

# GUIDING CHILDREN AS THEY MAKE DECISIONS

LESSON  
**15**

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**Purpose** To teach principles that will help parents guide their children in making decisions.

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**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 “Agency—The Key to Growth,” on pages 237–38, and “Reclaiming a Wayward Child,” on pages 252–53. Consider referring to these articles during the lesson.
4. Bring a small pebble to class. You will use it during the last section of the lesson.

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**Suggested Lesson  
Development**

**Children need guidance as they make decisions.**

Read the following poem, shared in a general conference address by President Thomas S. Monson of the First Presidency:

He stood at the crossroads all alone,  
The sunlight in his face.  
He had no thought for the world unknown—  
He was set for a manly race.  
But the roads stretched east, and the roads stretched west,  
And the lad knew not which road was best;  
So he chose the road that led him down,  
And he lost the race and victor’s crown.  
He was caught at last in an angry snare  
Because no one stood at the crossroads there  
To show him the better road.

Another day, at the self-same place,  
A boy with high hopes stood.  
He, too, was set for a manly race;  
He, too, was seeking the things that were good;  
But one was there who the roads did know,  
And that one showed him which way to go.  
So he turned from the road that would lead him down,  
And he won the race and the victor’s crown.  
He walks today the highway fair  
Because one stood at the crossroads there  
To show him the better way.

[quoted from *Central Christian Monitor*, in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 66–67; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 48]

Explain that children and youth often stand at crossroads—times when they face decisions that can have a lasting effect on their lives. Parents, who know the roads, should be there to help their children make righteous decisions. Even when parents cannot be with their children at moments of decision, the children should be able to receive guidance and rely on the promptings of the Holy Ghost as they remember their parents' teachings.

**Parents can help children exercise their agency righteously.**

Explain that agency is one of Heavenly Father's greatest gifts to us. Agency is the power to choose and to act for ourselves. It is through agency that we choose to follow the Savior and receive the blessing of eternal life (see 2 Nephi 2:25–28).

Read Doctrine and Covenants 58:27–28 with participants.

- In what ways does this passage apply to parents as they help their children make decisions?
- What are some benefits of allowing children to make decisions?

The following material outlines principles parents can follow to help their children exercise their agency righteously. Discuss these principles with participants.

*Teach children Heavenly Father's great plan of happiness.*

With participants, read the following excerpt from Alma 12:32:

“Therefore God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption.”

- Why is it significant that God gave commandments *after* making known the plan of redemption? In what ways does this principle apply to parents' efforts to encourage their children to obey the commandments?

Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught:

“Young people wonder ‘why?’—Why are we commanded *to do* some things, and why are we commanded *not* to do other things? A knowledge of the plan of happiness . . . can give young minds a ‘why.’ . . .

“You will not be with [your] children at the time of their temptations. At those dangerous moments they must depend on their own resources. If they can locate themselves within the framework of the gospel plan, they will be immensely strengthened.

“The plan is worthy of repetition over and over again. Then the purpose of life, the reality of the Redeemer, and the reason for the commandments will stay with them.

“Their gospel study, their life experiences, will add to an ever-growing witness of the Christ, of the Atonement, of the restoration of the gospel” (*The Great Plan of Happiness* [address to religious educators, 10 Aug. 1993], 3).

*Give children clear guidelines based on gospel principles.*

Explain that parents should give their children clear guidelines to follow in making decisions. This effort includes teaching the gospel and establishing standards of behavior in the home. Elder Joe J. Christensen of the Seventy taught:

*“Do not be afraid to set clear moral standards and guidelines. Be sure to say no when it is needed. . . . Let [your children] know that there are some things that, as members of your family, you simply do not do. Some parents seem to be almost pathologically concerned about their children’s popularity and social acceptance and go along with many things that are really against their better judgment, such as expensive fads, immodest clothes, late hours, dating before age sixteen, R-rated movies, and so on. For children and parents, standing up for what is right may be lonely at times. There may be evenings alone, parties missed, and movies which go unseen. It may not always be fun. But parenting is not a popularity contest”* (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 13; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 11).

