



STRIVING FOR
**FAMILY
 UNITY**

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It has been said that if you think you know a perfect family, you don't know the family very well!

This suggests that all of us have periodic challenges in establishing and maintaining love and unity within our families. Yet, in large measure, our challenge to teach and nurture our children in a way that will qualify us as eternal families defines our mission here on earth.



Successful parents know that unity grows when they act as "one" to teach, counsel, and encourage their children.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT CASEY

In his epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of “perfecting . . . the saints” and reaching a “unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:12–13). With this “unity,” Paul counseled that the Saints would “be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14). What a magnificent promise—especially for parents!

Love of families and fellow men was the keystone of the Savior’s ministry. To His disciples, He said, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Less than a year following the organization of the restored Church, the Lord told the Saints in Fayette, New York, “I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27).

The teachings of living prophets and apostles as summarized in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” make clear our responsibilities to our families:

“Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another. . . . Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities.”¹

Amid all the counsel we have been given about nurturing our children in love and unity, as parents we must decide how we can best accomplish this challenging but eternally compelling task. Some of the following principles and ideas may provide help in uniting our families in love and truth.



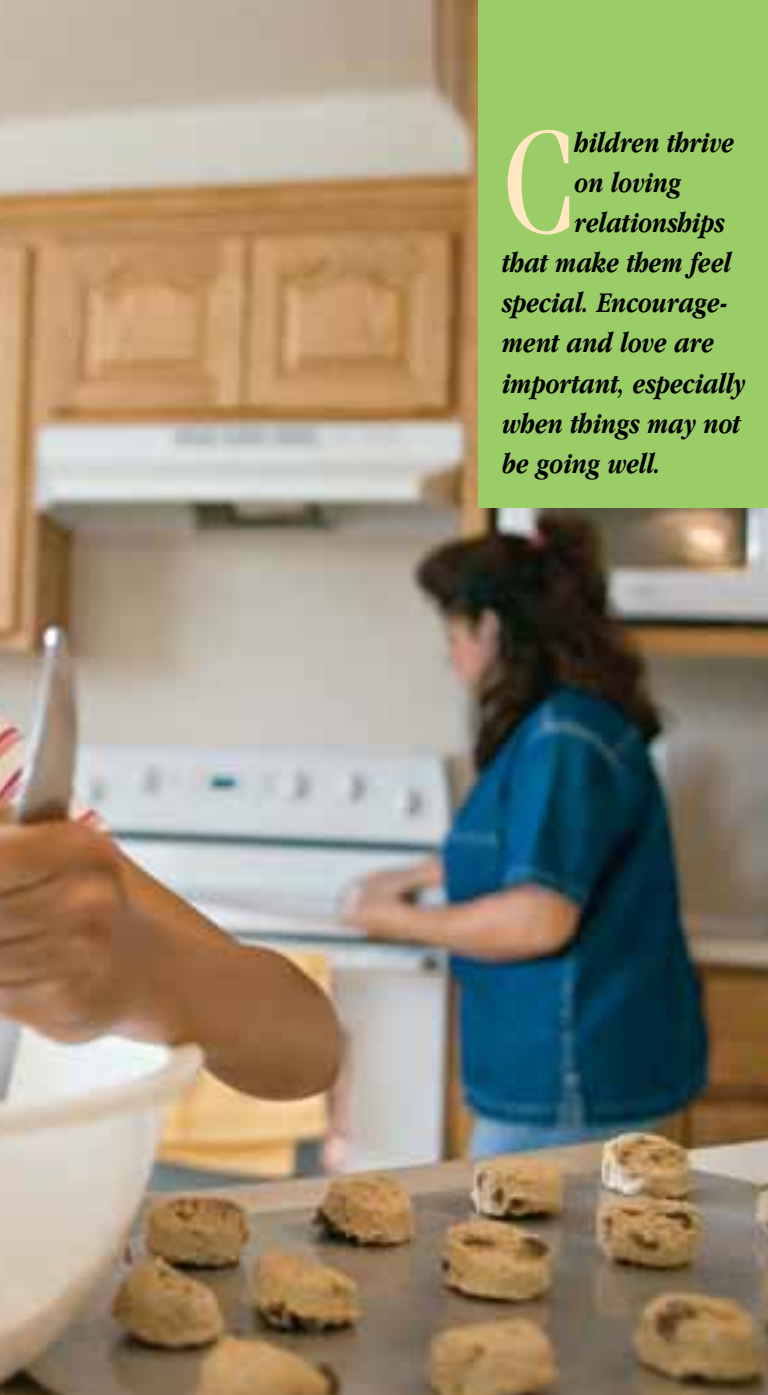
PHOTOGRAPH BY WELDEN C. ANDERSEN

Unity of Parents

Unity in the family begins with a loving parental relationship that sets an example for the family and extends in a personal way to each child.

