

HELLO, DARLING

this is motherhood

WRITE YOUR FAMILY'S STORY | SPRING 2014



MOPS

SARAH DREW SEAN ASTIN PATRICIA HEATON AND TRACE ADKINS

MOMS' NIGHT OUT

WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

"MOMS' NIGHT OUT is laugh-out-loud funny for Moms AND Dads. It's the perfect representation of the 'Beautiful Mess' of family life with kids."

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CEO, MOPS International

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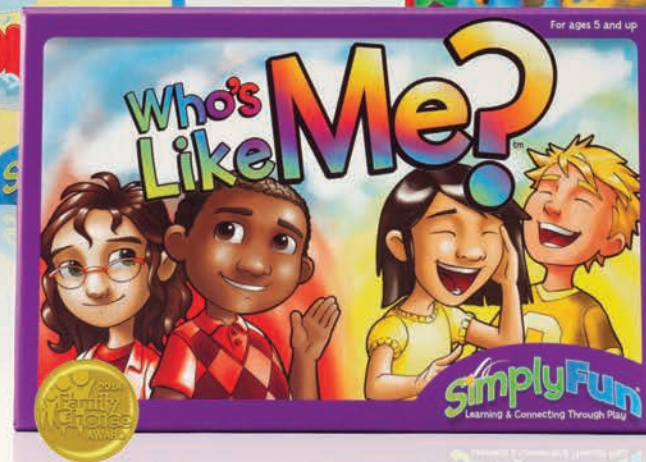
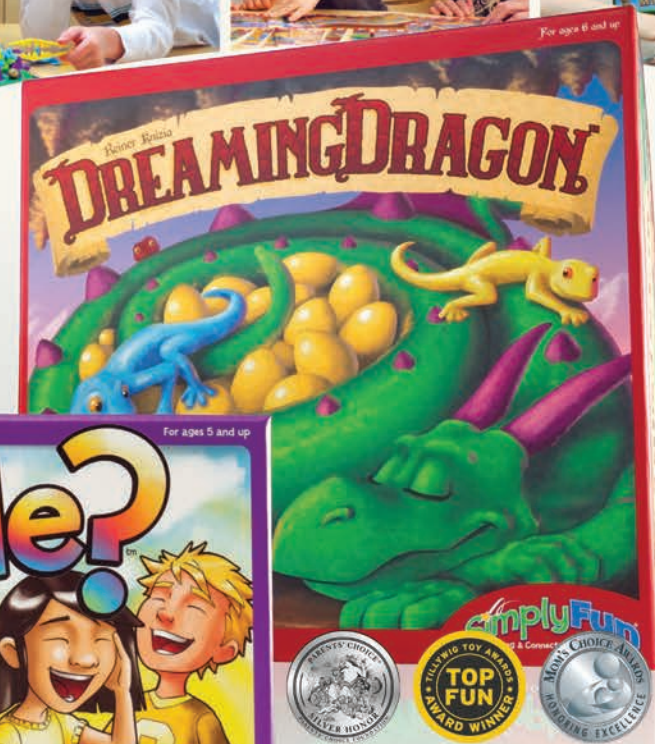


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WRITE YOUR FAMILY'S STORY

Wonder. Adventure. Possibilities.

Motherhood starts with dreams. You bring all of yourself to motherhood — where you've been, what you've experienced, your secret, and maybe not-so-secret, dreams for the someday. Your story collides with that of your children's father, who has his own history and ideas about what he wants from life. And you wonder: What kind of adventure lies ahead for my troupe that I call family?

But then dishes need to be done and phone calls made. The whirlwind of the immediate consumes every ounce of your energy, while hours turn into days and days into weeks. You feel exhausted, and adventures feel distant.

What if you want more? Not just for yourself, but also for your family. How do you have the energy or time to lift up your head and look past next week toward where you want to be headed? How do you bring some intentionality to your days?

This part of embracing your story feels harder to put your arms around and to capture with all of your unknowns and today's distractions. And yet, you are called to participate as the co-author of your story. No matter if the result is a simple outline or a dreamed-for final chapter, it's time to pick up your pen and write your family's story.

WE LOVE

A COLLECTION OF FAVORITES FROM MOPS ONLINE

(SUPER) FAMILY FUN NIGHT

We asked for your favorite Family Night activities. Love the way this family has fun: "We all put on superman capes and run around the house. Mom and Dad, age 33, daughter age 5 and son age 2."

Posted by Heather @ facebook.com/mops.int



PHOTO CONTESTS

Join us for this month's hashtag contest: Where do you take your *Hello, Darling*? Take a photo of your copy of this issue wherever you might take it. Include #hellodarling @hellodarlingmag in the comments to enter.

For more information go to mops.org/may-instagram-contest



MY BABIES SAVED MY BODY by Emily Wierenga

"The boys are asleep, ages two and four, tucked in their bunk beds with their bunny and bear. It's the after-hours, filled with dark chocolate and folding laundry. The hours in which mothers remember they are human.

I lean into the bathroom mirror, flecked with toothpaste from the boys' toothbrushes, find the girl there beneath the tired bags and the smile lines, the girl who was told she would never have children because of the way she'd wrecked her body at 13."

READ THE REST of Emily's blog at mops.org/my-babies-saved-my-body

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A MOPS STORY

THINGS FOUND IN THE FIRE

BY TALLY FLINT

LARESSA NORDGREN introduced herself to the ladies in a local MOPS group on their Facebook page. She and her husband had just relocated with their three young kids to the small town of Abilene, Kansas. And she was eager to make connections. One day later, Laressa and her family were homeless. A house fire had destroyed most of their possessions.

"After the fire, I felt extremely alone and helpless," Laressa said. "We didn't know anyone and all of a sudden we had all of these huge decisions to make quickly — as if we knew what we were doing."

Not knowing where else to turn, Laressa logged back onto the Facebook page of Emmanuel Church MOPS group. She posted a plea for help and included her cell phone number. When she awoke the next morning, she had nearly 20 texts or calls, offering help of all kinds.

