

Parent Wellness COMPASS

Outfitting for the Journey



Holly Hughes Stoner, LMFT & D. Scott Stoner, LMFT

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and D. Scott Stoner, LMFT

We have created a complimentary, downloadable *Companion Journal* pdf to accompany this book.

To find out more and to order: ParentWellnessCompass.org

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Questions? Email us: holly@samaritanfamilywellness.org or scott@samaritanfamilywellness.org

We wish to make it clear that this book is educational and inspirational in nature and in no way constitutes mental health advice or therapy. If what you read in this book raises concerns for you that might best be addressed by a mental health professional or parenting expert, we recommend you contact a local family therapist directly or contact your physician for a referral. The website for the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (www.aamft.org) provides a helpful resource for locating a licensed marriage and family therapist in your area. Seeking help when needed is always a sign of strength, and shows healthy commitment both to the well-being of ourselves and our families.

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The Samaritan Family Wellness Foundation—a foundation committed to supporting and enriching the well-being of youth, parents, and families—was created with a generous gift from Ab and Nancy Nicholas. While Ab passed away in 2016, their generous support continues to inspire us and make this resource possible.



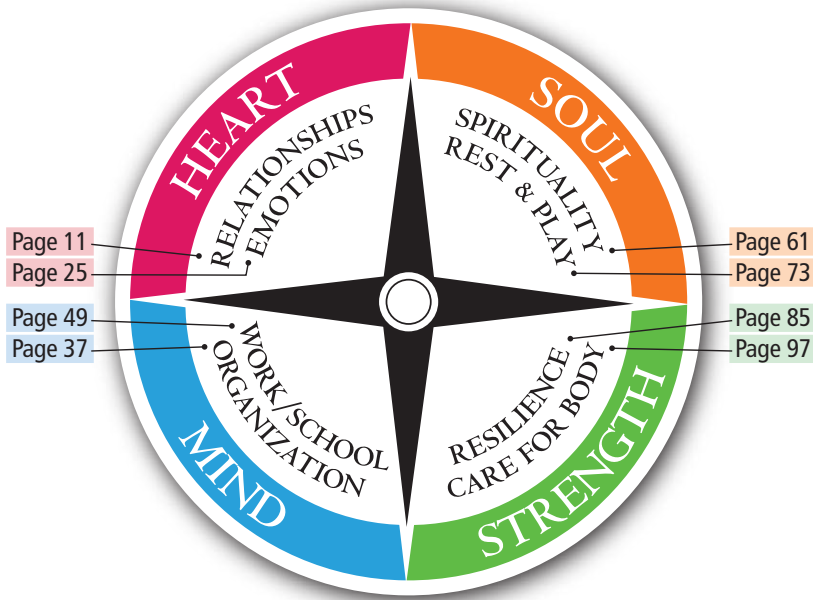
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Around the Kitchen Table

If it were possible, we would invite each one of you to come over to our house to sit around our kitchen table. There we'd share a cup of coffee or tea with you as we discussed the joys and challenges of raising a family. We'd offer a conversation about parenting as fellow travelers, as people who have been on this journey of parenthood for over three decades. We would share with you what we have learned about life and about ourselves in the process, and we would be enriched by your sharing the same. We would also share with you some of the wisdom we have learned in our work as marriage and family therapists from the thousands of parents and families who have trusted us with their stories. A great deal of family life happens around the kitchen table, and so it's only fitting to share this as an image of where we would like to sit with each of you as we discuss together what matters most in our lives.

The kitchen table is also a good place to gather with our neighbors and with other parents—a place where we can both offer and receive support. We hope that the reflections in this book can serve as jumping off points for discussions within your family, and with other parents. We hope groups of parents will want to gather together and discuss the ideas presented in this book and how they can best be applied and lived out in their own families.



We gave up long ago any notion that there is such a thing as a perfect parent or a perfect child. What there are instead, are simply real parents with real children in real families who are all trying to do the best they can. We have discovered that one of the greatest challenges we face as parents is not just raising our children, but raising ourselves into greater maturity. There is nothing like becoming a parent to call forth our own need to grow and mature into the kind of people and role models we want to be for our children.

We, along with our children, are sure to lose our balance or get off course more than a few times, but we will keep picking ourselves up, determined and committed to head in the direction we desire for ourselves and our families. Because, in the end, there is no greater gift in life than the joy and the journey of being a parent and living together as a family.

So, pull up a chair and let's get the conversation started. We are glad you are here.

Holly and Scott Stoner

The Journey Begins: Finding Our Way in the Wilderness

The first time we took our three children on a wilderness canoe trip, our son was thirteen and our twin daughters were ten. We had enjoyed car camping as a family, but this was our first camping trip by canoe. We used the services of a local outfitter to set us up with our canoes, food, and all the necessary camping equipment, including, most importantly, a compass and a good set of maps. We then entered the Boundary Waters Canoe Wilderness Area, located on the border of Northern Minnesota, a wilderness park only accessible by canoe.

It was a windy day and we worried about our canoes capsizing as we crossed the lake to our campsite for the first night. We made it safely across the lake, but as we pulled onto shore and stepped out of the canoes, those of us in the first canoe lost our balance, capsized the boat, and dumped the entire contents of our canoe. There is nothing quite like starting your children’s first wilderness canoe trip with half the clothes, food, and sleeping bags soaking wet, but we all persevered.

Trying to put a positive frame around our misadventure, we told our kids that overcoming setbacks was part of the fun of a canoe camping trip. As you can guess, they weren’t buying it. Fortunately, there were several hours of sunlight left in the day for us to have fun, and the winds remained high, which allowed most of our things to dry out before bedtime. Hot cocoa and roasted marshmallows around the campfire also worked wonders for our spirits.

That first wilderness canoe trip lasted three days. Over the years, our canoe camping trips became more adventurous and we went on longer trips into the some of the most remote sections of northern Minnesota and the Canadian wilderness of Quetico Provincial Park. We visited places where we saw more moose than people, and where we could drink the water right out of the lake without first filtering or boiling.

Our children are now adults, and we have been blessed to be grandparents to two little boys. We still take canoe camping trips into the Quetico wilderness in northwest Ontario, and are happy to report that it has been several years since we last capsized a canoe. Through the years our canoe trips have changed depending on who comes with us and how challenging a trip we want to take. Some trips have focused primarily on fishing, while others have focused on photography, reading, and just soaking in the spiritual refreshment of the natural world.

And while the trips have changed, one thing has remained constant: We always take a good compass and a good set of maps. There are no marked portages, campsites, or signs of any kind in the two-million-acre Quetico wilderness area, and without a compass and maps, anyone could easily get lost. In fact, on several of these trips, we were asked to assist others who had lost their bearings, weren’t sure how to follow their compass, and did not know where they were on the map.

Ways To Use This Book

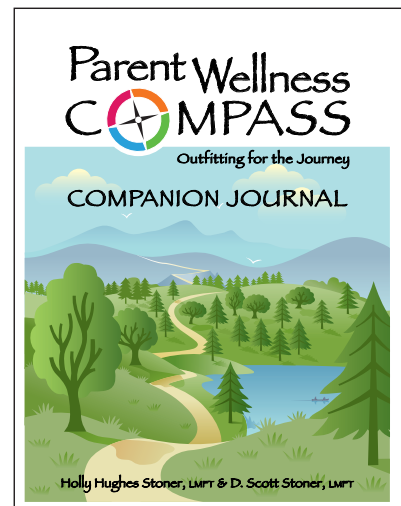
The material is designed to be read carefully and reflectively. Don't rush. Read it slowly at a pace that allows you to pause and reflect on what you are reading, and that gives you time to apply what you are learning.

More important than the pace you choose for reading is the mindset with which you approach this book. We encourage you to approach each reading with intention and purpose. Choose a time and place when you can give the reading your full attention. Setting aside a few minutes to sit and quietly read and reflect on your life as a parent is a gift to you, a gift your family needs and deserves. Additionally, you may want to use a journal (see below) or a notebook to write any thoughts you have as you read the reflections and respond to the questions in each chapter's "Making It Personal" section. These notes may be very helpful weeks and even months down the road.

There is no right way to use this book. You must discover the way that is right for you. Reflections can be reread over time, knowing that each time you read them you will be in a different place on your parenting journey, and they will mean something new to you.

Parent Wellness Compass Companion Journal

If you prefer not to write in this book, or find that you need more space, we have created a companion journal that you can download from our website: ParentWellnessCompass.org. This is a free, interactive, downloadable pdf that you can download and print, or fill out right on your phone, tablet, or computer. This journal contains all of the questions from the "Making it Personal" sections from every chapter, with plenty of writing space following each reflection question. We have also included NEXT Steps worksheet pages that you can use to create NEXT Steps (see following page to learn about NEXT Steps). If you have any questions, please contact us.



Parent Wellness Compass: A Brief Overview

The Four Compass Points

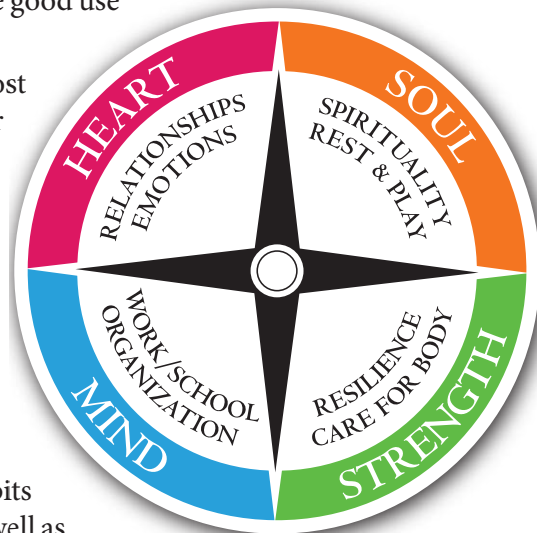
The “Compass” points toward the four dimensions of our being: *heart, soul, strength, and mind*. These dimensions are interconnected and our lives are intricately woven together. Much like an ecosystem, each area is affected by the other areas of the compass; therefore, whatever impacts one dimension of our lives (positively or negatively) impacts the other dimensions. A change in one area of our lives impacts the other areas.

Within the four points of the Parent Wellness Compass, we will provide a set of maps for understanding eight areas of family wellness. These maps will help you to better understand yourself as a parent while, at the same time, helping you to better understand your children and your family as a whole.

Eight Areas of Parent and Family Wellness

We are not compartmentalized people. The *Parent Wellness Compass* is based on the premise that parent and family wellness is a multidimensional phenomenon that requires us to take care of and nurture ourselves, and our families, in all eight areas identified on the compass. Here are the eight areas of wellness we address in this book:

- **Relationships.** The ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.
- **Handling Emotions.** The ability to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy way.
- **Organization.** The ability to keep track of and make good use of possessions, money, and time.
- **Work and School.** The ability to get the most out of employment, educational, and volunteer opportunities.
- **Spirituality.** The development and practice of a strong personal value system and a meaningful purpose in life.
- **Rest and Play.** The ability to balance work, school, and play and to renew oneself.
- **Stress Resilience.** The ability to deal positively with the adversities of life.
- **Care for the Body.** The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being, as well as the ability to end unhealthy ones.



What is a NEXT Step?

A NEXT Step is just that, the next step you feel ready to take based on a goal you set, inspired by what you learned by reading the reflections, and any whispers you may be hearing. After reading each reflection, you may or may not feel the need to create a NEXT Step. You know better than anyone what you and your family need. We are simply offering an invitation to make a change if you feel the need to do so.

