

Grade 8, Theme Two

Family Letter

Dear Family,

It's time for the second theme of *Fully Alive*. 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, please go to www.acbo.on.ca.

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. Living in relationship begins in the family, the setting in which people first learn about love. As children grow up, friendship becomes more and more important to them. In this theme we will be exploring these two important relationships — family and friends.

In Theme Two we will

- consider the significance of human relationships and the unique contribution they make in each person's life.
- examine the importance of families and their contribution to providing children with secure roots for their lives.
- learn about some of the difficulties caused by abusive families and how important it is for those who are affected to seek help.
- explore some of the challenges of adolescence for both parents and young people and the need to resolve conflicts in a respectful way.
- discuss the qualities of true friendship and consider some attitudes and behaviours that cause friendship difficulties.
- reflect on the virtue of mercy, which is essential for living in relationship with others.

Working together at school and at home

- The capacity for intimate relationships begins during adolescence, and parents may notice that their young adolescent's friendships, especially those of girls, are more intense. Young adolescents are no longer children, but they are not yet adults, and the changes they are experiencing have an effect on their relationships.
- We will be discussing the central role of families — to nurture their children and provide them with secure roots. We will also consider several serious family problems (alcoholism, physical abuse) that limit children's freedom to develop. The students are encouraged to understand that the cycle of family abuse can be broken and the harm it causes can be healed

- Family relationships change as children become adolescents. We will be learning about the views of both parents and children during this time of life. The main concern of parents is the safety of their young people; most often the main concern of young people is their relationships with peers. This difference of perspective often leads to stress, and the result can be conflict. It is helpful if both young people and parents make an effort to understand each other's perspective — to listen with an open mind, and when possible, try to solve problems cooperatively. There are times, of course, when it is not possible to solve problems cooperatively, and parents must make a decision based on the well-being of their children.

- The focus on friendships is very strong in early adolescence, particularly among girls. Their friendships tend to involve sharing feelings and confidences, which can result in feelings of betrayal if a friend is disloyal. Because loyalty is so important to most young people, parents have to be cautious in expressing negative comments about friends. Unless you have a serious concern about a friend, it's usually best not to voice your opinion. In general, however, it is important for parents to be open to listening to their children's concerns and to respond to them.

- We will be talking about causes of stress in friendship, some of which are simply part of the process of growing up. Other causes, however, are avoidable. We will discuss exploitation, spreading gossip and rumours, being jealous or envious of others, exclusive friendship groups that exclude certain people, and peer pressure.

These have the potential to cause serious harm to young people at a time when they are very concerned to be accepted. It's important for parents to talk to their children about this harm. In particular, electronic communication — instant messaging, e-mail, social networking sites on the internet — provides many new opportunities for these behaviours. It is essential for parents to monitor young people's use of electronic communication and to have clear guidelines for what is acceptable online.

- Ask your child to tell you about the virtue of mercy, which is highlighted in Theme Two. We will be discussing how this virtue guides us to have compassionate hearts in our relationships with other people — to forgive, to avoid conflict if possible, and to be gracious to people. Young people often get so caught up in their relationships with peers that they lose sight of the harm they can cause when they retaliate because of hurt feelings or anger. Parents can't remove all of the challenges of growing up, but they can remind their children to be faithful to the word of God in their behaviour: "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." (Psalm 145:8)

Teacher: _____ Date _____

School telephone: _____

Theme Two Topics

In Grade 8, Theme Two is developed through five topics. The opening topic looks at the importance of relationships in human life, especially those that are intimate and have a lasting impact. Topics 2 and 3 focus on the family, its role in helping children reach maturity, and the necessary adjustment for families as children grow up and become adolescents. The last two topics are about friendship, including the essential abilities demonstrated by friends, and some of the behaviours and attitudes that cause stress in friendship.

Theme Two Virtue

The virtue of mercy is featured in Theme Two. This virtue is essential for living in relationship with others. Without it, people build walls instead of bridges. To be merciful is to be open to the needs of others, to be willing to let go of grudges, and to be gentle and gracious toward one another. This reflection on the virtue of mercy is from the student text.

