

# Have a Happy Family *by Friday*

How to Improve  
✓ **C**ommunication,  
✓ **R**espect &  
✓ **T**eamwork in **5 Days**

**Dr. Kevin Leman**



*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2014 by Dr. Kevin Leman

Published by Revell  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Leman, Kevin.

Have a happy family by Friday : how to improve communication, respect & teamwork in 5 days / Dr. Kevin Leman.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8007-1913-5 (cloth)

ISBN 978-0-8007-2415-3 (pbk.)

1. Families—Psychological aspects. 2. Families—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Interpersonal relations. I. Title.

HQ519.L45 2014

306.85—dc23

2014005584

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations marked TLB are from *The Living Bible*, copyright © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

To protect the privacy of those who have shared their stories with the author, some details and names have been changed.

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my family,  
who has taught me so much  
and continues to teach me about having a happier family.

My beloved bride, Sande.  
Our children: Holly and her husband, Dean;  
Krissy and her husband, Dennis;  
Kevin; Hannah and her husband, Josh; and Lauren.  
Our grandkids, Conner and Adeline,  
whom we love to the moon and the stars.



# Contents

Acknowledgments 11

## Introduction

Success—Guaranteed 13

## Monday

Choose Your Words, Change Your Family 17

*What you say and how you say it has everything to do with how your loved ones respond.*

## Tuesday

The Big 5: Time, Priorities, Activities, Work, and Finances 45

*What to do, what not to do, and why.*

## Wednesday

Navigating the Perfect Storm 61

*How to get the best from toddlers, teenagers, and all ages in between.*

## Thursday

Why Dad Can't Be Mom and Mom Can't Be Dad 117

*Tweaking your roles—and your marriage—to their finest, indelible sheen. (If you're single, there's good stuff here for you too.)*

## Friday

Mission: Possible 185

*How to make your time together count and make lasting connections.*

## Ask Dr. Leman 197

*The hottest topics and time-tested advice that really works.*

Monday: Communication and Family Dynamics 199

Tuesday: Time, Priorities, Activities, Work, and  
Finances 209

Wednesday: Discipline and Attitude 217

Thursday: Dad, Mom, and Marriage 237

Friday: Family Connections 249

The Top 10 Countdown to Having a Happy Family  
by Friday 255

## Bonus Feature 257

*Everybody likes a little extra value, so I've included a special section to give you more bang for your buck. Enjoy!*

The Secrets of Birth Order 259

Notes 285

About Dr. Kevin Leman 287

Resources by Dr. Kevin Leman 289

# Acknowledgments

Thanks to . . .

My faithful book readers, audience participants, television show watchers, radio listeners, and loyal Facebook fans, who provide much food for thought and inspire material for new books to help multitudes of families just like yours. You are greatly appreciated.

My stellar editorial team—Lonnie Hull DuPont, Jessica English, and Ramona Cramer Tucker—who represent varied stages in the wonderful mixture of life and fun called *family*.





# Introduction

## *Success—Guaranteed*

Can you have a happier family by Friday? Sounds kinda crazy, doesn't it? But it's true. You can change your family in five days. Yet if you're like me—a little impatient—you want to have a happy family by Wednesday. Or right now.

Here's the great news. You *can* have a happier family by Friday. In fact, you can have one by Wednesday . . . or even by the end of today!

*Have a Happy Family by Friday* will show you how. The principles in this book will give you the road map to success.

You may be married with or without kids. You may be a single parent with kids in your home or with kids being raised by an ex-spouse. You may be a grandparent raising your grandkids or with grandkids living in your house. You might even be single and hoping to be married one day, and you want the scoop on how to craft the happiest family you can imagine.

Is that possible? Yes, it is.

And it has everything to do with you. *You* can change your family's world.

But let me ask you something first. Was the first meal you ever prepared your best? Was the first job you secured the best job you ever had?

Likely not.

The point is, we all have to start somewhere in order to make visible progress. Today's that day for you and your family.

Every member plays a vital part in the development and well-being of the family unit. Even the dog, cat, and goldfish have a role. All need to contribute in their own unique ways. Everybody in the home is important and deserves to be treated with love and respect. Each person should be granted the right to make mistakes in an environment of unconditional love—without being blamed or treated as a failure. In short, a happy family means every person in the family is pulling for each other so that everybody wins.

Is this kind of family life even possible? You bet! You can achieve this kind of family in five days (or less), if you start *now* and start *right*.

Many families I know live this way. The growing Leman family—my lovely wife, Sande, five kids, three sons-in-law, and two grand-kids—is living proof that these principles work.

The secrets in this book will take a lifetime to embrace, but you can start to embrace them now. When you do, I guarantee that you'll reap the kinds of rewards that last a lifetime.

You don't have to spend years hoping that the concepts will work. They will work, starting today. What's critical is that you start *now* in making some changes.

So what are you waiting for? The world is traveling at warp speed. We are all overworked, overstressed, overextended in nearly every possible dimension. Employers ask more of us. We feel the pressure of being involved in multiple activities because it's what everyone around us is doing, and we don't want to be left behind.

On top of that, the electronic age means that cell phones, iPods, laptops, instant messaging, television, and other devices vie for our attention. Add to that the challenges of rearing children through their many different ages and stages, navigating the waters of peer pressure and unique personalities, blending families, and dealing with our own expectations about life, and it's a lot to manage.

