

PURPOSE/ RATIONALE

A premise of this workshop is that a respectful, supportive, structured and grace-filled childhood helps children develop self-respect, respect for others, and a life of faith. Because the fall of humanity affects all relationships, gracious parenting is not innate; however but we can learn practices that childhood be an experience of abundant life. (Jn 10:10).

Note: Integrity, therefore, demands that this study be presented in a gracious manner with respect for participants' physical needs, emotions, experiences and opinions. The approach is invitational—exercises are optional and the degree to which each participant embraces the process is within his or her purview. It is possible, though, that some participants may use their opinions to try to shut down the process. Be sure to set boundaries as necessary. In so doing you will be honoring all the participants and modeling the type of boundary setting that is essential to gracious parenting.

DESCRIPTION

The goal of the workshop is for primary caregivers to explore the best ways to embody grace. Participants will explore their own experiences growing up. They will consider the goals of Christian parenting and biblical foundations, and, drawing from experts in fields related to child development and Christian formation, identify best practices for creating households that enhance the possibility that children will mature into independent adults who experience the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12)

Note: The term “parent” is used throughout as a reference to anyone who is the primary caregiver of children, which in many cases can be a grandparent or other relative. Workshop leaders need to be sensitive to individual family situations.

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TIME FRAME: 2.5 hours with two breaks

WORKSHOP OUTLINE:

- I. Welcome and Introduction (15 Minutes)
- II. Reflections (15 minutes)
- III. About Gracious Parenting Part 1: Foundations (25 minutes)
- Break: (15 minutes)**
- IV. About Gracious Parenting Part 2: Discipline (20 minutes)
- V. Principles and Practices (15 minutes)
- Break: (10 minutes)**
- VI. Scenarios (20 minutes)
- VII. Conclusion (10 minutes)

PREPARATION

- Review the workshop outline and handouts to become familiar with the flow and content.
- Consider your anticipated audience. Some aspects of this workshop may be challenging. How will you honor everyone present and be respectful of all experiences and opinions while seeking to promote gracious parenting? Keep in mind that resistance is often a crucial step in the process of change.
- Set up the space allowing for both large and small group work.
- Print and cut apart small-group labels.
- Make several copies of the information sheets and place on a table as optional resources.
- Copy handouts as follows:
 - Handout A “My Views on Parenting”
 - Handout B “The Bible on Children”
 - Handout C “Developmental Issues and Parenting”
 - Handout D “Proverbs and Hitting Children”
 - Handout E “Effects of Corporal Punishment”
 - Handout F “Anger Issues and Next Steps in Gracious Parenting”
 - Handout F “Scenarios” (Four copies: one per small group)
- Prepare sections for presentation on newsprint, overhead, or PowerPoint (optional).
- Write the following goal on newsprint or white/chalk board (or PowerPoint): *The goal of gracious Christian parenting is to provide nurture and structure in accordance with developmental needs and abilities in order to help children grow into persons with self-awareness and self-respect and the capacities to act boldly, show respect for others, and embrace the grace of God as made manifest in Jesus.*
- Write the following definition on newsprint or white/chalk board (or PowerPoint) *Violence is doing something or failing to do something that results in emotional or physical harm or puts a child at risk of harm.*
 - Prepare PowerPoint with basic content, if you opt for a PP presentation.
 - Set up drinks (and snacks if appropriate), label restrooms and otherwise make the space easy for participants to navigate.
- Gather materials.
 - name tags
 - tape
 - pens, crayons, markers
 - paper
 - a flip chart or white board or PowerPoint if you opt to prepare one
 - small-group labels
 - handouts and information sheets
 - Bibles



Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

(Matthew 19:14, NIV)

CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOP

I Welcome and Introduction (15 minutes)

Greet participants as they gather and provide name tags if they do not know each other.

Point out the information sheets as optional resources they can pick up.

Explain: that the term “parent” is used throughout this workshop; however it is being used as a catch-all term for primary caregivers of children.

Thank them for their commitment to children and to learning news to nurturing them.