The Virtue of Mercy

“The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.” (Psalm 145:8)

Mercy is essential for living in relationship with others. Without this virtue, people become hardhearted, and they build walls instead of bridges.

- They respond to conflict, not with forgiveness, but with retaliation.
- They think people who do wrong deserve to be punished, especially someone who offended them.
- They believe people should solve their own problems and not inflict them on others.
- They hoard grudges and keep them alive as long as possible.

The virtue of mercy points us in another direction. Mercy guides us to have gentle hearts, hearts that are open to others. People with open hearts build bridges.

- They respond to conflict by finding a way to forgive and to mend the relationship.
- They realize the desire to punish can be motivated by revenge, not justice, and try to find another way to respond.
- They make an effort to listen to people who are upset or worried.
- They try to let go of grudges, because angry feelings harden their hearts.

Jesus became one of us to show us how to reflect the goodness of God in our lives — to be gracious and merciful toward others, slow to anger and quick to forgive, and ready to open our hearts to the people around us because we recognize that they also are made in God’s image.

The virtue of mercy involves both our feelings and actions. When we see someone who is suffering, our hearts are moved. We want to remove the suffering from the person’s life. We know we can’t, so we put our feelings into action in the hope we might help in some way. It might be as simple as spending time with someone in need, raising funds after a disaster, or making an effort to see the people around us, especially those who offend us, with more open hearts.

Each one of us is in need of God’s mercy. When we look upon each other with open hearts and act with mercy, we are truly a reflection of our Creator.

Topic 1 — Building Bridges

In the evening of our lives, we shall be examined in love

St. John of the Cross

Summary

The opening topic of Theme Two gives the students an opportunity to reflect on human relationships and on the isolation that happens when people build walls rather than bridges. The students are encouraged to recognize how important relationships are in human life and how challenging it is to love others as God loves us.

Main Ideas

- We are created to live in relationship with others and to love others as God loves us.
- We are social creatures and are meant to connect with others.
- Only a few of our relationships are close and intimate, and they have an influence on our identity.

Family Participation

- The students began this topic with a Mind Alert quotation: “People are lonely because they build walls instead of bridges,” and were asked to share their thoughts about this statement. You might ask your child about this quotation. What did she or he think about it?

- **Intimacy** — We are created to live in relationship with others. We are meant to open ourselves to others and allow other people to be part of lives, just as we are meant to be part of theirs. Only a few our relationships are close and intimate. These are the relationships that are truly personal and have an influence on our identity. This is why, in one sense, a close relationship can never really die. It leaves a mark on us; it is a chapter in our life history.

The capacity for real intimacy begins to develop during adolescence. But this capacity is linked to another aspect of growing up — developing a sense of identity. During adolescence, young people’s sense of who they are is in the process of change. They are no longer children, but they are not yet adults. They want to have close relationships with others, but the changes they are experiencing have an effect on their friendships and on their family relationships.

- **Learning to be other-centred** —It is normal for young people to see relationships primarily in terms of what others can do for them rather than what they can do for others. They need consistent encouragement from parents to become more aware of other people’s needs and feelings in all of their relationships. Young adolescents don’t always recognize their contribution to a disagreement with a friend or family member, and need someone who asks: “How do you think he felt?” or “Is there another way you could have handled the situation?” Similarly, unless it is explained to them, young people may not realize that they are exploiting a friend by accepting an invitation, not because they enjoy the person’s company, but because it’s an opportunity to do something special.

- **Relationships with other adults** — It is good for young people to have relationships with adults outside the immediate family — other relatives, family friends, a favourite teacher or coach. These people see our children from a different perspective, and can be a positive influence in their lives. Sometimes parents feel hurt when their children confide in another adult, but it’s important for them to recognize that young people need other mentors in their lives as well as parents.

- **Poem** — This topic includes a poem by Canadian poet, Joy Kogawa, “The Wall.” You will find this poem at the end of this theme. You may want to discuss it with your child.

Topic 2 — Roots

In every conceivable manner, the family is the link to our past, a bridge to our future.

Alex Haley

Summary

Topic 2 is the first of two topics that focus on the family. In this topic the students consider the essential role of families in guiding children toward full maturity. They also examine the impact on children when families fail to fulfill this role. Also included in this topic are brief portraits of four of the families of the students who are featured in the Grade 8 program.

