

## LESSON 7: COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN

### Part 1

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**Father** is sitting reading the newspaper.

**Son** runs into the room shouting, "I'll never play with him again! I hate him!"

**Father** puts down the newspaper, turns to his son and says, "I can see you're very angry."

**Son** says, "He doesn't deserve to have any friends!"

**Father** says, "Oh?"

**Son** says, "I played really well and scored 2 goals. Then at the very end when the score was even, I missed a goal."

**Father** says, "Mmmm."

**Son** says, "And afterwards Micah said in front of everyone that it was my fault we didn't win. So, I yelled at him and marched off..."

**Father** says, "That must have been very embarrassing for you."

**Son** says more calmly, "Yes, it was horrible but I wish I hadn't gotten angry with Micah. He's my best friend."

**Father** says, "I understand."

**Son** says, "I think I'll go back and see if Micah's still there. I guess he really wanted us to win."

**Father** smiles.

- What were the child's feelings at the beginning?
- How did they change?
- What are some of the different things that the father did to help the son cope with his feelings?
- What surprised you about the result?

### Part 2: Ways to help a child manage their emotions.

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#### 1. Listen with your full attention:

- It is easier for the child if you do something to show that you are giving your full attention. Examples: putting your paper down and looking at the child, turning to face the child; coming out of the kitchen and sitting down.

#### 2. Recognize their feelings:

- Use a phrase or word – “Oh” or “Mmm” or “Wow” or “Yes” or “I understand”
  - Use some non-verbal signs – head nodding, eye contact, facial expression.
  - Don’t make them feel bad for having that feeling. With children, we need to accept their feelings and help them to deal with their feelings without behaving badly.
3. **Help them know what they are feeling:**
- Children are often unable to tell you how they are feeling. If you put their emotions into words for them they feel that you understand and accept them. They usually feel comforted and become calmer. Don’t worry if you get it wrong. Your child will tell you if you have misunderstood.
  - Some common emotions that children have may have include: Sadness, frustration, hurt, anger, embarrassment, loneliness, betrayal, surprise or happiness

Which of these do you do well?

Which would you like to improve in?

Take time to ask God to help you improve in the areas where you feel you need improvement.

Try to be intentional to do this this week.

## Part 3: Hurtful Words

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Most hurtful words fit into one of these categories:

- **Words spoken in anger and frustration**  
Often, we don’t mean what we have said (e.g., “I wish you’d never been born!”).
  - **Labels we give children**  
When children do something we don’t like we often say something about the child instead of the behavior (e.g., “You’re a failure,” or “You’re stupid”).
  - **Comparisons**  
It is very easy to compare a child with his brothers and sisters (e.g., “I wish you were more like your brother,” or “He’s not as clever as his sister”).
  - **Predictions**  
We sometimes tell them what will happen in the future (e.g., “You’ll never get a job,” or “You’re just like your uncle. You’ll become more like him”).
  - **Talking negatively to others**  
Sometimes we talk negatively about our children to others when they can hear us (e.g., “My son failed his exam again. He doesn’t try hard enough,” or “This is my daughter. She’s so naughty!”).
- Do you remember anything that was said to you as a child—hurtful or healing? It may be from your parents, siblings, a teacher, etc.
  - What impact did it have on your life?
  - If these are still painful memories take time to pray and bring them to God to ask Him to heal us from the memory and help us to forgive those who said the words. Ask God to also remind you of positive words that were spoken to you.

Now think about the words that you often use with your children.

What hurtful words do you say to your children? In what situations do you say them?

Ask God to forgive you for times when you haven't said the right thing.

## Part 4

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Principles for positive communication

1. **Explain to the child what is true as soon as possible if you said something that wasn't true**, even if what you said was unintentional. This avoids long-term misunderstanding.
  2. **Describe the behavior that disappoints or angers you instead of labelling the child.** Saying, "That was a very stupid thing to do!" is more effective and less hurtful than saying, "You're stupid!"
  3. **Never compare your children with each other.** Comparisons make children feel bad about themselves and cause resentment. It makes it difficult for your children to get along well.
  4. **Only say positive things about your child when it is possible for him to hear you.**
  5. **Never introduce your child with negative characteristics.**
  6. **Apologize and communicate positively after using very hurtful words in anger.** This gives your child a model of apologizing that he can copy. It also gives him an opportunity to apologize if appropriate for doing what made you angry. Children will respect you more if you apologize when you are wrong and they will be motivated to please you.
- What are some of these that you have done well?
  - Which would you like to start or get better at?

## Part 5

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Chun had believed it was best for his teenage son to be always busy with different church activities. As often as possible he sent him away to attend Bible camps and conferences, thinking this was best for him. But Chun's son didn't enjoy any of it. He was a little shy, and it was uncomfortable for him to go to these events. When a youth conference in the big city was announced, Chun and his son got into a big argument about him going. Chun was so angry that he yelled at his son and insisted that he go to the conference.

His son made the long trip to the conference. He knew almost no one and was miserable. He kept thinking about the harsh things his father said to him. When he got back home he was so angry he refused to even speak to his father.

While his son was gone, Chun attended the TCT Marriage and Family training. He learned about apologizing and asking for forgiveness even from his son when he spoke hurtful words. Normally, he would have never considered apologizing to his son. In his culture, people believed that parents and elders were always right, and so there was no need to apologize to children. But Chun realized that he'd wronged his son by yelling at him and not listening to him. He went and apologized to him. His son hadn't spoken to him in weeks, but from that point his anger started to decrease. He began to talk with his father again and slowly their relationship began to heal.

- Why did Chun want his son to go to the youth conference?
- Why didn't his son want to attend activities like the youth conference?
- What happened when Chun didn't listen to his son and recognize his feelings?
- What are some ways Chun could have listened better to his son? How would this have changed the outcome of the situation?
- When Chun realized that he didn't listen well, what did he do? How did that affect the situation?
- What did his culture believe about apologizing to their children?

## Part 6

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Take 5 minutes to think of 5 things that you could say to encourage each of your children. The more specific you can be the better. For those without children then either choose to think of ways to encourage some other children you have contact with or other members of your family.