Life is indeed short. All of us are given the same hours in the day. What's important is how we use those hours. How can you enjoy a happier family if you don't have time together as a family?

Most families fly by the seat of their pants, handling situations as they come along. But you can be smarter, because I know you are. You can put yourself in the driver's seat of your home and choose the direction and destination. *Have a Happy Family by Friday* reveals the workable road map. It's not always easy, but it is simple.

You can do it.

Even more, your precious family members are counting on you.





## *Choose Your Words, Change Your Family*

What you say and how you say it has everything to do with how your loved ones respond.

Admit it. Kids and spouses sometimes say and do stupid things. So do you. And teenagers specifically? Well, I'm not going too far out on a limb to say they get weirder than weird in the hormone-group years.

But through 47 years of marriage, 42 years of parenting, and 11 years of grandparenting, I've learned something critically important. You can change your family simply by changing the words you choose to use with those you love.

The concept sounds simple, doesn't it? Choose your words, change your family. But it's the working out of that concept in our daily lives that can sometimes prove tricky, because we're all too human. As the half-human, half-Vulcan character Spock said in *Star Trek*, "It is curious how often you humans manage to obtain that which you do not want."<sup>1</sup>

But a funny thing about us humans. When we do want something, we're more than capable of going after it with all things blazing. And of all the things in the world, in our hearts we want a happier home and family, a place of unconditional love and acceptance.

Choosing the words you use with your family is the kick start you need on your journey to a happier family by Friday. Since a family is a unit made up of parts, we'll talk first about communicating with your children.

Let's jump right in, shall we?

## **Why Your Kid's Opinion Matters**

When your child throws something your way that's slightly crazy, how do you respond?

Your 14-year-old son announces with a gleam in his eye, "Hey, I gave Ron the 200 bucks I saved toward buying his motorcycle. He says we can share it."

Your gut reaction is probably, "A motorcycle? Are you crazy?"

*When your child  
throws something  
your way that's  
slightly crazy, how  
do you respond?*

First of all, that's way too dangerous, and second of all, you don't even have a driving permit yet. If you think I'm gonna let you ride a motorcycle . . ." You shake your finger vehemently. Then you add, "Wow, your friend's brother really suckered you into paying for part of his bike. Talk about dumb."

Or your 9-year-old daughter says, "I want a Chinese water dragon. Can we go to Petco and pick one up?"

You happen to know a smidgen about water dragons from a friend of yours who is into reptile pets. And you know that a water

dragon grows to be about three feet long and needs a cage the size of the living room in your apartment. Not to mention the fact that Grandma would never enter your living room again if she knew a reptile was lurking there.

So what do you say after standing there stupefied for a few minutes? “Are you nuts? Do you know how hard it would be to take care of a water dragon?”

Let’s face it, parent. You’ve lived life a lot longer than your kid, and you know more about cause and effect than your kid does. But saying things like, “That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard” or “You’ve got to have rocks for brains to think that” only tells your kid that you think *he* is dumb and that his thoughts and dreams don’t matter.

What if, instead, you said calmly, “Wow, that sounds interesting—tell me more about that”? How might the resulting conversations be different?

Let’s go back to that motorcycle. Jim and his son, Craig, first had a blowout over Craig paying 200 bucks for the motorcycle. The results weren’t pretty, and Craig refused to speak to his dad for several days. By the third day, they’d both cooled off, and Jim had asked me for advice.

“First, say you’re sorry for behaving like an idiot,” I said. “After all, you’re the parent here. You need to make the first move.”

Jim, to his credit, didn’t take offense at me calling him an idiot and did just that. His son was so shocked by the apology that, instead of shutting the door in his dad’s face, he actually invited him into his teen cave.

“Tell me more about the motorcycle,” Jim said, sitting on his son’s bed.

The son who barely said a word anymore around the family dinner table began talking . . . and talking . . . and talking.

“I found out a lot about my son that day,” Jim said. “Including

that he was very interested in motorcycles and how they were built.”

So Jim, now a smarter dad, decided a dad-and-son road trip was in order. For Craig’s spring break, Jim took a couple of days off work, and the two drove 400 miles to the Harley Davidson factory in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, and took a tour.

Do you think that kid will ever forget what his dad did?

Not on your life!

And what happened with the water dragon? Right before Kari, little Andee’s mother, almost passed out on the spot at the thought of a reptile in her house, she gathered her wits together. “Uh, I don’t know if Petco is open right now,” she began. “Or if they carry water dragons.” As her daughter’s face fell, Kari said quickly, “But I’m sure they have water dragons . . . somewhere. What makes you interested in them?”

After a lively discussion, Kari realized her daughter did indeed know a lot about water dragons. In fact, she was fascinated by reptiles of all kinds. So Kari, a single mom, did a smart thing. She went online with her daughter, and they did some research together. They even discovered a reptile fair would be in their area the next week. The day of the fair, they packed a picnic lunch and strolled the fairgrounds, learning about iguanas, snakes of all kinds, and, yes, water dragons.

But to really appreciate what this mom did, you have to know that she was deathly afraid of snakes or any creatures that flicked “serpentine-type tongues” at her. Now that’s sacrifice.

When they got home, exhausted after a long day, Andee sighed happily. “Wow, Mom, that was the best day of my life.”

Kari held her breath, wondering if the request for the water dragon would come up again.