Main Ideas

- Families are meant to provide growing persons with secure roots for their lives. These secure roots provide the safety and freedom for children to develop and reach maturity.
- Some families have very serious problems that threaten the future of their children. There is help available for children and young people who have been neglected or abused. It is possible to overcome the past.
- Families, like people, are unique. All of them have some difficulties and some have big challenges. What is most important is that family members care about each other and are committed to each other, no matter what.

Family Participation

• **Roots and Wings** — The title of this topic, “Roots,” and the topic that follows, “Wings,” come from a description of the role of families by Hodding Carter: “There are two lasting bequests we can give our children: One is roots, the other is wings.”

These are the two fundamental tasks of families: first, to give their children the security of knowing that the basic commitment within the family is a lasting one, and second, to provide them with guidance and opportunities that prepare them to leave the nest.

The best possible way to reach full maturity is to grow up in a loving family. This doesn’t mean a perfect family, one with no conflicts or difficulties. All families have some difficulties and go through stressful times. What matters is that family members care about each other and are fully committed to each other.

• **Some serious family problems** — When this basic commitment within a family is lacking, children’s freedom to develop fully is threatened. In class, the students read and discussed two special features: the first about the journalist, Victor Malarek, who overcame an abusive and disrupted childhood, and the second on abusive families (alcoholism and physical abuse). You will find these features at the end of this theme. You may want to discuss them with your child.

In class, the students learned how essential it is for family members to get help when there are serious problems in a family. Hospitals, addiction centres, and Alcoholic Anonymous offer programs for spouses and children of people with addictions. For families who are living with physical abuse, child protection and family service agencies can assist family members to put an end to violence.

• **All families have challenges** — Just as people are unique, so are families. They differ in size, structure, customs, history, interests, and in the mix of personalities in the family. They also differ in the challenges they face. Some challenges are common to many families — not enough time for everything; conflicts among family members; worries about money; or needing more help and cooperation from all members of the family.

Other challenges are greater — unemployment, recent immigration, poverty, addiction, divorce, serious illness, or the death of a family member. Since the role of families is to provide security and stability for their children, it is so important for families who are having difficulty coping with great challenges to ask for help. Some parents may feel that this is a sign of failure or weakness. In fact, it is a sign of strength and hope when people recognize that their present family situation cannot meet their children’s needs without some assistance.

The students explored some of the family challenges of four of the families of students in Mr. Sato’s class: Meniki, Joe, Megan, and Michael. You will find the stories of these four families at that end of this theme. The students were asked to read these stories, and identify the strengths and challenges of the families. You might ask about your child’s opinion about these families.

• **Prayer for family** — The class ended this topic with a prayer for families. You will find this prayer in *Fully Alive* Grade 8 Prayers. You may want to say it together as a family.

Topic 3 — Wings

When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years.

Mark Twain

Summary

In Topic 3, the students explore the relationship between parents and young people during the early years of adolescence. They consider the differing concerns and expectations of these two groups and the need to handle inevitable conflicts with respect, open minds, and an effort to understand each other's perspective.

Main Ideas

- Both parents and young people have a number of concerns and worries as the life stage of adolescence begins.
- Both parents and young people have to make adjustments: Young people need to begin to manage their lives in a responsible way and parents need to begin to lessen their day-to-day supervision of their young people's lives.
- To resolve family conflicts in a healthy way, parents and young people have to talk to each other with respect, listen to each other with open minds, and try to understand the other person's perspective.

Family Participation

- **Many changes** — Family relationships undergo changes as children enter adolescence, particularly when it comes to the issue of freedom and responsibility. For some families, this change is peaceful, with only a few bumps along the way. For others, there is considerable stress and uncertainty. To some extent, it depends on the personalities involved, and on the way in which normal conflicts at this stage of family life are handled.
- **Ask Sophia** — In Grades 7 and 8 a new feature, “Ask Sophia,” was introduced in the *Fully Alive* student books. This feature is similar to an advice column like Dear Abby, and features responses to questions that are often asked by young people.