Offer a prayer of your own or use the following:

Gracious God,

We thank you for all children and for the opportunity to touch little lives with love and grace. Help us to open our hearts to possibilities and new ideas and to keep forever in our minds the goal of growing into grace-filled persons through whom others experience your love. In the name of you son who has shown us the depth of that love, we pray, Amen.

Explain:

- The workshop may cover some topics that are uncomfortable to talk about.
- This is a safe space in which all feelings, perspectives and struggles are to be honored.
- You will be exploring recent advances in child development and faith formation that provide valuable information for parenting practices.
- Research indicates that children form mental representations of God by the age of six, whether or not they have been exposed to the concept.
- A child’s first image of God, which remains influential throughout their lives, comes directly from their experiences with their primary caregivers.
- The goals of this workshop are: to help us become persons who, through our parenting, provide an image of a gracious, loving God; and to discover ways to nurture children to become the persons God created them to be.
- The intention is neither to guilt ourselves nor to critique our own parents, but to be honest and open to new information that might help enhance our parenting skills

II. Reflections (15 minutes)

A. Reflections on Assumptions and Aphorisms

Explain that we often spout popular adages without reflecting on them. While these adages often house some truth, they usually do not reflect all truth on a given topic. Spoken with an “and that settles it” attitude, an adage becomes aphoristic and can impede growth. On the other hand honestly exploring aphorisms provides a pathway toward uncovering unexamined assumptions and other truths. This exercise involves asking the following questions about common aphorisms about children: What’s true about it? What fears or concerns lie beneath it? What faulty underlying assumptions may be operative in it? and What other truths can provide balance.

Begin with the example of *Children are resilient*.

- **Truth:** Children are able to come through very tough experiences, sometimes with surprising strength and resilience.
- **Fears or concerns** at work: Fear that difficult experiences, especially those we experienced

or our children experience (especially those we can't control) may be irreparable.

- **Faulty assumptions:** Surviving a difficult situation is the same as being unaffected by it.
- **Other truths:**
 - What's the alternative? Children really have a choice but to survive difficult experiences.
 - 90 percent of brain development occurs in the first few years so difficult experiences do have effects, although they are not always visible. Freedom to express emotions about difficult experiences is crucial to moving past them in a healthy way.
 - Even healed wounds leave scars.
 - Experiences that seem not to be a big deal to adults are often very hard for children.

Invite participants to name some aphorisms they've heard (or said) about children. Encourage them to identify adages that they have "inherited" from important people in their lives, as these are the ones that are most often held without question. A good way to identify them is for participants to think of times they may have said "My mother always said..." or "I was always taught that..." Write down their responses on newsprint or a board. Select several to discuss as a group or in small groups using the following questions:

- Where did I first hear this adage?
- What aspects of it are true?
- What assumptions does it betray?
- What fears or concerns lurk beneath it?
- What other truths could provide balance?

After discussion, ask: *How did it feel to question some of these commonly accepted adages?*

Explain that we sometimes resist or feel guilty questioning a belief that was held by someone important in our lives. The goal is to be aware of those feelings while maintaining integrity in our own beliefs.

B. Reflections On Parenting

Distribute Handout A "My Views on Parenting." **Give them time** complete the exercise.

Ask: *Were there any surprises or other responses to the exercise anyone would like to share?*

Propose the following goal statement, displaying it on PPT, newsprint or white board:

The goal of gracious Christian parenting is to provide nurture and structure in accordance with children's developmental needs and abilities in order to help them grow into persons with emotional competence, self-awareness, self-respect and the capacities to act boldly, respect others, and embrace the grace of God as made manifest in Jesus.

Ask for initial impressions of this goal statement.

Explain: That there are many appropriate ways to frame gracious parenting; this is a working goal statement to help begin the process of exploring parenting.

III About Gracious Parenting, Part 1: Foundations (25 minutes)

A. The Bible (15 minutes)

Distribute Handout B "The Bible on Children."

Review the ► main principles from "On the Nature of Children."

