

Grade 3, Theme Four

Family Letter

Dear Family,

We have come to the fourth theme of *Fully Alive*, our family life program. Because the partnership of home, church, and school is so important, this letter is written to let you know what we talk about in class, and to offer some ideas for your involvement. For more information, for families please go to www.occb.on.ca. If you have any questions, please contact me.

About Theme Four

Theme Four of *Fully Alive* is called “Growing in Commitment.” Each one of us is challenged to grow in commitment to God and to each other. This is part of what it means to be fully human. The best way for children to learn about commitment is to grow up in a loving and committed family. Knowing that they can rely on the commitment of others helps children learn to be dependable, to keep their word, and to make wise choices.

In Theme Four we will:

- learn more about the commitments that all families have, and how important it is for people to keep their commitments
- discover that we have to think before we make a decision
- analyze a situation involving a decision, and learn that other people can help us when we are making decisions

Working together at home and at school

- Talk to your child about your family’s commitments (at work, at home, in the community), why they are important, and how each member of the family can contribute to making sure these commitments are met.
- We will be talking about the importance of reflecting — asking ourselves questions — before we make a decision. Although young children do not make major decisions, they do make small ones, and the habit of reflection is a valuable one to develop. Encourage your child to stop and reflect before acting.
- The story the children will be reading at school is about a boy named Eddie who has to make a decision involving a choice between two good things. Ask your child to tell you about Eddie’s decision. Children often need help with their decisions, not to make the decision for them, but to clarify for them the questions they need to ask themselves in order to decide wisely.

Teacher: _____ Date _____

Theme Four Topics

. . . let your yes be yes and your no be no . . .

James 5:12

This theme is developed through three topics. All of the topics involve stories about Eddie Petrowski and his family. In the first topic the teacher and students explore the commitments that all families have both within and outside the home. In the next topic, the students learn more about decisions and the need for care and thought in order to make good decisions. In the last topic the students discuss some of the decisions that people their age can make.

Topic 1 — Families Have Commitments

It is within the family that we have to learn that life is not fair. Love is not fair. It is not something that we can weigh out and balance against our goodness and our merit.

Jane Davies, *The Price of Loving*

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that family members have commitments to each other and commitments outside the home. The teacher and students read a story about the Petrowski family members as they try to figure out how they can juggle their many commitments. The students talk about the meaning of the word *commitment*, and explore some of the commitments they have at home and outside the home. You will find all of the Theme Four stories about the Petrowski family at the end of this theme.

Main Ideas

- Families have many commitments. Family members have important commitments to each other and commitments outside the family.
- A commitment is a responsibility that we try very hard to live up to.
- We need help from each other and from God to keep our commitments.

Family Participation

- You and your child may enjoy reading the first story about Eddie Petrowski and his family. What does your child think of the solution Eddie's parents came up with? Have you ever had a similar situation in your family?

- You could ask your child about his or her understanding of the word *commitment*. At school the students learn that “a commitment is a responsibility that you try very hard to live up to.” What commitments does your child have? What kinds of commitments do the other members of the family have?
- Conflicting commitments are a frequent experience for families. This topic gives you the opportunity to talk about this problem and what family members can do about the situation. Sometimes family members find that they have too many outside commitments and that these are interfering with family life.
- There are times when it is impossible for parents to keep a promise they have made to their children, or fulfill a commitment to them. These situations happen in every family, and children have to accept disappointment. As parents, we can respect the children’s perspective and acknowledge their disappointment, but we still have to make the appropriate decision.
- Your child might enjoy keeping his or her own calendar of various commitments. Even though children of this age still need a lot of assistance from parents to keep their various commitments, it is good for them to take some responsibility in this area. Encourage your child to keep track of special events at school, birthday parties, and any other activities she or he may have.

Topic 2 — Learning About Decisions

The strongest principle of growth lies in human choice.
George Eliot

Summary

This topic helps the students understand the importance of learning how to make good decisions. The teacher and students read a story about a decision Eddie’s father has to make. They discuss the need to reflect before making a decision, and the fact that some decisions can be hard to make. After considering the decision Mr. Petrowski has to make, the students write letters to him, offering him their advice.