Jen Frey, Publicity Team Leader, explained that the group's 45 members can relate to being uprooted. Just 25 minutes from Fort Riley, a U.S. Army base, this group has many military moms.

Approximately 80 percent of their members are transplants to the Abilene area. "I would have been devastated if that fire had happened to me," said Jen. "Yet Laressa humbly reached out for help to a group of women she had never met.

That brave act led me to offer help." Together, group members assisted with laundry, childcare and providing

household items, such as pots and pans. They also brought meals.

Laressa joined MOPS last year and views her current position on the Leadership Team as a way to give back to other moms in need. The group often solicits meals to help families with new babies, or for families who are fighting illness or experiencing traumatic life events.

"Too often mommies feel alone in the battle," said Jen. "We must use every tool available to encourage one another. Laressa's need was big, but even the small everyday needs can bond us if we allow them. We miss out on the connectedness that comes from leaning on each other when we insist that we take care of everything by ourselves."



Tally Flint is a freelance writer and editor. She lives in Denver, Colorado, with her husband and four children (10, 7 and 6-year-old twins).

ILLUSTRATION BY a small print shop, Denver, Colorado



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ESSENTIALS

TRIED & TRUE



KELLY STUART | THE GLOW / TRUNK ARCHIVE

NIGHTMARES:

WHY THEY HAPPEN TO KIDS & WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

BY DR. HENRY CLOUD

NIGHTMARES CAN BE FRIGHTENING for both the child and the parents. Hearing and seeing your child scream in total fear and distress is a scary experience. There are some reasons for nightmares and some things you can do about them.

First, make sure your child is physically OK. Sometimes when a child is in pain or something is physically wrong, her entire system registers distress. What can look like a nightmare is really a child who's more than uncomfortable. If you think there's a physical problem, then check with your pediatrician to make sure your child is OK.

Second, children experience a lot of developmental changes in their early years. And some of those changes are being processed even while they sleep. Dreams serve as a space for us to synthesize all that's going on in our day-to-day experiences and also in the bigger picture. When we consider what's going on in the world of a child, that's a big process! They're growing, changing, adapting and being stretched each and every day. In short, "What a nightmare!" It's understandable that all of those experiences could come out in their sleep, the same way it does in yours.

Here are a few things to remember:

Sometimes nightmares can be a sign that a child's system is under some sort of stress. If it's not a physical stress on the body, it could be an emotional stressor. Separations, change, loss or worse, are all

situations that can cause nightmares for a child. If your child's sleep is disturbed, then pay attention and ask yourself: *What about my kid's life is not allowing her to feel safe and secure right now?*

Kids are always adapting to normal developmental changes. Kids experience increased independence in their second and third years, as well as their budding competencies and increased mobility. All of these changes can create a lot for their little brains to work on. And these changes can be worked out in their sleep as they deal with issues of putting good and bad together in scenarios that represent the anxiety of the developing mind.

Watch for situations when they are awake and be attuned to them. Think about how your children are dealing with the big areas of attachment, separation and independence, failure and forgiveness and developing talents and competencies. Intervene in any areas where you see they're struggling.

When you need to intervene, think of one word beyond all else: Auxiliary. An auxiliary generator supplies power to a building when the power is down or insufficient. That's also what a parent does: *A parent acts as an auxiliary resource for an overwhelmed child.* When your child is stressed in the night, go and provide comfort and tell her it's OK. And then after you have calmed her down, require her to go back to sleep. This combination of offering some reassurance and giving

her the gift of independent sleep is a great one. Your child will internalize your auxiliary strength and make it her own, and then be able to sleep without you. That's the big win you are looking for, even as your child is making progress in the waking hours. For more details about these developmental steps, see my book, *Changes That Heal*, Zondervan.

WHAT YOU SAID *about nightmares*

"Our child's nightmares turned out to be growing pains ... in my little girl's legs.

She saw a specialist, and just like he said, she outgrew them." ... *Sonja*

"We talk about fun, pretty, exciting things to dream about before going to sleep: butterflies, coloring, hiking and fishing, etc. Then, remind them if they wake up, to think of those things." ... *Jaci*

"We have a sleep good spray. It's just lavender and water and sparkles." ... *Jessica*

"We pray, but also watch what we eat. Artificial food dyes were the cause of the worst nightmares I've ever seen in my daughter." ... *Amanda*

"I kick out 20 monsters as I leave the room for the night, then station a stuffed dog at the door as guard. If my son wakes up, I go cover him up and put my hand on his back until he falls back asleep." ... *Kate*

(Source: MOPS survey on Facebook)

Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, psychologists, leadership coaches and the authors of many books, selling over 5 million copies, including *Raising Great Kids*, *Boundaries*, *Boundaries with Kids* and *Mom Factor* — as well as the hosts of the syndicated national radio program "New Life Live." **Want more?** You can experience the wit, wisdom and understanding of Dr. Cloud and Dr. Townsend through the Solutions Audio Club. Each month you'll receive four exceptional audio recordings by the doctors, mailed to your home. Their biblical solutions for relationships and life's challenges will help you invest in the future of those you love, so enroll today! For more information or for a complete list of their extensive resources and speaking engagements, call (800) 676-HOPE or visit their website at cloudtownsend.com.



DIY

ESSENTIALS

FAMILY TREE CRAFT

1. Paint tree trunks for each family member. 2. Stamp each person's hand down in brown acrylic paint. 3. Place hand on canvas above trunk. Stamp down. Hold several seconds to make sure hand is imprinted properly. Wash hands. 4. Place fingers in colored paint and stamp fingers to create leaves around the hand branches. 5. Once trees are done, paint the wood letters or leave plain, and glue on canvas.

