FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

Fearfully *and* Wonderfully Made

A digital guide for a successful school year



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Psalm 139:14 says, "I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."

What if we lived fully believing that we are fearfully and wonderfully made? Wouldn't things be different? I picture God designing us as His masterpieces of creation made for incredible journeys with distractions, challenges, doubts, surprises, and unexpected gifts along the way.

Each new year presents families with a wealth of opportunities for engagement — opportunities that can be taxing on their brains, souls, and relationships. By fostering healthy and balanced connections and providing appropriate fuel for both the brain and the soul, you can give your kids a solid foundation to work with throughout the school year.

In this download, we offer you four ways to build and maintain the brains and souls in your home.

- **Personality Differences** — Essentially, personality is how each of us filters and interacts with reality. We have provided you with summaries of seven ways we can connect with God. Keep in mind that there is not one way that is better or superior to the other and that we all have multiple ways we filter the world around us. You and your children can identify each of the dominant ways that you tend to most attentively and energetically connect with God. In doing so, you can encourage one another toward a deeper relationship with God according to your personality preference. Is God truly relational or a distant God waiting to discipline and seeing each person as just a number? If He is relational, He is ready for connection any time. God does not stop speaking. It's about managing yourself to become attuned to Him. God's Word and prayer fill our souls to overflowing so we can pour into others. Imagine a school year where your family taps into the free refills for your soul that God offers as you pour into those around you.
- **The Right Fuel** — The human brain is three pounds of pure miracle! Our brains consume an incredible amount of calories, require lots of water, and are constantly working. As a result, our brains need sleep to create memories and optimize learning. They also need fuel to function at their best. In this download, you will receive great advice from a pediatrician about how sleep can effectively fuel the brain.
- **Time Management** — Time is easy to spend but impossible to buy. We get to be stewards of our time. I picture time as an investment. What are you investing in and why? Kids need visuals to learn how to manage and invest their time well. From youth group to music to sports — there are many good things to get involved in, but what are the most important? In this download, we provide you with a practical visual to help you and your child practice self-awareness and purpose when it comes to spending time each day. (Psalm 90:12)
- **Technology and Entertainment** — We hope to come alongside you as a resource to help you navigate and discern well as you lead your child toward freedom in their soul. It is so easy just to let our kids consume music, video games, television, movies, social media, and apps, but a lot is at stake. The messages they receive will directly impact their perceptions, beliefs, behaviors, thoughts, and emotions. What is your family mentally consuming, and how does that impact what each person believes, says, and does? In this download, we want you to consider what technology is used in your home and how it is used.

We hope this download helps you facilitate important discussions and habits in your home this coming school year based on spiritual truths. Research supports that spiritual security results in a higher likelihood of prosocial behaviors, complementing the benefits of self-control for both others and ourselves. We are fearfully and wonderfully made to be contributors in God's kingdom story. Scripture advises us to guard our hearts and to take our thoughts captive. In Psalm 119, loving God's Word and its rules is advised in pursuit of freedom. Our soul knows this well. We hope this year is full of growth, freedom, pursuit, relationship, and purpose through God's steadfast love and guidance.

Dr. Danny Huerta
Vice President, Parenting and Youth
Focus on the Family



Spiritual



How Your Child Connects *to* God

Is there a formula to connect with God the "right way"? Many Christians have grown up believing so. Quiet Bible study, daily prayers, going to a church service with upbeat music and a three-point sermon — these are the "proper" ways we worship and grow in our faith.

But not everyone fits the mold, and as children grow, they can begin to recognize that God has built their brains and bodies to approach His throne in a variety of ways. As parents, we can help our kids recognize their unique wiring to help nurture their faith. Children can connect with God, learning about His world and His truths, at the same time they are learning who they are and what their place is in the world.

In his book *Sacred Pathways*, pastor Gary Thomas describes different sets of patterns and practices believers may have a preference for in their relationship with God. Most children will exhibit a mix of these spiritual learning styles, and as parents, we have a precious opportunity to allow our children to find the pathway that allows them to connect best with their Creator and Savior.





Naturalists

(Visual/Spatial, Solitary/Intrapersonal, Physical/Kinesthetic)

Naturalists love God through His creation. The psalmist was thinking along these lines when he wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1, NKJV). Naturalists love being out in nature — camping, listening to birds, looking at flowers, and thinking through analogies of relationship through nature. This is where they feel closest to God. They also love journaling, self-study, photography, and other creative pursuits.

You can nurture their faith as you:

- Take walks and hikes, observe God's creation with awe.
- Visit zoos, gardens and aquariums.
- Read their Bible outdoors as the sun rises.



