

LESSON
12

TEACHING CHILDREN THROUGH EXAMPLE AND INSTRUCTION

Purpose

To help participants understand that parents are responsible to teach their children through example and instruction and to seek divine inspiration in all their efforts to teach.

Preparation

1. As you prepare yourself to teach, look for ways to follow the principles under “Your Responsibilities as a Teacher” (pages ix–xi in this manual).
2. Read the lesson’s bold headings. These headings give an overview of the doctrines and principles in the lesson. As part of your preparation, ponder ways to help participants apply these doctrines and principles. Seek the guidance of the Spirit in deciding what you should emphasize to meet participants’ needs.
3. If the *Family Home Evening Resource Book* (31106) is available, study “Teaching by Example,” on pages 242–44, and “Reasoning with Children,” on pages 244–45. Consider referring to these articles during the lesson.

**Suggested Lesson
Development**

Parents are responsible to teach their children.

Share the following story related by President Gordon B. Hinckley, the 15th President of the Church:

“Not long after we were married, we built our first home. We had very little money. I did much of the work myself. . . . The landscaping was entirely my responsibility. The first of many trees that I planted was a thornless honey locust. . . . It was only a wisp of a tree, perhaps three-quarters of an inch in diameter. It was so supple that I could bend it with ease in any direction. I paid little attention to it as the years passed.

“Then one winter day, when the tree was barren of leaves, I chanced to look out the window at it. I noticed that it was leaning to the west, misshapen and out of balance. I could scarcely believe it. I went out and braced myself against it as if to push it upright. But the trunk was now nearly a foot in diameter. My strength was as nothing against it. . . .

“When it was first planted, a piece of string would have held it in place against the forces of the wind. I could have and should have supplied that string with ever so little effort. But I did not, and it bent to the forces that came against it” (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* [1997], 419–20).

- How does President Hinckley’s experience apply to parents’ responsibility to teach children? (As participants discuss this question, read Proverbs 22:6 with them.)

Referring to his experience with the tree, President Hinckley said: “I have seen a similar thing, many times, in children whose lives I have observed.

The parents who brought them into the world seem almost to have abdicated their responsibility. The results have been tragic. A few simple anchors would have given them the strength to withstand the forces that have shaped their lives” (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 420).

Explain that the Lord has given parents a sacred duty to teach their children. This responsibility must not be taken lightly or left to others. Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles emphasized:

“We *cannot* and we *must not* allow the school, community, television, or even Church organizations to establish our children’s values. The Lord has placed this duty with mothers and fathers. It is one from which we cannot escape and one that cannot be delegated. Others may help, but parents remain accountable. Therefore, we must guard the sanctity of our homes because that is where children develop their values, attitudes, and habits for everyday living” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 106; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 79–80).

- Why is it essential for parents to teach their children rather than leave this responsibility to others? What are the risks when parents fail to fulfill this responsibility?
- In what ways can extended family members, such as grandparents and aunts and uncles, support parents’ efforts to teach children?

Parents can receive inspiration in teaching their children.

Have participants turn to Doctrine and Covenants 42:14. Explain that this verse contains an important key for parents as they teach their children. Then read the verse with participants.

- What key is found in this verse? (We must teach by the Spirit.) What does it mean to teach by the Spirit?

Read 2 Nephi 32:5 and 33:1 with participants. Point out that the Spirit, or the Holy Ghost, can help us know what we should do and say. When parents teach according to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost will carry the message to the hearts of their children.

Share the following counsel from President Gordon B. Hinckley:

“You parents, love your children. Cherish them. They are so precious. They are so very, very important. They are the future. You need more than your own wisdom in rearing them. You need the help of the Lord. Pray for that help and follow the inspiration which you receive” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 120; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 89).

- Why do parents need inspiration in their efforts to teach their children? What can parents do to invite the influence of the Holy Ghost as they teach their children?

Share the following story related by Elder F. Enzo Busche of the Seventy:

“One day when circumstances made it necessary for me to be at home at an unusual time, I witnessed from another room how our eleven-year-old son, just returning from school, was directing ugly words towards his younger sister. They were words that offended me—words that I had never thought our son would use. My first natural reaction in my anger was to get up and go after

him. Fortunately, I had to walk across the room and open a door before I could reach him, and I remember in those few seconds I fervently prayed to my Heavenly Father to help me to handle the situation. Peace came over me. I was no longer angry.

“Our son, being shocked to see me home, was filled with fear when I approached him. To my surprise I heard myself saying, ‘Welcome home, son!’ and I extended my hand as a greeting. And then in a formal style I invited him to sit close to me in the living room for a personal talk. I heard myself expressing my love for him. I talked with him about the battle that every one of us has to fight each day within ourselves.

