

Grade 3, Theme Two

Family Letter

Dear Family,

It's time for the second 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 Two

Theme Two of *Fully Alive* is called "Living in Relationship." God created us to live in relationship with others, and to respond to each other with love. Loving relationships begin in the family, and this will be our main focus during this theme, along with two topics about friendship.

In Theme Two we will:

- talk about our family names, some family customs, and how family love is open to others, especially when we celebrate special occasions.
- read a story about the death of a grandmother, and how it affects her family.
- explore different positions in the family (oldest, middle, youngest, only child).
- discover the importance of learning how to compromise with friends and of being friendly and open to others.

Working together at school and at home

- We will be researching family names, so be sure to ask your child about this. We will also be talking about favourite family customs. You might tell your child about your favourite family customs when you were growing up.
- We will be reading a story about a boy whose grandmother dies, and how sad he is. You might ask your child to tell you this story, and see if he or she has any questions about death. If there has been a recent death that has touched your family, please let me know so that we can include the person and your family in our classroom prayers.
- One of our topics on friendship encourages the students to think of friendliness as a quality that cannot be used up — there is always enough to share. In particular, we will be talking about being people who include others, not exclude them. You might talk about the importance of friendliness at home.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Theme Two Topics

This theme about relationships is developed through six topics. The first four are about the family. The students begin this theme by talking about their family names and some of the special customs that contribute to each family's unique identity. The next three topics focus on family love as an open, generous love, on the ways family members can help each other during sad times, and on the importance of co-operation and friendship with brothers and sisters. The last two topics are about friendship. The students learn that friendship is a necessary relationship in everyone's life, and that friendliness is a quality that everyone can develop and share with others.

Topic 1 — Our Families

A sense of memory and history provides the balance needed to compose a personal song.

Paul Connolly, *Building Family: An Act of Faith*

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that each family is unique and has its own special way of being a family. The teacher and students explore family names and family customs. The students are invited to bring something from home that will help their classmates learn about their families.

Main Ideas

- Belonging to a family is an important part of who we are.
- Each family has a special name, special customs, and traditions.
- These customs and traditions are signs of the family's special way of being a family.

Family Participation

- The students have been asked to bring in something from home that will help the class to learn about their families. This could be a photograph, a scrapbook, an object related to a special family custom, or an item that is part of the story of your family. The students have been asked to prepare a small card to go with the item, explaining what it is and why it is important to the family. These items will be displayed on a table.

- There are several optional activities with this topic that the students may be doing at school. One of these activities involves researching the meaning and origin of family names. Most public libraries and many web sites have information about last names. Your child might like to make a list of family names (both parents, grandparents) and, with your help, find out about their origin and meaning.
- This topic provides an opportunity for all of your family members to talk about their favourite family customs. Sometimes these customs are connected to special celebrations (for example, an Easter egg hunt), but there are also more frequent events (for example, a special breakfast on Sunday mornings, a story and chat at bedtime) that children come to expect. Family customs and traditions mean a great deal to children. The fact that certain events occur year after year, or week after week, gives the child a sense of security, of belonging, of roots, and of family identity. These customs may involve very small events, but they mean a great deal to children. When parents think back to their family of origin, they often realize that what they remember most are not the big occasions, but the little things they could count on.
- Special occasions such as Easter and Christmas are an opportunity to establish some customs that reflect our values. Attending church together, setting up the Christmas creche, or lighting the Advent wreath in the days leading up to Christmas are important events for children. Also, it is good to include children in the preparations for special celebrations. When they have special tasks connected to family customs, in years to come they will say, “I always made decorations for the tree,” or “It was my job to chop the fruit for the Christmas cake.”
- This topic also provides an opportunity to tell family stories about events in the past. Each family has a special story of how they came to be a family. Children learn about this story through parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents. A sense of family history is a wonderful gift that you can give your child.

Topic 2 — Family Love is Open

The family is the first and vital cell of society. Far from being closed in on itself, it is open to other families and to society. It has a social role of hospitality, opening one's door and heart, especially in favour of the poor.

Curriculum Guidelines for Family Life Education, OCCB

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that the family is a special place where we share love, and where family love may be shared with others. The teacher and students read a story about a Christmas celebration with the Eddie Petrowski's family. The students are invited to think about times when families, especially their own families, gather with extended relatives, family friends, and others.

Main Ideas

- Family love is open. It is a welcoming love.
- We try to keep in touch with family members and special friends even when we are far apart.
- When families are open to others they are sharing God's love for all of us.