Sensates

(Physical/Kinesthetic, Visual, Auditory)

Sensates love God through their senses. They love art, music and beauty. King David is a good example of this kind of person. He was a poet, a harpist, and a singer, and when he brought the Ark of the Covenant back to the tabernacle — a place richly decorated with gold ornaments, beautiful fabrics, and lots of small artistic touches — he sang, "Oh worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!" (1 Chronicles 16:29, NKJV). Sensates love audio dramas and are more emotionally sensitive to smell, light, and sound as they have time with God. Some enjoy listening to soft background music as they relax and have quiet time.

You can help Sensates grow in their faith when you:

- Visit an orchard — pick fresh fruit and experience the wonderful flavors that God has given us to enjoy.
- Have family "art worship" times to reflect on God's truth through the creation of paintings and pottery.
- Go to parks, smell flowers, do art together, listen to music, sing, talk about the miracle of the senses and what our senses tell us about the world.
- Encourage them to draw as they listen to a sermon or a speaker or when they are having quiet time with God.



Traditionalists

(Verbal/Linguistic)

Traditionalists love God through tradition and long-established patterns of worship. They thrive on routine and ritual. They love using words and talking through concepts, and will likely take notes during sermons. Psalm 119 — all 176 verses of it! — celebrates this brand of spirituality from beginning to end: "How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart" (Psalm 119:1, 2, NASB).

Help your kids draw closer to God as you:

- Choose a regular night of the week to read and meditate on a Psalm.
- Consider family devotionals that use a set liturgy, perhaps using the Book of Common Prayer or another prayer book.
- Develop and memorize a "family prayer" that you can say together at mealtimes.
- Help them find devotional books and develop a reading plan.



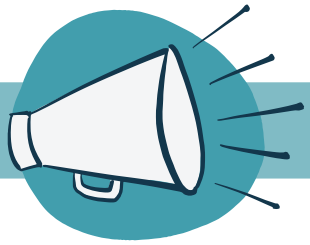
Activists

(Verbal/Linguistics, Social/Interpersonal)

Activists love God by standing up for His Truth and righteousness. They get frustrated at injustice, especially when others are hurt by it. They want to be active, speaking, and especially involved in a cause. The apostle James encouraged all of us to adopt the attitude of Activists when he said, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22, NKJV).

You can show them more about God when you:

- Serve as a family at food pantries, homeless shelters and pregnancy resource centers.
- Practice tactful confrontation together, focusing on gentleness, love and persuasiveness.
- Focus on God's faithfulness, studying Scripture that teaches how He is working when we cannot see it.
- Adopt an elderly neighbor or child who could use a friend, or open your home to show your kids faith in action.



Enthusiasts

(Physical/Kinesthetic, Auditory/Musical)

Enthusiasts love God in the midst of joy and celebrations. They love to see the evidence of God's work around them, and enjoy role-playing as they learn. They like hands-on and physical learning. Here again, King David comes immediately to mind. On the occasion mentioned above — the return of the ark to the tabernacle — David "danced before the Lord with all his might," so that the Scripture says, "So David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouting and the sound of the trumpet" (2 Samuel 6:14, 15, NASB).

You can nurture this child when you:

- Allow your child to participate in group worship services.
- Talk about dreams together, especially if your child has experienced dreams that were spiritual in nature.
- Encourage your child's sense of wonder for God's work.
- Invite new friends into your family's life and share your faith with them.



Caregivers

(Social/Interpersonal)

Caregivers love God by helping others, especially those who are hurting. They enjoy working in groups, and feel a sense of worship when they give their time to serve others. Jesus exhorted Peter to live out his faith in this way when He said, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17, NIV).

You can help caregivers see God more when you:

- Invite lonely or hurting people to your home for dinner, encouraging your child to help with the preparation.
- Give your child a chance to volunteer in the nursery during the Sunday sermon.
- Have them verbally share what they are learning.



Intellectuals

(Logical/Mathematical, Solitary/Intrapersonal)

Intellectuals love God by using their mind. These kids feel closest to God when they are reading books about Him. They do not like "soft-intellect" devotional books. They want to think deeply and figure out answers to life's questions. This approach is exemplified by King Solomon, who tells us that he wrote his proverbs "To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, To receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice, and equity: to give prudence to the naïve, to the youth knowledge and discretion ..." (Proverbs 1:2-4, NASB).

Help these kids think through their faith as they:

- Work on crafts and projects that help your children get engrossed in a Bible character or certain portion of Scripture.
- Study age-appropriate apologetics resources and prepare answers for those times when your child is called to account for their faith.
- Ask "Why?" a lot when in the car together. Talk about answers or ways to find the answer together.
- Create lists and systems. They love to use lists and read theological books.

Adapted from "7 Ways Your Kids can Connect with God" by Christie Thomas.

Enjoy talking about your child's faith more as a family with the "Ways Our Family Can Connect With God" activity included with this guide.