This topic begins with an “Ask Sophia” feature with two questions from young adolescents, and two questions from parents of young people. The students discussed the

letters in small groups, and were also asked to choose one of them to answer. You will find these four letters at the end of this theme. You might ask about the letter your child answered. What was his or her advice to the person?

• **Concerns of parents and young people** — In class, the students considered two lists of concerns.

- **Young people:** appearance; reputation; problems with friends; marks; finding time for everything; being left out; going to high school; arguments with their families; what other people think about them.

- **Parents:** safety; schoolwork; staying calm when provoked; not knowing what is going on in their children's lives; how friends influence their children; being too strict or too permissive; their children's judgment in difficult situations.

• **Adjustments for parents and young people** — Since parents and young people have different concerns, both groups have to make some adjustments in the way they think and behave. This doesn't happen overnight. It is a process that takes place over a number of years. In class, the students discussed the adjustments that they and their parents have ahead of them.

- **Young people:** have to demonstrate a growing ability to manage their lives in a responsible and prudent way: meet their obligations; learn from their mistakes; make thoughtful decisions; and be open to advice or help when it is needed.

- **Parents:** have to demonstrate a growing ability to withdraw from the day-to-day management of their young people's lives: encourage problem solving and decision making; avoid taking over when something goes wrong; listen more than talk; and offer assistance and advice when asked.

This is a big adjustment for both groups, especially during the stage of young adolescence. Parents need to remember that young teenagers are unpredictable to some extent, moody at times, self-conscious, and can create the impression that they are living in another world that their parents can't possibly understand. In other words, depending on the child, early adolescence can be stressful for parents.

• **Conflict in families** — In class, the students looked at different ways of handling conflict in the family. In some families, conflict is avoided, and children are not really allowed to express their feelings when they disagree with their parents. In others, small

disagreements always seem to turn into major conflicts, but never seem to really get resolved.

It's important for parents to think about how they make rules and handle conflicts, especially as children move into the teen years. From all of the research that has been done, the most effective way appears to be to make clear rules for children, and to be willing to explain your reasons for your rules. In healthy families, parents are in charge, and they do make demands of their children. But they also make an effort to listen to their children's viewpoint, and they are open to new ideas for solving problems cooperatively.

• **Perspective** — In class the students discussed three requirements for both parents and young people to resolve conflicts in a positive way:

- talk to each other with respect
- listen to each other with open minds
- try to understand the other person's perspective.

Perspective is an important focus in this topic. The students are encouraged to recognize their responsibility to try to understand the perspective of their parents, just as parents have a responsibility to understand theirs. The ability to see a situation through another person's eyes is both an emotional and intellectual achievement. For young people, it is a sign of growing maturity.

• **Single parents** — Single parents face special challenges as they raise children without a partner in whom to confide and with whom to share the joys and worries of family life. Every parent needs a support system, especially during children's adolescence, and single-parents are no exception. This might be a close friend, a relative, or a support group for parents living in similar situations. The children of single-parent families also need other adults who take an interest in them and support their development. Again, this might be a family friend or relative, or an adult from a big sister or big brother organization.

• **Immigrant families** — immigrant families can also face unique challenges as their children enter adolescence. Parents who come from another culture sometimes feel that their children understand the system better than they do. When it comes to questions about what young people are allowed to do, they may lack confidence in their own judgement. Organizations that provide support for immigrant families may be helpful in

such situations. It's important for immigrant parents to be aware of cultural differences, but they should also have confidence in their own common sense when it comes to decisions about their children's lives.

- **Spending time together** — Many parents find that as children get older and require less direct care, it's only too easy to spend less time with them. With both parents working, or in single-parent families, sometimes young people get an unintended message about family priorities — that jobs and other activities are more important than they are. Even though young teenagers are more independent, they are still very reliant on their families. They need adults who have time to listen to them, to keep in touch with what is going on in their lives, and to give them guidance and support.

Topic 4 — Friendship

It is mutual respect which makes friendship lasting.

Blessed John Henry Newman

Summary

In this first of two topics about friendship, the student examine four qualities of true friendship — accepting people for who they are, listening to each other, being loyal, and being willing to forgive. The topic also includes a feature on some of the differences between female and male friendships.