YOU'LL NEED:

Newspaper:
to cover work table

Stretched Canvas

Acrylic Paint:
brown and
colors for leaves

Small Paintbrush

Craft Wood Letters

Glue Gun and Glue



1



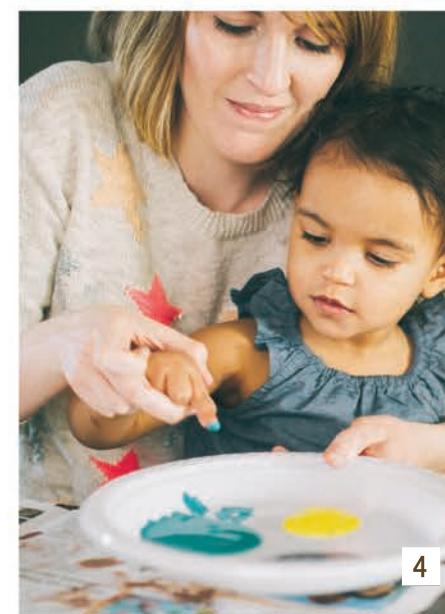
IMAGES BY Rebecca Caridad



2



3



4



5

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY

Mom, we're sure you'll get some cotton balls glued to construction paper or a special coffee and hugs from your favorite little people this Mother's Day. They'll thank you for being Mom. But we all know they have no idea what it means to work that role. You're simply the orchestrator of life for them. We wish we could send you on that Mediterranean cruise you so deserve, but for now, let us say mom-to-mom, thanks for the million unnoticed things you do that show your love to your babes:

FOR BUYING THE BATMAN BAND-AIDS, rushing to get them from the bathroom even when there's no blood to be seen and giving just the perfect kiss to make it feel better.

FOR THE MIDDLE-OF-THE-NIGHT WAKE-UPS, feedings, sheet changes, rocks back to sleep, blanket tuck-ins and whispered prayers.

FOR THE APPLE SKINS CUT OFF, not mixing foods on the plate, the washing of the lost-and-then-found sippy cups that now contain toxic waste.

FOR THE HIGH FIVES, the "You're the best at that," the "Let me show you how," and "Let's try it again."

FOR THE BILLS YOU PAY, the job you work, the coupons you cut and the meals you create from two jars of something and a piece of fruit.

FOR THE TEARS YOU WIPE — theirs and your own — the exhaustion you overcome to get up and face the day and the heartache and heart change you embrace with your new role.

FOR THIS AND SO MUCH MORE, thank you and Happy Mother's Day from MOPS, where we know what you do.

You're one amazing mom!

Alexandra Kuykendall's book, *The Artist's Daughter: A Memoir*, is available at co-store.com/mopshop.



HOW TO:

SET LIMITS

Begin setting tech time limits young, so that when kids are older, they will balk a little less (American Academy of Pediatrics suggests no more than 2 hrs/day). Set time-of-day limits such as: Not during dinner, only after homework and devices are given to parents at bedtime.

ESTABLISH GENERAL RULES

Don't talk to strangers, ask before you click and never send photographs of yourself.

ACTIVATE PARENTAL CONTROLS

Activate built-in parental controls for all devices with Internet capabilities. Find a helpful how-to article at mops.org/online-parental-controls.

MONITOR & FILTER

Maintain lists for all of kids' user names and passwords and do occasional online reviews. Use additional filtering software such as netnanny.com or opendns.com, a whole-house web filtering for all devices on your router.

healthy TECHNOLOGY BOUNDARIES

BY KELLEY GRAY, M.A., L.P.C.

"Heavy screen-time restrictions ensure elementary kids are creatively self-entertaining elsewhere, playing collaboratively with siblings and peers and enjoying the great outdoors."

SETTING NUTRITIONAL GUIDELINES are a normal part of my daily home life: "No sweets until after dinner." "That's enough butter." But establishing healthy tech boundaries for my kids can leave me feeling uneasy and vaguely guilty regardless of my decision. "Mom, can I play Angry Birds on your phone while you're driving?" "Can I watch a show on your iPad?"

Technology provides kids with unprecedented educational, entertainment and social outlets. By understanding your kids' developmental phases in the school years, you can use technology to support their growth, while protecting them from its dangers.

ELEMENTARY DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS: Kids are becoming more aware of the larger cultural world around them and more adept at relationships, honing in on specific interests and beginning to own their values. They're building intellectual skills, increasing responsibility and gaining intellectual mastery.

HEALTHY ELEMENTARY TECH BOUNDARIES: Keep the conversations going throughout elementary school and help prepare your kids to navigate increasing technology independence ahead.

Early elementary students can enjoy building tech confidence by navigating educational and entertainment resources (with a lot of parent interaction).

Heavy screen-time restrictions ensure elementary kids are creatively

self-entertaining elsewhere, playing collaboratively with siblings and peers and enjoying the great outdoors.

By grades 4 and 5, kids use electronics to email, listen to podcasts and share documents with teachers and other students. Technology is a fun way to build skills and gain mastery.

Even with filtering software and parental controls in place at home, continue to keep a sharp eye and add an "Ask before you click" policy to the family rulebook (for new sites, apps, etc.).

Kids are still naive to the manipulative ways of advertisers (who confuse wants with needs) and the values of the "rock star" culture. Engage their natural curiosity by discussing what they're seeing in media and your family's values.

MIDDLE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS: At the young age of 12 or 13, kids begin to face the exciting adolescent tasks of self-awareness, individuality and determining where they want to go in life. Socially, they must learn to interpret interpersonal cues. And generally, they desire to be the same as everyone else to

ensure acceptance in the pack. They have an acute awareness about who's in what social group. And a great deal of effort is poured into deepening relationships via communication and shared experiences.

HEALTHY MIDDLE SCHOOL TECH BOUNDARIES:

Electronics provide more autonomy and frequency of communication that can deepen connections with family members and safe, known peers.

Parents can boost the benefits of technology by helping their kids understand that connection to friends is valuable and amazing. But *constant* connection gets in the way of having a truly interesting life and identity.

Social media sites, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, have a minimum age of 13. If you choose to say yes to social media, then heavy monitoring and privacy restrictions are required to ensure that kids use it for deepening their *existing* relationships.

