

Parenting Tips:

A guide for church leaders

The COVID-19 lockdown has revealed – across the entire world – the challenges of parenting and shown how many parents are eager to learn simple strategies that can make a big difference to their daily family life, wherever they live. As a leader in your church, you are ideally placed to promote positive parenting that can make a significant impact on family and community life.

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THE BIBLE AS OUR PARENTING FRAMEWORK AND GUIDE

Children are gifts from God (Psalm 127:3), and should be lovingly nurtured (Luke 11:11), and raised ‘in the discipline and instruction of the Lord’ (Ephesians 6:4). The Bible has much to tell us and teach us about the role of parenting. Proverbs says, *“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it”* (22:6 NIV). The Bible confirms the important role that parents have and communicates wisdom that can be used in fulfilling that role.

The Bible is also very real about family life! It does not pretend it is easy. In fact, the Old Testament seems to go out of its way to draw attention to the often dysfunctional families of its leading characters! Cain and Abel, the first children of the first parents, had a disastrous relationship, with jealousy and hatred leading to a life lost at the hand of a brother. Isaac and Rebecca’s twin sons, Jacob and Esau, struggled with each other from birth. Jacob was favoured by their mother, Esau by their father— resulting in a family divided. Jacob had 12 sons of his own, and favoured one above the others, causing all manner of problems and pitfalls, although that family reunited in the end. So, the Bible offers much encouragement to parents who are struggling; parents need to know that they are not alone – and that even the heroic forebears of our faith struggled.

The COVID-19 lockdown has revealed – across the entire world – the challenges of parenting, and shown how many parents are eager to learn simple strategies that can make a big difference to their daily family life, wherever they live.

Parenting – when positive, warm and structured – has lifelong benefits for children and adolescents. These benefits include improved behaviour and well-being, improved relationships among family members, violence prevention and reduced substance misuse. Impacts on parents include improved mental health and well-being, capacity and skills to deal with challenging behaviour and

reduced stress, and of course, a more peaceful home.

As a leader in your church, you are ideally placed to promote positive parenting that can make a significant impact on family and community life. We appreciate your role and your work of promoting godly parenting, and to support these, have prepared this brief guide as an additional tool that can serve as a catalyst and aid.

With input from Christian leaders, this guide carefully connects Biblical themes to a series of evidence-based parenting tips created by Parenting for Lifelong Health. These tips are freely available on the WHO and UNICEF websites, and have been translated into over 100 languages.

In this guide for church leaders, you will find suggestions to integrate these parenting tips in the work you do with families and communities, which might include sermons, radio programmes, pastoral care, or through the use of social media.

As parents are the first teachers of their children, they play a vital role in supporting and accompanying them to grow healthy physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. Providing opportunities for children to know God, while implementing these positive parenting tips, can enrich children’s spiritual life and help them grow in their faith.

FOUNDATION STONES TO KEEP IN MIND

Keep it simple: These parenting tips are simple because that way, they are easy to grasp, easy to remember, and easy to put into practice. Simple, yes, but proven to make a big difference.



Keep it practical: Give examples of what parenting looks like in practice, including telling stories. Stories help in connecting parents with concrete ideas, as they help them see themselves through the lives of the story characters. Also share ideas from your own experiences as this will encourage others to be more open about the challenges they face.



Keep it positive: Help give parents ideas of what they **can** do, for instance, ways they can help their children calm down without any shouting or anger. A positive approach is always helpful. Children thrive with guidance, structure, and praise when they do something well.



Keep checking in: Try to include positive parenting messages throughout all your interactions with parents and caregivers, using not only your Sunday sermons but also other opportunities you have to interact with them. Visit families and spend time with them. During the week, ask parents how they are doing. Being asked this simple question, and being listened to, can make a huge difference when life seems overwhelming.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide contains key tips that have helped parents all over the world to manage stress and help their children grow up healthy, happy, and kind. The sections below explain these tips and provide related Bible verses, as well as ideas about how you can share this information with parents. There are Bible reflection passages which you can expand into or incorporate within your sermons. The tips, key ideas and conversation starters can be used in sermons and also pastoral care consultations, to help parents to reflect on their parenting styles and consider what they could do differently. In addition, these tips can be shared as text messages on social media, included in messages over the radio, used during informal conversations or in all sorts of other ways and opportunities which arise. Feel free to use them as you feel led to do. And thank you for the work you are doing to promote positive parenting in your community.

