

to make ourselves feel better; *we might try to make others do what we want by pressuring them or coercing them instead of listening to what they want, think, or feel; we fail to listen for a person's consent*)

- Can you overcome selfishness on your own? Why? Why not? (we need God's love and guidance; we need other people to believe in us)
- How would you describe a supportive relationship? (you accept each other, including each other's faults; you encourage each other; you want the best for each other; you are ready to forgive each other; *you talk openly and honestly with each other; you listen and respect each other's decisions, including seeking the other's consent for decisions*)

Note to the Teacher

The additions above are intended to bring out the concept of *consent*. This topic was introduced in Grade 6 in Theme Two, Topic 5 (in supplemental material to be added to the Teacher's Guide at page 104).

Consent is about communication and respect. Communication leads to better relationships with friends, peers, and family members. Consent is about knowing and respecting your own boundaries and those of others. Consent is about having the skills to avoid or leave a situation that feels uncomfortable and respecting when others want to do the same. The age of consent for sexual activity in Canada is 16 years of age. For more information, consult the Department of Justice website: input the terms "age of consent to sexual activity" in the search bar.

Further information can be found in the *Fully Alive* Grade 8 Teacher Guide on page 172a.

It is important for the students to understand the following about communication and consent:

- We must be clear with others about our ideas and feelings.
- We need to listen attentively to what others are saying to us.
- We need to interpret body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions correctly.
- We need to respect signals of agreement or disagreement.
- We need to negotiate with others in a respectful manner.
- We need to determine consent or lack of consent:
 - a clear "yes," freely given, is a signal of consent;
 - a response of "no" or an uncertain response or silence needs to be understood as no consent.

Health and Physical Education expectation D1.3

Note to the Teacher

In Topic Four a number of family challenges are presented, some of which are experienced by most families and others that are less common and far more serious. As the students explore these challenges, it is important to encourage them to recognize their ability to contribute to the life of the family and to accept their responsibility as maturing persons who can make a difference in their families.

In Grades 5 and 6, students were introduced to the concept of mental health problems and challenges to building and maintaining positive mental health and resilience. In this section, the distinction between mental health and mental illness is explored.

Family relationships are a powerful influence on the individual, and expectations for families are very high. You will need to be sensitive to students in your class who are suffering the effects of serious family difficulties. By this age most students are beginning to see that their parents are neither perfect nor all-knowing, and those who come from families where there are major difficulties no longer have the protection of their childhood fantasies. They often feel disillusioned, sad, and angry, and may adopt an attitude of indifference to family relationships. These students need to hear a message of hope — there are new possibilities for them in the future. There are no perfect families, but with effort, good will, patience, and forgiveness, family relationships can be both happy and deeply rewarding.

This topic includes two true stories, Robin (page 52) and Ned (page 57). Robin's story provides a glimpse of the delicate balance between supportive parents and an adolescent's desire to be free of adult authority. Ned's story is about fatherhood, the challenge of raising a severely disabled child, and how what may be seen as a burden becomes a gift.

Caution: This topic includes a discussion of divorce and remarriage and the experience of living in a blended family. You will need to be careful not to single out students who have been directly involved in these situations, although some of them may want to talk about their experiences. Their comments and insights should be acknowledged and accepted with care so as not to encourage personal details that are not appropriate for classroom discussion. The topics of mental health and mental illness can be equally sensitive as some students will have been affected by them.

Important Words

- *challenge*

Materials/Preparation

- You may want to take two sessions for this topic. The topic could be divided into Daily Living Challenges (pages 50 – 52) in the first session, and Significant Challenges (pages 53 – 57) in the second session.
- This topic would be enriched by a visit from a parent of one of your students or a member of the school staff who would be comfortable talking about a significant challenge his or her family has faced, for example, immigrating to Canada, caring for a disabled child, coping with a serious illness of a family member, or the experience of unemployment. (The topic of the visit should not concern intimate personal matters, such as divorce.) As an alternative, you could invite a social worker from your local Catholic Children’s Aid or Family Services to talk about the challenges of families.
- Songs: “Our Father” (#13, page 358 in the Teacher’s Manual for *Believe in Me* from the *We are Strong Together* catechetical program “Make Me a Channel for Your Peace”)

Program Resources

- Student Book, pages 50 – 57
- Reflection Sheet #9 (Family Challenges)
- BLM #9.1 — Identifying Possible Signs of Mental Health Struggles

Curriculum Connections

This topic provides a connection to the Health and Physical Education curriculum (Healthy Living).