“As I expressed my confidence in him, he broke into tears, confessing his unworthiness and condemning himself beyond measure. Now it was my role to put his transgression in the proper perspective and to comfort him. A wonderful spirit came over us, and we ended up crying together, hugging each other in love and finally in joy. What could have been a disastrous confrontation between father and son became, through the help from the powers above, one of the most beautiful experiences of our relationship that we both have never forgotten” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1982, 98–99; or *Ensign*, May 1982, 70).

- What might have resulted if this father had followed his impulse to act in anger?

Ask participants to share experiences when the Holy Ghost led them to teach or help a child in a certain way—perhaps in a way that they had not originally planned.

- What can parents do to prepare themselves to receive the guidance of the Holy Ghost? (As participants discuss this question, invite them to read some or all of the following scripture passages: Alma 17:2–3; D&C 11:21; 20:77; 121:45–46; 136:33.)

Parents teach through example and instruction.

Explain that parents teach their children in two general ways: through their example and through their words.

- In what ways do parents’ examples add meaning to their words in teaching their children?

Have participants read the following statement made by Elder James E. Faust while he was serving in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (page 49 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant’s Study Guide*):

“When parents try to teach their children to avoid danger, it is no answer for parents to say to their children, ‘We are experienced and wise in the ways of the world, and we can get closer to the edge of the cliff than you.’ Parental hypocrisy can make children cynical and unbelieving of what they are taught in the home. For instance, when parents attend movies they forbid their children to see, parental credibility is diminished. If children are expected to be honest, parents must be honest. If children are expected to be virtuous, parents must be virtuous. If you expect your children to be honorable, you must be honorable” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1990, 41; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 33–34).

- What can parents do to teach gospel principles by example?

While serving as Presiding Bishop, Bishop Robert D. Hales said, “As I think about . . . relationships with my own family, I cannot help but return to the example I received from my own parents” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 8; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 8). The following recollections show how Bishop Hales learned from his parents:

“My father taught me respect for the priesthood. While serving in the Aaronic Priesthood, we passed the sacrament using stainless steel sacrament trays which, as a result of spilled water, were often dulled with hard water spots. As a holder of the Aaronic Priesthood, I was responsible for helping prepare the sacrament. Father asked me to bring home the trays, and together we cleaned them with steel wool until every tray sparkled. When I passed the sacrament, I knew we had participated in making the sacrament ordinance a little more sacred” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 8; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 8).

“I am thankful for a mother who was devoted to her husband and children—a mother who taught by example. I am thankful for her dedicated service in the Relief Society for over thirty years. At the age of sixteen, upon receiving my driver’s license, I was privileged to learn from her as she took me along when she assisted the bishop in caring for the poor and the needy” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 90; or *Ensign*, May 1992, 65).

- What opportunities do parents have to teach their children through their words?

As participants discuss this question, explain that family prayer, family scripture study, and family home evening will be discussed in lesson 16. In addition to these established opportunities for teaching, many teaching opportunities come at unplanned times during daily life. These opportunities can be powerful teaching moments because they are closely tied to what children are experiencing. Because such opportunities may come and go quickly, parents need to recognize them and be prepared to teach principles that their children are ready to learn.

- What are some unplanned teaching moments that parents can watch for? (If participants have difficulty answering this question, consider sharing the following suggestions to prompt discussion.)

Parents can find teaching moments when children have questions and worries, problems in getting along with siblings or friends, opportunities to make decisions, or concerns about ideas presented through the media. Other teaching opportunities come when children need to learn from their mistakes, when they are giving service, when they need to control their anger, or when they need help recognizing the influence of the Holy Ghost.

- In what ways can family routines such as mealtime and bedtime provide opportunities to teach?
- In what ways can one-on-one time with children give parents opportunities to teach? What can parents do to ensure that they spend time alone with each of their children?
- What have you been able to teach children during unplanned teaching moments?

Explain that the next four lessons in this course will discuss principles that parents should teach their children and opportunities parents have to teach.

Conclusion

Emphasize that when parents seek direction from the Lord, He will guide them in their efforts to teach their children. Parents must be diligent and consistent in their efforts to teach through their example and their words.

As prompted by the Spirit, testify of the truths discussed during the lesson.

Refer to pages 48–53 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant's Study Guide*. Encourage participants to review the doctrines and principles in this lesson by (1) following at least one of the suggestions in “Ideas for Application” and (2) reading the articles “The Greatest Challenge in the World—Good Parenting,” by Elder James E. Faust, and “A Table Encircled with Love,” by Elder LeGrand R. Curtis. Point out that married couples can receive great benefits from reading and discussing the articles in the study guide together.