“You know,” Andee continued, “having a real water dragon would be fun someday. But I think it would be a lot of work too. So, for now, I’d like to get some modeling clay and make one for



my room. I've got some spending money from Grandma. Could we go to Hobby Lobby tomorrow and get some clay?"

Problem solved—before it even became a problem.

Both those parents deserve my applause for a job well done. Not only did they set aside their own prejudices, but they also entered into their child's world and dreams and, in the process, learned more about that child.

That's what communication is all about: looking at the world through each other's eyes.

## **Opening the Lines of Communication**

If there is one thing I want you to take away from this book, it's this important concept: the words you choose to use with those you love have everything to do with the way your loved ones will respond. You can change your family simply by changing the words you use.

Let's say your 15-year-old daughter tells you that her favorite band is playing 30 miles away, and her friends are going to the concert. She looks at you with those baby blues, hinting she'd like to go too.

What would many parents say? "You are not going to some concert 30 miles away. I don't care who's driving!"

All that accomplishes is shutting down communication between the two of you.

What if, instead, you said, "Wow, you must really love that group. Tell me about them. Do they have any top songs out? If so, I'd love to hear some of their music. Could you share it with me sometime?"

That, smart parent, opens the lines of communication—not only to talk about the group but also to step into your daughter's world of music and relationships.

You see, if your child doesn't think her opinion matters, she'll reject the values you try to instill in her and will shut you out of her life.

*If your child doesn't think her opinion matters, she'll reject the values you try to instill in her and will shut you out of her life.*

And, parent, when it comes to music, let me give you a little tip. You may not like it—then again, did your parents like *your* music when you were a teenager?—but you can always say, “Wow, that’s interesting . . .” and find one thing about it to compliment.

But there’s a tremendous difference between asking a child questions that intimidate or demand a response such as, “How was your day?” or “Why did you do that?” and making statements such as, “I’d like your opinion on something.”

When your teenager gets in the car after school and you smile and ask, “Hi, honey, how was your day?” what response do you get?

If you’re lucky, you’ll get a grunt or a shrug. Most of the time you’ll be ignored, which will tend to turn your own smile surly, even if you can keep your sarcastic comments to yourself. Why does your teen respond this way? Because he’s processing his day, which has been filled with all sorts of social, relational, mental, and physical noise, and your voice is only one more in a long line of stimuli. All he wants is to get home, dump his backpack on the floor, raid the fridge, and walk to his room with half of the fridge’s contents hanging out of his mouth. Then what happens? The door shuts. He’s in his man cave for the evening.

So what do you as a smart parent do? You don’t push the issue. You give the kid his space. When he does come out of his man cave, you smile and say, “Hey, Ryan, we need to look for a used car, and I noticed that you seem to keep an eye on different car models and seem to know a lot about cars in general. We need one with

### **Get Real: Real Problems, Real Solutions**

When my daughter turned 13, she started listening to a lot of what I call “moody” music—like “If I Die Young” by the Band Perry and “Breakaway” by Kelly Clarkson—and I started to get worried that she was getting depressed or something. Then I was visiting a friend and heard you speak at a community center event to parents of teenagers. You said that music has always changed with the times and that there’s never been a generation of parents who said to their kids, “Oh, I love that music!” You encouraged us to take a genuine interest in what our kids are listening to, instead of just trying to shut it off.

When I returned from my trip and my daughter and I were in the car together, she started singing with a song on the radio. I said, “Hey, turn that up. It’s got a great beat.” She looked surprised but did. When I found something in the song to compliment, she looked even more surprised. “Tell me more about that singer,” I said, and she did. It led to a great conversation about why she listens to the music she does. She said that she liked to listen to music that helped her process and think about her place in the world. For example, “If I Die Young” made her realize that anything can happen, and she wanted to make an impact on the world before she died. “Breakaway” encouraged her to spread her wings and try new things, even if she felt nervous.

Wow. Now I was the one surprised. My daughter had thought everything through with a level head. And here I was worried and thinking she was depressed. How wrong I was.

I also remember you saying, “The music you played probably drove your parents as nuts as the Top 40 stuff your kid listens to now. But the choice is clear: Do you want to be involved in your child’s life? Or be on the outside looking in?”

The choice was clear to me. I’m so glad I followed through on what you said.

Monica, Alabama

a working water pump, heat, and air-conditioning, and that isn’t over eight years old. Do you think you could do some research and come up with some suggestions? I’d really appreciate that.”

Watch that boy puff up and stand a little taller. “Uh, sure,” he says and heads back to his room.

By your actions you’ve said, “Hey, I know you’re a smart kid, and I notice what you’re interested in. You’re important to me, and what you think is important to me. You’re a contributing member of our family.”

*Do you know  
what your kid  
wants most of all?  
Your approval.*

Do you know what your kid wants most of all? Your approval. He wants to be important to you and needed. He wants to be treated as part of the family.

Want to bet Ryan is already starting to research Chevys and Fords behind that closed door?

And what do you do? You put your feet up on the couch and smile. You’ve created a win-win situation for both of you.

But in order to effectively communicate with each of your family members, it’s critical that you first understand them.

## **The Way We See Life**

Many parents work hard to treat all of their kids the same. But the truth is, you shouldn’t treat them the same. Each of your kids is different and should be treated differently. Each family member has unique gifts, and it’s your job as a parent to identify their gifts, evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, and then move your children in a healthy way to capitalize on those gifts for the good of all.