We Experience

Introduce this topic by reading together the opening paragraph (page 50) and exploring the meaning of *challenge*. You might ask them:

- If you find some kinds of school work challenging, what does that mean? (it’s not easy for you; you have to work very hard at it; you might wish you could avoid this kind of work; this kind of work is a test of your ability to understand it)
- What kind of challenges do you think families have? Are these challenges tests for the adults in the family or for all family members? (You might point out that at their age they can make a big difference in helping their families meet their challenges.)

Daily Living Challenges

Read pages 50 – 51 with the students and invite their response. You might ask them:

- Why do family changes often cause stress? (change of any kind can be stressful; family members get used to certain ways of behaving and relating to each other and, when this changes, they are confused and unsure of what to do)
- Do you think fluctuating moods are difficult to handle? Why? Why not?
- If a person is in a bad mood, what can the people around him or her do? (try to be patient; avoid getting into an argument; leave the person alone)
- Which of the suggestions for dealing with a bad mood do you like best? Least? What other suggestions do you have for managing a bad mood?
- What is the difference between being in an unhappy mood and being depressed? (You might point out that sometimes people say they're depressed when they mean that they're feeling down.)
- Why are drug and alcohol abuse associated with depression? (You might explain that people who are depressed sometimes try to dull their feelings by drinking or experimenting with drugs. Alcohol ultimately increases depression, as do many drugs.)
- Why don't young people who are seriously depressed talk to an adult about how they are feeling? (they may believe everything is hopeless and no one can help them; they may think they are old enough to deal with their own problems)
- If a friend told you that he or she was very depressed, and you told a trusted adult, would this be disloyal? Why? Why not? (You might point out that the main reason for telling someone is to get help for your friend and to protect your friend from harming himself or herself in some way.)

Explain to the students that mental health and mental illness are like physical health and physical illness. A person can be in good health but have a diagnosed illness. We don't say that someone who has a diagnosed health condition, such as diabetes or asthma, is "unhealthy". If they make healthy choices as circumstances allow, such as getting adequate sleep, being physically active daily, and eating healthy nutritious foods, they can maintain their health while still having a diagnosed illness. The same is true of mental health. If a person takes care of their mental health, as best they can and has a sense of well-being and resilience, they can be mentally healthy even if they have a diagnosed mental illness, such as an anxiety disorder or depression.

Clarify for students that mental health refers to a person's overall sense of well-being. Mental illness is something that a doctor would say you have, just like a physical illness. A mental illness is like any illness, only it affects your ability to think, to relate to others, or to function every day. Whether or not we have a diagnosed mental illness, our mental health is impacted by our feelings, thoughts, and actions, and by our experiences and circumstances in our day-to-day lives.

Discuss with the students that everyone experiences stress from time to time. There are common stressors that all students experience, like having tests and assignments or being worried about making a team, or about being included in something. Sometimes life can be very stressful for young people – at times when a parent or guardian loses a job, or someone moves away, or someone gets really sick. It's important to know that although we all have stress and that it sometimes leads to feelings of anxiety, this does not mean that we have an “anxiety disorder” or some other form of mental illness. Experiencing a range of feelings is normal as we develop and learn about how our bodies and brains work together. When problems go on for a long time, it might be a sign that a person needs help. Possible signs of a mental health problem include frequently having feelings of sadness or anxiety that are stronger than usual or last longer; having difficulty paying attention; having problems with eating, sleeping, or managing expectations at school; or being addicted to substances.

- What are some other signs that a person might benefit from seeking support from a trusted adult? It is important to recognize that a person's decisions and actions can be affected by their mental health or illness and to be compassionate and understanding toward them.

Student responses might include having feelings that interfere with everyday activities. For example, a person who feels too sad and tired to get up for school, or who loses interest in activities they normally enjoy, or whose behaviour suddenly changes a lot might need some support. A person who can't go to a friend's party because they are sure everyone will be judging them and talking about them might also need help.

Complete BLM #9.1 — Identifying Possible Signs of Mental Health Struggles

Read the section on the issue of privacy (page 52) with the students, and invite their response. You might ask them:

- Why do many young people want more privacy?
- What do you think family members should do to show their respect for other people's privacy? What do you do at home to show your respect for people's privacy?

- Do you think it is easy or hard to balance the need for privacy and the need to communicate with family members? Why?
- What might happen if family members never talk to each other about what's going on in their lives? (they may lose touch with each other; they miss the opportunity to help each other if they have a problem; they don't have the opportunity to show how much they care about each other)

Read Robin's story (page 52) with the students and invite their response. (Be sure to tell them that it is a true story.)

- What did you think of Robin's story?
- What are high expectations? (high hopes; a desire to see the person develop fully; a strong belief in a person's ability)
- Were you surprised that Robin had trouble getting along with her parents when she was a teenager? Why? Why not?
- How did Robin benefit from her parents' expectations, even though she didn't appreciate it when she was growing up?