For more information see: FocusOnTheFamily.com/FearfullyAndWonderfullyMade



Naturalists

- Love being outside enjoying God's creation
- Worship example: Sunrise Bible reading and prayer walks through the woods
- Psalm 19:1

Activists

- Love justice and standing up for others
- Worship example: Sharing your faith at school (BringYourBible.org)
- James 1:22

Enthusiasts

- Love celebrating God in the midst of joy and celebration
- Worship example: Singing freely about or to God, or leading others in song
- 2 Samuel 6:14-15

Sensates

- Love art, music, and experiencing beauty through your senses
- Worship example: Reflecting on God's truth by painting, drawing, or listening to music
- 1 Chronicles 16:29



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Caregivers

- Love helping people, especially those who are hurting
- Worship example: Mowing the lawn for an elderly neighbor
- John 21:15-17

Traditionalists

- Love tradition, routines, and patterns
- Worship example: Establishing a weekly devotion and prayer schedule
- Psalm 119:1,2

Intellectuals

- Love thinking, using their minds, and asking "why"
- Worship example: Practicing age-appropriate apologetics (why you believe what you believe)
- Proverbs 1:2-4

Spiritual Learning Styles Defined

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Naturalists

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- Take walks and hikes, observing God's creation with awe.
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(Physical/Kinesthetic, Visual, Auditory) love God through their senses. They love art, music, and beauty. You can help their faith grow when you:

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- Have family "art worship" times.
- Go to parks, smell flowers, do art together, listen to music, sing, talk about the miracle of the senses and what our senses tell us about the world.



Caregivers

(Social/Interpersonal) love God by helping others, especially those who are hurting. You can help them see God more when you:

- Invite lonely or hurting people to your home for dinner, encouraging your child to help with preparation.
- Give your child a chance to volunteer in the nursery during the Sunday sermon.



Traditionalists

(Verbal/Linguistic) love God through tradition and long-established patterns of worship. They thrive on routine and ritual. Help them draw closer to God as you:

- Choose a regular night of the week to read and meditate on a Psalm.
- Consider family devotionals that use a set of liturgy. Perhaps using the *Book of Common Prayer* or another prayer book.
- Develop and memorize a "family prayer" that you can say together at mealtimes.



Intellectuals

(Logical/Mathematical, Solitary/Intrapersonal) love God by using their mind. Help these kids think through their faith as they:

- Work on crafts and projects that help your children get engrossed in a Bible character or certain portion of Scripture.
- Ask "Why?" a lot when in the car together. Talk about answers or ways to find answers together.



Ways Our Family Can Connect With God

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Self Care



Understanding how the brain functions is important when assessing our children's spiritual gifts and strengths. Keeping their brains healthy requires careful attention and management, and one of the most important aspects is rest. Ensuring that your children get enough sleep is just as important in their spiritual and mental development as it is in their physical development. By creating bedtime habits and regulating sleep patterns, you can help provide your child with the appropriate tools to help their brain stay healthy.

Facts About Sleep

by Dr. Meg Meeker

How to Help Your Family Get Better Sleep: 10 Steps

Every May, like clockwork, groups of students come into my office with one complaint: They are exhausted. Many are convinced they have mono, anemia, chronic fatigue syndrome or some peculiar disease they have read about on the internet. And they want blood work taken to find out what is wrong with them.

And every May I ask the same question: How much sleep have you gotten over the last month? While most believe they have gotten sufficient sleep, the truth is, they haven't. The majority of the teens and young adults I query have gotten less than 6 hours per sleep at night. No wonder they feel like they have a disease.

Inadequate sleep is a very common problem among children and adults. Unfortunately, there are serious ramifications of too little sleep. In fact, research shows that 30 percent of people are sleep deprived. Adults with inadequate amounts of sleep are at risk for physical, psychological and even neurological health issues. These include cognitive impairment like confusion and an inability to concentrate, depression, anxiety, irritability, cardiovascular disease, immunosuppression, metabolic disorders, obesity and more.

How Much Sleep Is Needed?

So how much sleep do you need to avoid these side effects? The short answer is that it depends on your constitution. But here are some recommended guidelines for adults. Average adults need between 7-9 hours routinely. Those who get less than six hours per night consistently over several months are considered sleep deprived. Teens need 9-10 hours of sleep every night and almost 30 percent say that they aren't getting enough sleep. When teens are sleep deprived, their grades go down, they experience mood volatility and their driving can suffer.

The younger the child, the higher the sleep needs are. Elementary aged children should get 10-11 hours of sleep at night and preschoolers should get 11-13. Many parents read these numbers and are shocked because most of their children don't get anywhere near this much sleep, particularly in their teens.

Why Aren't We Getting Enough Sleep?