But you can’t do that without understanding how best to communicate with each other, and that has everything to do with the way each of us sees life—through our own personal lens.

Ever wonder why all the cubs in the family are so different?

Why your firstborn and secondborn are as different as night and day? Why the baby of the family always gets away with everything? Why you seem to butt heads with a certain family member—the one most like you? Why kid number one pairs up with kid number three when there's a family standoff? Why you and your spouse can see life from completely opposite perspectives? Why, at the last Christmas dinner, you and your siblings remembered a childhood event very differently?

Some people are rough and tough; others will melt before your eyes. Some are studious, athletic, or super smart, while others drop out of school and become rich entrepreneurs. As one of my favorite quotes says, we are made wonderfully complex and marvelous.<sup>2</sup> Every child born has her own DNA. Even identical twins have unique fingerprints. Each of your family members is wired differently. To have a happy family by Friday, we need to get behind each other's eyes to view life through their lens. We need to recognize each family member's unique talents and celebrate them so each person feels respected and special.

Some of you have already read *The Birth Order Book* and have gone through the process of figuring out who the firstborns, middleborns, and lastborns in your family really are, considering not only their position in the family but also different variables. I won't repeat all that material here.

For those of you who are new to birth order, you won't want to miss out on this exciting discovery. Read *The Birth Order Book* in full at your earliest convenience. For now, before you continue reading this chapter, flip to the bonus feature at the back of this book and read "The Secrets of Birth Order" (pages 259–83) so we're all on the same page. I guarantee you'll have some intriguing conversations over dinner tonight as a result.

*Each of your kids  
is different and  
should be treated  
differently.*

### **Get Real: Real Problems, Real Solutions**

No offense, but I thought birth order was a bunch of hooley until I found out how much it related to me and the problems I was having with my 11-year-old son, Shawn. I thought maybe he was entering “teendom” early and giving me fits. Then a friend encouraged me to read your *Birth Order Book*, and I’m not even a reader. Wow, did you peg me and my son. We’re both firstborns, so no wonder we butt heads. We both have to be right, and it wasn’t working for either of us.

I marked a bunch of sections and then took Shawn out for lunch one day. I shared with him what I was learning about myself and how I tended to respond without even thinking. I told him I was working to change my gut reactions and asked him to forgive me for always having to be right.

He was stunned. “You know, Dad,” he said, “that sounds a lot like me too.”

I didn’t even have to say it. He got it and even asked to borrow the book. I saw him passing it around to his friends when they met outside our garage to go biking. Thanks for providing real-life help. This father-son team is getting along a lot better.

Andrew, Texas

### **Communicating Uniquely with Your Family Members**

Each person comes to this world with a unique set of blueprints. Clearly, almighty God made each of us different, and it’s intended to be that way: “Before you were born I [God] set you apart.”<sup>3</sup> Your daughter may be athletically talented. Your son may be musically gifted. But imagine what would happen if you forced your 4-foot-11-inch son, who plays the clarinet beautifully, to shoot for the top volleyball player role that your 5-foot-10-inch eighth grade daughter has? And vice versa? You’d end up with two very frustrated children and a home that’s like a powder keg from the stress.

On the other hand, can you imagine a world in which there is only the cookie-cutter mold of you? For me, that would be downright frightening. As a baby of the family, I'd never be able to keep all those balls in the air without the firstborns in my life, including two admirable women I couldn't live without—my wife and my assistant.

Differences are critical to making the world go round. But we need to understand those differences and celebrate them in order to communicate effectively with each other. If we do so, we actually expand each family member's potential for success because we're acting as a unit—a hand with many fingers playing out their own roles.

Think of it this way. Do you communicate with an 11-year-old the same way you would with a 4-year-old? Or with an adult the same way you would with a 2-year-old? As your kids grow up and you get to know them as individuals, the way you communicate with each of them should flex and change. Here's what I mean.

### *Treat Your Kids Differently*

Many parents think they should treat all of their children the same. After all, they're schooled to think, *Well, if I keep things even, the kids won't have anything to fight about. They won't be jealous because everything's the same.* Trust me, those kids will still find something, or a lot of things, to fight about. They'll be jealous of each other multiple times a day. For the most part, kids are hedonistic suckers who have their own well-being as their top priority.

Let's face it. Sibling rivalry goes back to the very beginning of recorded history. The original brainstorm I had as a title for *The Birth Order Book* was *Abel Had It Coming*.

Whether it's Montana, Texas, or Virginia, the state you live in will treat your 16-year-old differently from the way it treats your 14-year-old. Similarly, as parents, don't be afraid to treat your kids differently concerning curfews, bedtimes, allowances, chores,

*Sibling rivalry goes back to the very beginning of recorded history.*

TV and computer time, cell phone privileges, and driving the car. Privileges should vary according to age and maturity, and you should communicate that.

“Justin, now that you’re going to high school, I know your homework load will be a lot heavier, and you start school almost an hour earlier than last year. So I’ve asked your brother to take over walking the dog in the morning. I know that’s been your responsibility in the past, and you’ve done a great job with it. But it’s time for a change and for your brother to step up to the plate with more responsibility. We’ve also decided to set your bedtime an hour later than your

### **Get Real: Real Problems, Real Solutions**

We have three stairstep girls, with only a little over a year between each one. To say I know about catfights between siblings is an understatement. You try living with three girls who are 10, 11, and 12. I was at my wit’s end, sick of the bickering, hair pulling, and screaming, when I heard you talk on *Fox & Friends* about birth order. I drove right to the bookstore near us and got a copy of the book. I knew I had to read it. I even started reading it in the car. (I told you I was desperate.)