President David O. McKay often credited his father and mother for the love and unity experienced in their family. He said: “Most gratefully and humbly I cherish the remembrance that never once as a lad in the home of my youth did I ever see one instance of discord between father and

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PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT CASEY

mother, and that goodwill and mutual understanding has been the uniting bond that has held together a fortunate group of brothers and sisters. Unity, harmony, goodwill are virtues to be fostered and cherished in every home.”²²

Loving, Trusting Relationships

Studies have shown that in most families, children’s self-confidence and sense of personal worth are directly related to the quality of their relationships with their parents³ and how parents have taught and lived basic principles of the gospel.

As our children become teenagers, they frequently rely

on things that will endear them to their peers. Unless a strong bond of love and trust has been established between parents and children, supported by a strong spiritual environment in the home, children’s loyalties tend to move to peers as they become teenagers. As children develop confidence in themselves and strong testimonies of the Savior, they add a special spirit of unity and happiness to their families and have strength to resist the pressures of the world.

President Gordon B. Hinckley has counseled: “I would like to see greater love in our homes. . . . You parents who are fathers and mothers of children, treasure your children. Look to them with love. Lead them . . . with love. . . . They will follow after you if you do that. And I make you a promise that if you do so, the time will come when you will feel so grateful that you have done so, that you will get on your knees and thank the Lord for the precious children who have come to you and grown up under your direction.”⁴

Frequent expressions of love are a key to building trusting and loving relationships, but equally important is the consistent demonstration of that love. How we act often speaks louder than what we say and how we say it. It is important that we consistently and genuinely show our children our love for them as well as tell them of that love.

Following his father’s death, one young man felt he could take little comfort from his mother’s assurance that his father loved him and was proud of him.

“While a doctor was verifying death, I was leaning against the wall in the far corner of the room, crying softly. A nurse came over to me and put a comforting arm around me. I couldn’t talk through my tears. I wanted to tell her:

“I’m not crying because my father is dead. I’m crying because my father never told me that he was proud of me. He never told me that he loved me. Of course, I was expected to know these things. I was expected to know the great part I played in his life and the great part I occupied of his heart, but *he never told me.*”⁵

Perhaps there was a greater message than most of us realize when God our Father announced His Son by saying, “This is my beloved Son, *in whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3:17; emphasis added).

Children thrive on loving relationships that make them feel special. Encouragement and love are important, especially when things may not be going well.

Listening to our children and respecting their views builds trust and opens communication. Understanding and agreeing on expectations with each member of the family adds to the unity and good feelings for each other. Periodic one-on-one time is a superb way to build lasting relationships and trust. In fact, personal time with each child is an essential building block to genuine lasting relationships of love and unity.

As children replace selfishness and envy with kindness and service to each other, unity grows within the family. And as the family serves together to assist others, a bond of unity and love becomes the hallmark of the family. Unity in the family will not always free parents from problems and challenges with their children, but it does enable families to cohesively focus on solutions.

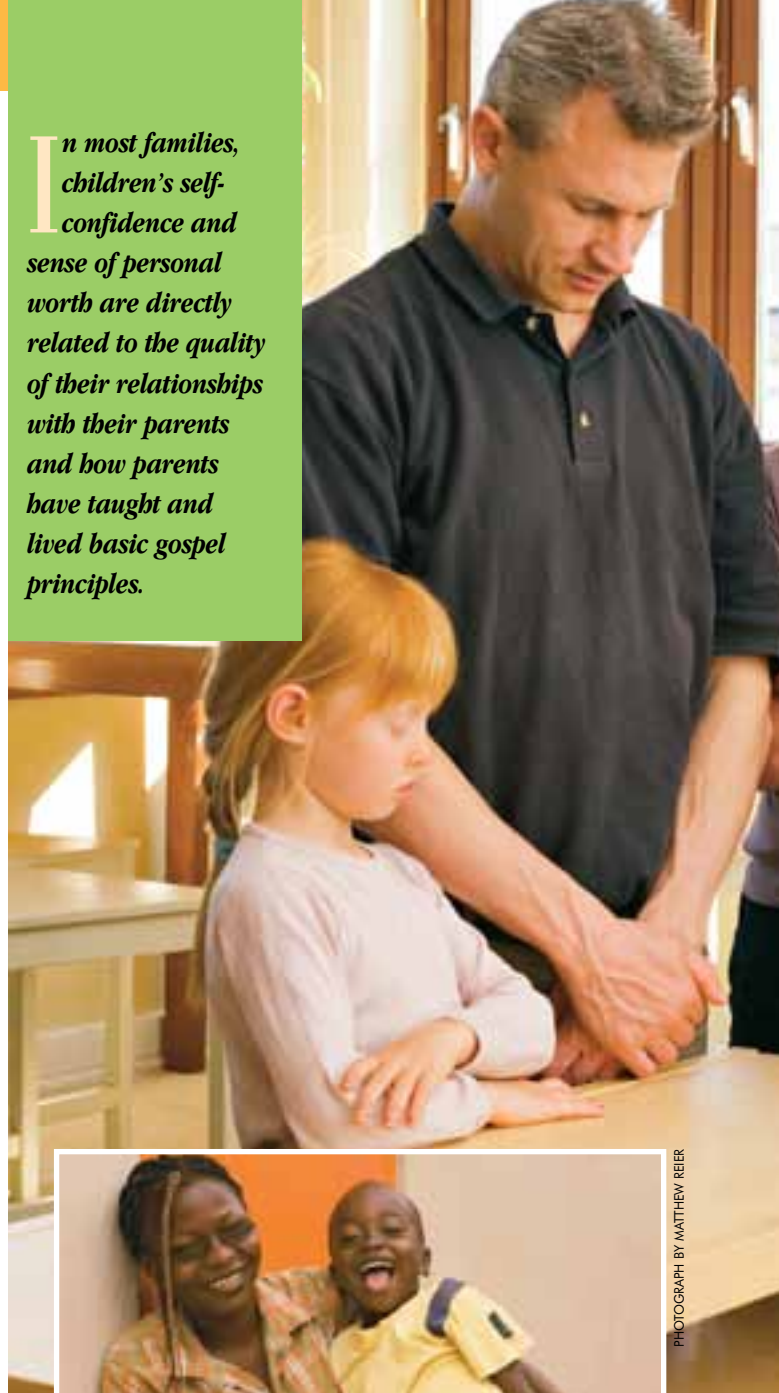
Personal Spiritual Experiences for Children