In an age when we are so concerned about eating organic food, getting enough exercise, lowering intake of cholesterol and managing our weight, why, we should ask, do we fail to pay attention to one of the most important contributors to good health? The answer is simple: We believe that we can't get more sleep. Most of us parents spend hours in the car driving kids from one activity to another, other parents spend late hours at work and still others can't sleep because of insomnia or a mood disorder.

Many adults and kids simply don't know how to get better sleep. After all, when was the last time (if ever) your doctor talked to you about healthy sleep hygiene? One would think that a physician would always ask about sleep. But we usually don't because we, like you, feel that everyone's lives are so busy, that we can't increase the amount of time we sleep.

However, we must pay attention to the need that God gave each one of us to rest. After all, in Genesis God rested. He made our bodies to need adequate time of refreshment to function well, serve Him and enjoy life.

Adults and kids who are sleep deprived can't focus, perform well at work, school, sports or keep their moods up. In fact, sleep deprivation can look exactly like ADHD, depression and anxiety. I wonder how many kids are inaccurately diagnosed with disorders that really stem from too little sleep?

How to Get Better Sleep

So what can we do to improve the amount and quality of sleep for our kids and ourselves? First, we must pay attention to good sleep hygiene. Here are important things to remember.

- Regulate your circadian rhythm. Our circadian rhythm is our body's 24-hour nighttime-daytime cycle. It cues our body when to sleep and when to wake up. Sleep deprivation throws our circadian rhythm off and our body doesn't know how to respond. The best way to keep your rhythm consistent is to do tasks as close to the same time every day that you can. Exercise, eat, work and go to bed about the same time every day.
- Control light exposure. This is one of the easiest things we can do to improve sleep. Open and close your bedroom blinds at the same time each day. Minimize light when you are sleeping and don't be around bright lights before bedtime. If you awaken in the night, keep lighting in your room low.
- Exercise. You don't have to be a gym rat or marathon runner to improve your sleep. A brisk walk after dinner around the neighborhood, kicking a soccer ball in the back yard with your child or going for an easy bike ride can be suffcient to help you fall asleep faster and improve the quality of your sleep.
- Keep your bedroom temperature cool. Sleeping in a warm room can make you restless, so try to keep your bedroom a few degrees cooler than the rest of your house.
- Create a bedtime ritual. Yes, even grown-ups need time to wind down and get ready for bed. You can read, listen to calming music or pray. This tells your body that it's time to relax.

- No electronics the hour before bedtime. The light from electronic screens tricks our bodies into thinking that it's still daytime. So, turn off the television, computer and cell phone one hour before you go to bed. Also, while a show may help you fall asleep, it won't help you stay asleep.
- Keep your bedroom free from electronics.
- The bedroom should be a place of rest and quiet. Many shows, computer games, etc. cause us to be charged up. It is important to create an environment where your mind doesn't have to concentrate on anything — even a game of solitaire.
- Stop caffeine and nicotine at least 4 hours before bedtime. These are stimulants and can prevent you from falling asleep.
- Skip that glass of wine before bed. Some people take a little wine before bed because wine does help most people fall asleep. The problem is, it won't help you stay asleep and sleep quality will not be as good.
- Eat turkey and drink milk. It turns out that mom was right when she told you to drink warm milk before bedtime. Milk and turkey have L-Tryptophan, an amino acid that can help you sleep. God created our bodies so that we can enjoy life, honor Him and serve others among other great things. He calls our bodies the temple for the Holy Spirit and if we take Him at His word, we have an obligation to take the best care of that temple that we can. And let it sleep.

Dr. Megan Meeker is a pediatrician in Michigan and a best-selling author of several books on parenting healthy kids

For more information see: FocusOnTheFamily.com/FearfullyAndWonderfullyMade



Time Management



Time management can be difficult for all ages, especially younger children who are often not the time manager of their daily activities. Helping your child learn to map out the time they spend during the day can aid in their understanding of where their time actually went. Take time to talk through how we train our brains to learn and think in different environments doing different things. In opening this conversation, you can show your children that how they spend time affects virtually everything about their day.