I know it sounds trite, but the light bulb went on. When I started treating each of the girls according to their birth orders instead of trying to keep everything even, the difference was amazing. I also discovered something about myself too. As a middleborn, I’d spent my growing-up years negotiating truces between my siblings. As I result, I took on too much of the girls’ fighting as my responsibility and not theirs. When I took your advice to put the ball in their court and then walk away, it worked . . . like a miracle drug. Thanks bunches.

Shauntel, North Carolina



brother's and sister's, since you're older and will have more evening activities."

When you state the change straightforwardly, your older child thinks, *Wow, Mom and Dad get that my life is changing. They're in my court. That's cool. A later bedtime. No getting up at the crack of dawn to walk the dog.* He sees the changes as the privileges they are and will most likely rise to the occasion in responsibility.

Your younger kids might outwardly complain about your older son "getting everything he wants." But inwardly they're thinking, *Okay, so as I get older, I'll get more privileges too. Cool. I just need to hang in there and do a great job.*

It's a win-win on all sides.

### *Lighten Up on Your Firstborn or Only Child*

Just because your firstborn or only child can do a chore and do it well, does that mean they have to? Middleborns and babies of the family can also be summoned to do chores capably around the house, even if sometimes you have to check up on those babies to make sure the job gets done. Whenever possible, some of the chores of the older children should be passed down to the younger children. If you have children who are 7, 9, and 11, and the 11-year-old has always been the one who packs up all the school lunches in the morning for all three kids, why not change that for the new school year? The 9-year-old is more than capable of making sure all the elements of a healthy lunch go in the bags, and that 7-year-old is fully able to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on her own to help. Your firstborn son has always taken out the trash for the past nine years, but should he continue to take out the trash when he's in high school? Or could your baby, who is now 10, easily take that on?

*Give your firstborns and onlies a break.*

Give your firstborns and onlies a break. Older kids' lives become more complicated. They should have fewer chores around the house and be granted more independence for making their own decisions as they move toward adulthood.

Above all, don't make that firstborn the stand-in babysitter whose social life has to revolve around whether or not you can get a babysitter for the younger kids.

### *Empower That Middle Child*

Since middleborns often feel squeezed in the middle and unimportant, they, more than any other birth order, need to know you're in their corner. Middleborns are great at sizing up situations because they're stuck in the middle and have negotiated for everything they've received in life.

*Say to a middle child, "I want your opinion."*

If you say to a middle child, "I want your opinion," make sure you have a safety net available to catch them when they fall over.

No one asks middle children that question. Neither do middle children go out of the way to give their opinion, because they often feel invisible.

By merely asking the question, you've got your middleborn's attention.

You can whet that middle child's appetite for more interaction with you by saying, "You know what? I'd like to have your input on something I'm dealing with at work. Two of the employees are driving me nuts. Here's the situation: One is always correcting the other and trying to show her up. The other is always trying to get my attention because I'm their manager." You look your middleborn straight in the eye. "You're so good at relationships, I'm wondering, what would you do? How would you handle the situation if you were me?"

Watch your kid's jaw drop. When she sees you're serious about getting advice from her, that middleborn will start talking . . . and keep talking.

You empower a middle child when you ask her opinion on anything. Giving your middleborn a piece of the action, asking her what she thinks, is like catnip to a cat. It draws the cat and then keeps it hurrying back for more.

### *Hold Your Youngest Accountable*

The single most important mistake parents make with babies of the family is letting them slide through life the easy way. Little Schnooky can be so manipulative and charming that she can get away with murder and not get killed. Instead, her siblings are blamed because they're older and should "know better." The baby gets off scot-free . . . and continues that path throughout life, unless she's held accountable somewhere along the way for her actions.

*Everybody in the family needs to pull their weight. There's no free lunch here.*

She's also very clever at getting out of anything she doesn't want to do simply by acting helpless. Believe me, she's not helpless.

Everybody in the family needs to pull their weight. There's no free lunch here. The sooner lastborns find out that life isn't always a party and there are things they need to do that they may not want to but have to anyway, the better for everyone in the family.

The tendency of a lastborn will always be toward a more care-free, lighthearted existence. But that doesn't mean her wish should be granted on a daily basis by the family genie.

Do yourself and your lastborn a favor: start looking now for a nice firstborn for your lastborn to marry. The best marriage matches are firstborn and baby, middleborn and baby, and first-born and middleborn.

### *Keep an Eagle Eye on Comparisons*

You do it so innocently and often without realizing it, but you do it.

“That’s a great sculpture,” you tell your middleborn, who is beaming over her accomplishment that she worked on all weekend. “I remember when Geri had to do that in fifth grade too, and her dinosaur was 12 inches tall.”

What are you really saying to your middleborn? “What you did right now isn’t such a big thing. Your sister already did it two years ago. And that eight-inch-tall dinosaur? Well, your sister made hers bigger, and it was better.”

Sure, Geri may have done it two years ago, but this is the first time for your middleborn. She should be allowed to feel the same accomplishment and to see a similar excitement from you that you would have shared with the firstborn.