Talk about what healthy relationships and communication look like. Forbidden territory includes talking to strangers, cruelty to others, photographs of your body or anyone else's.

Appeal to your kids' desire to be seen as mature by empowering them with the knowledge that the 14-year-old girl wanting to chat with them on Facebook may actually be a hairy, obese 45-year-old man in his basement.

Check online activity regularly, just as you'd check on the kids hanging out in your basement or backyard.



ALTRENO IMAGES / THINKSTOCK



PLAY

ESSENTIALS



1 year old

WORD GAME

MATERIALS: Laundry basket
WHAT TO DO: Children learn language concepts through play. Place the laundry basket in front of your child and ask, "Can you sit *inside* the basket?" "Can you sit *outside* the basket?" "Can you sit *next* to the basket?" "Can you sit *under* the basket. Repeat this activity using other objects in your house.

2 year old

MAIL TIME LETTERS

MATERIALS: Letters of the alphabet, envelope
WHAT TO DO: Children love to receive mail. Send your child a piece of mail containing an "Alphabet Letter of the Week." After your child opens the mail, talk about the letter and find it in books, on signs, etc. Repeat the activity by sending your child more letters of the alphabet to learn.

3 year old

BIG, BIGGER, BIGGEST

MATERIALS: Sidewalk chalk
WHAT TO DO: Draw three circles on the sidewalk or driveway: One large enough for your child to stand inside, one visibly larger and one even larger. Point out the big, bigger and biggest circles. Ask your child to stand in the big circle, hop to the bigger circle and then stand on one foot in the biggest circle. Add an object to the game and have your child put a toy in the circle.
VARIATION: Use the words small, smaller and smallest and modify the size of the circles.

4 to 5 year old

MAKING PREDICTIONS

MATERIALS: A book with a clear plot or story line
WHAT TO DO: When reading to your child, stop a few times and ask your child to predict what will happen next in the story. Alternatively, stop before the end of the story and have your child make up his own ending.

by ProductiveParenting.com

These activities originally appeared on ProductiveParenting.com and are reprinted with permission. To receive additional daily activity suggestions based on your child's age, visit ProductiveParenting.com. Emily Rempe, cofounder of ProductiveParenting.com, is a former MOPS Coordinator.



GLEN PEROTTE/GETTY IMAGES

SIMPLY

TIDBITS & THOUGHTS

LIFE HACKS

Genius ideas that make life easier. Here's a favorite: Don't let the back of your fridge become a food graveyard. **Put a Lazy Susan in the fridge** and place condiments or snack choices on it so kids can pick from what they see. For more life hacks go to mops.org/life-hacks. (Source: twistedsifter.com)



A Summer Bucket List is a great way to be intentional about summer fun.

Jessica took ideas generated by her kids and wrote them on coffee stir sticks wrapped with Washi tape. Find more ideas at pinterest.com/mops_int/summer



Photo by Jessica @ twoshadesofpink.blogspot.com

my mom said

Don't worry what other people think of you. Just do what you know is right.
... Kaslynn ...

Do your laundry a little at a time rather than waiting weeks and doing it all at once.
... Diane ...

When you move to a new town or into a new season of life, it can take up to a year before you adjust to your "new normal."
... CK ...

Believe in yourself even when others don't.
... Evelyn ...

When you clean and you're already exhausted, just focus on the kitchen and bathroom. Everything else is bonus points.
... Kristen ...

(Source: MOPS survey on Facebook)

HEY, IT'S OK

... if Mother's Day isn't your favorite day. Here's our guide to Realistic Mother's Day Expectations:

YOU'D LIKE to sleep in. YOU'RE LIKELY TO GET 10 extra minutes with your head under the covers before you get up to help with the crying baby.

YOU'D LIKE a spa mani/pedi. YOU'RE LIKELY TO GET ... umm. Let's just say that what the 4-year-old technician lacks in skill, she'll make up for in enthusiasm.

YOU'D LIKE breakfast in bed. YOU'RE LIKELY TO GET a lovingly prepared meal of Cheerios, a juice box and a yogurt squeeze, only slightly spilled all over the bed.

YOU'D LIKE endless snuggles, hugs and kisses. YOU'RE LIKELY TO GET endless snuggles, hugs and kisses! Yay!

WRITE YOUR FAMILY'S STORY



*"... as I sorted through the
pieces of my history and
considered what they meant
and how they'd shaped me,
I found gifts in my roots.
They weren't gifts that I would
have ever asked for."*

... Lori Lara ...



FINDING GIFTS IN MY STORY

BY LORI LARA

SOME WOMEN enter motherhood with a solid foundation, a strong sense of identity and a clear plan for raising their families. They have vision, roots and a sense of family. Then there are those women who pull into the hospital labor room with a U-Haul full of emotional baggage that has to be sorted with the diapers and bottles. *I'm a card-carrying member of the latter group.*

Before I could say breast pump, I was neck-high in depression and undiagnosed PTSD. I had no idea that having children would unearth unresolved childhood issues — the painful source of my depression and 20-year eating disorder.

Motherhood and depression don't mix well, so my early years of mothering were pure survival. My daily plan consisted of eight words: Feed them, love them and keep them clean. I knew my kids deserved more culture than the Baby Mozart and Baby Beethoven videos that I played over and over. But doing the basics took everything I had. Plus I couldn't relate to other moms. I felt marooned on the Island of Bad-Mommy.

Seven years ago, I couldn't hold it together any longer. I had a complete breakdown!

Out of desperation and love for my family, I started counseling to find healing, clarity and direction. I dug into the deepest parts of my being and put everything on the table to be examined.

It wasn't easy to look at what I saw there. But as I sorted through the pieces of my history and considered what they meant and how they'd shaped me, I found gifts in my roots. They were not gifts that I would have ever asked for. They were gifts of character and perspective. They were the unique pieces of my history that I could bring forward to help shape my own family's story.

It took us many years to get a solid footing. But my husband and I put together the pieces of our stories and created a set of mantras to guide our family's identity and story.

