

Suggested weekly e-mails

We have composed some e-mails you may want to send to your attendees between classes during the week. They will help remind them of the points made in the previous lesson and the home work assignments they are trying to complete. You can copy and paste the content of these e-mails into your own e-mail message form.

E-mail after Lesson 1

Dear Parents:

I hope you are having some fun as you begin to implement the principles we discussed in Lesson 1. Don't forget your homework this week:

- During the week, think about what parenting style best describes you (Rescuer, Dictator or Consultant). Why do you lean toward this style of parenting?
- Think about how you define "success" in parenting and how you can model Godly success for your children.
- Spend time engaged in an activity that your child enjoys. Ask them to tell you what it is about that activity that they love.

If you have trouble breaking bad parenting habits or find yourself falling into predictable patterns when reacting to your kids, don't lose heart! As painful as it can be, our parenting frustrations are one of the most effective ways God has to penetrate our defenses and reveal our motivations.

Unless we are daily abiding in Christ, our sinful human nature is bound to contaminate our parenting decisions. Our culture bombards us with its definition of success and many times we measure our worth as parents by how well our kids attain that culturally-driven definition. We begin to imagine how other people will react to our kid's successes or failures and how that will reflect on us as parents. We forget that God has a plan for us and sometimes that plan includes learning through embarrassing mistakes! Any time our focus moves off what is eternally important, we open the door to be influenced by worldly things. What is our biggest challenge? To trade "fear of man" for "fear of God". Have a great week!

Your Name Here

E-mail after Lesson 2

Dear Parents:

Hope you are having a great week! This week's homework is:

- Give your kids more age-appropriate choices / experiences and allow them to experience the consequences of their choices.
- If the chance arises, try exploration with empathy.

In addition, start thinking about empathy in your relationships with your children. Practice reflecting your child's feelings back to them. Example: ("You sound very frustrated." Or "You are very angry with him, aren't you?") It may feel weird at first, but keep it up. So often our first reaction is to give suggestions instead of listening. There may be awkward silences, but that's OK. Resist the urge to fill the silence with words. Instead, ask them, "What do you think you're going to do?" You might be surprised at the solutions they come up with on their own.

Reflect their positive feelings, too. (You really have a good time with him, don't you?" Or, "You really

enjoy playing basketball.”) These are opportunities to send the message that you understand them and it increases the odds they will feel safe to share their feelings with you.

Blessings,
Your Name Here

E-mail after Lesson 3

Dear Parents:

Hope your week is going well! This week’s homework is:

- Look for situations where you are reluctant to exercise your authority, and consider the fears that are preventing you from taking appropriate action.
- Are your boundaries clear and consistent or do they vacillate from day to day depending on your mood? Take some time to clarify your expectations and make a commitment to deliver consequences consistently when your child goes outside these boundaries.
- This week, try to make dinnertime enjoyable. Research shows that families who eat dinner together at least five times per week are substantially less likely to have kids who smoke, drink, lie, use drugs, have sex, and contemplate suicide. Is dinner a time of fun and sharing, or an opportunity to grill your kids about the things you feel they should be doing? Instead of forcing conversation about issues that concern you (homework, projects, sports, etc), postpone those discussions, focus on enjoying dinnertime and let your kids talk.

In Lesson 3 this week, we discussed what it looks like to be a godly authority in your home. Two verses that relate to this subject are:

Colossians 3:21 - “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.”

Ephesians 6:4 - “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

"**Lose heart**" is from the Greek word *athumeo*, (*a* = without + *thumos* = passions, desire, spirit). It means: "to become disheartened to the point of losing motivation, to be dispirited or to be broken in spirit." The word Paul uses for "**exasperate**" means: "to provoke or to irritate, or to excite in a negative fashion, or to embitter."

Sometimes we rationalize using a pattern of communication that exasperates or provokes our kids to anger, but this is not the picture of parental authority described in the Bible. Over-protection, a lack of standards, constant criticism, and failing to listen are just a few ways we can exasperate our children. A child might walk straight as an arrow to avoid disappointing his parents, but if he has no spirit left in him, the parent has failed to prepare the child for the future.

If we exasperate our children, we greatly limit the possibility of having a spiritual influence in their lives. They may obey for a time, but will they ultimately be interested in the Christianity that produced such a parent? Will our parenting encourage the desire to be known by their heavenly Father?

We need to be deliberate in creating times when our kids can relax and enjoy our company. This week we're working on making dinnertime an opportunity to enjoy one another as a family. As tempting as

it may be, try not to use this time to question them about responsibilities. This may take a lot of self-control, but remember, you can choose another time to address issues. The goal is to make dinnertime a bonding experience instead of an interrogation.

Ask non-judgmental questions such as, "Did you do anything fun today?" or "What was the best thing that happened to you today?" If you are greeted with blank stares, ask your spouse the same question. It can be an indirect way to share a piece of yourselves without requiring them to ask you questions.

Silence is OK, too. Don't feel the need to fill up every moment with talking. Give them some space to initiate the conversation. When they do, reflect their feelings and thoughts without offering advice.

Enjoy your week,
Your Name Here

E-mail after Lesson 4

Dear Parents:

You are half-way through the Parenting by Design series. Congratulations!

Your homework for this week is:

- Choose a minor "backpack" issue you have been tempted to take from your child (by rescuing or dictating). Instead, try using the techniques in the chart from the workbook.
- Attempt to recognize where your child tries to pull you off balance. How can you stay in balance and respond empathetically?