Main Ideas

- Everyone has to make decisions.
- Some decisions can be hard to make and need to be made carefully.

- Learning to make good decisions takes practice.

Family Participation

- You and your child may enjoy reading the story about Mr. Petrowski's decision. You will find it at the end of this theme. You might ask about the letters the students wrote to Mr. Petrowski about his decision. What was your child's advice? Should Mr. Petrowski be a coach or not? Why?
- When children are given plenty of opportunities to make decisions, they learn about the importance of thinking before deciding. For example, you might let your child decide on the time when he or she will complete homework. Will it be right after school? Or does your child prefer to play outside first and then complete the homework? Often children choose to leave a task they don't enjoy to the end of the day. Then they may discover that they don't have enough time or are too tired. They may have to experience this consequence a number of times before they recognize that they might be better off doing their homework or any other necessary tasks before they play or watch television.
- There may be some situations in which you will want to explore the reasons that your child is making a particular decision. Sometimes children avoid a situation or activity because they are afraid of failing. Or they might decide to stay inside rather than play outside because of an experience of being bullied. When you suspect that there is a deeper reason for a decision your child has made, one that is not being talked about, you may be able to help by bringing the situation out into the open.
- It's a good idea to let your child know that adults can have difficulty making a good decision. You might talk about one of your decisions and what you had to think about before you made up your mind. It's important to let your child know that it takes strength as well as thought to make good decisions.

Topic 3 — We Get Help With Our Decisions

Too often we give children answers to remember rather than problems to solve.

Roger Lewin

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that other people cannot make some decisions for them, but can help them by giving them advice. The teacher and students read a story about a decision that Eddie Petrowski has to make. They discuss the story, and also explore two different kinds of decisions: a decision between two good things and a decision between something that is right and something that is wrong.

Main Ideas

- We all make decisions. Some decisions are between two good things, and some are between something right and something wrong.
- We need to think and pray before we make an important decision.
- Sometimes other people can help us figure out what we need to think about.
- Learning how to make good decisions is something everyone has to do.

Family Participation

- You and your child may enjoy reading the story about Eddie and his decision. You will find it at the end of this theme. What does your child think that Eddie decided to do? If it were your child's decision, what would he or she decide to do? Why?
- At school the teacher and students discussed two kinds of decision — a decision between two good things, and a decision between something right and something wrong. You may want to discuss these kinds of decisions. It's important for children to know that even when they *know* what is right, it can still be difficult to *do* what is right. You might want to explain that what makes it easier is practice. In the same way, when we make many bad decisions, it gets harder to make good decisions.
- You might want to talk to your child about the difference between decisions that your child is old enough to make, and decisions that are made by adults for him or her. It's good for children to know that an important part of growing up is making more and more decisions for oneself.
- Parents can be helpful when children are having difficulty making a decision. Learning to make good decisions is not something that children are born knowing how to do. It takes time and experience, and assistance from other people, especially parents. It also involves making mistakes, and learning from them. You can help by pointing out what things are

important to think about. For example, if your child is trying to decide how to spend an allowance or a birthday present of money, you might help her or him weigh the pros and cons of various items.

- Another way in which parents can help is by talking about decisions that didn't work out. This is especially important when your child has done something wrong. Why was the decision a bad one? What could he or she do to make a better decision in the future? You could explain that at times everyone has difficulty making good decisions and that we all need God's help. When we pray, we ask God to help us make good decisions.

Theme Four Stories and Poems

Topic 1: The teacher and students read this story about Eddie's school science fair and the many other commitments the Petrowski family has.

The School Science Fair

Eddie is very excited. Today he found out that his project was going to be in the school science fair next Tuesday night. Only three projects were chosen from each class. Eddie's was a model of a volcano.

That night Eddie told everyone his big news.

"That's great!" his dad said.

"When is the science fair?" his mom asked.

"Next Tuesday. After dinner, from 7 to 9."

His mother's face fell. "I can't go," she said. "That's my class night, and I have a test."

"And I have to work late all next week," his dad said. "What can we do?"

Eddie looked very upset. "It's not fair," he said. "I really want you to come." Then he went upstairs to his room.

• • •

Later that evening, Eddie had a talk with his dad.