Significant Challenges

Read the introduction to significant challenges (page 53) with the students and invite their response. You might ask them:

- What kinds of big challenges do some families face? (not enough money to support the family; a family member is very ill or disabled; someone in the family has a problem with alcohol or drug abuse; someone in the family has challenges with mental health; parents separate and divorce)
- Why do family members need each other more than ever during very difficult times? (to support each other; to encourage each other; they can show their love for each other by being helpful and patient)
- Why is prayer so important during very difficult times? (we can always depend on God's love; prayer is our way of saying that we place our hope and trust in God)

Explore the first two significant challenges, unemployment and immigration, (pages 53 – 54) with the students. You might ask them:

- Why are financial difficulties one of the main causes of family stress? (without enough money to provide the basic necessities — food, shelter, clothing, transportation — families cannot manage; lack of money causes constant worry for parents)

- How does our government try to help people who are unemployed and cannot care for their families? (unemployment insurance; welfare payments; job retraining centres)
- How can children show support when their families are having serious financial problems? (try not to ask for things the family cannot afford; try to be patient and loyal; avoid increasing the stress by being uncooperative or angry)

If there are students in your class who came to Canada from another country and who would be comfortable talking about their experience, you could ask them to tell the class about their family's challenges. You might ask the students:

- If you moved to a new country, what do you think you would find most difficult? Why?
- What is a cultural challenge? (different countries have different customs; people want to keep their customs, but they also want to adapt to a new country; as children grow up they often want to adapt to the customs and behaviours of their friends, which may be quite different from their family's customs.)
- What can people who live in Canada do to make new immigrants welcome? (offer help when they can; be friendly and open; invite them to visit; answer any questions they have)

Read the feature on Romero House and refugee families with the students. Explore the meaning of *refugee* (someone who is seeking a safe place to live) and the important responsibility Canadians have to offer a safe home where people can live without fear.

Introduce the significant family challenge of divorce and read together pages 54 – 56 with the students. Invite their response and answer any questions they have about the statistics on marriage and divorce at the top of page 55.

Explore Jim's story with the students. You might ask them:

- Do you think Jim has a difficult family situation? In what ways?
- What do you think his feelings are? (lonely because no one is paying much attention to him; resentful because both his parents are busy with other matters; sad; wishing he could do something to change his situation)
- Would it be easier for Jim if he could talk to someone about the way he feels? Why? Why not?
- Why is it hard for Curtis to understand Jim's situation? (he has no experience of living with stepparents; he can't imagine having two homes)

Invite the students' comments on the most common causes of divorce. You might ask them:

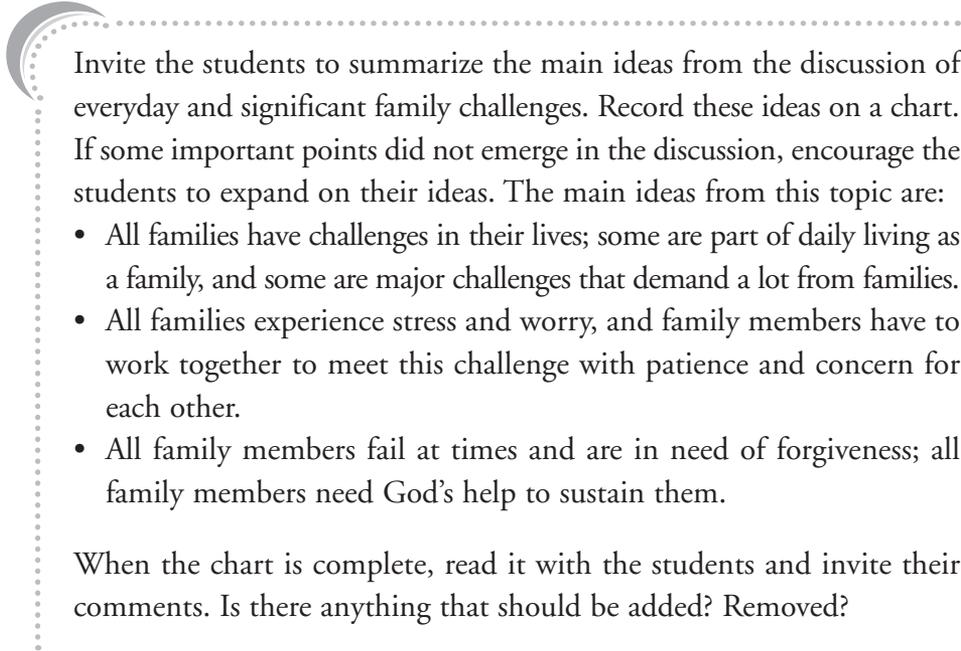
- Would it be a good idea if people talked to each other about topics like handling money, communication, fidelity, and commitment before getting married? Why? Why not?
- How well do you think people need to know each other before getting married? Why? (You might point out that the qualities that people want in a best friend, like loyalty, respect, and personal commitment, are the same qualities needed for a good marriage.)
- Why do people need to be mature before marrying? (you have to know who you are, including your strengths and weaknesses; you have to be capable of making a lifelong commitment; you have to accept the sacrifices that marriage requires; you need enough life experience to understand fully the commitment you are making)
- What do the words of Pope Benedict XVI mean to you?
- What did he say to young people who were worried that they would not be able to have a lasting marriage? Why is this an important message?