We make room for mistakes. Freely admitting mistakes creates a safe place to work out our faults and allows our kids to know: I can be wrong and loved at the same time. We focus on learning, not perfection. And our goal is to deal honestly with whatever happens, and move on. Character is best built in wide-open spaces with a lot of room for mistakes.

We keep very short accounts. We say we're sorry to each other (often). And that fills our relationships with

➔ CONTINUED ON PAGE 20



LORI ZILBERSTEIN

intimacy. I lost my mom 108 days after her cancer diagnosis; we simply don't have time to hold grudges. We deal with it and move on.

We feel our feelings. We lost six close family members in seven years. That's a lot to feel. We want to be "in it together," so we feel things openly. We teach our boys how to feel. We have a variety of tools to handle the emotions when they come up. We talk, cry, write and do art therapy. Some moments of sadness need only a loving hug; while deeper pain might require taking a break from schoolwork so we can deal with it appropriately. This has been vital to the emotional health of our family.

We love our friends. Having trusted friends is very important to us. We've intentionally widened our inner village beyond family, and that's part of the rea-

son our life is so full. From barbecues and fun camping trips to late-night hospital bed prayer vigils, our boys know that friendship includes both having a good time and being there during the hard times. Friends are our chosen family.

We learn together. We believe a big part of our job as parents is to help our kids discover their unique talents and aptitudes. By pursuing their passions, we aim to connect them to the joy of learning and the concept that education is 24/7, not 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. (and, thankfully, learning doesn't end with college graduation).

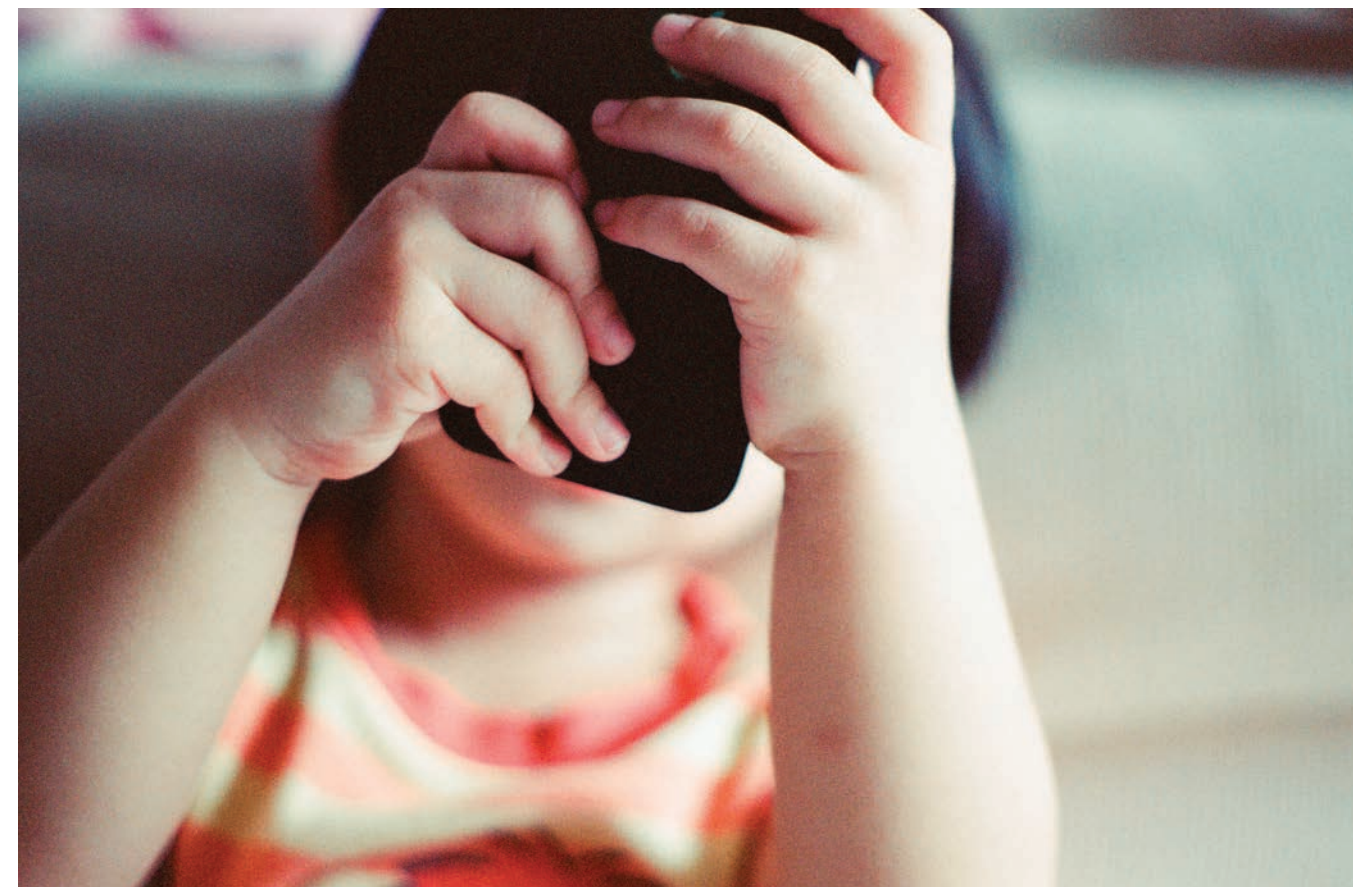
We develop our faith together. Our faith in God is at the core of who we are. The values of how we treat people (loving, not judging) stem from the principles in the Bible. Praying and reading Scripture together are very important to us, and we

try to shape our life around the teachings of Jesus.

We're a team. One of my favorite quotes by C.S. Lewis is, "There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind." When good times come, we celebrate together. And when hard times hit, we count our blessings and encourage each other to hang on and expect better days ahead. Our kids know that our family is an inseparable team dedicated for life. Few things fill my mommy heart more than watching our boys apply that lesson by supporting and encouraging each other.