Family Participation

- You and your child may enjoy reading "A Family Christmas," a story about Eddie Petrowski's family. You will find it at the end of this theme. The students have a shorter version of this story in their books.
- It's good to remember when you read this story that it views this family at their very best. Their sense of celebration and of openness to others is what we all want for our own families. Sometimes we fail, but we still continue to try. When families try to be open to others and make an effort to gather extended family members (aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents) and friends together for special celebrations, children are given a wonderful example of what family love is all about. They learn that family love is big; its warmth can include many people. This doesn't mean that there are no tensions or disagreements, but that we can put them aside, or try to ignore them, in order to celebrate with our families.
- When it is possible, it is good to include godparents in some family celebrations. In this way children are given the opportunity to experience a special relationship with their godparents.
- Children learn about the openness of family love when parents encourage them to invite their friends home. It is good for children to know that their home is open to others and to learn how to make people feel welcome.

- When there has been a separation or divorce in the family, it is important that a sense of sharing family love is not lost. Contact with extended family members and the support of special friends are very important for both parents and children. In situations where both parents continue to be involved with their children, children need to know that they are free to love both parents. Parents may feel bitter and angry toward each other, but such feelings should not be communicated to the children. Children cannot learn about the generosity of love if they are made to feel that in loving one parent, they are hurting the other.

Topic 3 — Family Changes

*Set me like a seal on your heart
Like a seal on your arm.
For love is strong as death.*

The Song of Songs 8:6

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that some changes in the family bring sadness. The teacher and students read a story about Shane Carson, whose grandmother has recently died. They discuss some of the ways the family changed after Shane’s grandmother died, Shane’s feelings, and his memories of his grandmother. The teacher brings the topic to a close with a prayer gathering. The students pray for all those who have died and for the families and friends who miss them.

Main Ideas

- Some changes, like the death of a grandmother are very hard for families.
- We feel sad when someone we love dies and sometimes we feel angry because they are no longer with us.
- The people who have died are with God and they continue to love us and we continue to love them.
- Family members can help and comfort each other when there is a sad change. God gave us families to help us be strong people.

Family Participation

- You and your child may want to read “Shane and Grandma,” the story about Shane’s love for his grandmother and his feelings about her death.

- This topic gives you and your child the opportunity to talk about death. If there has been a death in your family, it is important to encourage your child to share his or her feelings. Often, children's first experience of death is the death of a loved pet. They may feel sad, helpless, and angry, and their feelings should be respected and taken seriously. If this has happened to your child, you can help by acknowledging the feelings ("I know how sad you are feeling") and by reassuring your child that the very sad feelings will go away and what will be left are happy memories. What children need most when they are feeling sad is someone to listen to them.

- Children also have questions about death that are not about feelings, but about what happens when people die. These questions are best answered with simple but accurate answers. Children sometimes worry about death, particularly if they are aware of the death of someone young. It's a good idea to reassure them and to remind them that most people die when they are quite old.

- This topic also gives you the opportunity to talk about our Christian belief in eternal life. When you brought your child to church for baptism, she or he was baptized into the life and death of Jesus Christ. Your child was born again and received the life of the risen Lord, a life that is maturing as he or she grows. As the occasion arises, it is good to mention the people you have known and loved who have died and are now with the risen Lord. Let your child know that we continue to love people after death, and they continue to love us. We pray for them, and they pray for us. We know that we will all be together again one day. You can also let your child know how sad you were when the person died and that it takes time to accept the death of someone we love.

- If there has been a death in your family or of a close friend and your child will be attending the funeral or going to the funeral parlour, explain what will happen before the event. Children are often apprehensive because they do not know what will happen.

- Although this topic may raise many questions about death, it is really about the feelings people have when something sad happens within the family, and the importance of sharing our feelings with family members. If there has been a difficult change in your family (for example, illness, unemployment, separation) you could take this opportunity to talk to your child about her or his feelings. Even if your child has said very little about the change, you

may want to mention it. Let your child know that part of belonging to a family is sharing the bad times as well as the good times, and that people go on loving each other even when there are difficult changes. In the same way, God continues to love us, even when life seems very difficult.

- We often think that we must shelter our children from all pain and sadness, and it is certainly true that we always want to protect them from unnecessary pain. But at the same time, there are sorrows in children's lives — the loss of a friend, or a deep disappointment about something the child has been anticipating. As parents, we have to accept their pain, and allow them to experience it, in the same way that we must accept suffering in our own lives. The acceptance of suffering, with strength and with hope, is at the centre of our Christian faith.