Living in accordance with our strong personal testimonies becomes the foundation for unwavering love and unity within a family. Testimonies also provide the bulwark against Satan and the things of the world that he uses to bring contention into families.

One of our key responsibilities as parents is to help our children prepare for and have spiritual experiences in their youth that will develop strong testimonies of Jesus Christ and His restored gospel. These experiences come as a result of prayer, study, and living gospel principles. They come from family home evenings and scripture study. They result from personal experiences and feelings from association with Church leaders and spiritually strong friends. Frequently, they come in a very personal way as the Spirit touches and confirms the truth and testimony of the living Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, as the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

I will be forever grateful for my faithful parents who, in their humble way, used the priesthood and the power of prayer to bless their children with the Lord's healing power. On several occasions during my youth, the Lord responded with His tender mercies in a way that was miraculous. For me those experiences formed the basic foundation on which I have developed an undeniable testimony of the Lord and His love for each of us.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW REIER

Unified Families Minimize Contention

The Lord's challenge to raise our families in unity and righteousness is not a simple one. Our youth live in exciting yet challenging times. Their lives are filled with responsibilities and activities of various kinds. They have access to many things, including media and music that do not always fit within the standards of the home and the principles of the Church. As a result, almost every family at one time or another experiences disagreements on certain



PHOTOGRAPH BY CRAIG DIMOND

issues, both large and small. This creates contention.

The Lord made clear His feelings on contention when He said to the Nephites, “He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil” (3 Nephi 11:29).

Our challenge as parents is to keep misunderstandings and disagreements to a minimum and to resolve differences quickly and amicably. The more we and our children are committed to living gospel principles, the greater the opportunity for the spirit of unity and love to reside in our homes. A clear understanding of gospel-centered guidelines and expectations in the home will significantly reduce periodic issues that precipitate contention.

Consistent Family and Personal Prayer

Some of the most effective teaching in our homes comes from the family’s kneeling together and feeling the spirit of what is said in daily family prayer. Asking the Lord for forgiveness, while also petitioning His help in unifying the family in love and righteous purposes, can have a lasting influence on our children as they grow together in the family. Sincere prayers soften contentious thoughts.

It is absolutely imperative that we teach and encourage our children to be consistent and sincere in offering their personal prayers. As children pray daily, they will feel the Lord’s personal direction in their lives. As they learn to seek His blessings and guidance, the family will find the joy and happiness that come from striving to be a righteous family.

In His great Intercessory Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Savior pleaded with the Father *five separate times* for unity—“that they may be one, even as we are one” and “that they may be made perfect in one” (see John 17:11, 22–23). Unity is the outcome of a family engaging in righteous principles.

May we as parents pray for and live worthy of the Lord’s blessings so that our families may be one on earth and in the eternities to come. ■

NOTES

1. *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 1967, 7.
3. See Brent L. Top and Bruce A. Chadwick, “Helping Children Develop Feelings of Self-Worth,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2006, 35.
4. “Inspirational Thoughts,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2006, 4–5.
5. John Powell, *The Secret of Staying in Love* (1974), 68; emphasis added; see also Elder Marvin J. Ashton, “Family Communications,” *Ensign*, May 1976, 53.



HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

1. To help family members visualize family unity, consider weaving a placemat from strips of paper. Write the name of a different family member on each strip. As they are woven together, discuss how this process represents the process of creating family unity. Use Elder Staheli’s article to discuss ways the family can build unity.

2. Consider having family members draw a picture of five people holding hands. Label each person with one of the headings from Elder Staheli’s article. Point out strengths that your family has in each of these areas. Using the suggestions in the article, plan an activity that will strengthen your family.