Time Management

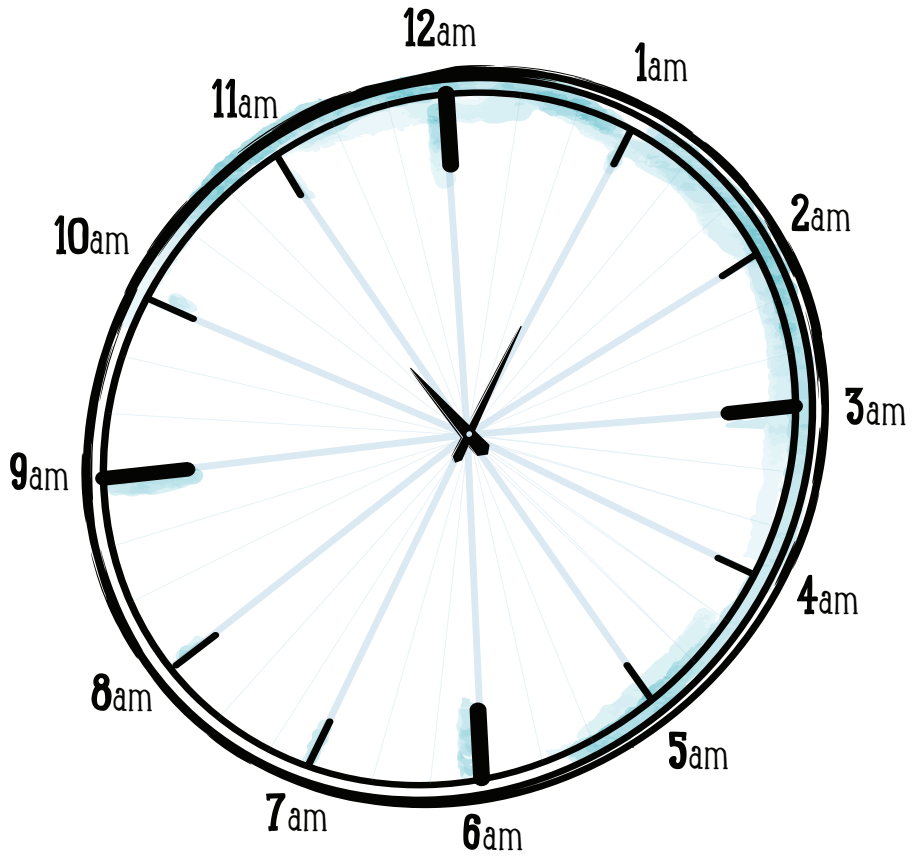
The following activity will help you assess if your children are over-scheduled.
To help you dig deeper in managing your family's time well, we have included the following resources.

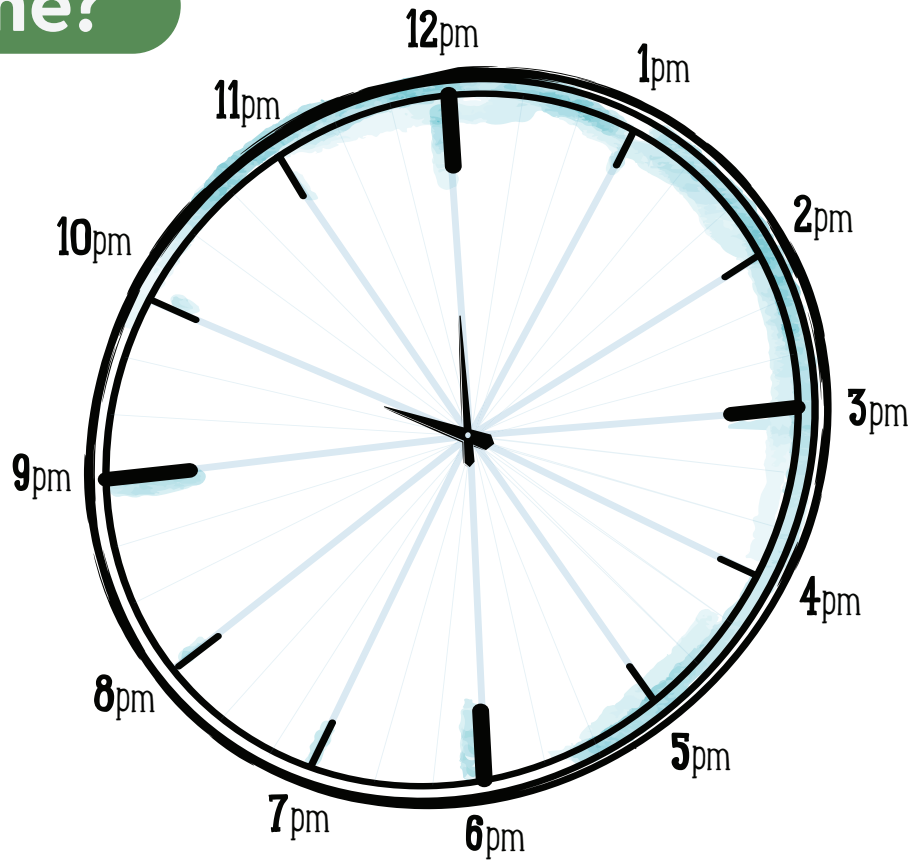
For more information see: FocusOnTheFamily.com/FearfullyAndWonderfullyMade



How Do You Spend Your Time?

Take time with your children to map out how they spend their days.
Using different colors, label and color the time they sleep and the time they are at school. Then focus on one recent day and map out how they actually spent their time — not how they think they spent it.





