

KIND WORDS

LESSON TWO

Follow-up *(As a family discuss the assignment for the lesson Kind Thoughts.)*

1. How are we each doing with recognizing our unkind thoughts and trying to make them more pleasant?
2. Does someone have an experience they would like to share about thinking of others kindly?

Concept

The sainted Catholic nun, Mother Teresa, said, “Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.” Kind words have the power to heal and to lift. Speaking kindly shows that we care about the person we’re talking to. We all feel good when we say kind things to others and when kind things are said to us. On the other hand, when we’re spoken to harshly, it is easy to lash back defensively and speak unkindly. Along with harsh words come unpleasant feelings such as anger, sadness, and regret.

When we speak negatively it focuses our attention on what is wrong with our world and our circumstances. It doesn’t help improve things, it makes our life worse.

An unkind remark to another person can range from seemingly harmless to truly hurtful. The truth is, however, whether we’re being simply sarcastic or being cruel, the effects are similar. Both types of remarks leave the giver and the receiver feeling negative and critical. The reverse is also true. When we speak kindly of others it focuses our attention on their goodness. When we speak kindly of our circumstances it turns our thoughts toward gratitude for what we have.

Here’s an example of how one person chose to speak kindly to a stranger:

A gentleman in the grocery store waited at the check-out while a young mother struggled with two children. As the man watched the scene he noticed how incredibly patient the check-out clerk was. The clerk calmed the young mother, helped her with her coupons, and even held the baby while the woman counted her money. After the mother left, the gentleman said to the clerk, “I’m so impressed with your patience and kindness with that customer.” The clerk looked at him sincerely and said, “Thank you, sir. You are the first customer in eight years to give me a compliment.”

We will be delighted to discover that as we notice and acknowledge people's goodness, that is what we will see. We will recognize the beautiful rose instead of the thorn, the glass half full instead of half empty. We will enjoy a dimension of love and gratitude which will spread contagiously to others and help us be a force for good in the world.

Family Survey Review

Statement # 2. **We express love for each other.**

- How do we express love for each other in our family?
- What are some of the words we say which show we love each other?

Story

It was an unseasonably hot day. Everybody, it seemed, was looking for some kind of relief, so an ice cream store was a natural place to stop.

A little girl, clutching her money tightly, entered the store. Before she could say a word, the store clerk sharply told her to get outside and read the sign on the door, and to stay out until she put on some shoes. She left slowly, and a big man followed her out of the store.

He watched as she stood in front of the store and read the sign: No Bare Feet. Tears started rolling down her cheeks as she turned and walked away. Just then the big man called to her. Sitting down on the curb, he took off his size 12 shoes, and set them in front of the girl saying, "Here, you won't be able to walk in these, but if you sort of slide along, you can get your ice cream cone."

Then he lifted the little girl up and set her feet into the shoes. "Take your time," he said, "I get tired of moving them around, and it will feel good to just sit here and eat my ice cream." The shining eyes of the little girl could not be missed as she shuffled up to the counter and ordered her ice cream cone.

He was a big man, all right. Big body, big shoes, but most of all, he had a big heart.

Discussion

1. Why do you think the man in the story gave his shoes to the little girl?
1. Do we sometimes think kind thoughts, but we're too afraid to say them? What are we afraid of?

Activity

For our activity we're going to read the Power of Appreciation on the following page, and do one (*or more, if you'd like*) of the activities included there.

Assignment

Choose one or more of the following assignments:

1. With everyone participating, name five kind things you can say to make someone happy. (*Example: "Thank you," "I like the way you look today," "You're a good friend," "I love you," "You did a great job!"*)
2. Make a special effort to use kind words in your home.
3. All family members give one compliment each day for a week.

ACTIVITY

THE POWER OF APPRECIATION

One of the important ways to communicate love in families is to express appreciation. We all enjoy being with people who make us feel good about ourselves. Family members who make the effort to notice the good things we do and express their thoughts of appreciation help us feel good. When we feel good about ourselves it's easier to give to others.

Think of an experience you've had trying to do something nice for someone, only to have it go unappreciated. Have you ever expected to hear praise and instead you were criticized? Let's compare this with an athletic game. Imagine yourself trying to learn a new game. You've been told the rules by an official, and you are now on the field ready to play. The game begins and you start playing the way you think you're supposed to, when suddenly the official blows the whistle and calls you over. The official explains what you did wrong, which is different from what you remember being told before the game. He gives you a warning to play by the rules. The action begins again but is stopped almost immediately, and the official scolds you again. Imagine this is repeated each time the game is started. No matter what you do, it's wrong.