We never give up. Period. ☞

Lori Lara is a writer, blogger (lorilara.com) and martial arts black belt. She's passionate about sharing God's hope and healing in her own raw and personal journey through motherhood, depression, PTSD and addiction.



WHEN MAMA NAPS

BY TIFFANY RAY

IN THE THIRD TRIMESTER of carrying my third child, I became a stickler about nap-time. I absolutely needed time to lay my whale-like physique on the couch and catch a sweet reprieve from waddling around.

My son was not a fan of my mandatory downtime. He was broaching five and had long outgrown the desire to waste a perfectly good hour of the day in bed.

But with my pregnancy brain firmly at the helm, I devised a plan. I would set the timer on my cell phone for an hour, let him take the phone into my room where he would quietly play and not appear again until said timer went off. This worked like magic. For two days, he disappeared into my bedroom, granting me 60 minutes of glorious solitude. He didn't resurface until my phone went off.

On the third day, he emerged after 15 minutes, phone in hand and said,

"It's ringing!" Glancing down on the display quickly, I recognized the clinic I had spoken to that morning, "Hello?"

"Oh good, Hi!" a relieved receptionist greeted me, "Is this the mom of the little boy who keeps calling here?"

"The WHAAAT??" I asked.

"Well, this little boy keeps calling here. He's probably called eight times. But he just keeps saying 'Hi,' and then hanging up. We weren't sure if you were OK ... so um, I'm really sorry ... but we called the cops."

Glancing out the window, a patrol car verified her story. I apologized speedily and profusely. Hanging up the phone, I gaped at my son in horror.

"You called the doctor's office over and over and now the cops are here?!" I said.

The officer at the door was very understanding and managed not to laugh out loud over my poor parenting tactics.

I coaxed Jesse out of hiding so the officer could convince him that he was not being taken away.

Then I tearfully called my husband and proceeded to give him the play-by-play.

"I know. He called here six times," he said.

Apparently my husband tried to talk our son into giving me the phone. But Jesse informed him that he was *not* allowed to leave the room!

The next morning at MOPS, three more friends told me that they'd received calls from Jesse within the last couple of days. And people just kept surfacing. He'd been making the most of his quiet time.

I definitely learned my lesson. But I'm pretty sure Jesse's take home was: *It's all fun and games until someone calls the cops!* ☞

BY (D-JIANG)/FLICKR/GETTY IMAGES

write your family's story

We take our roots with us whether we intend to or not. But we can choose how to let those roots shape our family.

We can carry on the parts of our history that give our family's story a rich heritage. For those uglier parts, we can be intentional about changing the legacy for our children. And for those things that have shaped us, we can consider the gifts that our wounds have given us and pass on the richness of character to our kids.

Set aside some time to honestly answer the questions below.

List your positive and negative answers alongside each other, because both can be influential in choosing the values that you want to shape your family's story and identity. If you're married, compare answers with your husband. Identify the most important values and traits to consider as you navigate your family's story with intentionality.

THINGS VALUED

What values did you gain from your childhood? Which ones shaped you for the better? What values do you want to pass on to the next generation?

THINGS OVERHEARD

What did your parents, grandparents or other adults say frequently? Were their mantras empowering and life-giving? Or were their words spirit-crushing or negative?

THINGS HAPPEN

What life events have shaped you the most? Why? Did those experiences help you see the world in a new way? Or did you gain a deeper understanding about life, or love or faith?

Tiffany Ray lives in Ellensburg, Washington, with her husband and four crazy children. She's been a part of her local MOPS group for the last nine years.



*Tell me your story, show me your wounds
And I'll show you what Love sees when Love looks at you
Hand me the pieces, broken and bruised
And I'll show you what Love sees when Love sees you*

... Mac Powell ...



PHOTOGRAPHY © Bret Cole Photography from North Lake Tahoe, California | bretcole.com
from the shoot: Cook Family, Bodega Bay

BE THAT MOTHER

BY MEGAN O'LEARY

WHEN I WAS FEELING FRAZZLED and slightly lost, I stumbled upon this quote: *Imagine the person you want your child to become, and be that person.* It made me stop and think: *What exactly was I showing my daughter? What kind of person was I?* The answer was one that I didn't like. I was the mother who was always running around and slightly impatient, more focused on the product than the process. When my daughter would call to me, "Mom, come here, I want to show you something!" I more often than not answered with, "Can you wait a minute? I have to finish these dishes."

After reading this quote, I thought, *Who cares about the dishes!* So I made a list of the type of mother I wanted to be. I know that I won't always be perfect, and that's OK too. But this is the mother I want to be and the person I want my daughter to grow into: A strong woman who is kind and respectful and, hopefully, filled with joy.

I WANT TO BE A MOTHER



WHO PAUSES

Who puts down the dishes, and listens and watches.

WHO PLAYS

"Yes! We should totally go and dig for worms."

WHO LAUGHS

A portion of every day should be filled with laughter. Find the humor or create it.

WHO IS FILLED WITH WONDER

Start to question the world — let's find answers together.

WHO GIVES

Whether it be attention, time or words of encouragement.



WHO ENJOYS LIFE

What gives me joy? How can I create more room for that in my life?

WHO CREATES

Art and music are soul healing, so is making something together.



WHO TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR MISTAKES

Quick to apologize and make amends.

WHO RESPECTS

Treats everyone with value, whether they're a stranger, a friend or a partner.

WHO SETS A GOOD EXAMPLE

Learn to stand up for yourself and others as you hear me speak against injustice and demonstrate conflict resolution.

Megan O'Leary, though a card-carrying American, currently lives with her family and writes in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY a small print shop, Denver, Colorado

HONESTLY

TRUE TALES



JULIA DRULIA-LAMPE/FLOKRY/GETTY IMAGES

IN IT TOGETHER

BY MANDY ARIOTO

I almost brushed my teeth with hair gel last night! It was late. And I was distracted because my husband, Joe, and I had one of those long “things feel off between us right now and how do we fix it” conversations.