In the pages that follow, you will quickly discover how closely aligned these positive parenting tips are to principles and values that are found in the Bible.

1

Keep communication positive

Praise goes a long way! James 3:1-12 speaks about how powerful and influential our tongues are. Our words are powerful and have a significant impact on our lives and the lives of others.

2

Structure is important

Structure is essential – and it can make a positive impact to our parenting. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 famously talks about there being ‘a time for everything’ – creating a structure for everything that needs to happen each day can be freeing, not restrictive.

3

Spend time one-on-one

One-on-one time is the best gift parents can give – but can be the hardest to find in the busy-ness of daily life. On at least one occasion, Jesus’s disciples tried to keep children away from him, because they thought he was too busy to be disturbed and distracted by youngsters. But Jesus made it clear that he wanted to spend time with children and stated just how important children are.

4

Encourage good behaviour

All children and teenagers misbehave, therefore discipline that has a positive impact is an important part of parenting, and the impact can be long-lasting. As Proverbs 22:6 says, “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it.”

5

Keep calm and manage your own stress

Parenting is stressful, and it’s important for parents to take time for themselves. Philippians 4:6-7 provides us with great advice when it comes to keeping calm and managing stress – and spending time with God each day can be a key part of this.

KEEP IT POSITIVE

When children and teenagers are shut in the home, they can easily become frustrated and forget rules. But there are positive things you can do! Watch out for when your children are behaving well and PRAISE them for it! This will help children and teenagers want to do better and learn how to be appreciative. Ask yourself: did I say something good today? And praise yourself, too. The whole country is proud of you for carrying on parenting through a pandemic.



Outline radio script

Verse for the day:

"Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up." Proverbs 12:25 (NIV)

Bible Reflection:

When children and teenagers are shut in the home, they can easily become frustrated and forget rules. But there are positive things you can do!

The Bible reminds us how powerful our words are. They can bring people down or build people up. They can have a big, long-lasting impact. Therefore, every positive appreciation of your children's achievements will be a morale booster for them, encouraging them to look at life positively and learn how to be appreciative.

Watch out for when children and teenagers are behaving well and PRAISE them for it. This will help them want to do better.



Sermon suggestion

Bible passages

James 3:1-12 – The power of the tongue

Key idea:

Our words are powerful and have a significant impact on our lives and the lives of others. Verses 4-5 say *"...take ships as an example. Although they are large and driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts."* The ideas this passage contains, and the many memorable pictures it provides, remind us of how powerful the words of a parent are. Remember to keep your words positive! Don't focus on the negative impact our angry words have; focus on the positive impact of our loving and affirming words.



Conversation starter

- During the past week, what is one of the best moments you have had with your children?
- We can easily find ourselves focusing on when our children are behaving badly, rather than the times they are behaving well. This week, watch out for when your children and teenagers are behaving well and PRAISE them for it. This will help them want to do better.
- As a church leader, urge parents not to be hard on themselves when they get it wrong and find themselves speaking harshly to their children. Instead, encourage them to pause and use it as a learning opportunity: What could they say differently next time which would have a more positive impact?
- Encourage parents to be kind to themselves! Suggest that each day they ask themselves, “What did I do that was good today?” And to praise themselves for it.



Suggested text message

Parenting tip of the day: How often do you find yourself saying “Stop doing that!” to your children? Today, focus on praising your child when they are behaving well. This will help your child want to do better.

(And, do the same for yourself – don’t focus on your mistakes – focus on what you do well!)



Social media



Keep it positive!

It’s hard to feel positive when your kids are driving you crazy. We often end up saying, “Stop doing that!” But they will listen better to your positive instructions and your praise for what they do right.”

Read: James 3:1-12

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STRUCTURE UP

It's hard for children, teenagers and for you when school is closed, especially if we can't go out. Having a structure to your day can help you all stay positive. Plan your day to include time for household chores, schoolwork, play and free time. Children can help make the day's plan. If you can, try to exercise every day. This can be as simple as playing "dance and freeze" in your home. Get some of that energy out!



Outline radio script

Verse for the day:

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Bible Reflection:

It's hard for children, teenagers and for you when school is closed and we can't go out. Having a structure to your day can help you all to stay positive.

In Ecclesiastes, it talks about how there is a time for everything. It seems that we all cope better when we divide time into manageable, bite-size slices!

Plan your day to include time for household chores, schoolwork, play and free time. Children can help make the day's plan.

