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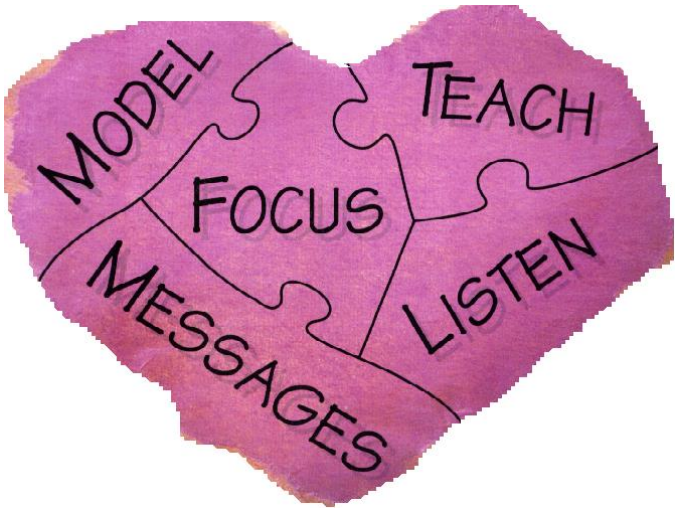
Creating Wellness with our Families and Communities



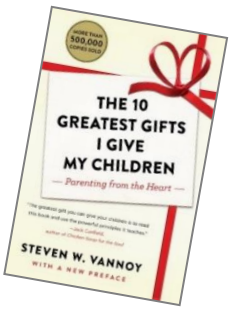
Creating Wellness with Our Families and Communities

Consider sharing and exploring these questions with your family and with members of your community.

- What is important to you about your family?
- How are you already creating a strong family?
- Where are opportunities to build a stronger family?
- What are 1 or 2 shifts that will make your family happier and healthier? Why?
- In families that you care about, what are 1 or 2 shifts that would make these families stronger?
- How would you like to serve these families?
- Why is that important? What difference might that make in their children's lives?
- What difference will it make when you are able to help other families?
- What are 1 or 2 things you are committed to doing to move the vision you just created forward?

Tools for Building Wellness in Families

Concepts taken from The 10 Greatest Gifts I Give My Children, by Steven W. Vannoy



On the following pages, you will find strategies and resources to create stronger families and communities. You have our permission to copy the materials in ***The 10 Greatest Gifts*** section of this workbook and share it with others to create wellness in the world. One request: write us and share what you are doing and the impact it is having on your family and community!

Verus Global Inc.
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5 Powerful Parenting Tools

FOCUS

What if the very thing we are doing to teach our kids to be responsible citizens is backfiring?

Since children are not born knowing the difference between responsible and irresponsible, why do they seem to act irresponsibly so often?

I used to think my job as a parent was to take all the responsibility for my kid's problems – to have all the answers, and always to point out their mistakes and shortcomings. What I did not know then was that *a person can only focus on one thing at a time* and *we go toward our focus.* If we keep reminding a child of how shy or irresponsible she is, that behavior will become her pattern.

Why is it that as our children are learning to walk we cheer their every step, but as they grow older we hover around waiting to point out every misstep?

Here is what happened when I used the **Focus tool** in a new way.

My seven-year-old daughter Alison was morose as we rode up the ski lift one sunny Saturday. She had just made a nearly disastrous run down the slope, full of bumps and falls and awkwardness. She was down on herself and so, of course, her skiing got worse and worse. I was being a good "old" dad, making notes on all the things she was doing wrong (which would ensure she would still be focusing on those things and doing more of them). I could have given her a whole lot of "don'ts" - - don't lean that way, don't use your inside ski, but that would have had her focusing on things that didn't work.

Instead, I simply reminded her: "Do you remember what you were doing a couple of weeks ago when the ski instructor said you were the best student in the class?" Her next run was magnificent as she focused on what worked and how to do more of it.

One of the biggest revelations for me was to understand that I was helping to perpetuate my children's misbehavior. I was constantly focusing on their problems and trying to fix them. For example, when their rooms were messy, I did not tell them they were bad or use stern consequences. I just repeatedly told them to clean up their room. The message they got was that they were messy kids, that they could not take care of themselves, and that I would own the responsibility for the problem.

If what we don't want our children to do is what we have them focused on, and they *can only focus on one thing at a time*, and they *go toward their focus* - - what have we been teaching them all these years?

Here is a suggestion. Every day, find one desirable behavior to compliment - - how nicely they buckle up without a reminder, how well they listened to someone's story at dinnertime, one toy picked up - - whatever. Be specific and sincere and you will soon notice that child focusing on and heading toward that desired behavior.