What could you say instead? Try this: “Wow, you did it! You’ve worked so hard all weekend on that sculpture, and I’m so excited to see it. You must really be proud of yourself. I’d love to know how you came up with your ideas.”

Be careful about the words you choose to use with your child. Comparisons are deadly; encouraging words go a long way in your child’s heart and in forming your future relationship.

### *Realize Who You’ll Butt Heads with the Most*

Who do you butt heads with the most in your family? Chances are, it’s the one who is the most like you, who tends to have the same birth order as you. Similarities cause rubbing, and that can be downright irritating. However, when you realize why you annoy each other—because you’re so much alike—it can go a long way in putting out the sparks that would otherwise make your tempers flare. And it can even bring some humor to the situation . . . yes, even for you firstborns, if you’d allow it.

We could all be clones, but then again, that would be majorly boring.

## The Secrets to Communicating Well with Others

As a baby of the family, I love a party. The more people there and the bigger the splash, the better!

Then there's my wife, Sande, a firstborn, who likes things quieter, normal sleep patterns, and all her ducks in a row.

Since I'm "the birth order guy" who has been talking about that subject for over 40 years, you'd think I'd have all the communication patterns with other birth orders down pat. But sometimes I have lapses and fall into the typical thinking that what I'd like is, of course, what everybody else will like.

Take Sande's fifty-fifth birthday party. I was determined to celebrate the event in a big way, so I planned a surprise party and invited a bunch of our friends. I even organized getting her out the door earlier in the day without her being suspicious so I could throw the party together. Planning, for a baby of the family, is a big deal and takes a lot of effort. I was so proud of myself and excited about the results. I thought I'd be giving my precious bride an incredible gift.

But when Sande opened the door and was greeted with the roars of "Surprise!" from our multiple friends, as well as the chaos of party horns, she did something unexpected.

She cried.

As old as I am, I learned something that day. My wife does not like surprises. In fact, she hates them. She'd rather have come home, put her feet up, and torn new recipes out of her favorite cooking magazines.

I was stunned. But after that day, I was indeed a smarter husband. You won't find me planning a surprise party for her anytime soon . . . or ever.

As for myself, though, I reveled in a continuous *week* of surprises for a recent milestone birthday, when my kids flew in from all over to celebrate in a walloping way. I wanted it to last and last and last.

You see, each birth order sees life through a distinctly different lens. If we assume others will respond and react like we do, we will be sadly mistaken. That's why it's critical we learn how to communicate in the way in which others are most comfortable and can receive the information.

The following "Communication 101" tips work for that particular birth order at any age or stage—kids, spouses, other relatives. They'll go a long way toward helping you understand your friends and co-workers too.

### *Communication 101 with Firstborns*

What you can do to have a happier family by Friday:

- Give them specifics, details.
- Lighten up on their responsibilities; as achievers, they already feel the stress and pressure.
- Watch your own critical eye; don't overcorrect them.
- Don't micromanage them; they're already doing that for themselves.
- Don't "should" on them; instead, project in all you say and do, "I love you as you are."

### *Communication 101 with Middleborns*

What you can do to have a happier family by Friday:

- Listen to them.
- Ask their opinion on *anything* (vacation, computer help, decor, purchases), and follow up by showing you value that opinion.
- Spend time with just them.
- Let them make choices ("I'd love it if you'd pick the restaurant for our family dinner").

- Show your respect for them as individuals in order to even out the competitive spirit the middle child naturally feels with siblings.

*Communication 101 with Lastborns*

What you can do to have a happier family by Friday:

- Give them the opportunity to lead (planning family outings and celebrations).
- Identify their unique strengths and encourage them; remember, they are continually comparing themselves to their siblings farther up the food chain.
- Affirm them for their unique role in the family and for their social skills.
- Grow their levels of responsibility and hold them accountable.
- Let them entertain you, and laugh with them often.

*Communication 101 with Only Children*

What you can do to have a happier family by Friday:

- Make plans to get them together with peers, to provide common ground and connection.
- Lighten up on their responsibilities, as only children take them seriously.
- Encourage unscheduled time for dreaming.
- Provide opportunities to balance their seriousness with fun and laughter.
- Remember that books are their best friends and also a needed escape from life's pressures.

## **Hot Tips for Married Couples**

### **Firstborns/Onlies Married to Firstborns/Onlies**

- Don't "should" on your mate.
- Stop "improving" on things your mate says. Marriage is not a competitive sport.
- Define roles carefully to avoid arguments over control. Both of you want it, but you can't both have it in every area of life. So why not put out the fires before they start sparking?
- Memorize these phrases and use them often: "I could be wrong" and "I'm sorry."

### **Firstborns Married to Middles**

- Make it a point to have regular meetings.
- Discuss feelings and events as they occur.
- Firstborns should say to middles, "Tell me how you feel about that," and then listen with open ears and a closed mouth until the middleborn is done talking.
- Middleborns, when you feel like avoiding conflict, don't! There are two in this relationship, and you're as important as your more powerful spouse.
- Force yourselves to share, even when you don't feel like it. Middleborn, your firstborn spouse needs you and your mediating and negotiating nature to balance his relationships, whether he's aware of it or not. Firstborn, your middleborn spouse has a lot of wisdom she's learned about navigating life's paths and making relationships work. You'd be wise to listen to it and act on it.

