

FAMILY DIALOGUE

We believe that any family can try Family Dialogue with hope of some measure of success, by using the suggested helps and by avoiding the pitfalls described here. If the couple has a positive attitude toward the possibility of success in their own family with Family Dialogue, most probably it will work for them.

- I. **HOW OFTEN:** From the experience of families from all over the country, we've discovered that once a week is most worthwhile. It is not law, however. Each family has it's own wants and needs. We do know of a family that did dialogue every day for the time they were on a camping vacation and it was good. But generally, more frequently than once a week can be burdensome to families and can become a chore and destructive to family relationships.

Less than once per week, it has been found, does not build trust. Family members lose touch with each other between times and any benefits that have been gained in the previous family dialogues can be lost.

- II. **THE WEDS OF FAMILY DIALOGUE:**

W - WRITE:

1. Some families will find it most advantageous to write just before dialoguing, while others will be most successful with each member of the family writing at a time most convenient for him/her.
2. Advantages to writing just before dialoguing: It is part of the whole pattern (family assembles, perhaps prays and sets buzzer for ten minutes, writes and begins the dialogue.) Another plus is that the feelings are most alive when they have just been written.
3. Disadvantages to writing just before dialoguing: Too structured for some families. Also, some members of the family may choose to write when the spirit moves him/her at another time.
4. The love letter concept is most commonly thought to be a concept that develops within the children as time passes and as they become aware that their parents are writing in the form of a love letter. Forcing children to use the love letter seems to be a disadvantage in that it may cause more discord than if the children are given the freedom to write in whatever form they wish. Writing in some way is a must, though, with most all families, if family dialogue is to be a success.
5. Children who are too young to write: They may draw pictures or dictate their letters to another member of the family. (Then during the reading, the words could either be whispered in the child's ear and then repeated outloud, or another member of the family could just read it for the child.)

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6. Feelings in the love letter: Not necessarily sticking to feelings when writing in the family seems to be an advantage. Unlike conjugal dialogue, where we write only feelings in our letters, but the family letters may contain thoughts, etc., but it should be carefully explained what feelings are and their importance as a core part of us. We could encourage them to write their feelings down and even make up a list of feelings words for them to refer to, but it seems best not to insist on strictly feelings or to correct them if they give an opinion or belief, etc. It's important to remember that family dialogue does not equate to conjugal dialogue.

E - EXCHANGE

** Please do try different methods to see what works best.

1. It is a good idea to consider not exchanging as a possibility. In this case, each member of the family reads aloud his or her own letter.
2. Another option is for everyone to pass books to be read silently by each other.
3. Or everyone may have a choice of reading his/her book or passing it.
4. One member of the family may read all books.
5. Non-verbal is a means to develop openness in family dialogue. Exchanging with a kiss may be good.

D - DIALOGUE

1. There are many ways to do this:
 - a. The sharing may start spontaneously with anyone starting that wishes to start, and continuing at random, or go around the room.
 - b. We might decide that everyone has to share. The obvious disadvantage is that there may be someone that just will not share, and what do you do then? How insistent can we be and still be loving, concerned and aware of that person?
 - c. There may or may not be comments allowed after each person shares. Or it may be better for some families to wait until everyone has finished sharing. But it must be made clear that family dialogue time is a very special time in the family to focus on each other's unique goodness and lovability, and to try to communicate more fully and deeply with one another. We all have to understand that this special time is not for picking apart each other's letters or comments, or person-hoods. Couples should make every effort to explain garbage dumping to the children before they begin a family dialogue at all. A danger is that a child garbage dumps

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anyway and a parent points it out, not deliberately perhaps, but damage is done to the confidence to share. We can be gentle and comment that we should focus on the good and positive.

d. Non-verbal is important in the dialogue, too. Holding hands and eye contact, facial expressions or body language are all part of the way we communicate.

S - SELECT: There are many ways to do this.

Try them and discover what is right for your family:

1. Select the question from the family's activities. (HDIFA us on the picnic?)
2. Select the question from the family's experiences. (HDIFA us on Christmas?)
3. Select the question from the family's moods. (HDIFA us as a family when we all feel edgy or resentful with each other?)
4. The question may come out of the last week's dialogue.
5. The question may come from scripture. We can use the Sunday scripture, or a line or two from it. All members of the family might want a turn at choosing the scripture passage to use, as well as the question.
6. When we select the question may vary from time to time. We may select right after a family dialogue, or we might wait until we are ready to family dialogue again. If the question is chosen before hand, it may be put on the refrigerator or bulletin board. We should be aware in this section of WEDS and in all the other sections of the diversity that is possible in family dialogue, and the diversity that may occur among the different families that try family dialogue. We are unique as families, too.