"Your mom really wants to go, Eddie. But she can't miss her test. You

know how hard she's studied. I want to go, too, but I have to work."

"I know," Eddie said, "but I want you both to be there."

"We'll work something out," his dad said.

By the next morning, Eddie's mom and dad had come up with the best solution they could.

"Steve will go with you and take pictures of the science fair for us," his mom explained.

"I will?" Steve said.

"Yes, you will. I don't think Eddie has missed one of your hockey games," she reminded him.

"I'll go, Mom," Steve said, "I was just kidding."

"Mom will drop you both off on her way to class, and John's dad said he would drive you home," Mr. Petrowski said. "How does that sound, Eddie?"

"It's a good plan, Dad."

* * * * *

Topic 2: The teacher and students read this story about a decision Mr. Petrowski has to make, and what he needs to think about to make a good decision.

Learning About Decisions

In Eddie's neighbourhood there are soccer teams that play once a week when the weather gets warm. Eddie's friend John played last year and said that it was a lot of fun.

Mr. Petrowski took Eddie over to the community centre to register.

"We're glad to have you sign up," said the woman who took Eddie's form. Then she asked Mr. Petrowski, "Would you like to coach? All our coaches are parents and we could use a few more."

"That would be great Dad!" Eddie exclaimed.

"I'm not sure," Eddie's dad said to the woman. "I'll have to think about it. Can I let you know?"

“Sure,” she answered.

“Why don’t you want to be a coach, Dad?” Eddie asked on the way home.

“I didn’t say I didn’t want to. But I have to think about it.”

“It would be really fun,” Eddie said.

“It would be fun because we could do it together,” his dad agreed. “But I have a lot of commitments already. And I really don’t know anything about coaching.”

“You’d be good at it, Dad.”

“I’m not as sure about that as you are,” his dad said. “That’s one of the things I need to think about. I’m also not sure if I have enough time to coach. And I want to talk to your mother about it. And then I’ll make a decision.”

“Well, I think you should,” Eddie said.

“I know what you think,” his dad laughed. “But I have to do my own thinking.”

* * * * *

Topic 3: The teacher and children read this story about Eddie Petrowski’s difficult decision.

We Get Help With Our Decisions

The school year is almost over. In a few weeks Eddie is going to a special one-week art program at the community centre. He wanted to go last year, but he wasn’t old enough.

On Saturday morning the telephone rang and Eddie answered it. It was John’s mother. She asked to speak to Eddie’s mom.

“John’s parents have rented a cottage for a week,” his mom said when she got off the phone. “They’re inviting you to go with them.”

“Can I, Mom? Can I? Please!” Eddie asked.

“Hold on a minute. Your dad and I need to talk about it, but there’s a problem, Eddie. It’s the same week as your art program.”

“Oh, no!” Eddie cried.

• • •

Eddie's mom and dad decided that if he wanted to, Eddie could go to John's cottage. They also checked with the community centre, but the other art program was full.

"I don't know what to do, Mom," Eddie said. "I want to go to the cottage and the art program."

"I know," his mom said. "Maybe I can help you make up your mind." She gave him a piece of paper, and asked him to write the words ART CAMP and COTTAGE at the top, and then draw a line down the middle between them.

"Now," she said. "Let's talk about each choice. You know they would both be fun, so you can write that under each one."

Eddie and his mom talked for a while. She asked him some questions he hadn't thought about, like:

"Which do you enjoy more — swimming and fishing or drawing and painting?"

"Could you do the art program or go to the cottage next summer?"

"How do you feel about being away from home for a week?"

Eddie decided to finish the list in his bedroom. He had a lot to think about. His brother Steve came in and looked at Eddie's list. He thought Eddie should go to the cottage, but Steve didn't enjoy art.

Finally, Eddie finished his list. "Mom," he shouted, "I've made a decision!"

• • •

Here is Eddie's list:

ART CAMP

1. Fun
2. At home
3. I can go next year.
4. I don't know anyone at at art camp.

COTTAGE

1. Fun
2. Away from home
3. I don't know if I can go next year.
4. John's my best friend.

5. I love art.

5. Swimming is O.K.

What do you think Eddie decided to do?

* * * * *