Talk about how we nurture our brains through certain activities and not through others. For example, taking time to play outside nurtures the brain more than playing video games.

Have your children map out different days so they get a picture of how they spend their time and how this might affect the care of their brain.

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Media Discernment



A Game Plan for Your Family's Entertainment and Technology Use

by Adam Holz
Condensed from ***Becoming a Screen-Savvy Family***

In the last 50 years, we've gone from garage-sized computers to pocket-sized devices that put the sum total of human knowledge and content in our hands. No wonder we're on our screens a lot. There's a lot to see.

So how do we manage that reality as parents? How do we set limits and protect our kids appropriately, while at the same time equipping them to make mature decisions on their own as they get older?

I'll admit that it's not an easy balance. The temptation is to do one of two things: to lock the digital doors, to make sure those portals stay shut. Or we may be tempted to do just the opposite: toss up our hands in frustration and capitulation.

I understand both temptations. But neither harsh legalism nor exhausted license can effectively equip our children to navigate the real world. To do that, they need our help defining a middle path of meaningful, thoughtful *intentionality, engagement, and conversation.*

Intentionality

In his book *7 Traits of Effective Parenting*, Focus on the Family Vice President of Parenting and Youth Danny Huerta defines intentionality as "knowing what you want to do to make each day count in your child's life and in your opportunity to be transformed."

I like that definition. *Knowing* requires effort and planning; being intentional isn't something that just happens. Instead, we order and structure our lives so that we can pursue a desired outcome. We embrace discipline to reinforce what's most important: our relationships with each other (especially our family) and with God.

But how do we begin to become more intentional about our—and our kids'—entertainment, media, and screen engagement? One step toward this goal is as simple as it is profound: We must make a fundamental shift from *passive consumption* of entertainment to active choices about what we're engaging with and why.

"I just want to veg out" is something we've all likely said. And what that looks like will be different from one person to the next. But essentially what it means is two things: We don't want to have to think, and we want to be entertained.

For me, vegging out might mean mindlessly surfing through internet sites I like. For my wife, it might mean watching a Hallmark movie. Now, there's nothing necessarily wrong with either of those pursuits. What's potentially a problem, though, is our attitude: I deserve space to relax, be entertained, and not have to think. That attitude is utterly passive and consumption-oriented. Instead of thinking thoughtfully about how we might relax, we simply turn the TV on and turn our brains off.

The point here isn't to say that you can't watch a movie or TV show to relax. The problem comes when doing this becomes an automatic, unconscious habit—not something we intentionally or purposefully choose, but something we do reflexively in a vain attempt to escape life and its constant pressures and pains.

Intentionality, then, involves the recognition that we're making a choice—and making that choice actively instead of drifting passively into mindless, zombie-like consumption.

Engagement

Intentionality goes hand in hand with our next area of emphasis: *engagement*. When we engage, we roll up our sleeves and get to work understanding two important and interconnected areas: the entertainment content our kids encounter and how it might influence them.

Recently I picked up my teenage daughter from school, and her phone made a chiming alert sound. Like one of Pavlov's famously conditioned dogs responding to the sound of a bell, she quickly reached for her phone and posed for a spontaneous selfie right there in the car. "What are you doing?" I asked. She told me that she was doing her daily BeReal selfie. I wasn't familiar with that app, so she explained that it prompts users to post a picture once a day, wherever they are, within two minutes.

When we got home, I did some further digging. You can almost always do a search on whatever you're looking for plus the words "parents' guide" to at least start your exploration of what you need to know. I did that and quickly found information giving me the basics on BeReal. Turns out it was designed to combat some of the biggest issues with social media.

So that's one half of the engagement equation: growing in our understanding of what our kids are interested in. The other half involves engaging with our kids enough to know their particular personalities and how various kinds of entertainment and content impact them. Which means we need to become students of our children.

I once reviewed the movie *A Dog's Purpose* for *Plugged In*. The story involved the life of a dog whose personality jumped from one dog to another when each canine reached the end of its life—something very close to reincarnation. I felt my kids and I could talk through that issue and maybe even have a nice theological conversation about it from a biblical perspective. The next weekend we went to see the movie.

Afterward, my youngest daughter was very quiet. I asked if the dogs dying had made her sad.

"No, Daddy. That's not it." She paused, then asked, "Daddy, is our house going to burn down?"

It took me a second to figure out where that question came from. Then I remembered: In the movie, the young protagonist's house is destroyed in a fire. It's dramatic, though no one was hurt. Still, it wasn't something I would have thought was potentially problematic. Yet it was suddenly very clear that this possibility was troubling my daughter much more than the thought of dogs dying and being reincarnated.