If you can, exercise every day. This can be playing "dance and freeze" in your home. Get some of that energy out!



Sermon suggestion

Bible passages

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Key idea

It seems that we all cope better when we divide time into manageable bitesize slices!



Conversation starter

- What does each day look like for you and your family at the moment?
- Have you found activities – and an order of those activities – that work particularly well?
- Explain how creating a simple structure for your day can really help children, teenagers – and parents! Children and families are used to the set structure of school, and making a new structure can help you all to stay positive.



Suggested text message

Parenting tip of the day: A structured day helps children feel secure and makes it easier for them – and you – to manage. Make a timetable with schoolwork, games, free time, exercise, and handwashing. Having a structure to your day can help you all to stay positive.



Social media



Create a routine!

A structured day helps kids feel secure and makes it easier to manage them.

Try making a timetable with schoolwork, games, free time, exercise, and handwashing. Take care of your days.

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

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ONE-ON-ONE TIME

The best gift parents can give. Lockdown is hard for all families, but there are easy and free things you can do. Try to spend 'one-on-one' time each day with your children and teenagers. This can be spent on something of their choice, like a story or talking about a famous person your teenager admires. Or it can be spent washing the dishes or cleaning together while you sing a song. Having this special time with you will make each of your children feel important and loved. Just 20 minutes a day will help them to get through this difficult time. Remember these three fun steps: Listen, Look and Laugh!



Outline radio script

Verse of the day:

"People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:13-14).

Bible reflection:

Lockdown is hard for all families. For some, it can be really busy, and for others, boredom is a bigger challenge. Either way, try to spend 'one-on-one' time each day with each of your children and teenagers. It will make each of your children feel important and loved.

On at least one occasion, Jesus's disciples tried to keep children away from him – perhaps they thought he was too busy for children. But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me." Jesus valued children by spending time with them – making them feel important and loved. By spending time with their children, parents will make them feel important and loved.

What could you do in your 'one-on-one' time? You could do something they choose – like reading a story together. Or talking about a famous person

your teenager likes. Or it can be washing the dishes or cleaning together while you sing a song.

Just 20 minutes a day will help them to get through this difficult time.

Remember the three steps: Listen, Look and Laugh!

School shutdown gives an opportunity to make better relationships with our children. One-on-one time is free and fun: draw, dance and no phone or TV. It will help your children feel safe and loved.



Sermon suggestion

Bible passages

Luke 10:38-42 – Jesus at the home of Martha and Mary

Mark 10:13-14 – Jesus welcoming children to come to him

Key idea

Spending quality time with people is important – it shows that we value them. Use lockdown as a time to spend quality time with God and, if you are a parent or carer, with your children.



Conversation starter

- During lockdown, what are you and your children finding hard?
- What are the things that you are enjoying?
- Within the busyness – or the boredom – spending one-on-one time with your children will make them feel important and loved. Just 20 minutes a day will help them to get through this difficult time.
- What could you do today to spend one-on-one-time with your children?
- What does your child like doing? What is your child good at doing?
- What could your child help you get done by doing together?



Suggested text message

Parenting tip of the day: What can you do today to spend one-on-one time with your children? Just 20-minutes a day will help them through this difficult time – it will make each of your children feel important and loved.



Social media



Spend one-on-one times with your kids!

School shutdown gives a chance to make better relationships with our children. One-on-one time is free and fun: draw, dance and no phone or TV. It will help your children feel safe and loved.

Read: Mark 10:13-14

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ENCOURAGE GOOD BEHAVIOUR

There are no bad children, only difficult behaviours: All children and teenagers misbehave sometimes. Having fewer opportunities for activities, makes it much harder to behave well. You can help reduce difficult behaviour. Praise what your children do well. This is important for everyone – from babies to teenagers. If they are misbehaving, it may be that they need extra attention or are feeling uneasy or frustrated. Children sometimes express their frustrations through tantrums. Encourage them to talk about their feelings. Listen to them empathetically and try to understand what they may be going through. Also explain to them how their actions affect them and others. Talking with them can help them to feel better and behave better. And afterwards, give them a chance to do something good – and praise them for it. Prevent, protect and praise. Catch difficult behaviour early and redirect your children and teenagers with something interesting or fun. For example, if your child is drawing on the wall, you can say, “Come draw on this paper here.” If you are concerned your teen is spending too much screen time, you can say, “How about we play a game together rather than both being on the phone?”



Outline radio script

Verse for the day:

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it”
(Proverbs 22:6).