### **Firstborns Married to Lastborns**

- Identify each other's strengths and know when to use each of them appropriately.
- Acknowledge your differences as diverse and unique, not right or wrong personalities.
- Firstborns, watch the flaw-picking so you don't shut down that happy-go-lucky baby. In times of irritation, remember why you married your spouse. Differences do attract and make life fun.
- Lastborns, remember that others need the spotlight too, and not everyone loves a party atmosphere 24/7.
- Enjoy the ride of these two opposite birth orders. They make for a wonderful balance in marriage (my wife and I can attest to that).

### **Middles Married to Middles**

- Make a pact that you will talk about anything that comes up, and that you will do it as swiftly as possible. Avoidance of hot topics is not the key to a happy marriage.



- Share your thoughts and feelings on a regular basis. Secrets don't make a marriage go round for long.
- Make space and time for outside friendships where you both "do your own thing" with friends.
- Realize it's okay for you to have and state your opinion. (Otherwise it's like the two middleborns who bantered back and forth so long over dinner—"Oh, you can have the turkey breast; I'll have the neck." "Oh, it's fine. You can have the breast; I'll take the neck"—that neither of them ended up realizing there was enough turkey breast to go around until their dog snatched it off the table and ate it himself.)
- Memorize these phrases: "Tell me more about that" and "I'd love your opinion on . . ."

### **Middles Married to Lastborns**

- Middleborn, share your feelings with the lastborn in a direct manner. Say, "I need to talk to you for a minute. This is really important." Otherwise the care-free baby may not be aware of your struggle.
- Look for common ground. Middleborn, remember that you're married to Mr. or Mrs. Spontaneous, always looking for fun. Combining your interests with the need for your spouse to have fun is a good idea.
- Lastborn, be aware of your self-centered tendency (because the spotlight was often on you, the cute baby, as you grew up). Work hard at making the middleborn feel important and needed in your life. After all, they were the birth order most likely not to be missed at the dinner table. They may not enjoy the spotlight like you do, but everyone needs moments in the sun.
- Lastborn, laugh *with* your mate but never *at* him or her. A middle child has a sensitive nature. Just remember how you felt when you were written off as "just the baby," and realize that a middleborn often felt the same way when he or she was squeezed in the middle or ignored.
- Middles and lastborns are a great match, so enjoy it fully!

### **Lastborns Married to Lastborns**

- Draw up a list of responsibilities for each of you.
- Carry out your responsibilities as designated when needed.
- Hold each other accountable to accomplish what you say you will.
- Watch your spending money. Not everything you want is something you should buy right away. Use the "at least 24 hours" rule. If you see something costing more than \$50 that you want to buy, wait at least 24 hours. Go home, think about it, and ask your spouse what he or she thinks. For most babies of the family, the thrill of the purchase is what gets them going and into debt. But if you set that purchase on hold for at least 24 hours, some of the thrill evaporates.
- Make sure somebody pays the bills!

## **The Grand Slam, 24/7**

Denny's has this awesome breakfast called the Grand Slam—you mix and match your own list of artery-clogging specialties. It's their big breakfast, guaranteed to please the appetite. I've watched in admiration as some folks inhale it. As for me, I'm trying to watch my girlish figure.

But there's something even more important about Denny's. It, like Walmart, is open 24/7.

If you want a grand slam with your family, you also need to be open 24/7. That means you're available anytime and every time your kids want to interact with you. It also means that you stay open-minded and your ears are tuned to listen.

As kids grow older, they'll try to shut you out of their life. That's natural. But the smart parent works to maintain a connection. You generate words, sentences, paragraphs, and even complete discussions by having an "Open 24/7" policy.

One of the perks of being a parent is whenever you feel like relaxing and putting your feet up on the La-Z-Boy, or you're almost asleep, that's the time your kids feel like talking. I can't tell you how many important late-night, one-on-one discussions I had with my five kids as I struggled to keep my eyes open.

But be aware that your body language announces whether you're open for business or not. Are your arms crossed when your kid talks to you? Does your expression say you've already made up your mind? Or are your arms relaxed by your sides, and do your eyes say, "Hey, I'm interested in what you're interested in, and you can talk to me anytime"?

Does hearing your kid out mean you'll always agree with her? No. Sometimes you'll need to say, "I know you're making a request. Tell me more so I have as much info as possible and we can make a good decision together." Does that mean you let your kid call the shots? No, you as the parent still make the judgment call based on your good sense and years of life experience. However, your

### Get Real: Real Problems, Real Solutions

Connecting with my 13-year-old daughter has been tricky for this single dad. Touchy-feely stuff isn't my thing, but being there for my daughter, even though she no longer lives with me, is. I started noticing that she was "owly" when I picked her up from school on Friday. After several weeks of that, the reason finally sank in. She was missing Friday night movies with her friends to be with me. Then, on Monday, her friends would talk about the movies, and she'd feel out of it. So I made an agreement with her—every other Friday night she and I would either rent or go to a movie she got to pick.

I've watched all sorts of movies this year that I'd never have watched on my own. That includes every episode of the *Twilight* series, *High School Musical*, and even *A Cinderella Story*. I don't discuss them with the guys at the office (ha), but seeing them with her gives us something in common to talk and laugh about. It jump-starts our discussions for the entire weekend.

Paul, Minnesota

kid needs to know you will hear her out and not put her down, no matter how crazy the idea might seem.