► *Out of all the available options, God chose to enter human history as a child.*

► *Children are spiritual beings with relationships with God that are independent of adults.*

- ▶ *Children have personal agency, are God’s instruments, and examples of faith for adults.*
- ▶ *God has special concern for children who are often innocent victims of adult choices and circumstances.*

Ask: *Were there any surprises? How might the principles guide how we related to them?*

Move to “On Relating to Children,” **explaining** that there are other texts that you will consider later but for now, you want to highlight four texts about how adults relate with children.

Read the texts on the handout and **elaborate** as follows:

- **Matthew 18:5; Mk 9:33-37; and Lk 9:46-48:** The word for “welcome” in this verse means to treat as a special guest.
- **1 Corinthians 13:11 (also Is 7:15-16; and Jn 9:20-21):** Children have a different level of accountability than do adults.
- **Ephesians 6:1-4:** People often quote “Honor your father and your mother” ignoring the whole sentence, which reads “so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Ex. 10:12). We cannot take the first part of the sentence out of context and apply it as a mandate for children to obey parents. The commandments are addressed to adults after the exodus from Egypt. This one calls them to follow the faith traditions handed down to them as a condition of living in the Promised Land.

The writer of Ephesians borrows the commandment for his discussion of family relationships and adapts it to include a phrase about life going well and living long on the earth. The historic context of Ephesians can help us better understand this text and see how remarkable it is.

Ephesians focuses on practical matters of survival in the midst of a hostile culture. It also challenged that culture in ways that would have stunned the original readers, but are often lost to modern readers. Under Roman family law, *patria potestas* gave the father absolute power over his family. He could sell children, make them work the fields (even in chains), punish them as he liked without consequence (even exacting death sentences). When a child was born, he or she was placed before the father’s feet. If the father lifted the child, the child was kept. If not, the child could be exposed, left outside to die. The admonition for children to obey would not have even registered among early readers—it was a given. Two things would have captured their attention, however:

- ▶ It would have been a big surprise for the writer to address children *directly* as though they are full human beings with a degree of agency
- ▶ The call to fathers not to provoke their children to would have been shocking.

Throughout Ephesians are Christian corrections to common practices. Not the least of which is the call to parenting that is gentle and honors children as full human beings.

- **Proverbs 22:6:** The verb translated “train” (*hanak*) means “to put something into the mouth,” “to give to be tasted,” as softened food was given to infants; it signifies giving elementary instruction, imbuing or initiating a child in accordance with God’s way. This text provides a beautiful image for raising children in faith—to give children a taste of grace in our parenting practices as a way to initiate them into the grace of God.

Transition to the topic of child development by **inviting** participants to think about a time when they were pressed to do something they were not capable of doing or did not feel confident in

doing, for example, starting a new job and being expected to jump right in before having figured out where to park, who your colleagues were, or even where the rest room was.

Ask:

- How did you feel?
- What would have made the experience better for you?
- On the other hand, how do you feel when you do something you feel capable of?
- Which of these feelings and experiences do you want for your children? Which lend themselves to belief in a loving God who wants the best for us?

B. Child Development (5 minutes)

Explain:

- Jesus himself went through a developmental process. (Lk 2:40).
- It is abusive to hold children to standards or place expectations on them beyond their developmental limits.
- In many cases the knowledge we now have was not available to previous generations. There was a time when children stood with their feet in x-ray machines in shoe stores. With more information, that practiced stopped without betrayal of or judgment on previous generations.

Distribute Handout C “Developmental Issues and Parenting” and **explain** that you will return to these handouts later in on, but for now you want to highlight concrete vs. abstract thinking.

Explain that: concrete thinking involves the senses. Abstract thinking involves abstract, such as time, manners, empathy, appropriateness and fairness. Children do not begin developing any capacity for abstract thinking until age 6, which is why telling a toddler that it's time to go can cause a temper tantrum. They simply don't understand time. Nor do they understand empathy. They don't share toys because they really can't understand what someone else feels, wants or needs. Additionally young children cannot transfer a specific behavior to a general concept. If you tell them not to touch the stove because it is hot, they will learn not to touch the stove but won't transfer that behavior to something else you say is hot.