- What can parents do to set clear moral guidelines for their families? (As participants discuss this question, encourage them to share examples from their lives.)

Read Moroni 7:15–19 with participants.

- What counsel does this passage give about how to know good from evil? In what ways can parents apply this counsel as they set guidelines for their children?
- In what areas of their lives do children and youth sometimes need help in judging between good and evil? In what ways can parents use the counsel in Moroni 7:15–19 to help children make righteous decisions?

*Help children recognize the influence of the Holy Ghost in their lives.*

Explain that Moroni 7:15–19 is about the Light of Christ, which helps us know good from evil. In addition to following the Light of Christ, we can receive guidance from the Holy Ghost, who “will show unto [us] all things what [we] should do” (2 Nephi 32:5) and will help us “know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5). As children learn to recognize and follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost, they will receive further help in making decisions. After children have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, parents can help them develop a desire to be worthy of the constant companionship of the Spirit.

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles told about how his mother helped him recognize the influence of the Holy Ghost:

*“After my baptism and confirmation, my mother drew me aside and asked, ‘What do you feel?’ I described as best I could the warm feeling of peace, comfort, and happiness I had. Mother explained that what I was feeling was the gift I had just received, the gift of the Holy Ghost. She told me that if I lived worthy of it, I would have that gift with me continually. That was a teaching moment that has lived with me all my life”* (in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 42; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 33).

- What can parents do to help their children feel and recognize the influence of the Holy Ghost? (Answers may include that parents can encourage their children to study the scriptures, listen to sacred music, keep the commandments, and pray with real intent. They can also share spiritual experiences with their children and express love for them.)

Emphasize that it is essential for parents to encourage their children’s private religious behavior, such as personal scripture study, prayer, and fasting. Participation in the family’s religious activities is important, but it is not enough.

*Give small children opportunities to make simple decisions.*

Point out that parents can give small children opportunities to make decisions. They can keep decisions simple, usually offering only two choices and making sure both choices are acceptable. For example, a parent could say, “Would you like to wear your blue shirt or your red shirt today?” or “Would you rather hear a story or continue playing until bedtime?” Once parents have offered such a choice, they should accept the child’s decision.

- How might such simple decisions help children prepare to make far-reaching and difficult decisions later in their lives?

*Help children understand that some decisions have eternal consequences.*

Explain that when children face difficult decisions such as selecting Sabbath activities, choosing friends, making educational plans, or setting goals for a career, it is important that they know how to make judgments based on gospel truths. It is essential that they understand that their decisions can have eternal consequences. Parents must take time early in their children’s lives to talk with them about these principles.

- What are some ways parents can guide their children as they counsel with them? (Answers may include that parents can share their own experiences, remind their children of the Lord’s commandments, and help their children consider the eternal consequences of different choices.)
- What situations might require a parent to intervene when a child is making unrighteous decisions?

Ask a participant to read the following counsel from Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (page 66 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant’s Study Guide*):

“It is the parents’ duty to intervene when they see wrong choices being made. That doesn’t mean parents take from children the precious gift of agency. Because agency is a God-given gift, ultimately the choice of what they will do, how they will behave, and what they will believe will always be theirs. But as parents we need to make sure they understand appropriate behavior and the consequences to them if they pursue their wrongful course. Remember, there is no such thing as unlawful censorship in the home. Movies, magazines, television, videos, the Internet, and other media are there as guests and should only be welcomed when they are appropriate for family enjoyment. Make your home a haven of peace and righteousness. Don’t allow evil influences to contaminate your own special spiritual environment. Be kind, thoughtful, gentle, and considerate in what you say and how you treat each other. Then family goals based on gospel standards will make it easier to make good decisions” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 114; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 87).

**Parents should allow children to learn from the consequences of unwise decisions.**

Point out that although parents should sometimes intervene to help their children make righteous decisions, they should not intervene to prevent the consequences of their children’s unwise decisions.

- What can result when parents protect their children from the consequences of their decisions? What good can come from allowing children to experience the natural consequences of their decisions? (Encourage participants to share examples from their own lives. Then read the following statements.)