A NEXT Step is based on an acronym that stands for *Needed*, *EXcited*, and *Time-specific*.

Needed means that you have a felt need to take this step. It relates to something you have wanted to do, something you know would be good for you and your family. *EXcited* means that you are positively motivated to take this step—you want to take this step, as opposed to being motivated by a feeling that you “should” or “have to” take this step. *Time-specific* means that you will take your step right away or within the next several days. It’s the difference between saying, “Someday I’m going to get our morning routines more organized,” and “Starting tomorrow, I’m going to get up fifteen minutes earlier than usual and prepare a simple breakfast before the kids get up.”

N Needed . . .

. . . means the step addresses a felt need that you have.

For example: “For several months now I have been feeling the need to set a screen curfew on in our house, a time each school night when all screens are to be turned off.”

EX EXcited . . .

. . . means the motivation for doing the step is positive—I “want” to do this rather than I “should” or “have to.”

For example: “I am looking forward to our having more time to connect as a family, and also everyone getting to bed earlier.”

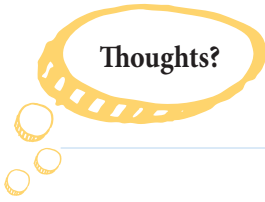
T Time-specific . . .

. . . means I will do my NEXT Step at this time, or within a specific time frame.

For example: “I am going to start the conversation about a nightly screen curfew tonight. We will discuss reasons and work out the details and for this new rule over the next several nights and then we will start the screen curfew Monday.”

Sharing your NEXT Steps with one another is a great idea: another parent, a family member, or a friend. If you are reading this book with a group, share your NEXT Steps with each other. You will inspire and learn from each other as you do this, plus you will become a built-in support system for each other as you put your NEXT Steps into practice.

Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



A series of horizontal blue lines for writing, overlaid with a large, semi-transparent illustration of the Parent Wellness Compass. The compass is a circular diagram divided into four quadrants by a central grey compass rose. Each quadrant is labeled with a domain and associated concepts:

- HEART** (top-left, pink arc): RELATIONSHIPS, EMOTIONS
- SOUL** (top-right, orange arc): SPIRITUALITY, REST & PLAY
- MIND** (bottom-left, blue arc): WORK/SCHOOL ORGANIZATION
- STRENGTH** (bottom-right, green arc): RESILIENCE, CARE FOR BODY

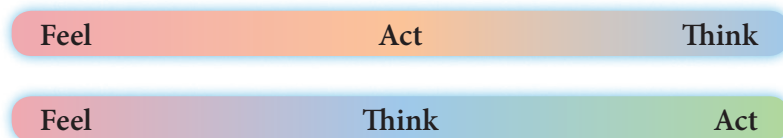
Standing In Love

There is a lot of emphasis on the feelings associated with love and new relationships. Falling in love gets all the attention, whether it is the romantic thrill of falling in love, the indescribable love felt around a newborn baby, the initial delight of making a new friend, or the excitement of starting a dream job. Everything tends to flow freely and easily in the initial stages of a relationship. Over time, however, as the initial “buzz” subsides, it is inevitable that imperfections, conflicts, and challenges will arise. This is when we have to shift our focus from “falling in love” to “standing in love.”

What does it mean to stand in love? Most importantly it means that we realize that healthy relationships require conscious and intentional effort to remain strong and vital. Feelings ebb and flow in all relationships, so it is essential to remember that love is not just a feeling. Love is primarily a decision. When an exhausted parent gets up for the third night in a row to care for a sick child, that act of love is as much a decision as it is a feeling. Love is not just a matter of the heart, but also an act of the will. To stand in love means that we are able to remember how important the relationships are in our families, and then to act intentionally in ways that will grow and strengthen those relationships, no matter how we are feeling in any given moment or circumstance.

Standing in love means that we ground our relationships in the core values of trust, integrity, honesty, commitment, generosity, and kindness. We commit to act out of these core values at all times, not just when we feel like it. When our goal is to create loving relationships and to “stand in love,” we are choosing to be intentional about how we relate with one another.

The graphic below illustrates a concrete way we can be intentional about allowing the belief that love is primarily a decision and an act of the will to guide us.



The first sequence: **Feel** → **Act** → **Think** describes a reactive pattern in relationships, which will likely produce conflict, as any overtired parent who has “lost it” with their child well knows. In this pattern, we experience a strong feeling and immediately act or, more accurately, react. Only after hurtful comments or actions have occurred do we think about or realize what we have said or done.

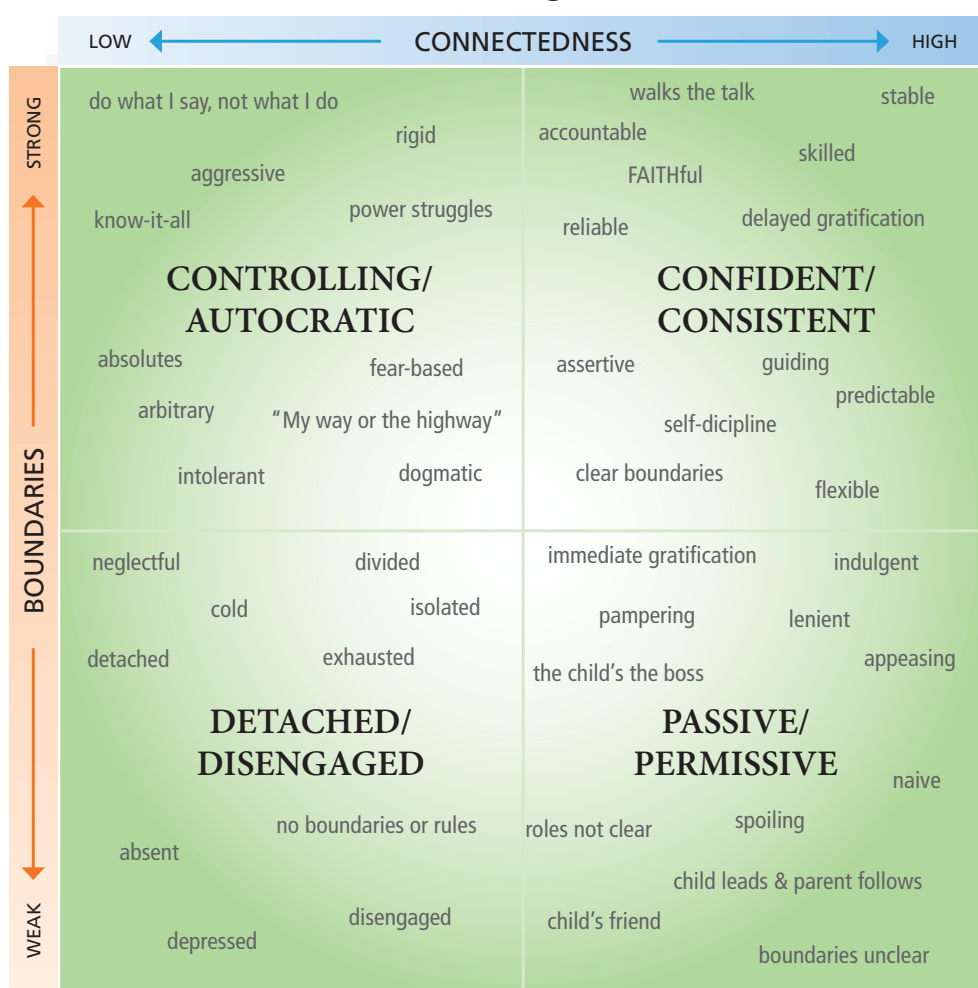
The second sequence is the hallmark of healthy relationships: **Feel** → **Think** → **Act**. Here, when we experience a strong feeling, instead of reacting immediately, we hit our personal “pause” button to stop and think about the action we want to take. We can then choose a response that will both express our feelings *and* honor the relationship with the other person. This style of relating is based on thoughtful responding rather than impulsive reacting, and is a very important tool for building and maintaining loving relationships.

Voice Training for Parents

Singers have years of voice training to help them strengthen the capacity, expand the range, and improve the clarity of their voices, which gives them the ability to perform with more clarity and confidence.

It turns out there is another group of people for whom having a clear and confident voice is essential, and that's parents. Every day, parents make decisions—both big and small—about how to respond to their children and, over time, those responses become their voice. Any one interaction may not seem like much in the short run, but in the long run habits form, and our relationships are either strengthened or strained based on these routine interactions. Little things do mean a lot for us as parents.

Four Parenting Voices



Making it Personal

Do you recognize one of the four parenting voices described here as your primary voice as a parent? If so, are you comfortable with your voice?

Sometimes parents shift to a less nurturing and effective parenting voice when things are stressful. How does your parenting voice shift when you or your child are stressed?

If you are parenting your children with another parent, you may find that you have different parenting voices. This is not uncommon. Talking about parenting voices and being intentional about what message you want to send to your family is important. What could you two do to work more closely together?

Can you identify your parent's voice in your voice with your children? Are you satisfied with that? Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now around your voice as a parent? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 21.

they have won a game or when they have lost a game?” Children quickly understand that if we are not careful, we can easily take out our struggles, worries, or disappointments on each other. What we want to teach and model for our children is that the very time we are most stressed or unhappy is the very moment we need to turn toward one another for support and comfort. As it turns out, that is just what we learned on that Canadian canoe trip; things work better when we remember we are all in the same boat—together.

Making it Personal

Do you remember a time when a “storm” divided you as a family and you turned against one another, even if just temporarily? How might you have avoided that?

Do you remember a time when a “storm” brought you closer together as a family and you turned toward one another for support and strength? How did you make that happen?

What makes the difference for you and your family as to when you are able to turn toward one another in the midst of a “storm” rather than against one another? How can you create more of that going forward?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take that would help your family work better together? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 22.

in our belief that we are right and the issue is the fault of someone else. Choosing to have a hard conversation means that we may find out an uncomfortable truth, or that the other person has a considerably different perspective on the issue and that they believe it is we who have some important changes to make.

Significant growth and change requires risk and vulnerability from everyone involved. The good news is that when we are willing to have those difficult conversations, real change, or conversion, can occur. The word *conversation*, and the word *conversion* come from the same root words: *con*, which means “together,” and *versatio*, which means “to turn.” This serves as a good reminder that authentic conversations have the capacity to change us.

Making it Personal

Can you think of a time when you put off having an important conversation in your family and it ended up making the situation worse? Looking back, what could you have done differently?

Can you think of a time at home when you made the decision to have a difficult conversation and it made the situation better? Explain.

Is there a conversation in your family that you want to start right now, but are finding it difficult to do so? How can being brave enough to start the conversation help your family?

Is there a NEXT Step you would like to take now to start a conversation that needs to be started? To create a NEXT Step using our NEXT Step worksheet, go to p. 22.