Topic 4 — Sisters and Brothers

The family is the first school. It is the only school no one can do without.
Curriculum Guidelines for Family Life Education, OCCB

Summary

This topic helps the students learn more about the importance of co-operation and friendship among brothers and sisters. The teacher and students discuss the positions of children within families (oldest, middle, youngest, or only child) and the advantages and disadvantages of these positions. The students complete an interview to find out more about other children's views of family positions.

Main Ideas

- Each child has a special position in the family.
- There are advantages and disadvantages to each position in the family.
- Being a brother or a sister is a special kind of friendship.
- Getting along with brothers and sisters requires co-operation and willingness to compromise.

Family Participation

- You might ask your child about the class discussion of advantages and disadvantages of particular positions in the family. What does your child think about his or her position?

- Sometimes middle children have difficulty seeing any advantages to their position in the family. They have neither the special privileges of being the oldest, nor the attention that often is given to the youngest. You could point out to them that middle children can be the kind of people that everyone likes to be with because they are sociable and willing to share. As parents, we need to make sure that middle children do get as much attention as the oldest and the youngest children.
- If your child is an only child, you may be tempted to mention that he or she has more possessions, or doesn't have to share them with a brother or sister. This is not really an advantage, however, since opportunities to share and to learn to compromise are important in children's lives. Only children often find these lessons harder to learn since they lack the daily give and take of sibling relationships. Regular contact with friends, cousins, and membership in groups like Brownies, Cubs, and local sports teams are especially important for only children.
- Children enjoy hearing about parents' experiences with brothers and sisters. You could share your memories of your particular position in the family, and how you resolved conflicts with brothers and sisters. You could also talk about the good times you had with brothers and sisters as you were growing up.
- It's important for children to know that getting along with others is something that everyone has to do. Having a brother or a sister is an important way to learn. It's difficult for children to see at times, but it is the other people in their families who can bring out the best in them.

Topic 5 — What is a Friend?

*A friend is someone who leaves you with all your freedom intact . . .
but who obliges you to be fully who you are.*

J. L'Heureux

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that everyone needs friends, and that friendship is an important part of being human. The teacher and students discuss the qualities and actions involved in friendship, and the importance of learning how to compromise in order to settle disagreements with friends.

Main Ideas

- Everyone needs friends. That is the way God made us.
- It is important to try hard to be a good friend.
- Learning how to settle arguments fairly is part of being a friend.

Family Participation

- You and your child may enjoy reading the poem “Friends,” which is in the student book. You will find it at the end of this theme.
- At school your child completed a friendship interview with a partner. You could ask about this interview. What did your child and his or her partner say about their friendships?
- You could ask your child about times when she or he has compromised with a friend. What was the difficulty? What did your child do to resolve it?
- Some children have many friends; others have one or two friends. This is a natural difference among children. But no child should be friendless. When children have difficulty making and keeping friends, it is likely that their behaviour is contributing to the problem in some way. Some questions parents might consider are: Does the child insist on having things his or her own way? Is she or he too aggressive? Overly shy? Does the child act in a friendly way — smiling, enthusiastic, willing to share or does he or she appear unfriendly? If there is an obvious difficulty, it can be helpful to discuss it with the child. This discussion, of course, shouldn't involve criticism, but some constructive suggestions to improve the situation. You may also want to talk to your child's teacher about the difficulty.
- Sometimes when children are having friendship difficulties at school, it is helpful to get them involved in outside activities. A sports team or a music group, for example, may give them a fresh opportunity to make friends who have common interests.
- Many parents find that family card games or board games are a good opportunity for children to learn about compromising, winning, losing, taking turns, deciding who goes first, and playing fairly. When parents participate they provide an example for the children of how to play fairly, and win or lose gracefully. By contrast, electronic games offer less opportunity for group interaction and learning to participate in a social activity.

- Families often hear about one or two children who are unpopular in the classroom. If this topic of conversation comes up, you might ask your child about the feelings of children who are unpopular. Is there something your child could do to improve these situations?
- It's good for children to know that friendship is also important to their parents. Let your child know that you value your time with your friends, and that you couldn't get along without special people to confide in, laugh with, and share activities.

Topic 6 — Being Part of the Group

Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.

J. M. Barrie

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that friendliness means being open to others and including them in group activities. The students begin by working in small groups and discussing situations that involve being included or excluded from a group. The teacher discusses these situations with the students, and explores the concepts of inclusion and exclusion in relation to how it makes people feel.

Main Ideas

- Friendliness is a quality that each person can share with others. The more we use it, the more we have.
- Being friendly means to be open to others and include everyone in the group.
- Excluding people makes them feel sad and hurt; including people makes them feel happy and like they belong.