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “Parents, don’t make the mistake of purposefully intervening to soften or eliminate the natural consequences of your child’s deliberate decisions to violate the commandments. Such acts reinforce false principles, open the door for more serious sin, and lessen the likelihood of repentance” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1993, 43; or *Ensign*, May 1993, 34).

Elder Robert D. Hales taught: “It is frightening to allow our children to learn from the mistakes they may make, but their willingness to choose the Lord’s way and family values is greater when the choice comes from within than when we attempt to force those values upon them. The Lord’s way of love and acceptance is better than Satan’s way of force and coercion, especially in rearing teenagers” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 43; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 34).

### **Parents should show unfailing love for children who go astray.**

Point out that even after parents’ best efforts, some children may make decisions that cause great sorrow for themselves and others. Parents must never cease to love children who go astray. Elder Richard G. Scott said:

“Some of you have children who do not respond to you, choosing entirely different paths. Father in Heaven has repeatedly had that same experience. While some of His children have used His gift of agency to make choices against His counsel, He continues to love them. Yet, I am sure, He has never blamed Himself for their unwise choices” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1993, 43; or *Ensign*, May 1993, 34).

While serving in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Howard W. Hunter gave the following counsel to parents who have done their best but grieve because of the mistakes of a child:

“A successful parent is one who has loved, one who has sacrificed, and one who has cared for, taught, and ministered to the needs of a child. If you have done all of these and your child is still wayward or troublesome or worldly, it could well be that you are, nevertheless, a successful parent. Perhaps there are children who have come into the world that would challenge any set of parents under any set of circumstances. Likewise, perhaps there are others who would bless the lives of, and be a joy to, almost any father or mother” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1983, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, 65).

Give a participant the pebble that you have brought to class (see “Preparation,” item 4). Ask the participant to place the pebble directly in front of his or her eye. Then ask the individual to describe what he or she can see. Read the following analogy, which was shared by Elder Richard G. Scott while he was serving in the Seventy:

“When I take a small pebble and place it directly in front of my eye, it takes on the appearance of a mighty boulder. It is all I can see. It becomes all-consuming—like the problems of a loved one that affect our lives every waking moment. When the things you realistically can do to help are done, leave the matter in

the hands of the Lord and worry no more. Do not feel guilty because you cannot do more. Do not waste your energy on useless worry. The Lord will take the pebble that fills your vision and cast it down among the challenges you will face in your eternal progress. It will then be seen in perspective. In time, you will feel impressions and know how to give further help. You will find more peace and happiness, will not neglect others that need you, and will be able to give greater help because of that eternal perspective” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1988, 70; or *Ensign*, May 1988, 60).

- In what ways can parents show constant love to a son or daughter who has gone astray? How can they show such love without condoning the actions of the son or daughter?

Read Luke 15:11–32 with participants. Explain that this passage is often called the parable of the prodigal son. However, it could also be referred to as the parable of the loving father.

- What can we learn from this parable about how parents’ love can influence wayward children?

While serving as First Counselor in the First Presidency, President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

“Through the history of the generations of man, the actions of rebellious children have been laden with sorrow and heartbreak, but even when there has been rebellion, the strong cords of family life have reached out to encircle the rebellious one.

“I know of no more beautiful story in all of literature than that told by the Master as recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Luke. It is the story of a heady and greedy son who demanded his inheritance, which he wasted until none was left. Penitent, he returned to his father, and his father, seeing him afar off, ran to him and embraced him and fell upon his neck and kissed him” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 95; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 72).

## Conclusion

Emphasize the importance of guiding children as they make decisions and then allowing them to learn from the consequences of their actions. Remind participants that the Lord will bless parents as they continue to love and work with their children. Then read the following statement made by Bishop Robert D. Hales while he was serving as Presiding Bishop:

“Certainly parents will make mistakes in their parenting process, but through humility, faith, prayer, and study, each person can learn a better way and in so doing bless the lives of family members now and teach correct traditions for the generations that follow” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 10–11; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 10).

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

Refer to pages 64–67 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 article “Like a Flame Unquenchable,” by Elder M. Russell Ballard. Point out that married couples can receive great benefits from reading and discussing the articles in the study guide together.