III. THE 90-DAY GUARANTEE:

This is a possibility that families may use. Try family dialogue for 90 days - once a week for 90 days.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS to help couples in their preparation for FAMILY DIALOGUE:

1. What do I/we want to gain from family dialogue?
2. Do I/we want to change (control, manipulate) our children?
3. Is my/our goal deepening family relationships or problem solving?
4. How does family dialogue fit into God's plan for our family?
5. How do I/we apply God's plan to our family?
6. What am I/are we willing to sacrifice for the success of our family dialogues?

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"Dialogue Questions for Couples Preparing for Family Dialogue"

1. What are your best qualities as a parent? WAMF
2. What are my best qualities as a parent? WAMF
3. What quality as a parent do I most envy in you? WAMF
4. What is my attitude toward discipline? WAMF
5. What is my attitude toward punishment? WAMF
6. Which of our children do I defend most often? WAMF
7. WAMF when you correct or discipline that child?
8. WAMP when one of our children confides in you alone?
9. Which of our children (at home) (away from home) most needs our help and understanding? WAMF
10. Which of our children am I the most proud of? WAMF
11. Which of our children do I feel closest to ? WAMF
12. Which of our children is my favorite? WAMF
13. Which of our children am I the least proud of? WAMF
14. In what ways do I feel superior to you as a parent? WAMF
15. What is my greatest privacy as a parent? WAMF
16. What do I want most for our children? WAMF

Note: It is a good idea to take all the questions from your original weekend and dialogue on them in the context of your relationship as parents.

Questions for Family Dialogue

1. What was my most exciting feeling today? DFLD
2. What was the most meaningful experience that I had today? HDIMMF
3. If Jesus came to our house for a 24 hour visit how would I feel? DFLD
4. HDIFA being unforgiving?
5. HDIF being unforgiven?
6. HDIFA the love I bring to our family?
7. HDIFA being part of this family?
8. HDIF when someone in our family helps me?
9. HDIF when a friend helps me?
10. HDIFA when I receive a compliment from someone in our family?
11. HDIF when I receive a compliment from someone outside our family?
12. What is the meaning of Christmas to me? WAMFAMA
13. What is the meaning of Lent to me? WAMFAMA
14. What is the meaning of Easter to me? WAMFAMA
15. What is the meaning of Thanksgiving to me? WAMFAMA
16. What is the meaning of my birthday to me? HDIFAMA
17. What is the meaning of our anniversary/of Mom and Dad's Anniversary to me WAMFAMA
18. WAMF as a new school year begins?

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19. WAMFA attending Church on Sunday?
20. What is my best quality? WAMFAMA
21. What do I like best about our family? WAMFAMA
22. WAMFA Grandma coming to live with us? (after decision was made) or any decision that had been made in the family.
23. WAMFA the first five years of my life?
24. WAMF when I'm asked to cut back or do without?
25. WAMFA belonging to this family?
26. WAMFA family dialogue?
27. WAMF when Jesus says to us, "Unless you become as little children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven?"
28. What are the things I am most thankful for this Thanksgiving? HDIFAMA
29. What is the most important thing that has happened to me this week?
WAMFAMA
30. WAMFA our family as it is right now?
31. WAMFA Christmas this year?
32. "Over all these virtues put on love which binds the rest together." What do these words mean to me and WAMF?
33. WAMFA (Child's name) becoming more independent?
34. When do I feel closest to all of you? WAMF
35. Our goal is family unity. What does it mean to me? How are we doing?
WAMFAMA
36. What are a few things I like to do with our family? WAMF
37. WAMFA Lent this year?
38. WAMFA us/you (parents) being out 2-3 nights a week?
39. WAMFA the privacy of my room?
40. What do I hope for next summer, how does that affect our family? WAMF
41. What do I want most out of life? WAMF
42. What has been my most painful experience in this family this past week? WAMF
43. What do I like to do best without the family? WAMF
44. WAMFA Easter this year?
45. WAMFA Springtime in our family?
46. WAMA sharing our family dialogue?
47. What do you like most about our family? WAMFAMA
48. What do you dislike about our family life? WAMFAMA
49. How do I feel when our parents show their love for each other in front of us? (husband and wife: How do I feel when we are loving in our children's presence?)
50. How do I feel when we pray together as a family at meal time?
51. How do I feel when we go to church together?
52. How do I feel when we are all having dinner together?
53. What do I think you add most to our family life?
54. What is the possession I have that I like best? WAMFAMA