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Healthy Relationships**



Reflection: *Standing In Love*

Date: _____

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
| EXcited: | |
| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Healthy Relationships**



Reflection: *Voice Training for Parents*

Date: _____

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
| EXcited: | |
| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Healthy Relationships**



Reflection: *All In the Same Boat*

Date: _____

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
| EXcited: | |
| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Healthy Relationships**

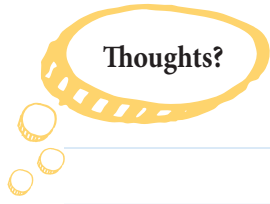


Reflection: *The Best Time to Start a Conversation*

Date: _____

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
| EXcited: | |
| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

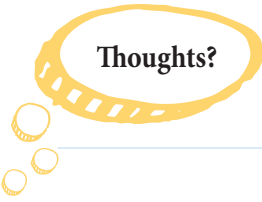
Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



A series of horizontal blue lines for writing, overlaid with a large, semi-transparent circular graphic. The graphic is a compass rose divided into four quadrants, each with a different color and associated text:

- HEART** (Pink quadrant): RELATIONSHIPS, EMOTIONS
- SOUL** (Orange quadrant): SPIRITUALITY, REST & PLAY
- MIND** (Blue quadrant): WORK/SCHOOL, ORGANIZATION
- STRENGTH** (Green quadrant): RESILIENCE, CARE FOR BODY

Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



A series of horizontal blue lines for writing, overlaid with a large, semi-transparent watermark of the Parent Wellness Compass. The compass is a circular diagram divided into four quadrants by a central cross. The quadrants are: top-left (pink) labeled "HEART" with sub-points "RELATIONSHIPS" and "EMOTIONS"; top-right (orange) labeled "SOUL" with sub-points "SPIRITUALITY" and "REST & PLAY"; bottom-left (blue) labeled "MIND" with sub-points "WORK/SCHOOL" and "ORGANIZATION"; and bottom-right (green) labeled "STRENGTH" with sub-points "RESILIENCE" and "CARE FOR BODY".

Rethinking Discipline

Years ago, Holly was involved in a discussion with some fellow teachers about how to handle student misbehavior. The discussion turned into a debate over which punishments would be most effective for certain recurring offenses. One teacher wisely pointed out that their primary job as educators was to teach, which is what discipline really means. In fact, she explained, the word “discipline” comes directly from the Latin word *disciplina*, which means “instruction given, teaching, learning, and knowledge.” This meaning was new to many of the teachers and this increased awareness began to shift their thinking.

In the end, the group agreed that their real goal was to teach the children to be self-disciplined and this meant more emphasis on instruction, and less on punishment. They decided as a staff to switch their thinking and discussion from what punishments were most appropriate to how they could best teach their students the following: the rules, why they were important, what good behavior looked like, and how they could be successful by following the rules. The teachers, of course, would still have consequences for misbehavior, but their main energy would go into teaching positive behavior. That shift in thinking was very helpful for Holly as a teacher, and for us both as parents.



Somewhere along the way—to almost everyone: teachers, parents, and to most of the world—discipline came to mean “to punish.” In the history of child-rearing, this was the norm. When a child did something wrong, they were punished with the hope that they would learn not to (or be afraid to) repeat the undesirable behavior. Thus, over time, many began to think the words were synonymous. Unfortunately, there were unintended negative consequences for thinking this way. Children withdrew from adults out of fear; they did not see adults as people to whom they could turn when they needed help. And, they did not learn what *to do* instead of what *not to do*.

Today we know so much more about children and what is positive and healthy for them. We know that children need respectful guidance, as well as to be loved and nurtured, to thrive, and they need boundaries to keep them safe. And they also need discipline. They need to be taught a million different things in order to live safely in the world, and they will learn best when they are taught what to

Inside Out: Feeling and Expressing the Full Range of Emotions

Imagine your emotions existing on a continuum, or a scale from zero to ten. Think of the emotions on the bottom end of the scale, zero to five, as the difficult or unpleasant emotions, such as fear, worry, anger, and sadness. Now think of the emotions at the top end of the scale, six to ten, as the pleasurable emotions, such as joy, laughter, love, and excitement. Right in the middle, at number five, is considered the neutral point, where we don't really feel much of anything, pleasant or unpleasant.

Here is an important insight: There is a strong connection between the degree to which we are comfortable feeling and expressing unpleasant emotions, and the degree to which we feel and express pleasurable emotions. Difficulty feeling and/or appropriately expressing unpleasant feelings usually means we will, perhaps surprisingly, have difficulty feeling and expressing positive feelings. While we know that we all have the full range of emotions, it is when we either tamp feelings down or let them explode that we get into trouble.

The best example we have of those who are comfortable expressing the full range of emotions is young children. Observe them at a playground: one moment they are shrieking with delight as they come down the slide, and the next moment they are sobbing loudly because they have fallen and skinned a knee. A moment later and we might see them angry at a child who will not share, and in another moment hugging that same child. It is easy and natural for children to live into all of their emotions.



There is a wonderful animated movie from Pixar, *Inside Out*, that depicts a young girl learning to handle the full range of her emotions. Eleven-year-old Riley is having a hard time when her family uproots itself from Minnesota and moves to California because of her father's new job. Riley becomes quite sad and angry because she misses her friends, school, and hockey team back in the Midwest. Riley's well-meaning parents don't like seeing her upset and so they repeatedly encourage her to "focus on the positive" and try to act happy even when she is not feeling that way on the inside.

The brilliance of this film is its portrayal of Riley's inner emotional life. Through the magic of animation, we are able to "see" inside Riley's brain where five characters representing five emotions—Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust—take turns controlling the "keyboard" of Riley's brain. Riley's

Emotional Bank Accounts

When you make a deposit in your checking or savings account, you receive a receipt that shows the current balance of your account. You can also go online and check the current balance of any accounts you have. If you have been making more deposits than withdrawals, then your balance will grow, but if the withdrawals are outpacing the deposits, the balance will decrease and could even become overdrawn.

The relationship between deposits and withdrawals is a principle at the core of the idea of emotional bank accounts, and an idea that is very helpful and important for parents and families to understand. Stephen Covey introduced this idea in his business book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and we find it to be a helpful concept in maintaining emotional wellness in families, as well.

Think of your children as each having an emotional bank account. **One of the most significant ways you can enhance a child's well-being and your relationship with that child is to make regular deposits in their emotional account.** Deposits are positive things we do to let a child know we care. A deposit could be a kind word, a promise kept, a loving action, a gentle touch, a meaningful gift, a special meal, or quality time spent together. Making a deposit in your child's emotional bank account makes them feel special and helps strengthen your relationship with them.



Of course, there are times when we need to critique our child, or allow them to deal with the consequences of dangerous or undesirable behavior. When we do this, our child might very well see this as negative and experience it as a withdrawal from their emotional bank account. We also make withdrawals when we lose control and say or do things that we regret. This, however, won't turn into a lasting problem if we are willing to apologize and also make plenty of regular deposits. These deposits can be showing love and concern, listening to feelings, and enjoying our child's company on a regular basis. Deposits will usually more than cover the withdrawals if they are regular and sincere. If, however, we have not been making adequate deposits, we run the risk of "overdrawing" the relationship account with our child and, over time, could potentially bankrupt the relationship.

We'd like to offer one important guideline suggestion when it comes to a child's emotional bank account. To create a healthy, thriving connection between parent and child, a ratio of five deposits for every one withdrawal is recommended. If we maintain a five-to-one ratio of deposits-to-withdrawals in our relationship with our children, both our relationship and our children will have a better chance of thriving. This ratio holds true for children of all ages, so never underestimate how much our teens need us to

Say What You Mean. Mean What You Say. And Most Importantly . . .

Good communication is a key indicator of, and a key factor in, creating strong emotional and relational wellness, and so it should be no surprise that it is vital in family wellness, too. One piece of communication advice that we feel is particularly helpful is: “Say what you mean and mean what you say.” A few years ago, we learned a third phrase to add to this already great advice: “Don’t say it mean.”

“Say what you mean. Mean what you say. Don’t say it mean.” There is much wisdom for parents and families in those three short sentences. Like a lot of great sayings, it takes a moment to memorize, but a lifetime to master. We feel this sums up a healthy approach to discipline: the need to be clear and consistent with the boundaries we create for our children while, at the same time, being respectful and keeping a consistent emotional connection with them. Let’s further reflect on this sage advice.

“Say what you mean” captures the importance of communicating boundaries and expectations to our children. Discussing family rules and expectations with our children gives us a great opportunity to connect these boundaries and expectations with our core values and beliefs. It is in everyone’s best interest to confidently and consistently say what we mean when it comes to sharing with our children what matters most.

“Mean what you say” speaks to another key aspect of effective parenting: parents need to “walk the talk.” It would not be effective, for example, for a parent to tell their child to express anger in a respectful manner if that same parent “goes off” in an angry tirade against the child or anyone else. This type of behavior is confusing to the child and undermines any potential lesson. The best way to teach our core values and beliefs is to pattern our lives in such a way that others can see our values through our words and actions.



“Don’t say it mean” often is the most difficult advice for many of us to follow. Somewhere along the line, it seems we got the idea that we could increase our power by raising our voices in anger. Yet, we now know that attempting to increase our power by raising our voices actually has the opposite effect: the loss of both power and respect. When we yell at our children, they may feel shame and humiliation and, over time, will gradually stop listening. It is never appropriate for us to shame or humiliate our children, as it tears down self-esteem and hurts the relationship. When we find ourselves emotionally

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Handling Emotions**



Reflection: *Rethinking Discipline*

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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Handling Emotions**



Reflection: *Inside Out: Feeling and Expressing the Full Range of Emotions*

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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Handling Emotions**



Reflection: *Emotional Bank Accounts*

Date: _____

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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Handling Emotions**

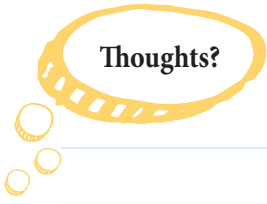


Reflection: *Say What You Mean. Mean What You Say. And Most Importantly . . .*

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Learning Organization: The Hidden Curriculum

Many years ago when teaching kindergarten, Holly discovered that with children that young, much of her time was spent helping to teach them the discipline of cleaning up after themselves, and of keeping track of their things. She kept the coat room organized so that each child had a specific hook for hanging their coat, and a place to put their boots, hat, and backpack. Keeping things organized was truly a group effort.

Every day during playtime, the children got out blocks, paints, and other toys and played to their hearts' content. Then came time for everyone to pitch in and clean up, which was a large part of the kindergarten "hidden" curriculum. The children learned that if everyone helped clean up, they could walk around without stepping on toys, find things more easily the next time they wanted something, and could move on more quickly to other fun activities.

She loved working alongside her students as they straightened up the room because she knew that—above and beyond the obvious positives they noticed—the children were learning an important lesson about being responsible. She saw a strong connection between young children learning to be organized and learning to care responsibly for their own things, as well as those of others.

Holly knew that being responsible and organized was key to a child's success, both in school, and eventually in the workplace and in the larger world. When children learned to take responsibility for cleaning up and keeping their things in order, she noticed that they tended to set goals, plan ahead, get things done, be careful with their things and, ultimately, they experienced less stress. It also created more time for fun.

Developing these positive habits was important for success at all levels of school and life. This was verified years later when she taught high school and again saw how essential having good organizational skills and being responsible were for the students. She invested time teaching her students how to get and remain organized, but now at a more advanced level. Being organized doesn't always directly correlate to greater learning and success, but it is nearly impossible to have the latter without the former.

As in the classroom, teaching responsibility and organization is an important "hidden curriculum" for parents, as well. Yet, in order for them to really stick, organizational skills need to be taught consistently



Organizing Our Family's Priorities

A story is told about a nonprofit that conducted a phone survey of parents, asking them to rate on a scale of one to ten how important was being a good and loving parent. They asked one particular man and he replied, "I don't think I am the best person to answer that question. I will go and get one of my children and you can ask them because they would know best."