“In the beginning, I thought I’d married someone who made me happy. But now I realize that I actually found someone who makes me better ...”

He’d been traveling a lot, which meant that I might have been throwing a little pity-party because I had full-time kid duty with bedtime routines and the stomach flu (times two kids) and a little bit of PMS. My bad attitude may or may not have contributed to the poor guy missing out on the warm welcome home he anticipated.

When Joe and I got married, we agreed that success would mean having a marriage that after the kids left the house, we’d still like each other. Most days this seems like an easy goal to check off the to-do list. That is, until he gets welcomed home from a business trip with a pity-party. And suddenly our goal feels pretty lofty.

Joe and I both recited our vows with the most

earnest intentions. But looking back, it feels a little like we were repeating our vows like we said the pledge of allegiance in elementary school. Making powerful pledges of devotion and allegiance, where you know the words almost entirely by heart, but the meaning hasn’t completely owned you yet.

When Joe and I first met, we were both different versions of ourselves, the dating versions. We were always showered and thoughtful. But the beginning is the easy part. It’s the middle where you really fall in love ... and not in the honeymoon kind of lusty love we felt at the beginning. In the beautiful, I really know you kind of way. That’s a profound experience because you know the other person has seen your best and worst and loves you in spite of it.

In the beginning, I thought I’d married someone who made me happy. But now I realize that I actually found someone who makes me better: A man who will put up with my unsavory parts, up until they make me a lesser version of myself. Then he swoops in with truth and help that sometimes doesn’t feel like help, but is.

No one has held up a mirror to my flaws quite like my husband has. And no one has been as tender in enduring them either. Our marriage is at its best when we are helping each other change for the better, without sacrificing the parts that we know make us great.

In the beginning, we talked a lot about our future. But now, we have a story we can recite from memory. With chapters filled with adventure and failure, forgiveness and intimacy, words that continue to remind us that we are better together. Our vows have taken on texture and have been lived and worn down and sewed into our hearts with laughter and commitment.

And so, when our kids are gone, and Joe and I are sitting side-by-side, the house will be quieter and cleaner, and we’ll still be working on writing a good story together. Reminding ourselves that legacy takes a lifetime to achieve. That we are a family by choice, and when we intentionally choose each other, we are participating in writing our future. And I am convinced that the future is good.

CINDY CLARSSA TANUDJAJA/FLOKOR/GETTY IMAGES

Mandy Arioto is a mom of three who has transitioned from sippy cups to soccer games. She’s learned that the best way to love her tribe is by loving herself.



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“We are stuck. Stuck trying to be perfect. Stuck in sadness. Stuck feeling numb. Stuck pursuing more stuff to make us happy. Stuck in something we can’t even name. And most of our stuck places are invisible to the world. Which keeps us from dealing with them.”

— Jennie Allen



PHOTOGRAPH BY ASHLEY CARSON

JENNIE ALLEN

WIFE // MOTHER // TEACHER // AUTHOR

On being stuck

What does being stuck mean? These are the words that I’ve used to define how I’ve felt — like I was in a really cute prison cell I had made for myself. For some women, stuck is the desire for comfort, or success or control. For me, it was a mix of feeling very anxious and worried. Things looked so good on the outside that I didn’t even know I was stuck. Then, I started waking up at 3 a.m., worried about what people were thinking of me. I had this huge desire to win approval — everyone’s approval.

What did you discover about your personal story? My sense of discontentment was a sign. I had put my hopes in others and it was incomplete. I had no idea that other people didn’t feel the same way until my husband told me that my feelings were impacting every area of my health. I began to realize how much energy I had given to this and knew I had to get some help. I couldn’t do it alone. I had to risk my image and show the dark places of my soul.

How’d that go? It was a big fat mess! I invited a few friends over to do a study. At first I was able to be vulnerable. But when we talked about worry and anxiety, I was pretty much crying the whole time. I told them everything — I wasn’t sleeping; I wanted people to like me; and I didn’t know how to let it go. Over time, we all realized that we struggled with sadness, anger, fear and feeling overwhelmed, nearly every day! On the outside, we looked like we had it together. On the inside, we discovered how strongly these emotions were controlling us.

What if you don’t know how to have this discussion? Try. And go first. Be brave and share your mess. Start with something small. I remember a mom who shared that she yelled at her kids, and she hated it. She didn’t know where that anger and tone came from. Women around the table said, “Me, too! I thought I was the only one!” They talked about their guilt and shame and discovered the joy and freedom in sharing and letting it go.

Have you ever felt stuck in your marriage? Yes. About five years into our marriage, my husband and I went to counseling. I was a people pleaser, and my husband didn’t express his emotions. So I stopped showing mine. And it was very difficult. We were in counseling for a year and a half. He really saw that emotions are a good thing and allowed himself to feel things. It was hard, but we did the work, and now we have a strong marriage. I really believe in the power of a third party who can help speak into your marriage.

What if you feel insignificant as a mom? I once felt a lot of discontentment in my role with my children. I knew there had to be more. I went on a journey to find my significance outside of motherhood. Was there more? What was I missing? The answer was: 1) Yes, there is more, and 2) No, I was not missing it. There was more within the life that I was already living as a woman, wife and mother. Once I voiced that feeling of insignificance, I could begin to study where those feelings were coming from and could uncover brokenness I hadn’t thought about or dealt with before.

Jennie Allen is a wife, mother, teacher and author. She and Zac, her husband of 17 years, are the parents of Conner (14), Kate (12), Caroline (8) and Cooper (6). Follow her blog at JennieAllen.com. Hear Jennie live at MOMcon in Louisville, Kentucky, October 2-4.

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MOM STORIES

HONESTLY

THE HOPE OF SMALL TRIUMPHS

BY ERIN BUHR

WITH LITTLE WARNING or time to plan, I was plunged into the deep end of toilet training when my 2-year-old twins decided they were ready. Overnight, I found myself stocking Elmo underwear, doing extra loads of laundry and spending hours in the bathroom.