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MESSAGES

Did someone you know grow up with messages like these?

- Do you think money grows on trees?
- Why don't you use your head? You never stop to think.
- Where did you get a silly idea like that?
- You are driving me crazy!

There are really only two kinds of messages. Ones that either hurt or diminish a child -- or ones that empower. Here is an example of two mothers I saw in the grocery store one day.

One mother was sorting through a pile of apples, choosing the ones she liked best. Her young son reached out from the child's seat in the grocery cart and picked up one he liked to add to the sack. His mother yelled: "Don't touch. I'll choose. That one doesn't look very good to me. Stay still. Do not argue with me. I'll spank you if you keep touching stuff."

What were the messages the child got? I think they were things like, "Don't be curious. I'm in charge. Your opinion is not important. You cannot think. I am not interested in what you have to say. You are a bad kid."

Another mother just a few feet away was also looking at some produce. Her young daughter reached out from the cart to touch some broccoli. She was entranced by the vegetable's odd surface. She asked why it was like that. Her mother responded: "Do you have any ideas why it is so knobby? No? I don't either, but let's find out when we go to the library next time." This mom's messages were loud and clear: "I am glad you're curious. I value your opinion and ideas. Think creatively. Let's figure out how to find an answer. You are a good kid."

And, of course, not all messages are verbal. A pat, a hug, a smile - - all offer helpful love messages. Frowning, rolling our eyes, a spank or turning away only reinforce in children how bad we think they are or how much we disapprove of them - - keeping them focused on the undesirable behavior and practically insuring they continue it since we *go toward what we focus on*.

With the **Focus tool**, I suggested you find one desirable behavior in your child to compliment each day. You can enhance just about any quality you want in your children when you find it and acknowledge it with appropriate messages. Do you want your children to have the gift of patience, responsibility, caring, and honesty? What a difference you can make if you always treat your children not as they might be at that moment, but as you know they can be.

As author Matthew Fox said so beautifully, "Unhealthy families remind each other of their failings; healthy families remind each other of their goodness."

Here is a suggestion for using this tool. Take a moment to taste your words before you spit them out. Ask yourself, "What is the real message I am about to send?" A mother in one of our programs summed up this concept so well when she said, "If I do not want to hear it, I do not want to say it."

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TEACH

How many times have you heard yourself say, "If I've told you once, I have told you a thousand times!" But, then, how effective is TELLING our kids what to do, where to go, when to study, what to say? One of the gifts I consistently hear parents say they want for their children is the ability to make wise decisions, to think for themselves. Yet if we are always telling our children what to do, can they ever learn to think for themselves? And what are the messages we are really giving our children - - or anyone - - when we are always telling them what to do? What they are really hearing is, "I'm the boss, you are not as important. You can't think, I have to take all the responsibility here."

I would like to suggest that instead of trying to teach our children by telling, giving orders, or insisting they do things a certain way, that we instead ask questions. But not the type of questions it seems almost every family uses most of the time - - questions like, "Why did you do that?" "Did you remember your lunch money?" "Why haven't you gotten all your homework done?" Or, "Who's responsible for this mess?"

Those are all *backward-focused questions*. You can recognize them because they focus on what is wrong, on who is to blame or to point out - - subtly or otherwise - - why I think you screwed up. They hurt. They are the kinds of questions that teach our children how to lie because they need to defend themselves. They are questions that rip families apart.

Instead, try using *forward focus questions*. *Forward focus questions* help us look ahead to solutions instead of focusing on problems; they help our kids think through natural consequences, and help them find their own best solution to a situation. When kids come up with their own answer, they own it and use their own internal commitment to ensure that behavior. (After all, when is the last time you rebelled against one of your own good ideas?)

These are questions like: "What is the best thing that happened today?" "How did you learn to do that? Would you teach me?" "What do you think is the best way to handle this?" "What will likely happen if you do that? Are those the results you want most?" "What would be the value of that option?" Here is what happened to one family that had been completely frustrated with a common family situation.

We used to use time-outs all the time with our little girls. It was frustrating because they just did not work. Now we use questions. If our preschooler bites or hits the baby, for example, we ask, "What should we do about what just happened? How do you think the baby feels about what happened?" She will answer with something like, "I was angry at her," or "I don't like her." We listen, honor feelings and then ask again what we should do about it since hitting and biting are not acceptable ways to show anger.

The questions let her be part of the solution. When we were punitive with time-outs, she usually became angrier than ever and repeated the behavior. Now she thinks of other things to do. After this, she will go over and comfort the baby and give her a hug - - on her own and not because I suggested it.