This wise man realized that he could say whatever he wanted to the surveyors and they would have no way of knowing if being a loving parent was truly a priority for him. By telling them to speak to one of his children, he was holding himself to a higher standard. His children would know whether or not his actions and decisions consistently demonstrated that being a thoughtful and loving parent was a high priority.

This story is illuminating for us as we reflect on the ways we order priorities, in our lives and in our families. It is one thing to say that family is one of our most important priorities; it is another thing to reflect that priority in our day-to-day choices. If asked if our family priorities are aligned with our deepest values and beliefs, we need to pause and reflect on our lived reality. We need to consider honestly how we order our lives, not just how we think about, or say we order our priorities. We need to be real with ourselves and, if our children are old enough, to involve them in the conversation.



The word "prior" refers to that which comes first or before. This definition makes it clear that when we talk about family priorities, we are talking about those things that are of first or utmost importance in our families. How are we doing with putting each other first? Our home? Our jobs? School? Activities? Community involvement?

Friends and neighbors? Extended family? Connection with a faith community? Often without even realizing it, every family defines who is it by the way they order their priorities. They reveal what is most important, both in short- and long-term decisions, day in and day out.

In his book, *The Leadership Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*, Patrick Lencioni, a well-respected author of several books on leadership, talks about the difference between the core values and aspirational values of an organization. Core values are the actual values of an

Do We Manage Our Schedules or Do Our Schedules Manage Us?

Have you ever felt overwhelmed by all the things you have to do? The answer for most people, especially parents, is, “of course!” While it may seem like we don’t have much of a choice but to be overwhelmed by life’s demands, author Greg McKeown believes otherwise. McKeown is the author of *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*, a thoughtful book for busy people and families. The following questions come from a promotional web page for this book. If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, you might find this book helpful.

- Have you ever found yourself stretched too thin?
- Are you often busy but not productive?
- Do you feel like your time is constantly being hijacked by other people’s agendas?

This is not another book about organizing time, money, or stuff. It is a book about organizing our priorities, about deciding what in our life is essential and life-giving. According to McKeown, organizing our priorities requires us to focus our energy on determining what is most essential to us and doing only those things. The following from the book helps make this point.

“Essentialism is not about how to get more things done; it’s about how to get the right things done.”



This, then, is the real question. What are the right things to get done? Each parent, each family, has to answer this for themselves. Of course there are many things that must be done on a regular basis to keep a family running: laundry, grocery shopping, jobs, meal preparation and clean up, baths and bedtime rituals, homework, paying the bills, and cleaning the house, to name a few. All of these tasks are necessary, but many of the other things we do are not mandatory, and so we must examine those things and decide if they are right for us. How do our extracurricular activities fit in? Are they enhancing our lives or are they stretching us too thin? Which of our other activities truly enhance our lives, and which ones drain time and energy away from what matters most?

I don’t know about you and your family, but in the past, we have been prone to saying “yes” to too many activities, making commitments, and then finding it challenging to fulfill all of them well. We

Your Money or Your Life?

A popular cultural assumption about money is that there is a positive correlation between happiness and money, that money = happiness. Left unexamined, this assumption can create great stress for us and for our families. Many people are surprised to discover that research on this topic reveals that once a family's basic security needs are met for food, shelter, healthcare, and safety, there is no direct correlation between how much money they have and the degree of self-reported happiness they experience. As parents, it is good for us to explore how much we have bought into the assumption that money and happiness are connected, and to examine the stress this assumption may be causing us.

The lack of correlation between money and happiness (after basic needs are met) runs counter to what we are taught to believe by our consumer-driven culture. We have been led to believe that greater happiness is tied to greater financial resources and the accumulation of possessions. Parents and families around the world have a variety of financial mindsets—some that are life-giving and some that are not, some that bring happiness, and some that do not. Each parent must decide for themselves whether or not the relationship with money they are modeling for their family is serving them well.

We need to examine what our children are learning about money and the role it plays in their lives. Teaching them to respect what money can do is important as they learn to save it, spend it, and share it with others. Helping your children keep these three things in mind and find the right balance between them will help them grow up with a healthy relationship with money.



In our work with families, we find that there are a few primary areas of stress related to money that seem universal. The first is when a family gets caught up in the consumerism of our culture, stuck on the treadmill of always wanting and thinking they need to have more, not realizing the toll this is taking on their family's overall well-being. We have worked with many families who, when they finally reach a state of exhaustion from trying to have more, are able to come together and make some new, simpler choices. They begin making conscious choices, sometimes bold new choices, around money by using a different compass, a guide that is healthier for everyone in the family.

Another area of stress that we see in families regarding finances is the difficulty in communicating effectively about money. Money is a sensitive topic because it often brings up all kinds of issues that

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Organization**



Reflection: *Learning Organization: The Hidden Curriculum*

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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Organization**



Reflection: *Organizing Our Family's Priorities*

Date: _____

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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Organization**



Reflection: *Do We Manage Our Schedules or Do Our Schedules Manage Us?*

Date: _____

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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Organization**



Reflection: *Your Money or Your Life?*

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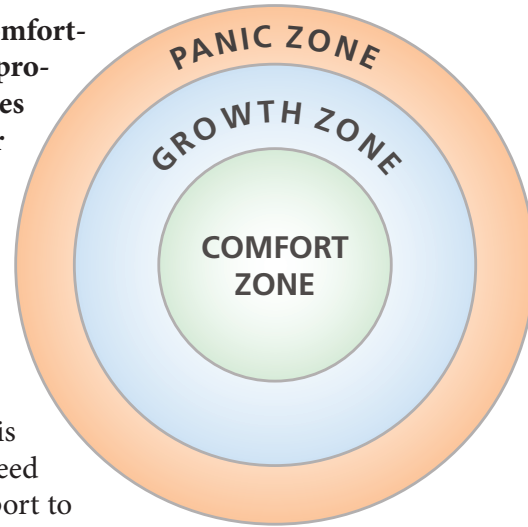
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- HEART (Pink):** Relationships, Emotions
- SOUL (Orange):** Spirituality, Rest & Play
- MIND (Blue):** Work/School Organization
- STRENGTH (Green):** Resilience, Care for Body

Putting Children and Parents in the Growth Zone

All personal growth involves being willing to be uncomfortable as we move out of our Comfort Zone in order to promote and allow for growth, but not so far that it causes us to move into the Panic Zone. This process is true for parents, and children, too, no matter their age.

As we help our children grow through the school years—preschool through high school and beyond—many of us will find this concept of the three zones quite helpful. All children will face myriad challenges during their school years. These challenges may include academic, social, emotional, and/or physical. Add to this extracurricular activities of all kinds, and our children need even more of our thoughtful guidance and careful support to help them learn and grow.



This is where parenting becomes an art. There are no hard and fast rules about when it is helpful to encourage our children to try reading a more difficult book, to go away to camp, or to try out for a school production or team. We always need to balance what we know about our individual children and their strengths and vulnerabilities, and what experiences we think will benefit them. For example, it is an art to know the difference between when a mediocre grade demonstrates an honest best effort, when it is an indicator that our child needs extra support, or when our child is disengaged for some reason. It is also an art to figure out how best to help them.

All of these situations are opportunities to help our children move into the growth zone. The tricky part is doing this with care and empathy without moving them into the panic zone and possibly creating more stress. We need to recognize when they are stuck in a comfort zone, one that could be potentially unhealthy for them in the long run, and what could help them choose to move into a growth zone without tipping over into the panic zone. It is our job to help our children leave comfort zones behind, trusting that it will be worth their while if they are willing to risk the initial discomfort as they move into the growth zone. The growth zone is where learning happens and where we want to encourage our children to live.

These three zones are equally helpful for parents. It is wise for parents to move into growth zones as often as possible to learn new and effective skills to respond to ever-new issues at home, at work, and in the world.

Imagine a parent who is very uncomfortable talking to their teen about sensitive topics, such as drugs, alcohol, or sexuality. Such a parent might be tempted to stay in their comfort zone and avoid such

Who's Your Teacher?

When children head back to school toward the end of summer, there is one question commonly on their minds: "Who will my teacher or teachers be this year?" Parents hope that their children get teachers they like, teachers who will understand and connect with them. They know that their child's teachers will have a big impact on everyone's school year. We would like to invite you to reflect on this same question, "Who's Your Teacher?" as both an adult and as a parent.

As adults, we may no longer formally attend school, but we will always continue to learn. Life is our classroom and the lessons all around us are limitless. We learn about life and people at work, in our communities, and from our families. We learn what is healthy and life-giving and what is not through our connections and what happens in these places. As you reflect on your own life right now, who or what are you learning from, and what is influencing you? There is an old saying that when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. What, in life, do you think you need to learn more about right now? From whom could you learn that?



In this classroom called "Life," we are all lifelong learners, and we are all teachers. We turn to our friends, family members, colleagues, religious leaders, coaches, therapists, and others, to be our teachers. Along the way, others may turn to us to be their teachers, as well. The way we live our lives also teaches our children a great deal about what we value most in life.

We often turn to someone with particular experience to be our teacher. Often this is someone who has already been where we are going or has been doing the job longer than we have. Parents often turn to other parents, especially those with more experience, to learn from their wisdom. People who want to learn yoga will find a yoga teacher and/or a class from which to learn. People wanting to deepen their spiritual life turn to a spiritual leader and/or spiritual community to teach them. And people often turn to leaders in their line of work or place of employment to learn more. Turning to others to learn is a good practice to have for both children and adults.

When we were school children we did not have a great deal of say about who our teachers were, but as adults, we get to choose our teachers. Will it be our modern culture, ancient wisdom texts, the way

Pay Attention to What You Pay Attention To

In our practice, we spend a lot of time talking to families that are hurting. Over time we have noticed that one symptom—and perhaps a cause of hurt—in families is a tendency to focus on the negative with other family members. During a negative cycle, an encouraging word is nowhere to be heard. One of our favorite sayings for this is: “Pay attention to what you pay attention to.”

In the context of families, we become fully known to each other. Our deepest longings and vulnerabilities are revealed in a way that the rest of the world seldom sees. Our endearing qualities, along with our annoying habits, are transparent in our families.

We know better than anyone our children’s strengths and vulnerabilities. We know what at school is fun and challenging: socially, emotionally, and academically. We also know which subjects are easy and which are hard, if they are having trouble with friends, or if they are worried or sad.

Our children also learn important things about us. They know if we like our jobs or find them a challenge. They know if we resent having to earn a living to support them, or if we think of it as a privilege in order to better care for them. They know if our jobs take up most of our time and energy, or if family life is just as important.

This full knowledge of one another in the context of a family is a given. The choice becomes what we will pay the most attention to, and what we will emphasize most in our interactions with one another. What will we notice most about our children? **Wise families focus on intentionally lifting and celebrating the positive in one another.** Other families do just the opposite, focusing instead on each other’s shortcomings. Over time, what we choose to pay attention to about each other greatly influences the level of happiness within our families.

The habit of paying attention to what we pay attention to is very important in terms of our children’s school life, as well. We can focus exclusively on grades and achievement, or we can also give equal attention to nurturing the joy of learning in our children. If our children are challenged in some areas of school, we need to be careful to not always pay attention to that. By intentionally lifting them up



There is No One Who is More Youer Than You

Today you are you. That is truer than true. There is no one who is more youer than you. —Dr. Seuss

This quote reminds us that our job in this life is simply to show up as the fullest and most authentic version of ourselves. And, as parents, it is our job to nurture the unique spirit and expression that is within each of our children.