Main Ideas

- As people grow up, their ideas about friendship change. Friendship becomes more important to them, and they want to have relationships with their friends, not just do things together.
- True friends have the ability to accept each other for who they are, to listen to each other, to be loyal, and to forgive each other.
- Healthy relationships between males and females are based on the same foundations as a good relationship between females or between males.

Family Participation

- **Friendship in young adolescence** — It is normal for young people to be preoccupied with their friends. Especially at the beginning of adolescence, the need to belong and to be accepted is very strong. As a result, the highs and lows of friendship relationships are

taken very seriously. The most helpful thing parents can do is to listen sympathetically when there are difficulties, and offer tactful advice. To a great extent, however, the complications young people face in learning how to be a true friend are ones they have to sort out for themselves.

- **Being loyal** — Loyalty toward friends is a big issue during early adolescence. For this reason, parents have to be very careful when they express their opinions about various friends. It's important to distinguish between friends whom you may not particularly like, and those whom you do not want your child to spend time with because of the potential for serious trouble. If you are worried about the influence of a friend, you may want to encourage some new activities, which would provide opportunities to meet other people.

In class the students discussed the difference between loyalty and possession. When young people are insecure, they often feel threatened when a friend becomes a relationship with another person. It takes time for some young people to realize that a true friend does not try to possess or to control their friends.

- **Some differences between female and male friendships** — The students discussed an “Ask Sophia” feature about some of the differences between the meaning of friendship for girls and for boys. You will find this feature at the end of this theme. In general, friendships between girls are more intimate and emotional than those of boys. As a consequence, conflicts or betrayals among female friends are very upsetting.

Topic 5 — Friendship and Stress

*A bird, a nest
the spider, a web
the human, friendship.*

William Blake

Summary

In the last topic of Theme Two the students consider some sources of stress in friendship: exploitation, jealousy and envy, gossip and rumours, cliques, and peer pressure. They are encouraged to recognize and avoid behaviours and attitudes that harm friendships and often result in injustices.

Main Ideas

- Friendship is a wonderful relationship but it can also be a source of stress. Some friendship stresses during young adolescence are unavoidable and others are avoidable.
- Some attitudes and behaviours that are harmful to people and to friendship are: exploitation, jealousy and envy, gossip and rumours, cliques, and negative peer pressures.
- Attitudes and behaviours that often cause harm to others also harm the people who are responsible for the friendship difficulties.

Family Participation

• **Friendship and stress** — The years of early adolescence are usually the most stressful when it comes to friendship relationships. Friendship no longer means just doing things together and having fun, as it does for younger children. Friendship involves a relationship.

There are several reasons for friendship stress at this time of life. First, early adolescence is a time of change that not only affects the person, but also the person's relationships. Not all friendships from younger years survive as children grow up. Second, the desire to fit in and belong to a group of friends, which can be very strong for young people, means that difficulties with friends are a source of distress. Third, young adolescence is a time of self-involvement, which can result in a lack of sensitivity to other people's feelings.

• **Avoidable friendship stress** — In class the students discussed a number of attitudes and behaviours that are harmful to people and to their relationships. The essential point of this discussion is that young people can do something about these attitudes and behaviours. They can make an effort to avoid them. As the occasion arises, parents can also encourage young people to avoid creating unnecessary stress and pain to others.

- **Exploitation** — To exploit people is to use people for selfish reasons, for example: to humiliate a person; to achieve status; to gain power; to get sexual favours; or to get even. The fundamental issue is that exploitation is always wrong because it treats people as if they were things, not persons.

Brothers and sisters can be very hard on each other during the years of adolescence. Some of this give and take is normal, but parents do have to be aware of situations that go too far and cause harm. Deliberately hurting the feelings of a brother or sister or retaliating harshly over a small matter are behaviours that require parental intervention.

- **Gossip** — Because young people can be very unsure of themselves, they can also be quick to point out other people's failings and faults. Gossip often thrives in a Grade 8 classroom, and can be very hurtful. If parents become aware of this, it's important for them to point out how destructive and wrong this is. Young people need to be reminded that when they gossip, they are getting pleasure from something they would hate to have done to them. It provides a false sense of self-confidence — feeling better by putting someone else down.