Family Participation

- The experience of being welcomed and included in clubs, teams, games, and activities is one we want for all children. Although the occasional exclusion is to be expected and is part of everyone's childhood, when this experience happens regularly, it is both painful and damaging. Those who participate on a regular basis in deliberately excluding certain children are engaged in a form of social bullying.
- Sometimes children can be possessive of their friends, and resent the fact that a friend has decided to play with another child. If you see this happening it's a good idea to discuss the

situation. You could try to help your child see that we do not own our friends, and that being friendly is not something that we limit to a few people.

- If your child has been excluded from a group it can be a painful experience. Talking about her or his feelings can help. You may want to explore the reasons that your child wanted to be part of this group. Was it because someone your child liked had been included? Did your child really want to be in this group, or was it the experience of being excluded that was the problem? Or was it the activity that your child really wanted to do? You might discover that your child is lacking a particular skill that the group values (for example knowing how to play baseball or soccer). A special effort to get some extra practice could make the difference.

Theme Two Stories and Poems

Topic 2: The teacher and students read this story about a Christmas eve dinner at the Petrowski home.

A Family Christmas

It was Christmas Eve. The Petrowski family was getting ready for a big celebration. Steve was helping his mother in the kitchen, and Eddie was outside with his father shovelling the walk. It had been snowing all day.

Before long, people started to arrive. First came Mrs. Petrowski's parents, Grand-père and Grand-mère Lafleur. Then Mrs. Petrowski's two brothers arrived with their wives and children.

"Come in, come in," Mr. Petrowski said. "Just pile the boots up over there. Eddie and Steve, give your cousins a hand with the presents."

"And don't forget to bring in the tortière," Grand-mère said.

"You made tortière." Eddie said. "Great!"

"Of course she did," his Uncle Paul said. "We can't have Christmas eve dinner without her tortière!" [Tortière is a delicious meat pie.]

Eddie and Steve and their cousins were piling up the presents under the tree when the doorbell rang. It was their Aunt Louise, and with her were Angela

and Richard Chan. Angela worked in the same office as Aunt Louise, and Louise had invited Angela and her husband to join the family for Christmas Eve. Richard's and Angela's families lived far away so they couldn't go home for Christmas. They were very happy to be with the Petrowski family.

Before dinner, there was a big exchange of presents. There was something for everyone, including Angela and Richard.

"Thank you for being so kind to us," Angela said, and she gave Mr. and Mrs. Petrowski a hug.

"Time to eat," Mrs. Petrowski announced. "We need some extra hands to carry all the food to the table. I think we could feed the whole neighbourhood!"

In the dining room, there were two tables put together to make room for everyone. When they all sat down, there was one empty place.

"Were you expecting someone else?" Richard asked.

Eddie explained that it was a Polish custom to leave one empty place on Christmas Eve for Jesus, just in case he arrived.

"What a lovely idea," Angela said.

Mr. Petrowski looked around the table. "We have a lot to be thankful for," he said. He smiled at his wife. "Will you say a special Christmas grace?" he asked.

Mrs. Petrowski led the prayer. "Lord, we are happy to be together to celebrate your birthday," she said. "Bless all of the people gathered here. Thank you for giving us to each other." She smiled at Angela and Richard. "We are happy to share our Christmas Eve with Angela and Richard. They are part of our family tonight. Lord, watch over those who do not have homes or good food to eat. Help us always to be grateful for your many blessings. Keep us in your care. Amen"

"Amen," everyone answered.

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It was a wonderful dinner, and the tortière was delicious! After all the dishes and food were cleaned and put away, it was time to get ready for Christmas Eve mass. What a commotion there was! Coats, scarves, and gloves were flying all over the place. Eddie couldn't find his boots, and Richard and Mr. Petrowski ended up wearing each other's hats. They looked so funny that they all had a good laugh.

The church was beautiful with all the Christmas decorations. Every year Eddie looked forward to seeing the Christmas crèche with the baby Jesus, his mother, Mary, and Joseph. The one the Petrowskis had at home was much smaller. And Eddie loved singing Christmas carols.

As they left the church, the snow began to fall again. The air was cold and the stars were bright. "Merry Christmas," "Joyeux Noël," people called to each other as they brushed off their cars. The Petrowskis said goodbye to all their relatives and to Richard and Angela. There were lots of hugs and thank-yous. It had been a wonderful Christmas celebration.

There was one last thing for Eddie and Steve to do when they were back home. They got to open a present from their parents. This was another family tradition — one present each on the night before Christmas, but the rest had to wait until the next morning. When Eddie opened his present, he was very surprised. His father had made him an artist's box and filled it with paints and brushes. He went to sleep that night with the artist's box at the end of his bed.