When we talk with parents we sometimes hear about the conflicts they have when their child is not turning out to be the person they dreamed of or wanted their child to be. “I was so hoping my child would be good at sports like I was, but they have absolutely no interest in sports.” “I thought my daughter would be a really good student, but it has become clear to me that she doesn’t have the same desire or interest in academics that I had.” “My child hates to read but has more friends than I can count. I don’t know how to handle this.”

We have a responsibility to guide and direct each of our children but, in the end, it is about helping them grow into the person they are meant to be. A birch tree seed does not grow into an oak tree, no matter how much guidance and direction it gets, and an oak tree will never grow into a pine tree. There is no feeling more satisfying than showing up in the world as your true self, something we all continue to work on our entire lives.



We remember when our children first began to love picking out their own clothes and then going out in public in the most creative outfits imaginable. At such moments, after taking a deep breath, it was easy to look at them and think, “There is truly ‘no one who is more youer than you!’” Most young children do not look to others for approval of their style; they know what they like and what makes them feel good, and that’s that.

And, it’s not just two-year-olds who like to put together creative outfits, as any parent of a teen knows all too well. Teens are also trying to express their “no one is more youer than you” identity by literally trying on different ways of presenting themselves to the world. There are limits to what parents may allow in terms of how their adolescent dresses, but if we can be generous with those limits and not get

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Work and School**



Reflection: *Putting Children and Parents in the Growth Zone*

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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Work and School**



Reflection: *Who's Your Teacher?*

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| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Work and School**



Reflection: *Pay Attention to What You Pay Attention To*

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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Work and School**

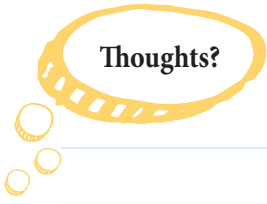


Reflection: *There is No One Who is More Youer Than You*

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- HEART** (top-left, pink arc): RELATIONSHIPS, EMOTIONS
- SOUL** (top-right, orange arc): SPIRITUALITY, REST & PLAY
- MIND** (bottom-left, blue arc): WORK/SCHOOL ORGANIZATION
- STRENGTH** (bottom-right, green arc): RESILIENCE, CARE FOR BODY

Building a Cathedral

As the story is told, several hundred years ago in a small town in Europe, a large group of men were building a cathedral. These men were the laborers for the project and so their work was often tiresome and tedious. One day, a visitor to the town had a chance to ask two of the laborers about their work and received two very different responses.

The first man the visitor questioned had a cart full of rocks that he was straining to pull. He looked tired and harried. The visitor asked the man what he was doing. The man paused, looked up at the visitor, and snapped, “What does it look like I’m doing? I’m hauling rocks! Every day, that’s all I do. I haul rocks from morning until night.”

A few minutes later, another man came along, also working on the same building. He, too, was straining to pull a cart full of rocks. This man, though, had a happier look on his face and his attitude seemed quite different from the first laborer.

When the visitor asked him what he was doing, this man smiled and said, “I’m helping to build a cathedral. And it’s going to one of the most beautiful cathedrals in all the world!”



This is a story of two men doing the exact same task. The first man is exhausted and irritated because he sees what he is doing all day as a never-ending grind of hauling rocks from place to place. The second man is toiling just as hard as the first man, but feels a spirit of excitement and pride in what he is doing. In his mind, he is not merely hauling rocks, he is building a cathedral. It is the mindset each chooses that makes all the difference.

The power of mindset is captured in a quote from Henry Ford, who said, “Whether you think you can, or whether you think you can’t, you are right.” To paraphrase this quote as it applies to parenting, we could say, “Whether you think parenting is just an exhausting grind of hauling rocks day in and day out, or whether you think parenting is the sacred opportunity and privilege to help build a beautiful cathedral, you are right.”

There is no doubt, at times, that parenting can be a grind. There are times when it is exhausting and feels like all we are doing is hauling rocks from place to place. If we get stuck in that mindset, that

Your Spiritual Root System

Recently, an eighty-year-old elm tree had to be cut down in our front yard. Shortly after the tree was cut down, our street was dug up in order to work on the sewer system. This afforded us a view of just how deep and wide the root system of our tree had been. We all know that large trees have correspondingly large root systems, nourishing them and giving them an anchor and stability. But because we rarely have the chance to observe these roots systems, it is easy to forget.

People are no different from trees; they also need a vigorous root system in order to grow strong to weather the inevitable storms of life. This is true for us, and for our children. One of the greatest responsibilities in life is becoming a parent, and so this is an ideal time to nurture, strengthen, and deepen the roots of what grounds our lives. It is also an important time to examine our values and think about how we want to pass those on to our children.

One way to think of spirituality is that it is the root system that grounds our lives. Just as a tree draws strength, stability, and nourishment from its root system, we too can draw strength, stability, and nourishment from our spiritual lives, even though others cannot directly see it. Parenthood is often a natural time for us to deepen our spiritual lives.



It is not uncommon for new parents to join a faith community, even if they have not been part of a faith community for a long time, or perhaps ever. The reason often stated for seeking out a faith community is because parents think it would be good to give their child a strong spiritual foundation. We think there is an additional reason why parents often seek to connect with a faith community. Many parents recognize a need to deepen the spiritual foundation of their own lives as they take on the awesome responsibility of raising a child. It does indeed take a village, and not just to raise a child, but to raise and support a family, as well. Faith communities can be important villages for families.

As we mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the word “spirituality” comes from the same root as the word “breath.” Knowing this helps us to understand the power that spirituality can have in our lives. Spirituality gives us breath. It animates our lives. Spirituality is the source of all that gives us joy, creativity, and love. And it is as close to us as our own breath.

When the Student Is Ready, the Teacher Will Appear

When a person is ready to grow, or to learn something new, it is common to find a teacher who can assist with the learning process. If a person wants to become more proficient as a singer, they will often work with a voice teacher. If a person wants to increase their abilities as a basketball player, they will often work with a mentor or coach who really knows the game. If a person wishes to grow spiritually, they might find a spiritual teacher from whom they can gain deeper insight into spiritual wisdom. Such a spiritual teacher might be an author, a retreat leader, a spiritual director, or a clergy person.

There are many spiritual teachers from whom we can learn important lessons, including those listed above. In addition to these spiritual teachers, there is one more teacher from whom we can learn a great deal of spiritual wisdom: our child. While children are certainly always learning from us, there is a great deal of spiritual wisdom that we as parents can learn from our children, as well.

Here, then, are a few of the spiritual lessons that we can learn from raising our children.

Live fully in the present moment.

All wise spiritual teachers talk about the importance of living in the present moment, letting go of past regrets, and avoiding getting caught up in worries about the future. Young children are masters at living in the present moment.

They can be laughing one moment, then a few moments later be frustrated because they can't do something, and then just a few moments after that be delighted because they see a bird out the window. Children by nature live in what many spiritual teachers refer to as the "eternal now."

Laugh and play, and don't take ourselves too seriously. There is great spiritual wisdom in learning to live more lightly, taking ourselves less seriously. Humor and joy are truly fruits of a spiritual life. Children by nature are playful and love to laugh. They bring this spirit of playfulness out in adults, as is obvious when watching an adult making funny faces and funny noises as they interact with a young child. Children give adults permission to engage the life-loving spirit of their own inner child.

Take time to rest. For the most part, children have two speeds: on and off. When they are on they are full of energy and activity. When they become tired, they can fall asleep anywhere: in the car, on



The Power of Vulnerability

Many of us were raised with the idea that showing vulnerability was a weakness to be avoided whenever possible. We may have been taught that if we were ever feeling vulnerable, it was best to hide this from others. Thankfully, we are now realizing that this mindset does not serve us well. There is extensive research to support the idea that a key to living well, a key to living a wholehearted life, is the ability to feel and express vulnerability. Not surprisingly, many faith traditions also have taught us to accept our vulnerability as the first step in acknowledging our need for a power higher than ourselves.

Dr. Brené Brown, a professor at the University of Houston and the author of several best-selling books and eCourses, is the leading writer and researcher on the topic of vulnerability. There is a great chapter on parenting in her book, *Daring Greatly*, and she is featured in the one of the most-watched TED talks ever. Additionally, she consults regularly with both nonprofit leaders and leaders of Fortune 500 companies on the topic of vulnerability.

Through her research, Brown has discovered that while blocking or numbing feelings of vulnerability may help us in the short run, in the long run it prevents us from learning the ability to form meaningful connections with others. It turns out that science can now prove that the old advice—that we should hide feelings of vulnerability in order to protect ourselves—is not at all helpful. Instead, learning to express vulnerability is a key to experiencing happiness and joy. She even goes as far as to say in *Daring Greatly* that being vulnerable and real with our children has more positive influence over our children than any other thing we know about parenting.



Here is a concrete application of what Brené Brown is teaching. Imagine you lose control of your emotions and overreact to a mistake your child makes by losing your temper and yelling. Now imagine it's the next day and your child comes to you and says that they didn't like it when you yelled the night before. At this point you have a choice: to be vulnerable ... or not.

If you choose not to be vulnerable, you might respond to your child in a way that inadvertently says to them, "I don't care about your feelings." Responding this way hurts your child a second time and increases the likelihood that they will no longer risk sharing their true feelings with you.

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: Spirituality



Reflection: *Building a Cathedral*

Date: _____

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| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
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| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: Spirituality



Reflection: *Your Spiritual Root System*

Date: _____

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| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
| EXcited: | |
| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Spirituality**



Reflection: *When the Student Is Ready, the Teacher Will Appear*

Date: _____

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| Goal: | |
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| Obstacles: | <i>Solutions:</i> |
| NEXT Step: | |

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Spirituality**

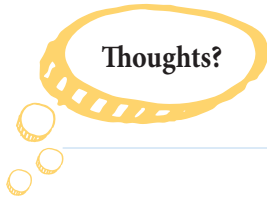


Reflection: *The Power of Vulnerability*

Date: _____

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| T ime-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | <i>Solutions:</i> |
| NEXT Step: | |

Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



Below the text and thought bubble, there are several horizontal blue lines for writing. A large, semi-transparent watermark of the "Parent Wellness Compass" is centered on the page. The compass is a circular diagram divided into four quadrants by a grey compass rose. The quadrants are: top-left (pink) labeled "HEART" with sub-points "RELATIONSHIPS" and "EMOTIONS"; top-right (orange) labeled "SOUL" with sub-points "SPIRITUALITY" and "REST & PLAY"; bottom-left (blue) labeled "MIND" with sub-points "WORK/SCHOOL" and "ORGANIZATION"; and bottom-right (green) labeled "STRENGTH" with sub-points "RESILIENCE" and "CARE FOR BODY".

Playfulness as an Attitude, Not Just an Activity

When our son was three, he discovered a stirring stick for paint in a bag we had brought home from the hardware store. He took the stick out of the bag and his mind sprang to life with all the possible things the stick could be. He immediately lifted it to his lips and pronounced that the stick was a trumpet as he busily fingered the valves of the make-believe instrument. The paint stick was soon a violin, a guitar, and a flute. Then a golf club, a necktie, a fishing rod, and a tree. Before the afternoon was over, it had also become a baseball bat, a diving board, a spoon, a fork, a knife, a popsicle stick, a teeter totter, a giant pencil, and a magic wand.