This week, begin distinguishing between Backpacks and Boulders and help your kids come up with their own solutions. Instead of jumping in to solve their problems for them, reflect their feelings and put the ball back in their court. "You sound really disappointed. What do you think you're going to do?" By doing this, you are encouraging them to use the problem solving part of their brain. They won't do it perfectly at first! Problem solving is a skill that takes practice. But, the best way to get better is through trial and error, so give them leeway to come up with their own solutions and room to fail. This works with kids of all ages. Use the suggestions on the chart in your workbook for dealing with Backpacks and Boulders.

In Christ,
Your Name Here

E-mail after Lesson 5

Dear Parents:

For some of you, this week was pretty interesting. For others, maybe a little less so, but isn't it interesting to see God's design unfolding? The developmental stages can be fascinating.

Your homework for this week is:

- Reread the developmental stage for each of your kids. Identify those areas where you may be attributing unrealistic capabilities to your kids.
- Reflect on your own development. Think about whether you still struggle with the challenges of any of these stages.

No matter where your child is in the developmental stages, try to be proactive in affirming their strengths. So often, it's the weaknesses that receive our attention. If we're not careful, this can cause

our kids to become discouraged. I have a friend whose son was not performing well in school and this frustrated her. She spent a lot of energy addressing the issue, but neglected to devote equal time to acknowledging his strengths.

In making an effort to do better in this area, she noticed he was good at research. For instance, he spent hours surfing the net and gathering information on car stereo systems. She recognized this by saying, "You are really awesome at researching details. That's a great skill to have."

Be creative in finding their strengths. If they like pets, say "It's really fun to watch you with the dog. You really have a way with animals." The list is endless and doing this will challenge you to pay more attention to the nuances of your child's personality.

In Christ,
Your Name Here

E-mail after Lesson 6

Dear Parents:

Choices, choices. Hopefully, you will choose to do your home work for this week. This week:

- Take a couple of the chronic issues you have with your kids and turn them into positive choices.
- Look for an instance where you can diffuse a control battle by giving choices.

Get into the habit of giving your kids lots of choices. Choices help them learn to make decisions and give them a measure of control over their lives. Example: "Would you rather have eggs or cereal?" "Would you rather do your homework before or after eating a snack?" "Would you rather unload the dishwasher or vacuum the living room?" There are several more examples in the back of the workbook.

Choices are a great way to avoid control battles. When your child objects to something, instead of giving commands, find a way to give them a choice. Limit it to two choices and make sure you're OK with either of the choices you propose. If they say, "I don't want to do either." just say, "I know, but what were the choices?" You may have to repeat it several times.

Use positive and indirect statements as tools to help turn commands into choices. Then, notice how your kids respond to this new way of communicating.

Blessings,
Your Name Here

E-mail after Lesson 7

Dear Parents:

Your homework for this week is:

- Work on your consequence worksheets in the back of your workbook.
- Pick an issue that has become chronic. Devise an action strategy you might use to help resolve the issue.

Thoughts on consequences:

Hebrews 12:11 – "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

Discipline may be hard to receive, but it can be just as hard for parents to give. When giving kids

consequences, will our response add to the problem or honor God and aid their growth? When kids feel out-of-control, they need you to be in control. They want to know that you can handle them – even on their worst days.

We all need some reminders when, in the midst of discipline, our kids push the limits of our patience. Here are some thoughts:

1. **Pause and pray.** This is sometimes the hardest thing to do! If possible, leave the room and ask God for wisdom and self-control.
2. **Look at your motives.** Ask yourself if you are parenting to achieve your desires or God's. Are you circumventing the learning process because you are unwilling to allow your child to make a mistake or embarrass you?
3. **Be humble.** Be willing to admit to yourself and your child if you have responded in a sinful way. Ask for forgiveness. This does not excuse their behavior or exempt them from consequences, but you won't earn much respect if you are not honest about your mistakes.
4. **Reflect** their thoughts and feelings back to them. Before you implement consequences, take the time to let them know you've heard them and understand how they feel – even if you don't agree with them.
5. **Acknowledge their strengths.** Many times we are so focused on the mistake, we overlook their positive behavior. Under stress, we tend to see things in black and white (mostly black) and ignore the ways in which they have matured. Remember, their growth won't unfold evenly. When we dismiss past progress, they feel discouraged and defeated.
6. **Give choices whenever possible.** Choices help teach our kids to be good decision makers and circumvent control battles by giving them a measure of control.
7. **When met with anger, keep your responses brief.** Don't get sucked into a debate or feel the need to defend your parenting decisions. Be a calm, strong presence. If they persist, you may need to leave the room or the house or have another consequence handy.
8. **If you don't know what to do, delay the consequence.** Seek help and advice from someone you trust. Sometimes we are too emotionally involved to see the situation clearly. Ask for help *before* you overreact.
9. **If you keep hitting the same dead end, consider seeking professional help.** Your child might be dealing with issues you are unaware of or you might be blind to how your actions are contributing to the problem.

Blessings,

Your Name Here

E-mail after Lesson 8

You made it! Congratulations for finishing the series. Thank you for your dedication to finish this class and work through the material.

Now, the parenting journey can begin again. We will pray for you.

Your homework for this week is:

- Can you identify some areas where it is hard for you to be empathetic because you are not following through with needed consequences?
- What are some other areas where it is hard for you to be empathetic? How could you improve?

Parenting by Design would love to keep in contact with you and continue to provide you with the resources to be a better parent. You have digested a significant amount of information over the past

few weeks, but we wanted to remind you that the Parenting by Design has daily devotional, a newsletter, and tons of resources in their online store just for you so please visit that for articles and more information at parentingbydesign.com.

Thanks Again,
Your Name Here