Unfortunately, with electronic communication (instant messages, e-mails, comments posted on social networking sites) people can remain anonymous when they spread harmful rumours and harm other people's reputation. It's important for parents to talk to their young people about this issue, and stress the need to be careful in their use of electronic communication. A quick way to help young people to decide whether to send or post the message is to answer this question: Would I say this to the person's face? Electronic communication, especially in chat rooms, also presents the danger of exploitation of young people by an adult posing as young person.

- **Cliques** — Another friendship issue the students discussed was cliques. Like the clubs that sprout in the middle grades, the main purpose of cliques seems to be to include certain people and to exclude others. This happens for several reasons: to gain status from being in a group that doesn't let just anyone in; for the leaders, to gain power; for the members, to feel secure. If cliques are an issue for young people, parents may want to point out that inclusion and exclusion are a pretty poor basis for friendship. It's also important to challenge young people to see the effects of being excluded. In every school there are a few students whose memories of the social aspects of classroom life will be deeply painful and bitter. Children need to know what a difference they can make in the life of another person with a small gesture of friendliness.

- **Peer pressure** — Friendship is an important influence in young people’s lives. The desire to be accepted and to belong is very strong during early adolescence. For this reason, it can become an unhealthy pressure. At this age, most peer pressure revolves around issues like clothing, hair styles, music, preferred radio stations, popular television shows, or how late they are allowed to stay out. Serious problems involving drugs, sex, and alcohol are more frequent during the high school years, but can occur in late grade school. Most frequently the reason is low self-esteem combined with lack of supervision.

The best advice experienced parents have to offer about the dangers of negative peer pressure is this: Know your children, and keep in close touch with their daily lives. Teenagers are inexperienced, and there are many temptations facing them. Young adolescents, in particular, need careful monitoring. Problems arise when parents do not know the friends their children are with, or when teenagers have too much freedom and spend a lot of time just “hanging around.” Thirteen and fourteen year olds are too young for a blanket curfew, for example, eleven o’clock or midnight every Friday or Saturday night. Instead, arrangements for evening activities and curfews should be related to specific events — a party, a movie, or a school game.

- The students concluded Theme Two by listening to and reflecting together on a passage from St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. You will find this passage in *Fully Alive* Grade 8 Prayers.

Theme Two Resources from the Student Text

Topic 1: This is the poem, “The Wall,” by Joy Kogawa from the Grade 8 student text. It reflects the ideas the students discussed in class about walls and bridges between persons.

Where there’s a Wall

where there’s a wall
there’s a way
around, over, or through
there’s a gate
maybe a ladder
a door
a sentinel who
sometimes sleeps

there are secret passwords
you can overhear
there are methods of torture
for extracting clues
to maps of underground passageways
there are zeppelins
helicopters, rockets, bombs
battering rams
armies with trumpets
whose all at once blast
shatters the foundations

where there's a wall
there are words
to whisper by a loose brick
wailing prayers to utter
special codes to tap
birds to carry messages
taped to their feet
there are letters to be written
novels even

on this side of the wall
i am standing staring at the top
lost in the clouds
i hear every sound you make
but cannot see you

i incline in the wrong direction
a voice cries faint as in a dream
from the belly
of the wall.

Joy Kogawa

Topic 2: The first two items address serious family problems: a portrait of Victor Malarek, and a brief discussion of the impact of alcoholism and physical abuse in families. The students also discussed some of challenges of four of the families of students in Mr. Sato's class: Meniki, Joe, Megan, and Michael. You will find these short stories below.

Victor Malarek

Victor Malarek's father was an alcoholic who abused his wife. When his parents first separated, Victor was seven and was sent to live in a foster home. Several years later he and his two brothers were placed in Weredale House, a home for

children who were delinquent or came from families who could not care for them. Victor spent three and a half years at Weredale, and learned more than he ever wanted to know about beatings, humiliation, neglect, and fear. During all this time, he had only one desire: to be back home with his parents.

When Victor did return home, he was an angry and bitter young adolescent. His parents were together again, but the family continued to have serious problems. By the time Victor was seventeen he had been arrested for armed robbery. But the judge who heard his case looked beneath the tough surface and saw a boy who had been badly hurt. He took a chance on Victor and made the decision not to send him to jail. At that moment, Victor began to turn his life around.