Optional note: The absence of abstract thinking is why most object lessons, which are popular for children's sermons, do not work. They may give the appearance of being concrete, however, generally involve an advanced mental construct. Once we say “This is like . . .” we are asking children to move from a concrete object to an abstract concept. That is a leap that children cannot make.

BREAK: Announce a **15 minute break**, pointing out the refreshments and rest rooms.

Transition to the next section by **explaining** that awareness of children's capacities is crucial for parenting in general and in particular for discipline. Later on, you will look at scenarios that might arise and consider ways to respond in keeping with children's developmental stages, but for now you want to take some time to talk about discipline.

IV. About Gracious Parenting Part 2: Discipline (20 Minutes)

Introduce the topic of discipline by reminding participants that Jesus teaches kindness and respect for all people, including children.

Ask them to identify ways we use the word “discipline.” For example: *I discipline my children. I need to learn self-discipline. I practice spiritual disciplines. My discipline is physiology.*

Explain:

- The word “discipline” comes from the Latin, *discere* which means “to learn.” Unfortunately, “discipline” is commonly used as a synonym for punish, which obscures and even contaminates its meaning as in “I’ll *teach* you a lesson!”
- Gracious parenting is not permissive. It relies on specific tools of discipline rather than punishment.
- Gracious parenting precludes violence of any form in parenting.
- Violence is defined not by parental intent, not by circumstances and not by culture.
- Violence is defined solely by the impact of an action (or non-action) on children as follows.
- Violence is being broadly defined for purposes of this discussion as **[show newsprint, board or PPT]:** *Violence is doing something or failing to do something that results in emotional or physical harm or puts a child at risk of harm.* Therefore violence includes a wide-range of practices including:
 - corporal punishment, which includes hitting, slapping, shaking
 - neglecting basic needs
 - yelling, threatening, silent treatment, withholding comfort
 - shaming, humiliating, criticism, blaming
 - being dismissive of or belittling feelings
 - unrealistic or age-inappropriate expectations
 - forgoing the parental role by failing to provide consistent structure or expecting children to meet of any adult’s emotional, relational or physical needs
 - violating a child’s physical boundaries (e.g. forcing them to hug someone)
 - sexualizing a child
 - fighting in front of or within earshot of children

Transition to a discussion of corporal punishment by **explaining** that before you can explore together the tools of gracious parenting, you need to address corporal punishment. Physical punishment, largely in the form of “spanking” is frequently practiced and encouraged among Christians, often even considered a biblical mandate. **Acknowledge** that discussing corporal punishment brings up strong feelings and you will address those as you proceed.

B. Corporal Punishment

1. Draw/Share Exercise: Provide paper and pencils/markers/crayons. Invite participants to draw an image representing a memory of being punished. **Ask** them to write under the image how they felt at the time and how they feel about it now. **Ask** volunteers to name feelings they identified and note these on newsprint or white board.

2. Explore aphorisms

Identify the common aphorisms about corporal punishment. These include:

- “It really only hurts their feelings.”
- “It’s the only thing they understand.”
- “You can’t reason with young children.”
- “It’s okay if you do it without anger.”

Examine one or two aphorisms using the model provided earlier. Here is an example:

Aphorism: “It really only hurts their feelings.”

- **Truth:** It *does* hurt their feelings
- **Fears or concerns at work:** I *have* to make this child behave. I am not a good parent if my child behaves in ways I don't like.
- **Faulty assumptions:** It's okay to "just" hurt their feelings. Corporal punishment is the most effective means. (It isn't as we will see later.)
- **Other truths:** We don't generally condone hurting other's feelings. Why is it okay to intentionally hurt children's feelings? It hurts more than their feelings. Children's behavior is not about you.

Transition to biblical background by **explaining** that a common defense of corporal punishment is that the Bible commands hitting children.

3. Biblical Background

Quote "Spare the rod and spoil the child" and **challenge** participants to find this quote in the Bible. When no one can find it, **explain:**

- The phrase is not from the Bible
- The phrase has nothing to do with children.
- The quote is from *Hudibras*, a satirical 17th century poem and polemic by Samuel Butler against the English Civil War. It tells the tale of a colonel in the Cromwellian army and his misadventures, including ill-advised romances, which is the context for the quote:

If matrimony and hanging go

By dest'ny, why not whipping too?