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LISTEN

There is research about the simple act of listening with our families that I find pretty frightening. The first study found that the average family spends just 30 seconds a day actually listening to their children. Another study found that 20% of 6th to 12th graders had not had a 10-minute conversation with a parent in over a month.

I thought I talked to my kids a lot more than these studies suggest, but I quickly realized the emphasis was on my TALKING, not my listening. Listening seems like it ought to be one of the easiest things to do, but I realize that most times when I acted like I was listening I really was not.

Except while driving in the car, we know eye contact is an important first step in listening. But, even if we maintain steady eye contact with someone, we are still not really listening until we actually hear what he or she is saying. I did not even have the steady eye contact handled because I was doing the dishes or reading the paper or still typing at my computer while my girls were talking to me. A cordless phone made it even easier to be doing something else when I called them.

Truly listening means listening until the person is finished, paying attention to their nonverbal clues, and most importantly, not planning your response until the other person is finished talking. All too often our listening to children means responses filled with advice, mini-lectures, moralizing or arguing with what they have to say. What kind of message do we leave with our children when we always have a better idea? Research has shown that you have a far greater impact on people by how you listen than by what you say. When we take the time to truly listen, we give such life-enhancing gifts to our children.

We validate their feelings.

How real can children feel if it seems that we never hear them? What kind of messages are they getting when responses to their statements go like this?

> "I'm not hungry." "Eat your dinner now."
> "I don't like my brother." "You've got to like him, he's your brother."
> "I'm not sleepy." "Get into that bed and go to sleep."

We enhance self-esteem.

When we truly listen we are acknowledging that they have something important to say, and that we value their opinion.

We encourage their problem-solving skills as we hear out their solutions to an issue.

We foster their creativity as we let them recreate a scene.

We all know that if we are not listening, our children simply stop talking to us beyond asking for the gravy or to find out where the TV remote is. One of the best ways to get them talking again is to ask *forward focus questions*. Then to truly listen to their answers, even if only for a few minutes each day. It is a powerful tool to bring joy and closeness to our families.

It is a major complaint of people from dysfunctional families - - they were never allowed to have real feelings. They grew up distrusting their own sense of the world and themselves.

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MODEL

A mother who attended one of our programs recalled how one day she was screaming at the kids for some problem when she suddenly noticed their dog cowering behind the toilet as the waves of shrieking rolled over him. Goodness, she thought, if the dog is reacting like that, how must I sound to my children? It was at that moment she realized how important we as parents are as models for how we want our children to be.

I wonder how many of you think that many of today's kids decide what is right and what is wrong based on whether or not they get caught. If that is so, what messages are they getting from us when they see us speeding, or hear us on the phone giving a phony reason why we do not want to do something, or fudging on our income tax? If that is the case, can we ever have enough police or jails?

Another mom discovered that her 13-year-old son was lying about his age so he could still get into the movies for the children's price. She made sure he heard plenty about honestly from both her and his dad. The next week her son accompanied her to the transmission shop where her car had been towed when it broke down the day before. The mechanic presented them with the bad news: It would take at least $2000 to fix the car. But the good news was that it was a repair that would be covered under the warranty. The really bad news was that the warranty had expired the week before.

"Don't worry," the mechanic said. "I can fudge the date on the work order by a few days so it would come under warranty." The mother agreed immediately.

As they were leaving the shop, her son turned and asked, "So, Mom, is there a $2000 limit on honesty?"

Bottom line, we are constantly modeling life to our children, shaping a majority of their behaviors, attitudes, mannerisms, speech patterns, and problem-solving techniques - - the list is endless.

We are the ones who create their operations manual for life. But are we doing that in the old unconscious "zombie" way or the "new" way of being consciously aware of what we are doing all the time? Modeling is one of the most important, yet simple, parenting tools. It is a tool that keeps working even when you are not around because your children see how your life is working, and what kind of results you create by the way you live.

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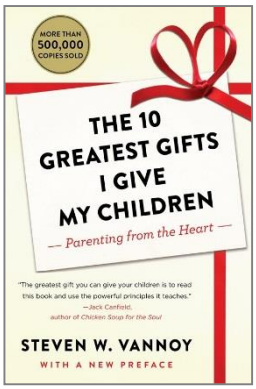
Free Study Guide for

The 10 Greatest Gifts I Give My Children



Here's your free study guide outline. You can use this with your book club or church study groups for ***The 10 Greatest Gifts I Give My Children***.

Getting Started:

As the organizer of the group, you will need to make a copy of this guide for each member. The suggested group size is 3 to 20, and the time frame is 4-6 meetings, 2-3 hours per meeting. You can add members as you go along, but it is better not to add anyone after the second session unless the whole group wants to review for the sake of the new arrivals.