Engagement, then, looks both ways: at our kids and at the things they're interested in. Then it dives into understanding how the entertainment they're interested in may be influencing their hearts. Engagement also leads to the next foundational principle when it comes to equipping our kids to think critically about entertainment and technological access to it: *conversation.*

Conversation

Conversation, of course, means *talking*. That's self-evident. But let's face it—our first impulse as parents often doesn't involve talking about our kids' entertainment and screen interests.

Awhile back, my kids were talking about songs on their respective playlists. I feel like I know what they're interested in. But I was totally caught off guard when my middle child mentioned that she had Katy Perry's hit song "California Gurls" on her list.

That's when Dad. Went. *OFF*.

"*What?*" I practically yelled. "Katy Perry? I don't want you listening to her. The messages in that song are terrible!" I went on like that for maybe a couple more "I don't want you listening to that garbage" kinds of sentences. And when my spontaneous little rant was done . . . total

silence from my daughter. She sat like a stone. She completely shut down, conversationally, relationally, and emotionally.

I had to do some damage control with my daughter to repair our ruptured relationship. I let her know that while I had some concerns about the lyrics of that song, I hadn't acted respectfully toward her.

Conversation requires trust and respect, space to share ideas without fear of being shut down. I didn't *talk* with her about Katy Perry. I *told* her. It was a one-way road, and conversationally, I'd run her over. So why on earth would she trust me in similar conversations in the future?

Those two values—trust and respect—form foundational building blocks for our relationships with our kids. Sometimes we need to say no. But even in these cases, as our children move from their tweens to their teens, our goal is to cultivate conversation instead of issuing edicts.

Especially as our kids move through their teen years, we want to cultivate conversation grounded in trust and respect. We aren't perfect, so we may not always get it right. But if our kids know that we're more invested in our relationship with them than we are simply trying to enforce rules, it will pay dividends in our connection with them as they move toward adulthood.

Boundaries

Those dividends might be the most obvious when it comes to a subject that, frankly, most of us probably aren't that crazy about—whether we're parents, kids, or in some other season of life. I'm talking about boundaries.

Researchers have found that even if kids naturally seem to push against boundaries, they unconsciously want them. And so do we. When we know where the "fences" in life are, we can live with a sense of security and confidence. But when boundaries are unclear, especially for children, it can create a sense of unease because they don't know where the edge of the proverbial playing field is.

For the purposes of entertainment and technology, however, we can focus on four concrete areas as we strive to set appropriate limits:

What content will we engage with?

Where will that happen?

How long will we be engaged with it?

With whom will we do that?

What?

When we think about setting limits on entertainment, this is very likely the question that comes to mind first: What is out of bounds? The younger your child is, the longer the list of content concerns you'll likely have that push various forms of entertainment out of bounds. These include obvious issues such as profanity and sexually explicit imagery. But parents will also need to think about issues that are perhaps less clear-cut. What about a story that emphasizes the concept of evolution, for example?

There are no cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all answers here. Instead, you'll have to decide which images, ideas, and issues are out of bounds for your children at their varying stages of development.

Where?

At first glance, this question might seem less obvious. Not that long ago, really, the answer was obvious: Most entertainment took place where the family TV was. These days, though, anyone with a smartphone or tablet likely has access to a broad range of movies and TV programming, as well as internet-based content on YouTube and social media.

Families will need to decide what limits should be placed on devices in bedrooms, especially at night. From social

media notifications to video games to pornography use, kids with access to screen devices in their rooms at night risk exposure to harmful content as well as interruptions in healthy nighttime sleep patterns.

How Long?

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry offers detailed screen-time advice for young children:

"Until 18 months of age limit screen use to video chatting along with an adult (for example, with a parent who is out of town). Between 18 and 24 months screen time should be limited to watching educational programming with a caregiver. For children 2–5, limit non-educational screen time to about 1 hour per weekday and 3 hours on the weekend days. For ages 6 and older, encourage healthy habits and limit activities that include screens."

For many years, the rule of thumb for multiple experts has been two hours of screen time a day, in part because more than that has correlated with unhealthy mental and physical health outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, and obesity, among other things.

The problem, however, is that the gap between what's *recommended* and what today's screen-using kids are *actually doing* is enormous. The Common Sense Census reported in 2021 that the average eight- to twelve-year-old spends five hours and thirty-three minutes a day on screens, while thirteen- to eighteen-year-olds use screens eight hours and thirty-nine minutes each day.

So establishing and keeping limits on screen time is going to be a major area of boundary-setting every family has to navigate.

With Whom?

Finally, we must consider who our kids are interacting with when they use screens. Are they connecting with others online via FaceTime or another video app? Are they completely isolated in their rooms as they surf TikTok or other social media sites? Are they watching a movie with Mom and Dad in the living room? While being alone with a device isn't necessarily a problem, a family with multiple children who all have their own screens can easily find themselves drifting their separate ways, interacting primarily with their devices instead of with each other.