What med'cine else can cure the fits

Of lovers when they lose their wits?

Love is a boy by poets stil'd

Then spare the rod and spoil the child (Part II, Canto I, ll. 839-44).

Explain that there are other texts that people often turn to once they learn that "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is not in the Bible. **Distribute and review** Handout D "Proverbs and Hitting Children." You may decide to have them review in small groups and then reconvene.

Ask for reactions. Be prepared for resistance as people process long-held beliefs.

4. Effects of Corporal Punishment

Remind participants of the definition of violence that you are working with and then **explain** that it is important to review the science behind the impact of violence experienced in childhood before considering what current research says about the effects of corporal punishment. **Review** the following key points:

- At birth, a child's brain and nervous system are incomplete. A newborn's brain is one-fifth the weight of an adult's and brains develop throughout childhood and into early adulthood.
- In the face fearful and stressful experiences, the brain drives a "fight or flight response" with the release of stress hormones.
- When a child is not allowed to fight or flee in response to the release of stress hormones, the developing brain's capacities are diminished, development of the neurons is faulty, and some neurons even sustain lesions.
- In situations of chronic stress, the brain establishes connections that give priority to detecting every sign of imminent danger—this is the source of much adult reactivity. These

changes in turn lead to atrophy of the pathways for normal learning. Frontal lobes do not develop correctly; fail to do their job of inhibiting the limbic system, and thereby interfering with the ability to tune in to the present, record new information, and to learn from experience.

- These changes are actually visible on brain scans.
- The [Kaiser Permanente-CDC Adverse Childhood Experiences Study \(ACE Study\)](#) (along with more than 1500 peer-reviewed studies replicating the findings) found that a chronic state of stress floods a child's body and brain with stress hormones, altering the genes that oversee stress reactivity and increasing the risk of inflammation, which often manifests in adult life as serious disease.
- Our Creator equipped us with this response designed to protect us from danger. When we expose children to violence and force them to override that God-given response, we cause physical and emotional damage.

Distribute and review Handout E “The Effects of Corporal Punishment” **asking** the participants to review the content.

Explain that for some, learning about the risks of corporal punishment can feel overwhelming. These feelings can be exacerbated when we have experienced corporal punishment as children. Many of us enter into a sort of grief process, which includes the following:

- Denial: dismissing the research, often with anecdotes and detachment from negative feelings
- Anger: aggressively defending spanking when the underlying emotions become more present than the denial
- Rationalization: justifying corporal punishment by saying it is a last resort, for the child's own good, or a biblical mandate or by insisting they turned out okay. (Is “okay” a sufficient goal for parenting?)
- Fear and depression: worrying it's too late to repair damage done or to bounce back from their experiences or actions
- Acceptance: honestly feeling full range of emotions and becoming receptive to research and alternatives to corporal punishment

Explain: that recovering from having experienced corporal punishment can be difficult. When we make changes in how we parent, children often respond positively to the increased connection. It can be harder address the issue with our own parents. Some helpful steps are:

- Try to forgive your parents.
- Talk to them about your feelings and what you've learned. Don't take it personally if they are not receptive.
- Seek therapy, a support group, or other means to address any deep feelings you have about your experiences.
- Commit not to use corporal punishment—one of the best ways to heal is to make different choices.

IV. Principles and Practices Gracious Parenting (15 minutes)

Begin by repeating that gracious parenting is not permissive parenting.

A. Basic Principles

Review the following basic principles of gracious parenting:

- Be the adult.
- Let your child be a child.
- Don't take things personally; it's not about you.
- Remember parenting was a one-way option. You made the choice.
- Do not confuse or identify a child with his or her behavior.
- Love patiently, protectively, trustingly, honestly and hopefully with kindness, respect, forgiveness and perseverance and without pride, self-seeking, easy anger. 1 Corinthians 13 isn't just for weddings!