Topic 3: The teacher and students read this story about Shane and the death of his grandmother.

Shane and Grandma

Shane Carson walked slowly home from school, kicking dry leaves in front of him. His twin sister, Beth, passed him. She was walking with her friend, Christine. He didn't try to catch up with them. When he reached the apartment building where he lived, he looked over to see who was in the small playground beside

the building. His big sister, Pamela, was there keeping an eye on Donna, who was his little sister. He didn't see any of his special friends. He didn't feel like playing anyway.

When he got upstairs and into the apartment, a funny feeling started in his stomach. It had happened to him before when he came home after school. Ever since Grandma died.

"Hi, Shane. Good day?" his dad called from the kitchen. "Your mom's not home from work yet. Beth's playing at Christine's and Pamela took Donna down to the playground. So it's just you and me, old fellow. Want a snack?"

"No, I'm not hungry."

"Hey, tonight's cub night," his dad said, as he ruffled Shane's hair.

"I don't feel like going," Shane answered and he flopped down on the couch.

"Make some room for me, son," his dad said, and he sat down next to Shane. They sat quietly for a long time.

"You're not feeling that great, are you?" Shane's dad said.

Shane didn't say anything.

"Is this about your grandmother?" his dad asked.

Suddenly Shane said in an angry voice, "I don't want her to be dead. Why'd she have to die anyway?"

"That's a hard question, Shane," his dad answered, and he put his arm around Shane. "It was time for her to be with God. She was very sick. And she was quite old."

Shane was silent again. Finally he said in a loud voice, "But I miss her so much. She was always here when I came home from school. Why isn't she here?"

"I know you miss her, Shane," Dad said. "And I know it makes you feel angry sometimes. We all miss her. You know, I wasn't sure how it would work out

when she came from Barbados to live with us. That was a big change for her and for us. But she became an important part of our family, didn't she? And now, it's another big change."

"If she hadn't lived here, I wouldn't miss her so much," Shane said, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Maybe that's true, Shane," Dad answered. "But think what you would have lost! These last two years with your grandmother have been pretty special for you. Remember how she loved going to your soccer games?"

Shane nodded.

"And remember the jokes you two used to play on each other?" Dad continued.

Shane smiled. Grandma had loved jokes.

"Dad, remember when I scared her with the rubber toad?"

"Oh, do I ever!" said Dad, chuckling. "And then she put the toad in your lunch pail!"

They were both silent again. Then his dad said, "Those are good memories, Shane. Not everybody has them."

"Will I ever see Grandma again, Dad?"

"Of course you will, Shane. We'll all be together with God one day."

"Will she still be like Grandma and I'll still be Shane?"

"Of course," his dad answered. "And just remember, all the love and laughter you two shared is part of you forever."

Shane thought about what his dad was saying.

"There's something else that's important too, Shane," his dad continued. "You aren't going to see Grandma, but she's still going to be with you."

"How do you mean, Dad?"

"People don't stop loving us after they die. And we don't stop loving them. You're here and your grandma's with God. But the loving doesn't end."

Shane pulled himself up off the couch.

"I don't always feel bad," he said, "but today I did."

"I know," his dad said, and he stood up and gave Shane a hug. "The bad feelings will slowly go away," he explained. "But it's all right to be sad. We've lost a member of our family. We have to learn how to live with that change. That takes time. When I'm feeling really sad, I think about how your grandma was always smiling and laughing. You and I need to remember that."

Just then, Pamela and Donna came in. "I hung by one leg from the jungle gym," Donna announced. "But Pamela had to help me down."

Pamela looked at Shane. There were still some tear marks on his face. "Shane," she said, "there's a whole bunch of your friends in the playground. Beth and Christine are there too."

"Dad, can I go too?" Donna begged. "Shane, I'll show you how I can hang by one leg."

Dad nodded. "Sure, if Shane is going."

Shane thought for a moment. "I think I will." he decided. "C'mon, Donna. I'll race you to the elevator."

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Topic 5: This poem about friendship is from the Grade 3 student book.

Friends

What belongs together
Like running shoes and feet,
Or mustard with a hot dog,
Or blankets and a sheet?

What belongs together
Like crackers go with cheese,
Or birthday cake with ice cream,
Or thank-you and a please?

What belongs together
Like hamburgers and fries
Or jelly in a sandwich,
Or winning and a prize?

Friends belong together
Like sticky goes with glue,
Or sniffles with a head cold,
Or laces and a shoe.

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