You would quickly begin to feel confused and frustrated. Depending on your personality, you might become withdrawn and discouraged, or you might become angry and aggressive at constantly being stopped. You might decide the game isn't worth playing.

Unfortunately, all too often families get into a pattern like this. People are trying their best, but the focus is on what they do wrong rather than on what they do right. We often think that in order for someone to learn or improve, we need to criticize what they did wrong.

Answer three questions:

1. Do we like it when people criticize us?
2. Do we want to share our thoughts and concerns with them?
3. How do we feel about ourselves when we're criticized?

Criticizing others not only creates bad feelings, it isn't a good way to get people to change. It's a fact that animals can be trained much faster if they're rewarded for each correct attempt rather than being punished each time they fail. This principle holds true for people, too. We improve our performance faster with praise than with criticism.

It seems to be a law of human behavior that how we act is contagious. In other words, if we are kind to others in our family, we receive kindness in return. It's also true that our usual response when someone criticizes us is to criticize them in return. In families, it is especially important that

we avoid the vicious cycle of criticism which always hurts relationships.

William James, considered by many to be the greatest American psychologist, wrote a book on human needs. Years after the book was published he remarked that he had forgotten to include the most important need of all---the need to be appreciated. Establish an atmosphere of appreciation in your family by overlooking the negative and “catching” one another doing good things.

Expressing appreciation is not difficult. It requires making the effort to notice the positive things that happen, and telling the person involved how you feel about it. If Mom doesn’t get a sale she has been working on, other family members can remind her that she got three last week. If a child doesn’t do well in one subject, parents can point out his good grades in other areas.

Four Appreciation Activities

Activity One - Showing Appreciation

Have each family member put his name at the top of a piece of paper. Each one should then pass his paper to the person on his right. The recipient then writes something specific that the giver has done which they appreciate. On the bottom of the page the writer then folds the paper over to conceal what’s written, and passes it to the next person. After everyone has his paper back, he can read what others have written. Then taking turns, have everyone say something about your family that he appreciates. Be specific about some behavior rather than the more general “We’re nice to each other.” An example of a specific behavior may be: “I like it when we go on walks together.”

Activity Two - Expressing Affection

Family members, including husbands and wives, often think it is not necessary to say, “You are wonderful!” to each other. Everyone needs to know they are needed, appreciated, respected and admired. Telling your spouse or other family member why they are important to you is a good way to keep your relationships healthy. The following activity can help you share some of your feelings:

2. Make a list of reasons why you love your spouse or other family member.
3. On each day of a calendar (for a week or a month) write one reason why you appreciate them.
4. Decorate the gift calendar with stickers, pictures, clippings, etc.
5. Give the calendar to your spouse or family member as a way to express your feelings for them.

Activity Three - Notice Good Qualities

In strong families people truly care about one another’s well-being, and they say so. The

following activity can help family members notice the good things about each other.

1. Suggest that family members make a real effort to look for things they like about each other. These might be:
 - Talents, skills, and achievements
 - Qualities and characteristics that make the person special
 - Something nice the person did or said
2. Encourage family members to let each other know how they feel by writing short notes about the things they have noticed.
Example: Mom, you made a super dinner! Love, Judy
3. Put the notes under the person's pillow, or in a backpack, lunch bag, desk, etc.
4. Write at least one note to each family member every month.

Activity Four - Tell Family Members You Care

It's important for family members to care about what's going on in one another's lives. They need to know they can depend on each other for support and encouragement when life gets a little rough. The following activity shows one way family members can tell each other that they understand and care.

6. Think of times a family member might appreciate a few kind words from you, like these:
 - Good luck on the test!
 - SMILE! I'm thinking about you today.
 - Thanks for listening last night.
 - You're my favorite 16-year-old son!
 - Don't worry--we'll work it out.
 - We're behind you all the way.
 - Stay calm, you'll do fine!
 - Hurry home, I miss you.
 - I'm sorry I got upset with you.
7. Write these notes then tuck them into briefcases, backpacks, purses, lunch boxes or coat pockets.