Today, Victor Malarek is a successful journalist who has worked for *The Globe and Mail*, the CBC and CTV. In his autobiography, *Hey, Malarek!* he names two factors that helped him overcome the violence, disruptions, and disappointments of his childhood: his unshakeable belief, despite everything, in his parents' love, and the role of religion in teaching him the difference between right and wrong.

Victor Malarek's story touches on two aspects of abuse of children.

- **Alcoholism** — When children grow up with a parent who is alcoholic they are deprived of basic care and security. Since alcoholics are often unpredictable and unreliable, their behaviour teaches their children a very destructive lesson: don't trust or depend on anyone because they may fail you. If the alcoholic parent is also physically abusive, the situation is all the more frightening.

Children of alcoholic parents experience a variety of emotions: helplessness, embarrassment, anger, guilt, and fear. They cannot safely invite friends to their home, and often have to assume family responsibilities that should be handled by adults.

Until the person with the problem is willing to admit it, he or she is not going to change. But other members of the family can get help for themselves. Hospitals, addiction centres, and Alcoholics Anonymous offer programs for spouses and children of alcoholics.

- **Physical Abuse** — Parents who are physically violent toward members of their family — children or spouses — cause far more than just physical pain. They inflict deep emotional and spiritual wounds. Their children are denied the right to feel safe within the family, and, by example, are taught that violence is an acceptable way of handling frustration and anger.

The pattern of violence cannot be broken until someone asks for help – and that takes a lot of courage. Child protection and family service agencies can assist family members to put an end to the violence.

When people grow up in abusive families, it is hard for them to imagine that family life can be loving and happy. As they become adults, they often look back

and feel that a great injustice was done to them. They are right — any kind of abuse in the family is wrong. They have been deprived of a safe and caring family environment, which is the birthright of every child.

Sadly, as abused children reach adult years they are at risk for continuing the pattern of abuse they learned in their families. For some, their capacity to create a loving family environment, handle stress, and control their anger is damaged. This is why it is so important for children who are suffering abuse to tell a trusted adult. It takes great fortitude to do this, particularly if the abuser has made threats about what will happen if anything is said. If the first person they tell isn't helpful, then they must find another person. Abuse has to stop somewhere. And the harm it causes can be healed.

* * *

Meniki Da Silva's Family

Meniki's parents came to Canada in the early 1980s, where both Meniki and her younger brother, Roshan, were born. The marriage of Meniki's parents, Kumera and Nimala, was an arranged one. Their families knew each other and thought they would make a good match. It turned out that they were right.

Kumera Da Silva, Meniki's father, a chemical engineer, is part of a team that evaluates the impact of projects on the natural environment. He is a quiet, serious man, and tends to worry. Nimala, his wife, doesn't work outside the home, but is active in several groups that promote Sri Lankan culture. Unlike her husband, she is lively, talkative, and laughs easily. Roshan, their son, is like her— outgoing and full of stories.

Getting a good education and doing well in school are very important to Mr. Da Silva. He asks his children many questions about what they are learning, checks their homework, and is disappointed when their marks aren't high. His wife has been trying to tell him that he is putting too much pressure on them, but so far, he doesn't seem to be listening.

Joe Morano's Family

Joe's family includes his mother, Angela, his 16-year-old sister, Linda, and two younger brothers. Joe's father abandoned the family six years ago. He used to turn up once in a while, but hasn't contacted the family in the last two years.

Joe's parents married when they were very young. Mr. Morano had trouble keeping a job because of his gambling and bad temper. As the children were born, his responsibilities overwhelmed him, and he solved the problem by walking away.

The younger boys hardly remember him, but Linda and Joe do. Linda hates everything that goes with being poor — being on welfare, trips to the food bank, and not spending money when she's out with friends. She blames her dad for all this, but still wishes he would come back. She remembers him singing to her as she fell asleep when she was a little girl.

Joe is angry with his father, too, but unlike Linda, he wants his dad to stay away forever. It was much worse when he would come back for a while, leave again, and then come back again. Joe hated how hard it was on his mother.