My daughter was more ready to train and easily grasped the toileting concept. My son, however, was a different story. After about a week of me discovering small puddles all over our home, my son came running into the kitchen and proudly said: “I went potty in the toilet!” Sigh, *through* his underwear. This would likely be a funny anecdote that I would use to embarrass him some day. But right then, I was trying to calmly explain to him that he has to pull his underwear down. *Every time!*

Frustration welled up in me as he gave me a confused look and told me again that he went potty in the toilet. I took a deep breath and looked at his little face. He was right. He did. I told him, “You did go potty in the toilet, Sweetie. You hurried right to the bathroom when you needed to go.” He nodded and cheerfully donned another pair of dry underwear.

Someday toilet training will be a distant memory, but until then, I can find hope in small triumphs.

Erin Buhr is a SAHM of twin 2 year olds. She attends the St. Paul MOPS group in Baraboo, Wisconsin (bambinitravel.com).

A REAL FAMILY

BY SARAH TORNA ROBERTS

I WAS A LITTLE GIRL when the first seeds of my *real family* dream were planted. The oldest of four in a very unhappy and fractured family, I was 11 when my parents divorced and things went from very bad to much worse. Anxiety and fear were my constant companions.

Certain that I wasn't experiencing what a *real family* was supposed to look like, act like or feel like, I held on to the idea that someday I could do it my way. I'd have my *own* family, and we'd be the happiest, most loving family ever. My husband would come home every night, and he'd **stay** home. He wouldn't yell, and we'd kiss in the kitchen. My children would be best friends, never pitted against each other, never forced to pick a side, mom's or dad's. Above all else, we'd be safe.

I've been married for 10 years now, and in many ways

my dream came true. I married a good man, committed to our children and me. He and I are still in love, and we rarely argue. I can count on one hand the number of times the volume of his voice has inched ever so slightly above a normal speaking volume.

However, each of those few times, I have responded with complete brokenness, as if he had done the unspeakable. In those moments, it didn't matter that he's the gentlest man I've ever known. It didn't matter that he's never actually yelled at me or that he certainly has never laid a hand on me. In those moments, my story follows me.

Like most parents, when we started our family, I wanted a happy and secure childhood for my boys. I desperately wanted them to have a *real family*. And while our family story doesn't have themes of divorce, it does have themes

of developmental delay, medical crises, financial stress. I've had to make my peace with the fact that I can do all I can do, but it will still never be enough to guarantee they have a childhood free from pain or fear. Their losses will shape them in some way, just as mine did. Their story will follow them.

I believe I'm telling my sons a better story. I believe they'll reflect on their childhood with happy memories and a sense of security. But I know now that a “real family” is the one you've been given. It's where we learn about trust and love, for better or for worse. It's what teaches us about the things we want to do better, about the story we want to tell.

Sarah Torna Roberts blogs at sarahrotnaroberts.com. Married to her husband for ten years, she spends her days mothering her four little boys.



ROB CAMPBELL

QUIZ

WHAT'S YOUR FAMILY'S PERSONALITY?

1. Does your family eat dinner together every night?
Ⓐ Yep, it's a priority.
Ⓑ Sometimes, at least 3 times a week.
Ⓒ Nope. Do meals in the minivan count?
2. What's your house like in the morning?
Ⓐ Peaceful.
Ⓑ We try to take it as easy as possible.
Ⓒ It's a crazy circus!
3. Do you have friends over to hang?
Ⓐ Yes, we have an open-house policy.
Ⓑ Sometimes, when we can schedule it in.
Ⓒ No, we'd rather go out.
4. Is the inside of your family car neat and organized?
Ⓐ Always.
Ⓑ Sometimes.
Ⓒ Are you kidding? Never.

PERSONALITY KEY

Mostly **A**s = Laid back: Your family's relaxed with time set aside for everyone to be together and chill.

Mostly **B**s = Middle of the road: You've all got your own thing, but take some intentional time together.

Mostly **C**s = Busy bees: Your family's involved in a lot of different things and pulled in many directions.

HERE'S WHAT I KNOW

WE ARE THE SURRATTS!

"You're so stupid!"

The words flew out of my son's mouth, aimed directly at his little sister, with the intent of making her stop the pestering and endless questions.

I felt like all I had done on this long, dreary day was referee quarrels and fuss with the words, 'Don't' and 'Stop that.' I'd said these words so often that I was sick of hearing them too.

That night, I talked over the situation with my husband, Geoff. 'They don't listen to me. I tell them over and over to not hit; don't snatch the book away; stop calling your brother names. I'm not getting anywhere.'

My husband paused. Then he shared a story of when he had whined to his mom that he didn't want to go to church. His mom answered, "But we are the Surratts! We worship God. We make the right choices. We love each other and other people, and we do the right thing. We are the Surratts!"

These words have stuck with Geoff his entire life. With a simple sentence, his mom had instilled a sense of something bigger — family pride and purpose. *We are the Surratts!* It was a family plumb line based on honor, respect and love.

I knew there'd be more refereeing to come and decided to go the road of instilling family pride. Instead of a quick

'Stop that,' I paused, took a deep breath and said, 'You are a Surratt. Surratts don't slap each other.'

'Surratts pick up our socks instead of leaving them in the middle of the kitchen floor for someone to trip over.'

'We don't scream and call each other names. Surratts don't treat each other like that.'

Wouldn't it make a tidy, sweet story if I could say this new approach instantly instilled perfect family behavior and loving attitudes?

Well it didn't. What it did do, however, was to remind each of us of who we are and the intentionality of the family God put us in.

There's nothing perfect about us. We mess up, we forget and we say hurtful things. Sometimes we leave our socks lying around. But then we apologize. We love. We forgive. Because, we are the Surratts!



Sherry

Sherry Surratt
CEO and President,
MOPS International
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THE FAMILY Project



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An escape.

A space to rejuvenate.

A moment of inspiration.

A little mom sugar.

Take a break from all those tiny moments
of mothering you do every single day
and let us help you rekindle.

HELLO, DARLING

— this is motherhood —

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