What we remember even more keenly than all the creative uses he discovered for a stick designed to stir paint were the shrieks of joy and laughter. With each new announcement, he would exclaim, “That is so silly!” As with all young children, this depth of joy and laughter seems to burst forth from every cell in their bodies, and because his laughter was so contagious, we both were laughing out loud with him every step of the way. We continue to be so grateful for this experience, along with all the other similar experiences our children offered us because they remind us of the importance of taking time to be silly and just play.



Author George Bernard Shaw once wrote, “We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.” Some studies have found that children laugh an average of three hundred times each day, while adults only laugh an average of ten to fifteen times a day. All of us adults could benefit greatly by following the playful example given by children and raising our daily laugh quotient.

Some might be wondering how adults could possibly laugh more, with all the serious issues they have to address, things children know little about. We believe that laughing and being playful are choices, and not simply choices about whether we engage in playful activities or laugh at funny things. More important, playfulness is an attitude, an outlook on life, that we can choose. **In many situations and endeavors, we can choose to bring either a serious or a playful energy and outlook to the situation. The attitude we bring to any conversation or interaction has a direct impact on everyone around us.**

The Intersection of Screens and Families

Holly recently led a Parent Wellness Circle at our local high school. During the class, many of the parents admitted—now that their children were in high school—that they felt somewhat alone and were looking for genuine connection with others. She invited them to work in groups as they each took a simple self-assessment of their lives, identifying which areas of wellness they felt good about, and which areas needed more of their attention. Most discovered that they wanted to work on connecting more meaningfully with their teenage children, and to spend more fun time with them. Many spoke of experiencing an increasing distance from their children, and a desire to recapture some of the playfulness they experienced with their children when they were younger.

Upon examining more deeply their common concern, they agreed that part of the challenge in making connection with their children was the barrier created by screens. Parents expressed their frustration with their children's attraction to all kinds of screens and how this had become a real obstacle to having time together as a family. They complained that their kids were watching television and movies online, constantly texting or checking social media on their phones, or playing video games, frequently in their bedrooms behind closed doors. They just couldn't seem to pull their children away from their screens.



One parent asked a question that changed the direction of the conversation. He asked the group what their relationships were with screens when they were at home. Everyone got quiet as each began to examine their own behaviors. Many told stories about having to answer work emails in the evenings. Others admitted that too often they spent time checking social media updates rather than paying attention to their families. Several realized that in order to unwind in the evenings, they also liked retreating to their bedrooms to watch movies on their laptops. They came to the shared conclusion that if they wanted their teenagers to change their pattern of relaxing and unwinding by going off on their own somewhere and sitting in front of a screen, they would have to change what they were doing, as well. They would have to lead the way and set the example. It would be a change of routine for everyone.

I Love To Watch You Play

As family therapists, an issue that comes up frequently in our work is that of helping parents determine how they can best respond to their children's involvement in extracurricular activities—whether it is sports, music, dance, chess club, voice, debate, theater, art, or mock trial. As children participate in these types of activities, parents have several options for how they can show interest and give feedback. Our feedback can potentially be helpful and enhance our children's enjoyment of extracurricular activities. And, if we are not careful, our feedback can unintentionally hurt our children.

It is fairly obvious what types of things parents can say or do to hurt their children in such situations, such as expressing disappointment, offering unsolicited advice or criticism, losing control emotionally and yelling, or not showing interest. Few things are more painful than watching an adult—whether parent or coach—say shameful or hurtful comments to their child, thinking this is going to motivate the child to perform at a higher level.

What is less clear is what parents can do after watching their children participate that is honest and, at the same time, will build connection. Several years ago, we read an article by Bob E.

Brown and Rob Miller of Proactive Coaching, LLC. These two men speak to athletes and their parents at all levels of competitive youth sports, from grade school through college. Based on their years of experience with student athletes, and having asked them over the years what they most liked hearing from their parents after a competition, they reported that they got a simple response, repeated over and over from the athletes: “I love to watch you play.”



One thing young people are yearning for are relationships with adults who are not assessing them.

—Sarah Robbins-Cole

“I love to watch you play” is powerful, both in its simplicity and in its positive affect on children. It is the role of coaches and other youth leaders to give thoughtful critique and feedback when needed, and it is the role of parents to be their child's greatest fans. The beauty of “I love to watch you play” is

I'm Bored!

At some point every parent gets tired of their children saying, “I’m bored!” It might happen in the middle of summer or in the middle of a long car ride, but whenever it happens it can grate on our nerves. Sometimes it seems that no matter how many structured activities we provide for our children, they are still prone to periods of boredom.

When we talk with parents, we often hear them wonder if the very fact that they structure so many activities for their children actually has an unintended side effect of creating the “I’m bored” response from their children. They wonder if their children struggle to come up with their own ideas because they seldom have to do so. What we tell parents is that this is not an “either/or,” but a “both/and.” Structured activities are important for children, as is unstructured free time where children get to create their own fun and activities. They are both essential for a child’s growth and development. Structured activities help children learn how to socialize and then collaborate with others and to follow directions. Unstructured time, especially if it is alone time, helps a child to become comfortable with solitude and with their inner thoughts and feelings, as well as allowing them space for imagination and dreaming.



Children are not the only ones we hear saying, “I’m bored.” We talk with adults who often say, “I’m bored in my work,” or, “I’m bored in my marriage,” or, “I’m bored as a parent,” or, “Overall, I’m just bored with my life.” The parallel between expressions of boredom by both children and adults is the perceived helplessness to do anything about their boredom. “I’m bored and I don’t have any idea of what I can do to change this feeling,” is what they seem to be expressing.

We can all agree that parenthood can be boring at times. Laundry, grocery shopping, making meals, and cleaning up after our children can become tedious. So, like our children, it’s not a question of *if* we will experience boredom sometimes, but rather a question of *how* we will deal with it when it happens.

An important dynamic that keeps us feeling stuck in a state of boredom is that we think we need an external solution to our boredom. We want someone or something else to interrupt our boredom, distract us, or fill up the emptiness that often accompanies these thoughts and feelings.

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Rest and Play**



Reflection: *Playfulness as an Attitude, Not Just an Activity*

Date: _____

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| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
| EXcited: | |
| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Rest and Play**



Reflection: *The Intersection of Screens and Families*

Date: _____

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| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
| EXcited: | |
| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Rest and Play**



Reflection: *I Love To Watch You Play*

Date: _____

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| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
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| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Rest and Play**

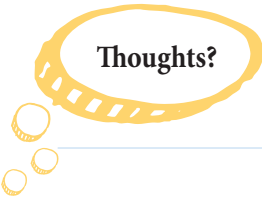


Reflection: *I'm Bored!*

Date: _____

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| Goal: | |
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| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

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A series of horizontal blue lines for writing, overlaid with a large, semi-transparent illustration of the Parent Wellness Compass. The compass is a circular diagram divided into four quadrants by a central grey compass rose. The quadrants are color-coded and labeled as follows:

- HEART (Pink):** Relationships, Emotions
- SOUL (Orange):** Spirituality, Rest & Play
- MIND (Blue):** Work/School, Organization
- STRENGTH (Green):** Resilience, Care for Body

Gradually, Then Suddenly

Strangely enough, we can learn something about how stress can creep up on us from frogs. You may have heard that if you put a frog in a pot of cold water, put the pot over a flame and gradually heat the water, the frog will not jump out. Eventually, the frog will allow itself to be boiled to death, unaware of the danger created by the heat slowly building around it. On the other hand, if you drop a frog into a pot of hot water, it will immediately jump out to save its life.



People and families can be much like frogs when it comes to recognizing and reacting to stress. When stress heats up around us gradually, we may fail to notice the way it is affecting us. Yet if something extremely stressful happens very suddenly, it gets our attention and we are more likely to deal with it right away. When stress comes on gradually, we may miss the warning signs because it may first show up as simply a whisper (more on “whispers” on p. 7). Whispers about stress might show up in our families as stomachaches or headaches, trouble sleeping, arguing, change in school performance, changes in our children’s friends, or pulling away from each other. Whispers sometimes show up in our emotions, such as moodiness, sadness, worry, or just plain crankiness. If whispers aren’t listened to, and the stress is ignored, things may suddenly “boil” over.

In Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, a character by the name of Mike Campbell is asked how he went bankrupt. He answers, “Two ways. Gradually. Then suddenly.” Had he been paying attention to his money problems, his bankruptcy would not have seemed to come suddenly and could possibly have been avoided. The same is true for us and for our children. If we pay to attention to the whispers in our family life or in each member’s individual life and notice when things are heating up, it will be much easier to correct things and avoid difficult surprises that can cause additional stress.

The three simple things you and your family can practice to help you recognize stress and help you figure out how to deal with and diminish it are: trust, feel, talk.

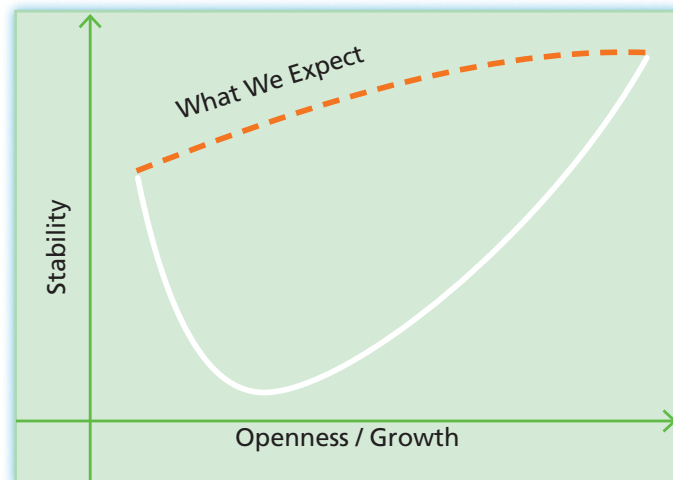
Trust. Trust is a day-to-day byproduct created by honesty, loyalty and integrity. It is the bedrock of family life because when trust is present, family members feel safe and know they can be honest with each other, sharing both concerns and joys. When people feel safe they are more apt to be vulnerable and share feelings of stress and worry.

The Wisdom of the “J” Curve

Change tends to come in one of two ways: planned or unplanned. It is a given that unplanned changes will be stressful. A surprise job loss, an unexpected diagnosis for ourselves or our child, an accident, the sudden death of a friend or loved one, the sudden end to a relationship, or a sudden change at your child’s school or your work. All are stressful. And because no one ever plans or chooses these, they always catch us off guard and unprepared, which only adds to the stress already created by the change.

What is perhaps not as well understood is that even planned changes—change we choose for positive reasons and happily anticipate—can also be stressful. Starting a new job, blending a family, moving to a new community, adding a baby to the family, or beginning a school year. While planned and chosen, each comes with its own share of stress because they bring with them significant changes to all areas of our lives.

The “J” Curve is a helpful concept we often use to explain how change evolves, both planned and unplanned. As you can see from the graphic, the “J” Curve has a vertical axis that represents stability and a horizontal axis representing openness and growth. The dotted line shows the trajectory most of us would like to follow when facing change, especially when we want it and have planned for it. We expect that this change will put us on a path where life will be even better tomorrow than today. The reality is that all change, even planned, initially creates a period of instability. The “J” Curve illustrates this. It also shows that most of the time things get better with patience and steadfast forward movement.