B. Practices

Explain:

- Punishment is defined as an artificially created consequence for a given behavior.
- Gracious parenting is not only non-violent, it is non-punitive.
- While reward and punishment approaches do get some results, they have limitations:
 - They presume that the primary interaction between adults and children is that adults tell children what to do. Gracious parenting presumes the parental task is to nurture children and provide structure to help them grow into responsible adults.
 - They move the focus away from the behavior to the punishment or reward thereby interfering with children linking consequences in a logical way to their choices.
 - Both are within the purview of the "rewarder," external to children and therefore don't them internalize principles of choice-making, which is essential to developing agency and personal responsibility.
 - Rewards are generally focused on the material (treats, outings, cash). The most powerful rewards in life are intangible, such as a feeling of accomplishment, the joy of helping others, or the experience of camaraderie when working with others.

C. Tools

Explain that the tools of gracious parenting are nurture, structure and limits, guided consequences, and modeling. Before we look at these tools, we need first to address one crucial component of that focuses on the parent, namely self-care.

1. Parental self-care

Ask if anyone has ever felt stressed in parenting. **Explain** that while children are a joy, raising them can be difficult, time-consuming, and exhausting. Fantasies of a cooing baby, playful toddler, or accomplished teen can quickly fade in the face of colic, a tantrum or rebellion. Because children need so much love and guidance, parents may feel inadequate, which lead to impatience and anger. Parents are also precious children of God. Jesus said that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. We must be gracious with ourselves if we are going to be gracious with our children. That means addressing our physical and emotional well-being and learning healthy ways of dealing with anger.

Introduce the topic of anger by explaining:

- There are generally two kinds of anger: natural anger and triggered anger.
 1. Natural anger is anger that might arise in response to events of the day.
 2. Triggered anger arises from unresolved anger (often based in fear or sadness) from the

past that is tapped into and generates a level of reaction inappropriate to the actual event.

- There are several tools to address anger.
 1. The number one rule is not to do any discipline while you are angry.
 2. Acknowledge your anger but don't shame yourself. Harsh self-judgment will only exacerbate the anger.
 3. Pay attention to why you are angry. Did the child's action delay your plans or create more work for you? Are you disappointed or do you think that the behavior reflects badly on you?
 4. Take time to calm yourself with deep breathing, a cup of warm tea, prayer, or a walk. Don't focus on the incident. Become present and focused on the calming activity.
 5. At times when you are experiencing triggered anger, step away from the situation. Ponder what experience from the past is being triggered. Such experiences are generally lodged within our bodies. Try to identify where the emotion is held and place your hands on that part of your body. Breathe deeply. Remind yourself that you are no longer in that situation.
 5. If you are prone to triggered anger, it needs to be taken seriously. Acknowledge this truth about yourself and repent by committing to doing the work of resolving the anger. It is not your fault, but it is your responsibility. If you don't address anger issues, you will likely push that anger onto your child. You will need to learn new skills like regular meditation and awareness, seek counseling or a support group and covenant with a friend or co-parent to step in when necessary.

Distribute Handout F, "Anger Issues and Next Steps in Parenting" and **explain** that it is a tool for them to use on their own.

Transition by **explaining** practicing self-care makes us better able to nurture our children.

2. Nurture

Explain that nurture is the essence of gracious parenting. It is both a goal and a technique. Meeting a child's needs in accordance with his or her developmental level lays the foundation for a healthy parent-child relationship, a sense of security, and an atmosphere in which children are confident enough to act on their natural desire for parental approval. As Fred "Mr." Rogers once put it: "

There's a world of difference between insisting on someone's doing something and establishing an atmosphere in which that person can grow into wanting to do it."

Nurture is essential to creating that type of atmosphere. So too are structure and limits.

3. Structure and Limits

Explain that children intrinsically know they do not have the skills or resources to "parent" themselves. Therefore, it is essential that adults provide structure to instill a sense of security. Structure includes setting and consistently enforcing limits. Limit-setting means children will not always be happy and will not always "like" their parents, and it's not always easy.

Review the following requirements for setting limits:

- Setting limits requires not taking your child's reactions or emotional states personally.
- Setting limits requires the investment of time and energy.
- Setting limits requires patience and confidence.
- Setting limits requires standing with your children as they experience consequences.