Why is this so important? Because we live in a democratic society. If you have the right to put me down, I have the right to put you down. Most parents expect their kids simply to fall in line. But our kids today have far more access to ideas through technology and their peers than ever before in history, and they're weighing all that information. You have to earn the right to step into your kids' world. I encourage you to enter it any way you can. If you want to know what teens are listening to, go to Smudge Music ([www.smudgemusic.com](http://www.smudgemusic.com)). Google some of their favorite actors, actresses, and musicians. Check out YouTube videos. Kids today live in a very complicated world.

When does entering your child's world start? The earlier, the better. But it's never too late to start. Too many families are on

the conveyor belt of life, running from activity to activity. With two working parents in many households, some young children get dropped off at 6:30 a.m. and are picked up at 6:00 p.m. They might get used to it like hamsters running on a wheel, but is it what

*You have to earn  
the right to step into  
your kids' world.*

they really need? What's best for them?

That's a long day away from parents for a kid. A full day for a 3-year-old kid is two and a half hours of preschool in the morning, three days a week. By the time the kid comes home and has lunch, he's ready for a nap, not for

more interaction with other kids at day care.

The pressure on today's families is great—the economy is tough. More and more families and single parents are working multiple jobs to make ends meet. Both mom and dad are often working. Anything we can do to help release the stress within the family will pay dividends both now and in the future. If one parent can be at home or work from home, that adds stability for the whole family.

Being a parent means sacrificing some of your goals and dreams in the meantime to do what's best for your family. Let's say you earned your degree in a high-demand field. You have to keep your feet in that field in order to stay cutting edge. But your kids are 6 and 8, and it's flu season. Your 6-year-old gets the flu and wants her mommy. What do you do? Rearrange your workday? Not go in for a week while she gets over it? Or find a nanny who can stay with her? If you are a single parent and don't have a spouse to spell you during such times, the ante is upped even further.

My wife and I made a strategic decision before we had children. Though Sande had dreams of owning her own antique store, she put those dreams on hold until our children were older so she could stay at home with them. My job as a psychologist was a traveling one. Though I was a very active father, we knew I wouldn't be able

to consistently stay home with the kids and still earn the bacon. Years later, even our teenagers said they were glad to have Mom there when they got home from school.

Families today would be wise to figure out what working really costs—not only in paying day care personnel but also in travel time, wardrobe extras, gas for the car, and so on. Today there are many flexible job options—for example, job sequencing, sharing of jobs, and working from home.

Karen, a young mom, made the decision to stay home when she found out she was pregnant with her first child. Two more children followed within the next five years. When her youngest was in first grade, Karen returned to the workplace. However, she worked shorter hours so she could take the kids to school and pick them up.

If any mom deserves the “Mom of the Year” award, it would be Marcia, an amazing single mom, for her creativity. Without any consistent income from her ex, she was determined to rear her two young children as much by herself as possible. So she got together with another mom on the block and brainstormed. Andrea’s husband had been injured and was unable to work, so she had to pick up the slack in their income somehow. Both women found part-time jobs outside the home and received approval from their employers to have alternate schedules. Marcia worked in the morning; Andrea worked in the afternoon. They took care of each other’s children—no money exchanged!—and switched off who was responsible to get lunch for the kids. Both had similar styles of child rearing, and their children were close in age.

*Being a parent  
means sacrificing  
some of your goals  
and dreams in  
the meantime to  
do what’s best for  
your family.*

In order to make ends meet, after her kids were tucked in bed, Marcia also worked at home from 8:00 to 11:00 p.m. on a developing business. Today her kids are in middle school, and her at-home business has blossomed into enough income to become her full-time job from home. The years in between weren't easy. But I've got to tell you, Marcia's two junior highers are some of the most respectful, helpful children I've ever met.

Whether you're a single mom who has to make an income or a mom who needs to pick up the slack in her husband's income, or you're at a stage in your career where it would be difficult to step away and still retain your career trajectory, it's important to carefully think through your priorities. In the short time that speeds by like lightning when your children are at home with you, it's critical that your primary focus is on raising well-balanced children who will grow to adults who become contributing members of society.

The stakes are higher than ever for the family today. The average marriage lasts seven years. Spouses have little time for each other in the pursuit of careers and raising children. More families than ever today are blended. Families have little downtime to rejuvenate, whether as individuals or as a group. However, if you want a happy family by Friday, you need to find the space to experience joy and deeper communication as a family.

You *can* change your family by simply changing the words you use with those you love.

I guarantee it.

---

### ***Family Check-In***

---

1. The words you choose to use with those you love make a huge difference. What is the number one communication issue you're facing right now? Explain.

2. What words do you usually use in response to a family member? How might you change the words you use for the goal of having a happy family by Friday?
3. Identify your birth order, as well as that of each of your family members (keeping in mind that rank is affected by different variables). What strengths and abilities do individual family members have? How might you best encourage the use of those strengths to the family's advantage?
4. How did your parents handle differences between you and your siblings (unless you were an only child) when you were growing up? How has that influenced the way you think of yourself now? The way you interact with your spouse and your children?
5. Want to make your family dinners lively? Discuss one of the "Communication 101" tips (pages 34–35) at each of your next five family dinners. What surprises or eureka's come to light?
6. How might you use your shared discoveries as a group to move your home toward an environment of healthy communication and unconditional love and acceptance?