Group Coordinator:

This study guide is designed to have a group leader for each session. Their job during each session is to arrange and confirm location, attendance, refreshments, and lead the discussion group. The group leader recognizes each speaker, and makes sure the discussion stays on the subject for that session. Their goal is to honor the person talking, and support their efforts at home as well as sharing with the group.

We find that the groups that work best use forward focus questions (see Chapter 1) to avoid a teaching or telling style which can shut down sharing. The goal is to create a very supportive, warm, positive environment where people truly get excited about the potential and success of their family. Everyone is welcome to share their own experiences, ideas and stories. The session leader and the group are on the same team, sharing in the opportunity to help one another, each family and the community.

The Goal:

As each participant begins to share ideas and stories with other parents, an amazing phenomenon happens. Each person gains a sense of authority over the ideas presented, making the ideas his or her own. This improves family life and positively affects their own personal growth in career and interpersonal relationships. Placing blame or feeling powerless is replaced by taking responsibility for enhancing self, home and community. This ultimately leads to the realization that EACH PERSON TRULY CAN MAKE A VITAL DIFFERENCE!

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First Session: Introduction

Operating Guidelines

Ask your group members to set up the rules of your meetings. The group leader will ask the Study Guide questions and recognize each member who wishes to speak. To keep everyone participating, the group Llader should:

- ALWAYS USE FORWARD FOCUS QUESTIONS (see Chapter 1) to focus the group on solutions rather than dwelling on the problem.
- GIVE EACH SPEAKER YOUR UNDIVIDED ATTENTION AND LISTEN to what he/she has to say. If necessary, put a time limit on speakers to give everyone a chance to speak.
- REALIZE THAT THIS IS NOT A DEBATE about what is right or wrong. This is a sharing of ideas, questions, and success stories among participants.

The following questions keep the group on the front side of the Energy Map/Energy Circle (see pg. 43):

- Share the names and ages of your children, and something you value most about your family.
- What is your objective in joining the group?
- How do you expect this to benefit your family (community/organization)?
- Think back to the first time you met your kids. What were your dreams for them then?
- What qualities and values did you want them to grow up with? What are your dreams for them now?
- What is the value of giving these gifts to your family?

Sessions 2 - 6: The Tools

FORWARD FOCUS, MESSAGES, TEACH, LISTEN, MODEL

Ask the following questions for each of the five tools, and share your successes in using them:

- How have you used this tool in the past? In the last week?
- What is the cost of doing it the old way? What is the benefit of doing it the new way?
- What are the gifts (qualities and values) you are giving your family in using this tool?
- Create and share your plan focusing more of this tool.

Session 7: Review of Tools

- What has been the greatest revelation or idea you have gotten from reading the book?
- Where are you applying it? (Share a brief story if possible.)
- What do all 5 tools have in common?
    - They are parenting from the heart. This is the way we all want to be treated and treat others.
    - They are all about giving, not about controlling or winning or fixing.
    - They can be used to handle situations in a way that gets the job done, and also gives priceless lifetime gifts of qualities and values.

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Session 8: The Gifts

- In your words, how would you describe each of these gifts?
- What are some ways that you are already giving these gifts to your family?
- What is the value of these gifts to your life now... and when your children grow up?
- How does each of the tools work to nurture these gifts?
- In small groups: Create and present to the full group plans to nurture more of these gifts using all five of the tools.

Celebration of Family:

Now that you have all spent this time together, you may want to have a celebration potluck dinner and include all the kids! You may also want to consider getting together again in 3 to 6 months just to keep in touch. Some of you may be so inspired that you want to suggest a new study group to some of your other friends and family or church group.

Additional Resources

Verus Global website – *www.verusglobal.com/family-non-profit*

Click on the Family & Non-Profit tab at the top of the home page for:

- Parenting articles
- Free 30-page Study Guide as a companion to the book, ***The 10 Greatest Gifts I Give My Children***
- Homeward Bound stories from participants
- Tips for Home and School

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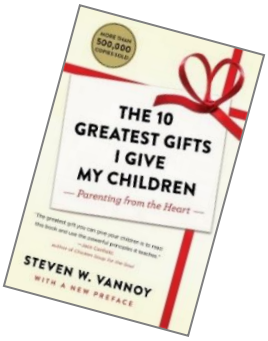

The 10 Greatest Gifts I Give My Children, by Steven W. Vannoy (paperback)

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3-9 copies for $12.95/each

10+ copies for $10.95/each

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