Megan Bauer's Family

Megan is an only child and was adopted by her parents when she was a baby. She has cerebral palsy, a condition caused by brain damage around the time of birth that affects control of muscles and coordination. She walks with canes and her speech is slow and sometimes a struggle for her.

Megan's parents, Anne and Tom Bauer, married when they were both in their early 40s. A year later, they adopted Megan. Mr. Bauer had grown up with a sister who had severe disabilities and her life motivated him to become a doctor and specialize in brain injuries. Mrs. Bauer works in hospital administration, which is how they met.

Megan is realistic about her physical condition and isn't embarrassed to ask for help when she needs it. She is outgoing and self-confident. Her parents have encouraged her to see herself as a person with a disability, not a disabled person. They are proud of her positive attitude and her perseverance.

Michael Cormier's Family

Michael lives with his parents, Paul and Adele, and his younger brother, Paul. His father is an accountant and his mother works from home as an illustrator of children's books.

Until recently, the household also included Mrs. Cormier's older sister, Elly. Ten years ago, Elly was diagnosed with chronic leukemia, which is a cancer of the bone marrow where blood cells are made. When her disease began to worsen, the Cormiers asked her to come and live with them.

During the two years Elly lived with the Cormier family, Michael and Elly became good friends. Unlike most people, she had a way of drawing him out, and even got away with teasing him, which astonished his parents and his younger brother.

A month ago Elly moved into a hospice wing of a hospital. The family visits her frequently, visits that Michael finds very difficult. His parents recognize that Elly is not going to live much longer, but Michael does not want accept it.

* * *

Topic 3: This is the "Ask Sophia" feature with questions from young people and parents and answers from Sophia.

Ask Sophia

My parents just don't get it. Things have changed a lot since they were growing up. Almost all the people in my class have much more freedom

than I have. They buy the clothes *they* want, not what their parents want. They don't have to answer a lot of questions about where they're going or what they're doing. I think I'm old enough to make my own decisions about where I go and what I do. I'm a good person and it's my life, not theirs.
Heather

...

I'm having a problem at school. A bunch of guys in my class are giving me a hard time. I used to be friends with them, but this year they're into stuff I don't want to do. I lose no matter what I decide. If I go along with them, I'm going to get into trouble. If I don't go along with them, they'll freeze me out. I can't talk to my parents about this because they'll freak out. First, they'll tell me I have to do the right thing, which I already know. Then they'll probably call the principal and make a big deal about it. *Matt*

...

I am totally baffled. It seems like overnight my 13-year-old daughter has turned into a stranger. She disagrees with everything I say, argues about the smallest things, and is disrespectful. We used to be so close, and now she acts as if she hates me. I'm trying to be a good mother, but I'm obviously failing. *Susan*

...

My 14-year-old son got drunk at a party. On his way home, he fell asleep on the bus, and the driver couldn't wake him. The driver called an ambulance and my son was taken to the hospital. He's going to be okay, but I'm not sure I will. Part of me is furious with him for being so stupid and the other part of me is terrified by what could have happened. How do I handle this situation? *Frank*

* * *

Topic 4: This is the "Ask Sophia" feature with a discussion of some of the differences between the meaning of friendships for girls and boys.

Ask Sophia

How come girls in my class always show so much drama when dealing with issues? Like, some girl is upset about something, and her friends get really worked up. Or two girls have a fight, and everyone else gets involved, and it turns into a big deal. Why do they do this? *Justin*

...

Dear Justin,

The short answer is that friendship means different things to girls and boys of your age. For boys, friendship is mainly about doing things together, kidding each other, and having a good time. Friendship is more intimate and emotional for girls — sharing thoughts and feelings, and looking after friends who are upset. Have you noticed that boys often express concern for a friend not in words, but by trying to involve the friend in an activity?

Female friendships often include a deep sense of anger and betrayal when friends aren't loyal — gossiping, spreading rumours, or sharing private information with others. Male friendships also involve conflicts, of course, but are usually resolved more quickly — sometimes with insults or even with a physical response, followed by a period of time of letting the issue blow over.

This pattern evens out to some extent as girls and boys mature, but some differences remain in the expression of friendship among adult females and among adult males. *Sophia*

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