4. Guided consequences

Explain the two types of consequences: natural consequences and logical consequences.

- **Natural consequences** occur naturally as a result of behavior. For example mishandling a toy leads to a broken toy and no longer having that toy to play with.
- **Logical consequences** result from violating established rules with clearly understood consequences. For example, taking a sibling's toy and mishandling it, may mean no longer that a portion of allowance is set aside each week until the toy can be replaced.

When consequences are present:

- Children need to be allowed experience the consequences.
- Parents need to point out negative consequences inherent in or logical to behaviors and help children make connections between consequences and their choices.
- Parents need to walk with children and guide them through the experience of consequences.
- In some cases, parents may need to provide extra support. For example, giving the child additional chores to earn money (or matching funds) to buy that new toy for the sibling. In so doing, parents model compassion, which is a quality we hope to instill in our children.

5. Modeling

Explain that we need to keep in mind what qualities we want to nurture in our children. If we want them to be non-violent, we must demonstrate non-violence. If we want to teach them how to stay safe, we need to employ safe practices in our lives. If we want them to be respectful of others, we must practice respect. If we want them to listen, we must listen to others, including them. If we want them to handle their emotions in a healthy, productive way, we must do the same. When parents practice time out as a way to deal with anger and stress, they are modeling a valuable technique that children can also use.

Child's Time In

Explain that "time-out" has unfortunately become a form of punishment for children rather than a time for them to calm themselves. Therefore, while we talk about time-outs for parents, in gracious parenting, we refer to "time-ins" for children.

- Time-in refers to retreating to a comforting space to relax, get distracted and reregulate. Time-in creates calmness, which allows for discussing incidents and consequences without emotions escalating for the child, the parent or both.
- Children can help set up a time-in space and even name it if they want.
- Include things like cushions, a music box, stuffed animals, or books, depending on the age of the child. (Computers, phones or other electronics are not recommended.)
- When a child experiences a behavior challenge, ask "Would it help to go to your space?" If the child responds, "No," ask "Would you like for me to go with you?" If the child still resists, you can say, "Well, I need time out to calm down. I need to know you are safe while I do that. I'll set a timer for myself and you can either go to your space or sit [in a chair, on the couch...] until the timer goes off."

BREAK: Before the break, **explain** that they will be gathering in small groups around age levels to discuss scenarios. **Ask** them to bring the drawings of a punishment experience and Handout C "Developmental Issues and Parenting" with them to the groups.

Note that the age level descriptions were created around typicals. **Suggest** that parents of

special needs children join groups that best reflect the cognitive developmental level of their children. Their input will be very helpful to all parents.

Invite them to take **10 minutes** to stretch, get a drink or visit the rest room and then **return to their selected small group**.

Set up tables with the small group labels while they are taking a break. **Place** one copy of Handout G, “Scenarios” on each table.

After the break, transition to scenarios by **inviting** them to revisit their drawings and consider how the situation might have been handled differently, in keeping with their age level and in a way that engenders self-worth, self-confidence and self-discipline.

B. Scenarios (20 minutes)

Explain that you are now going to return to Handout C, “Developmental Issues and Parenting” and explore some possible scenarios in parenting.

Provide the groups 20 minutes to discuss their scenario per the instructions.

V. Conclusion (10 minutes)

Reconvene and **invite** participants to revisit Handout A “My Views on Parenting” and spend a few minutes considering their initial responses.

Invite concluding thoughts about the experience.

Remind them that gracious parenting is well- suited to raising respectful, self-aware, and self-confident children who can relate to a loving and gracious God. It may require adjustment time for children as well as parents. It definitely requires commitment, patience and prayer.

Close with a spontaneous prayer or the following

Gracious God,

Thank you for the gift of our children.

Help us to honor them as independent beings, created in your image.

Remind us that they belong first to you and have entrusted to us by you.

Help us create safe spaces for them to explore the wonders of this life.

Give us hearts filled with grace so we can treat each day as a fresh start, and

So our children can come to know you as a loving God, a safe place for hard times and a source of joy throughout their lives.

In the name of Jesus, who came to us first as a little child, we pray,

Amen.