Setting and maintaining boundaries almost never feels like an easy or fun thing to do. But, as the author of Hebrews wrote:

"For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

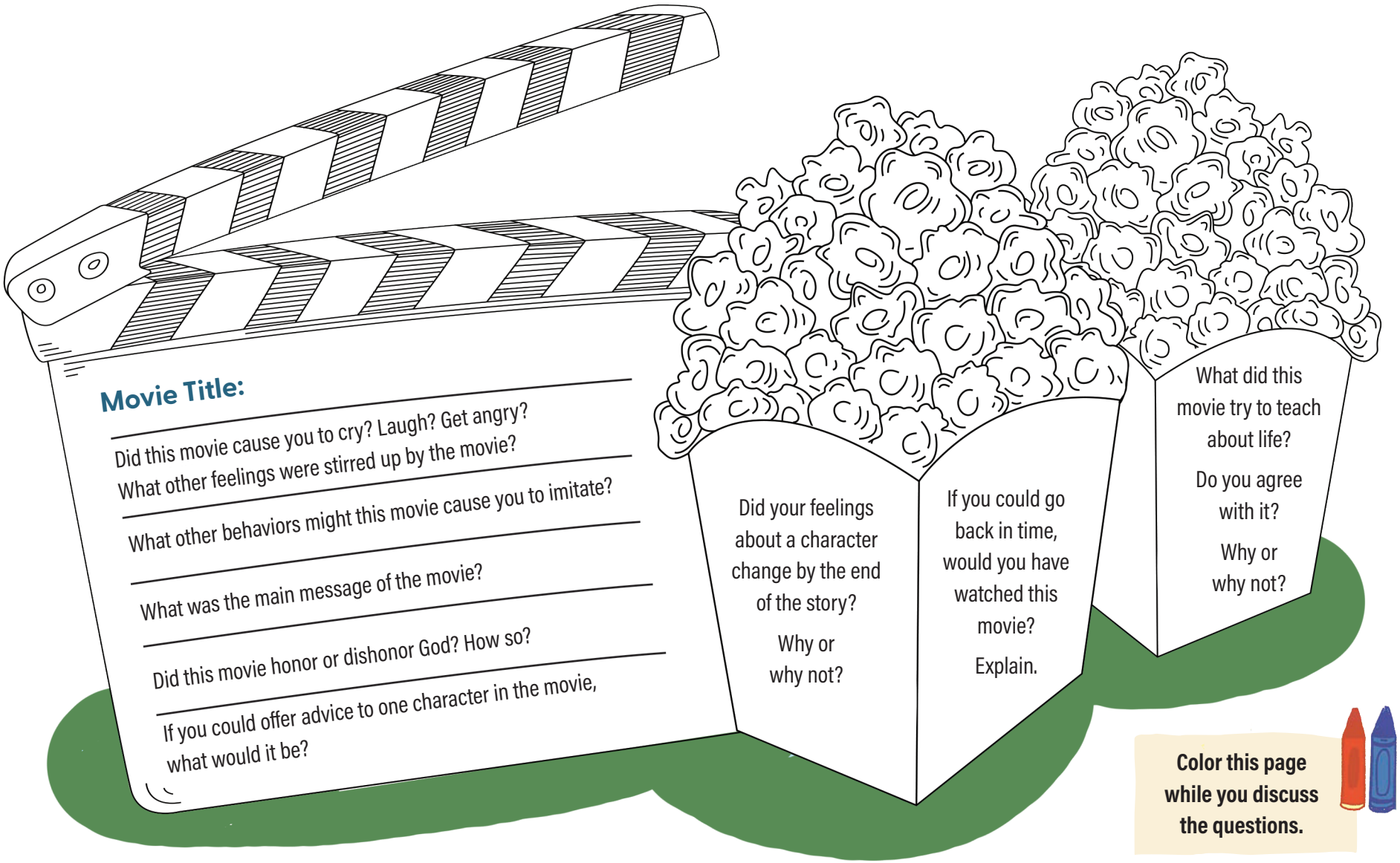
(Hebrews 12:11)



Enjoy talking about Media Discernment more as a family with the "What Am I Feeding My Brain?" activity included with this guide.

What Am I Feeding My Brain?

After watching a movie together, use these questions to talk together about how the film affects you.



Movie Title:

Did this movie cause you to cry? Laugh? Get angry? What other feelings were stirred up by the movie?

What other behaviors might this movie cause you to imitate?

What was the main message of the movie?

Did this movie honor or dishonor God? How so?

If you could offer advice to one character in the movie, what would it be?

Did your feelings about a character change by the end of the story?

Why or why not?

If you could go back in time, would you have watched this movie?

Explain.

What did this movie try to teach about life?

Do you agree with it?

Why or why not?

Color this page while you discuss the questions.

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