Bible Reflection:

All children and teenagers misbehave sometimes. Being stuck inside makes it much harder to behave well. You can help reduce difficult, challenging behaviour.

“Start them off on the way they should go.”
PREVENT challenging behaviour by guiding your children toward good behaviour.

One simple and immediate way you can do this is to redirect them away from the difficult behaviour to a good alternative instead. By distracting them in a positive activity, children find themselves feeling positive, engaged and happy.

Another approach is to PRAISE what a child does well. This is important for everyone – from babies to teenagers. Doing this will PROTECT them from future bad behaviour.

However, remember that all children and teenagers sometimes misbehave! So, don't be hard on yourself for not eliminating those challenging behaviours – that's not possible.

If a child's behaviours are challenging, encourage them to talk about their feelings. Listen to them empathetically and try to understand what they may be going through. Gently explain to them how their actions affect them and/or others. This approach might help them to feel better and behave better. And afterwards, give them a chance to do something good – and PRAISE them for it. Prevent, protect and praise.



Sermon suggestion

Bible passages

Proverbs 22:6

Key idea

All children and teenagers misbehave sometimes. Help guide children and teenagers towards good behaviour and away from bad behaviour.



Conversation starter

- Are you finding your children behaving differently during lockdown? In what ways?
- What have you found works to help them manage their behaviour well?
- Reassure them that all children and teenagers sometimes misbehave.
- Outline two strategies:
 - Prevent challenging behaviour by guiding them toward good behaviour. One way you can do this is to PRAISE what they do well. This is important for everyone – from babies to teenagers.
 - Encourage your children to talk about their feelings. Listen to them empathetically and try to understand what they may be going through. Talking with them could help them to feel better and behave better. And afterwards, give them a chance to do something good – and PRAISE them for it.



Suggested text message

Parenting tip of the day: All children and teenagers misbehave sometimes. It's not just you and your children, so don't be hard on yourself. When you are faced with a challenging behaviour from your child, take a deep breath, listen to your child, try to empathize by showing consideration and understanding, and engage in a positive activity together. You can prevent challenging behaviours by focusing on what children do well and praising them for that. This is important for everyone – from babies to teenagers.



Social media



Kids at home driving you crazy!

Feel like you are going to scream? All children misbehave sometimes – it is normal. Catching challenging behaviours early can help. Try to redirect them to a positive behaviour. Prevent, protect, and praise!

Read: Proverbs 22:6

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KEEP CALM AND MANAGE STRESS

Everyone who is looking after children or teenagers at home – you deserve praise! We know this is stressful, so make some time for yourself. If you feel lonely, talk to someone. When the children are asleep, take a break. Try this simple pause. Sit down, close your eyes. Listen to your breath as it goes in and out. Notice how you feel. When you are ready, open your eyes again. Take care of yourself, so you can support your children!



Outline radio script

Verse for the day:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV).

Bible Reflection:

Everyone who is looking after children or teenagers at home – you deserve praise! We know this is stressful, so make some time for yourself. Don’t forget to spend time with God. If you feel lonely, talk to someone. When the children are asleep, take a break.

As you stop and pray, why not also try this simple exercise. Sit down, close your eyes. Listen to your breath as it goes in and out. Notice how you feel. When you are ready, open your eyes again.

Take care of yourself, so you can support your children!



Sermon suggestion

Bible passages

Philippians 4:6-8

You may also like to refer to Mark 1:35-37 and Matthew 28:20b

Key idea

Spending time alone, and with God, is often the first thing that goes when life is busy and stressful. But that can just make things worse! God wants us to bring our concerns to him (Philippians 4:6-8) – we don’t have to pretend that we have it ‘all together’ when we pray. Jesus took time to be alone with God (Mark 1:35-37) – if it’s important for Jesus, it’s also important for us! (Although, during lockdown, we might not be able to go up a mountain alone to do this!) And during this time, we should remember the most frequent promise of God in the Bible, “I am with you” (Matthew 28:20b).



Conversation starter

- What activities do you do to refresh yourself? Are you still able to do them in this time of COVID-19? If not, is there something else you could do as a replacement relaxation for yourself?
- What prevents you from taking time to be by yourself and spend time with God? How might you overcome these hurdles?
- Do you have a 'special place' where you like being by yourself and connecting with God? What changes could you make to allow you to spend more time there this week?