The wisdom of the “J” Curve shows us that we need to avoid wasting energy wishing we could go back to what was and instead, invest our energy in moving forward until we eventually begin to recognize growth and experience a new sense of stability. The key to being resilient is finding a way to go forward and to accept the “new normal” in our lives. One thing that can give us confidence as we face changes is to remember that we have all gone through—and successfully navigated—many previous changes. We know that we all can and will, with time, intention, and the support of others, get through the “J” Curves of our lives, both planned and unplanned.

The “J” Curve can also be a very helpful tool for understanding our children when they are going through times of change and transition. Any time our children experience a significant change in

The Importance of Timeouts

We both love being active, so it's no surprise that sports were and are a big part of our children's lives, as well. Through the years, we saw first-hand how our children's involvement in sports provided many valuable life lessons for them. One that stands out is the importance of knowing when to call a timeout. Timeouts are a key part of any good coaching strategy, and the art of knowing when to call one is a gift that all great coaches possess.

So what constitutes a well-timed timeout in sports? When a game is getting out of hand and a team is on the edge of falling apart, they need a timeout. The players might be tired, flustered, confused, or emotionally heated, and it will get in the way of their playing a good game. This type of a timeout gives the coach a chance to help the team calm down, regroup, and make a new plan.

The importance of well-timed timeouts is as important in family life as it is in sports. Whenever you or your children find yourselves getting tired, flustered, confused, or emotionally heated because—for whatever reason—life is getting out of hand, it's time to call a timeout. A parent who is stressed by work, worried about bills, or their child's grades, and is about to say something they are going to regret will benefit from a timeout. Children who find themselves flooded with emotion also need to be taught about the power of taking a timeout. These timeouts do not ignore the pressures and emotions that are present, but give everyone a chance to calm down, regroup, and a devise a new plan for expressing themselves and solving the problems at hand.



Frustration, anger, jealousy, sadness, and grief are all emotions that can signal a need for a timeout. We like to think of emotions as being like the ocean. Oceans, like emotions, can get stormy and a person in the water can easily get tossed about or pulled under if they aren't careful or don't know how to swim. For this reason, it is imperative that parents teach their children how to swim through all of the emotions that come their way, *before* they have to know how.

Learning when and how to take a timeout to regroup is one of the first lessons for successfully swimming through emotions. If emotions are getting the best of anyone in the family, it is a good idea for that person to practice waiting a few minutes, take a few deep breaths, and then to think about more productive ways to talk about the upsetting issue.

Learning to Be “Response-able”

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

—Viktor Frankl

The above quote is from Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist who survived being a prisoner in a concentration camp during the Holocaust. The key word for us here is the word “choose.” When stress arises in our families, we can choose—and this is a very important distinction—to either react or respond. When we simply react, it is likely an indication that our emotions have taken over and when this happens, we may later regret what we have said or done. When we overreact with our children, we oftentimes are tempted to blame our child for our overreaction. While it may be true that we would not have overreacted if our child hadn’t done what they did, we are still the ones responsible for our behavior.

Responding, on the other hand, means we are able to choose the response we wish to make. To respond is to be thoughtful and controlled before we speak or act. It is optimal when we choose to respond thoughtfully to our children rather than thoughtlessly reacting because they are always watching and learning from us.

It is not uncommon for us—and our children, too, for that matter—to lose our perspective from time to time. It is also not uncommon for us to get “hooked” and find ourselves caught in a cycle of reactivity with our children. The challenge then is to become aware of when we are in such a reactive cycle, take responsibility for our part of that cycle, and then to learn from what has happened.

Blaming others, including our children, for our reactivity will not help us regain our balance, and will only prolong the cycle of reactivity. We will regret that we reacted too quickly and too impulsively because it hurts everyone. Instead, we need to remember to pause and take some deep breaths, put on our own oxygen masks first, so to speak. We will never regret that we paused and took some time to think about how to respond in the midst of an emotionally stressful situation. And our children will learn an important lesson, as well.

This reminds us of a time when Scott was refereeing a youth soccer game. One of the coaches was yelling at his ten-year-old players so harshly that Scott felt the need to talk to him at halftime. After discreetly pulling him aside, Scott gave him some clear, but gentle feedback about his demeanor and how it was affecting not only his team, but everyone involved in the game. The coach immediately reacted and said, “I know I yell at my players, but it’s only because they never listen to me!” Scott didn’t say a word and waited to see if the coach would notice the irony of what he’d just said. He did and added quietly, with a knowing look, “Maybe if I didn’t yell all the time they might listen more often.” Scott was glad that the coach could see that his reactive style was diminishing his power to positively influence his players. The second half of the game was much quieter and after the game, the

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Stress Resilience**



Reflection: *Gradually, Then Suddenly*

Date: _____

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| Goal: | |
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| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Stress Resilience**



Reflection: *The Wisdom of the "J" Curve*

Date: _____

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| Goal: | |
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| Time-specific: | |
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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Stress Resilience**



Reflection: *The Importance of Timeouts*

Date: _____

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NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Stress Resilience**

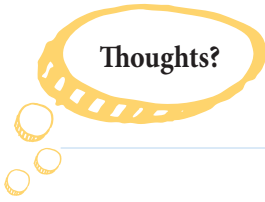


Reflection: *Learning to Be "Response-able"*

Date: _____

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| Goal: | |
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| Obstacles: | <i>Solutions:</i> |
| NEXT Step: | |

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- HEART** (top-left, pink): RELATIONSHIPS, EMOTIONS
- SOUL** (top-right, orange): SPIRITUALITY, REST & PLAY
- MIND** (bottom-left, blue): WORK/SCHOOL, ORGANIZATION
- STRENGTH** (bottom-right, green): RESILIENCE, CARE FOR BODY

Our Children Are Always Watching

Wherever we turn, we see and hear advice about caring for our physical well-being—what to eat, the importance of exercise, getting enough sleep, and being aware of the effects of chronic stress on our bodies. Most of us know what we should be doing to care for our physical well-being, as well as for our families. Yet, in the midst of the busyness of our lives, what we know is easily neglected. It is easy for us to overlook the day-to-day healthy decisions that are required to care for our physical wellness because, after all, the choices we make on any one day don't really matter all that much, or so we tell ourselves.

Every day we face a dizzying array of options: at the grocery store, at the movie refreshment counter, at the mall food court, at restaurants, and take-out delivery orders phoned in or texted. And those are just some of our choices related to food. Then there are the other choices we make, for ourselves and for our families: getting outdoors or watching TV; staying up late or going to bed on time; having just one more alcoholic beverage or choosing a glass of water. The list is endless. And we can bet that none of our decisions are going unnoticed by our children. Taken in isolation, these decisions don't seem to be that significant, yet it is precisely the accumulation of those small, daily choices that ultimately affect our physical well-being, as well as the well-being of our children.



Those daily choices we make for ourselves and our children regarding diet, rest, and exercise become the foundation on which we and our children build long-term habits—healthy or unhealthy. We all want our children to grow up to be happy and healthy and, in large part, that will depend on the habits we teach them as children.

Our children see images of people obsessing over having perfect bodies, as well as people who neglect or abuse their bodies by eating poorly, not getting enough sleep, abusing drugs or alcohol, and smoking. It is up to us to model healthy habits that counteract the often-unhealthy lifestyle choices our children witness.

As with all aspects of parenting, it is important to remember that whether or not our children seem to be listening to us, they are *always* watching us. Parents are clearly the primary teachers of what children think they should eat and drink, and about the importance of sleep and exercise. What children learn at home about how to treat and care for their bodies will continue to influence the

Me Want It, But Me Wait

The award-winning television show *Sesame Street* has long been a favorite of young children and parents alike. Just thinking about Big Bird, Cookie Monster, Snuffy, Elmo, Grover, Oscar, as well as Bert and Ernie, will most likely bring back happy memories of watching this delightful show, either as a child, as a parent, or both.



One of the factors that has kept *Sesame Street* relevant for so many years is that the show is always evolving to both include and address changes in the culture. A few years ago, the show expressed a desire to respond to what early childhood educators said was a growing problem with young children: struggles with impulse control and self-regulation.

Which of the favorite Muppets do you think the creators of *Sesame Street* chose to teach children about the importance of learning to delay gratification? Cookie Monster! Cookie Monster is, of course, well known for his insatiable desire to consume cookies any chance he gets. The show decided to have Cookie Monster reform his ways, coming up with a new motto to help him teach children about waiting: “Me Want It, But Me Wait!”

The creators of *Sesame Street* did a very smart thing. They created parody videos that were aimed at parents. The goal of these videos was to draw in the parents as well as the children, so that the parents could help model and reinforce the importance of their work in teaching their children to delay gratification. The *Sesame Street* creators seem to know that when it comes to creating healthy habits of any kind, parents are their children’s primary teachers.

“Me Want It, But Me Wait” is a great motto for all parents who are teaching their children. No matter what our children may want—a cookie before dinner, not completing homework, or to stay up late on a weeknight—learning to wait is a key to wellness for all ages. Learning to wait can be as simple as waiting until a healthy meal is served, waiting for a special occasion to have a soda, or waiting until the weekend to play a video game. None of these are in any way meant to be punitive, but are simply subtle ways to teach self-control. Cookie Monster isn’t punishing himself or saying he will never have cookies; he is saying he is learning to wait until the time is right. He is learning to make healthier choices about having cookies, choices that will serve him better in the long run.

Physical Education Teachers

As a teacher for many years, Holly had the opportunity to work with many Physical Education teachers. She noticed that children looked forward to gym class because it was their chance to run around, talk more freely with other kids, and play fun games. And yes, this was true even with high-school students. It is easy to understand why kids of all ages love gym class, given that they can be active during otherwise fairly sedentary school days. Sadly, many school districts are cutting back on their physical education programs.

While we can appreciate the difficult financial realities that many school districts face, we know children and youth need daily exercise. Studies have consistently shown that children who get exercise during the school day, and who are physically active outside of school, perform better academically and are both happier and healthier (obesity and diabetes rates are at a record high). Knowing all of this, it is even more imperative for families to encourage and model healthy habits regarding physical activity.

You may have never thought of yourself as a Physical Education teacher, but that is exactly what you are as a parent. In fact, whether or not your children have such teachers at their schools, you are their most important PE teacher. You don't need a license to be your child's PE teacher, but you do need a commitment to model and encourage physical activity for yourself and for your children.



While parents can help their children to be more active, it is also true that children can serve as inspiration for their parents. Family trips to the playground or gym, hiking, biking, walks around the block, or practicing a sport with your child, can motivate everyone to become more active.

Even though neither of us played soccer growing up, all of our children loved playing soccer. So when Scott started coaching our children's soccer teams, he soon realized that if he wanted to coach at more advanced levels, he was going to have to learn to play the game himself. He found an adult beginners team and began playing. It's been many years since he coached our children, but he continues to take great delight in playing soccer, and plays with that same team to this day. Without the motivation of our children, he may have never discovered soccer and would very likely have missed out on all the great fun and exercise he has enjoyed over the years.

Body Language

The study of body language is the study of how people communicate non-verbally with their bodies. For example, crossed arms usually reveals that a child or parent is not open to an idea that is being discussed. The eye roll of a teen communicates that their parents are annoying or embarrassing them in some way. A warm smile communicates love and acceptance without saying a word. Our bodies and those of our children are always communicating, even when we are not fully aware of this fact. It is natural and important for us to watch the non-verbal clues from our children as they give us critical clues about their well-being.

