNDARIES AND CONSEQUENCES

It's important we understand that there may be times when a family member (either an adult or a child) is having a challenge adhering to the family values. Planning ahead for this possibility helps everyone in the family know the boundaries and the consequences.

Remember, the focus is "Relationship over Rules." All family members have input and all family members will be expected to adhere to the boundaries the family establishes.

Together, based on your Family Creed, list behaviors that go against your family values.

Such behaviors against our example Family Creed might be:

- ➔ Lying
- ➔ Taking cell phones into our room at night
- ➔ Arguing or yelling at each other
- ➔ Not letting the family know if they're going to be late

Together, decide some natural consequences for any of these behaviors. Make them clear, again emphasizing relationship rather than punishment.

- ➔ No TV time
- ➔ Early bedtime
- ➔ Doing the person's chores that you yelled at
- ➔ No cell phone for a certain time period
- ➔ Write an apology letter

WRAPPING IT UP

Now that you've put all this work into developing your Family Values Plan, post it proudly for all to see! Refer to it often, revise it as necessary, so everyone remembers the importance of this family that God brought together.