Suggested text message

Parenting tip of the day: What are you doing today to take care of yourself? It can be easy to forget to spend time by yourself and with God. But make sure you do! Taking a few minutes away from our children – at an appropriate time – isn't bad parenting, it's good parenting! It will make us more effective. You could spend time by yourself, read a Bible passage, and spend time in prayer contemplation and ask God to speak to you through his Word.



Social media



Keep calm and manage stress

Crowded house? Stressed out? #COVID19 is a stressful time. Share your feelings. Take a break. Take care of yourself so you can take care of your children. You can do it!

Read: Philippians 4:6-7

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THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON CHILD RIGHTS AND GIFTS

A Theological Reflection on Matthew 18:1-4: Empowering Children to Participate and Contribute to Community Life in the Time of COVID -19 Pandemic

Rev. Fred Nyabera, Director, Arigatou International, End Child Poverty

At a moment of great theological debate with his disciples on the essence of the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus picks a child from those following him and “had him (*the child*) stand among them” (Mathew 18:2). Subsequently, Jesus informs the disciples that none of them is likely to enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless “they change and become like little children”. (Mathew 18:3)

By picking and placing an actual child right in the middle of a debate on the most significant concern for a majority of the disciples and their countrymen, and by so obviously having this child take centre-stage in the gathering, Jesus turns both the debate and the physical world on their head. Not only does the physical child become the fulcrum of attention, but being childlike or being a child becomes the new and primary consideration in meriting citizenship of the future Kingdom. In a society which rarely allowed or paid attention to children in the public sphere, a society in which to be a child was a severe handicap, Jesus’ disciples and followers are instructed to become like children, with the powerful example of an actual child standing before them, in their midst.

The crux of the text

This startling injunction throws the whole project and concept of our responsibility and relationship towards and with children on a new trajectory. Not only is children’s right to participate and partake in public life upheld, but the child is presented as the gatekeeper, the paragon of virtue, and the one to whom the Kingdom of Heaven belongs. Disciples and followers of Jesus Christ have to be like a child to enter the promised Kingdom.

What this text teaches us

Though the ethical faculty of children is still under development, and they are in need of the protection and nurture of family, community and state, the child is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), pre-formed and pre-known by God (Psalm 139:13-16). Hence, the Bible portrays children as full members and participants of the community in their own right. For instance:

- Children were **ever present** complement of Jesus’s public and religious life and follow him with the rest of the crowds. According to Mathew 19:14: When Jesus’ disciples sent them away, he would welcome them and rebuke the disciples. “Let the children come to me and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” (Matthew 19:14)
- Children were **active participants** in Jesus’s ministry. “But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David’, they were indignant.” (Matthew 21:15)
- According to Jeremiah 9:21, the lack or absence of children in public life is a **key indicator** of the poor health of a community and society: “Death has climbed in through our windows and entered our fortresses; it has removed the children from the streets and the young men from the public squares.” (Jeremiah 9:21)

Application to the present pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic invites a reflection on the interface between the teaching and values of the Christian faith and the pandemic in relation to children. Finding innovative and transformative ways to engage and empower children in this time of crisis is important to help them strengthen their sense of belonging in their community and their sense of purpose. We can: Listen to the voices of children, their fears and concerns. Create spaces to listen to their ideas and encourage their proposals on how they can respond to and support each other.

- Be mindful of their wellbeing – mental, physical, emotional and spiritual. Provide space for them, as Jesus did.
- Use the internet and social media, radio, TV and telephone-s to promote and encourage the participation of children and young people in religious activities. This can be done by asking children, to contribute, from their homes, prayers, songs, or messages for other children and the community, and by creating spaces for children to participate meaningfully during digital worship, and thereby connect with their community and their peers.
- Organize specific online activities by members of the community for children to practice and deepen their faith by listening to stories, singing songs, and connecting to one another.
- Engage children and young people to organize online activities and other visual aids for the younger ones, or to develop videos or social media messages and online activities for your religious Community.

Conclusion

The model set up in scripture is not only to listen to children, but to recognize and affirm their own intervention, and thus include them in the ongoing COVID–19 pandemic discourse. To do this, adults must embrace a more emancipated concept of children, one which recognizes and affirms that a child and children have a voice, have something to say and are competent to carry it, and that what they say is important and constitutive of the public engagement.

Your Opinion Matters

Do you have any questions or suggestions for us? Would you like to tell us how you are using the Church Leader Pack in your community?

Get in touch with us covid19parenting@gmail.com