We would like to invite you to think about body language in a little different manner. Rather than simply thinking about it as communicating non-verbal messages to the world, we invite you to listen to what your body, and the bodies of your children, may be telling you right now about everyone's overall sense of well-being and life balance.

Bodies always tell the truth. They never lie and are always speaking to us. Our bodies, and those of our children, reveal a great deal about the level of stress we are currently experiencing. Our bodies also reveal a great deal about the day-to-day choices we are making about food, alcohol and other drugs, exercise, sleep, and how, in general, we are caring for our bodies.

Take a moment right now and listen to what your body is telling you. Is your body feeling refreshed or exhausted? Are you feeling relaxed or tense? Is there a pain in your body that is trying to tell you something? Are you feeling weighed down or energized? Is your breathing deep and slow, or shallow and rapid?

Listening to our bodies regularly, and teaching our children to do the same, is a good practice to develop. If we don't, we may find that the only time we listen to our bodies is when they are "shouting" at us because we have neglected or exhausted them. If you notice that you are feeling tired much of the time, your body might be telling you that you need to rebalance some things in your life. It might be telling you that you need to sleep more, exercise more, change your eating habits, or reduce the amount of stress you are carrying. Learning to listen and responding to the "whispers" from our bodies is always preferable to getting a "shout" later on from more severe symptoms or a disease.



NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: Care for the Body



Reflection: *Our Children Are Always Watching*

Date: _____

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
| EXcited: | |
| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: Care for the Body



Reflection: *Me Want It, But Me Wait*

Date: _____

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
| EXcited: | |
| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Care for the Body**



Reflection: *Physical Education Teachers*

Date: _____

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
| EXcited: | |
| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

NEXT Step Worksheet

Area of Wellness: **Care for the Body**

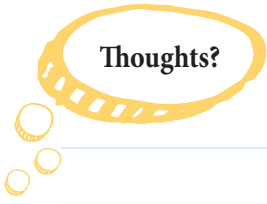


Reflection: *Body Language*

Date: _____

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|----------------|------------|
| Goal: | |
| Needed: | |
| EXcited: | |
| Time-specific: | |
| Obstacles: | Solutions: |
| NEXT Step: | |

Use the space below to reflect on this chapter. Remember: what you write is private, and no one should read it unless you want to share it.



A series of horizontal blue lines for writing, overlaid with a large, semi-transparent illustration of the Parent Wellness Compass. The compass is a circular diagram divided into four quadrants by a central grey compass rose. Each quadrant is labeled with a domain and associated concepts:

- HEART** (top-left, pink arc): RELATIONSHIPS, EMOTIONS
- SOUL** (top-right, orange arc): SPIRITUALITY, REST & PLAY
- MIND** (bottom-left, blue arc): WORK/SCHOOL ORGANIZATION
- STRENGTH** (bottom-right, green arc): RESILIENCE, CARE FOR BODY

Where To From Here?

The Journey Continues

By now it is likely that you have read most, if not all, of this book, reflected on your life as a parent, and perhaps created some NEXT Steps for yourself and your family. In doing so, you have demonstrated a strong commitment to your well-being, as well as the well-being of your family. You have helped your family in ways that may already be apparent, or in ways that will become more so over time. It takes courage to engage in honest self-reflection, and we congratulate you on what you have committed to and what you have accomplished.

You certainly know now that wellness is a journey, not a destination. Like parenting itself, each of us, our children, and our life together, are always changing. There always will be more to teach our children, and always more to learn ourselves. And there is always more that we can do to strengthen and expand our own villages of support, and those of the parents and families in our communities.

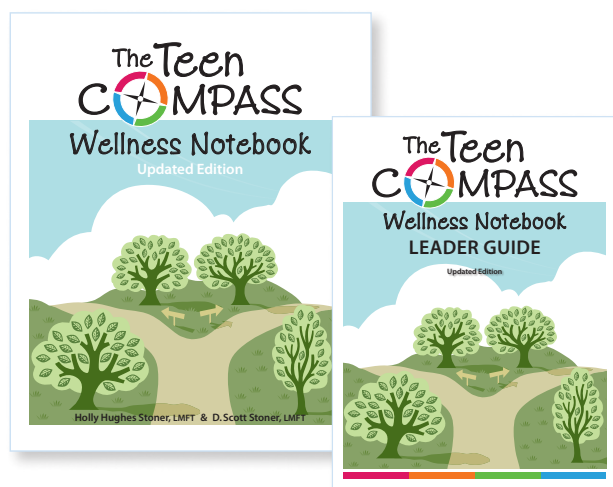
What Next?

Now that you have begun to develop a habit of self-reflection, you will most likely want to find ways to continue this practice. It is strongly recommended that children and adults get an annual physical exam to make sure they are healthy, and to catch anything that might be developing that could threaten their health and well-being. Following that same line of thinking, you may want to refer back to the **Parent Wellness Compass** at regular intervals as a way to check up on everyone's well-being. While the material will be the same, you will not be. You and your children will be older and undoubtedly facing new challenges, as well as celebrating new joys. You will have an opportunity to identify NEXT Steps based on where you find yourself and your family at that time.

Now that you are familiar with the concepts in this book, you might want to invite other parents to read through the book together, with you as the facilitator and guide for the discussions. Our hope is that this book and the **Parent Wellness Compass Coaching Program** (see below) will be catalysts for parents to gather, talk, reflect, and make adjustments in their habits, if needed. These honest conversations, and the support parents will receive from one another, will build stronger families and communities of support for all.

Knowing that teens are a unique and sometimes vulnerable population—they are living in a family but are looking ahead toward their adult lives—we have also created a book very similar to the *Parent Wellness Compass*, called *The Teen Compass*.

It introduces the same eight areas of wellness, teaches about healthy practices in each area, and encourages teens to make SMART goals in each area. These books are being used in schools, youth centers, by therapists, and within faith communities. Used in tandem in communities where parents are also using the *Parent Wellness Compass* can create new spaces for conversations that otherwise would probably not happen between parents and their teens. Go to TheTeenCompass.org to find out more.

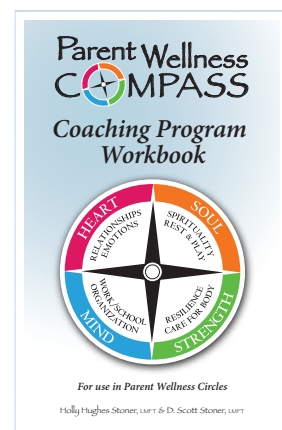


Parent Wellness Compass Coaching Program

In addition to this book, we also offer a **Parent Wellness Compass Coaching Program**, a six-week parent coaching program that we have created based upon the principles in this book. In the program, parents gather with a trained facilitator in a **Parent Wellness Circle** to set goals, share thoughts, and support each other as they work on parent and family wellness NEXT Steps. The **Parent Wellness Compass Inventory**, a signature part of this coaching program, is completed during the first session and serves as a guide to help parents identify and create their NEXT Steps.

While we encourage parents to gather together to read and discuss this book, the **Parent Wellness Compass Coaching Program** requires a trained facilitator. The facilitator, along with the other parents participating in the wellness circle, creates a safe space for parents to say “yes!” to the journey toward parent and family wellness.

We regularly offer facilitator trainings for leading a **Parent Wellness Compass Coaching Program**. If you have an interest in becoming a trained facilitator for the **Parent Wellness Compass Coaching Program**, please contact us. You can stay up to date on this program and our trainings through our website: ParentWellnessCompass.org.



A Closing Word of Gratitude

Please know that we travel regularly to speak to groups of parents, teachers, clergy, and youth leaders about the principles covered in this book. We speak at schools, community centers, health facilities, youth organizations, faith communities, and other non-profit organizations—any place where groups of parents, and those who support them, gather for support and growth. We welcome the opportunity to assist you and your community in growing a stronger parenting village in your area. Please let us know if you'd like us to come work with you to grow **Parent Wellness Circles** in your community.

Thank you for being a parent who is committed to your own wellness and the wellness of your family. Thank you for being vulnerable and sharing your thoughts and feelings with others. You have strengthened your own village of support with other parents and families by being authentic and by growing in relationship with one another.

It has been an honor to walk with you on your journey of parent and family wellness. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to support you as you do the most important work of all—raising a family.

For more information, you can reach us by email or through our website:

- Holly Hughes Stoner: holly@samaritanfamilywellness.org
- Scott Stoner: scott@samaritanfamilywellness.org
- ParentWellnessCompass.org



About the Authors

Scott and Holly Stoner are the Co-Executive Directors of the Samaritan Family Wellness Foundation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They are both Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs) with a combined sixty-five+ years of experience helping parents and families. They are the creators of both the *Parent Wellness Compass* and *The Teen Compass*.

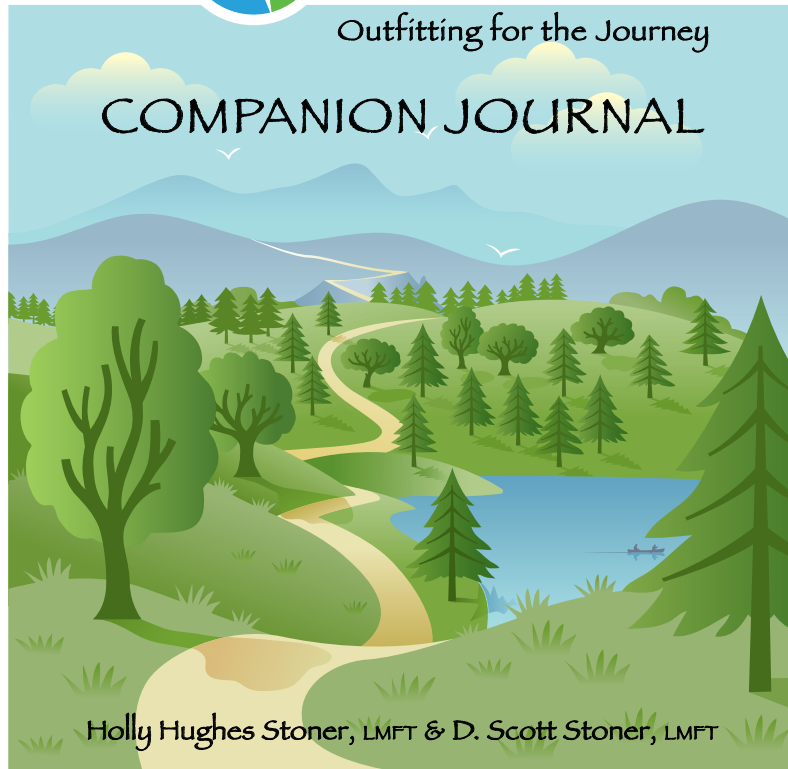
Holly has worked with many families and children as a teacher at both the grade-school and high-school levels. Scott, too, has worked with many families and children when he served as a pastor of an Episcopal church.

Married for more than 40 years, they have three adult children and two grandchildren. For both, personally and professionally, family has always been what is most important in life.

Parent Wellness COMPASS

Outfitting for the Journey

COMPANION JOURNAL



A free, interactive, downloadable pdf that you can download and print, or fill out right on your phone, tablet, or computer.

This companion journal contains all of the questions from the “Making it Personal” sections from every chapter in the *Parent Wellness Compass*, with plenty of writing space following each reflection question. We have also included NEXT Steps worksheet pages that you can use to create NEXT Steps.

To download, go to: ParentWellnessCompass.org

Parent Wellness
COMPASS



ParentWellnessCompass.org