Read the end of family challenges with the students (page 57) and invite their response. You might ask them:

- Do you believe there is such a thing as a perfect family? Why? Why not?
- Why is forgiveness and prayer so important for families? (all family members fail to be loving and helpful at times; each family member needs forgiveness at times, and each person in the family needs to offer forgiveness at times; families pray because they know they need God's help all the time, not just when things are going badly.)

Read Ned's story (page 57) with the students and invite their response. (Be sure to tell them that it is a true story.)

- What do you think of Ned's story?
- Do you think he is a good father? Why?
- Do you think he finds his life difficult at times?
- Do you agree with Ned — is he lucky?



Invite the students to summarize the main ideas from the discussion of everyday and significant family challenges. Record these ideas on a chart. If some important points did not emerge in the discussion, encourage the students to expand on their ideas. The main ideas from this topic are:

- All families have challenges in their lives; some are part of daily living as a family, and some are major challenges that demand a lot from families.
- All families experience stress and worry, and family members have to work together to meet this challenge with patience and concern for each other.
- All family members fail at times and are in need of forgiveness; all family members need God's help to sustain them.

When the chart is complete, read it with the students and invite their comments. Is there anything that should be added? Removed?

Give the students copies of Reflection Sheet #9 (Family Challenges). Ask them to keep the Reflection Sheet in their Family Life notebook and to complete the questions in the next few days.

We Respond

Invite the students to prepare for a prayer service. Choose suitable peaceful music to play in the background, light candles for the prayer table, and then quietly gather around the prayer table.

Gathering Song: Our Father (#13, page 358 in the Teacher's Manual for *Believe in Me* from the *We are Strong Together* catechetical program)

Opening Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you came to live among us to show us how to live. You lived in a family, as we do now. You grew up in a family, as we are growing up now. Show us how we can be loving and patient family members, as you are loving and patient with us. Help us to forgive each other in our families, as you forgive us. Give us courage and hope when we feel weak and discouraged. Watch over all of our families, and protect them from all harm. Amen.

In his letter to the community in Corinth, St. Paul describes the love that Christians should show one another. This love is especially important in families.

Scripture: A reading from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

Love is patient and kind.

Love does not envy or boast.

It is not arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way.

It is not irritable or resentful

It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things

1 Corinthians 13: 4-7

Response: Praise to you, Lord, Jesus Christ.

Petitions (The response is, "Lord Jesus, fill our families with hope and love.")

- Forgive us for the times we have hurt our family members with our words or actions.
- Forgive us for the times we have refused to resolve a conflict with a family member.
- Forgive us for the times that we have failed to be loving members of our families.
- Help us to be loyal and responsible family members.
- Help us to make your love and care visible in our families.
- Help us to bring joy and hope to our families.

Our Father (say the prayer together)

Sign of Peace (have the students exchange a sign of peace with each other)

Closing Song: "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace"

We Explore (related activities)

- **Family Challenges Visitor** — (see Materials/Preparation) Following Board protocol, invite a parent from your classroom or a staff member to visit your class and tell the students about a significant challenge his or her family has faced; for example, immigrating to Canada, caring for a disabled child, coping with a serious illness of a family member, or the experience of unemployment. Have the students discuss some questions they might ask before the visit, and have them send a letter of thanks after the visit.
- **Research on Family Challenges** — Invite the students to work in pairs or small groups and choose a topic to research that is related to one of the significant challenges they have been discussing:
 - services for immigrant families
 - organizations that provide help to refugees
 - job retraining centres for unemployed people
 - organizations that provide support for families with children with disabilities
 - groups that are working to reduce poverty among families in Canada
 - organizations that provide support for those who experience mental illness
 - organizations that work to promote mental health

The format for this research project could be a booklet with illustrations and photographs, a multi-media presentation, an oral report, an interview, or a poster. (**Curriculum Connection:** The Arts: Visual Arts; and Language: Media Literacy. See Appendix B, pp. 269 – 270.)

