



**CORE CURRICULUM
FOR
SPIRITUAL EDUCATION**

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Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

**National Bahá'í
Education Task Force**

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CORE CURRICULUM FOR
SPIRITUAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING



Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

Purpose of the Training

The purpose of the Core Curriculum Spiritual Parenting Program is to foster loving, unified, spiritually vibrant families.

The Indispensable Foundation of All Human Excellence

The education and training of children is among the most meritorious acts of humankind and draweth down the grace and favor of the All-Merciful, for education is the indispensable foundation of all human excellence and alloweth man to work his way to the heights of abiding glory.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, P. 129

Preface

Yea, certain persons shall in this divine dispensation produce heavenly children and such children shall promulgate the teachings of the Beauty of Abhá and serve His great Cause. Through a heavenly power and spiritual confirmation they shall be enabled to promote the Word of God and to diffuse the fragrances of God. These children are neither Oriental nor Occidental, neither Asiatic nor American, neither European nor African, but they are of the Kingdom; their native home is heaven and their resort is the Kingdom of Abhá. This is but truth and there is naught after truth save superstitions (or fancy).

May all humanity welcome with open arms the children of the Kingdom!

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *TABLETS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, VOL. 3, PP. 647-48

[At the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jenner in Britain], their three small children clambered on to His knee, clung round His neck, and remained as quiet as wee mice whilst the Master ['Abdu'l-Bahá] spoke, He meanwhile stroking the hair of the tiny ones and saying: "Blessed are the children, of whom His Holiness Christ said, 'Of such are the Kingdom of Heaven.' Children have no worldly ambitions. Their hearts are pure. We must become like children. . . ."

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, QUOTED BY LADY BLOMFIELD, *CHOSEN HIGHWAY*, P. 165

Know ye the value of these children, for they are all My children.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, P. 54

The education of children in the teachings of the Faith must be regarded as an essential obligation of every Bahá'í parent, every local and national community, and it must become a firmly established Bahá'í activity during the course of the Plan. It should include moral instruction by word and example and active participation by children in Bahá'í community life.

MESSAGES FROM THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, PP. 263-64



The Core Curriculum Spiritual Parenting Program provides a process for exploring the basic principles of spiritual education expressed in the compilation *Foundations for a Spiritual Education*, and for applying these spiritual principles to the sacred work of parenting. The course begins with an exploration of the unique station and role of parents. It then builds understanding of the spiritual reality of children, and provides practice in the skills of encouraging, guiding, training, disciplining, and educating their development as lovers of God, servants of humanity, and active contributors to the advancement of civilization. Children have a spiritual destiny before God at this time in history, to be fulfilled through the encouragement and support of parents, teachers, and the community as a whole.

Spiritual parenting includes cultivating a greater capacity in the coming generations for genuine unity, a primary goal of the Bahá'í Faith. Parents, the first teachers of their children, bear great responsibility for this work. The Core Curriculum Spiritual Parenting Program is designed to support the efforts of parents to raise up children that “shine as emblems of a brighter future.”¹

This course is based on writings of Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), founder of the Bahá'í Faith; ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1922), His Son and appointed Interpreter; Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), the appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith; and the Universal House of Justice, the internationally elected governing council of the Bahá'í Faith. These writings form the “core” at the heart of this course. In an age of vast social change, these writings apply eternal truths to the challenges of this age, and inspire a vision of unified families that nurture children who, in turn, contribute their talents to the creation of a unified, peaceful, and prosperous world.

The learning activities in this course assist parents to study these writings and apply them to the everyday challenges of family life in the 21st century. This grassroots effort engages course participants and facilitators alike in the great drama of our own lives, and the lives of our children, our families, and our communities.

The Core Curriculum Spiritual Parenting Program includes the creation of a community spirit among parents, in which all strive to gain a more spiritual understanding of effective parenting, create a climate of loving encouragement with the parenting group, and appreciate the “unity in diversity” of successful approaches to spiritual parenting.

The Core Curriculum Spiritual Parenting Program was first introduced in 1992 as part of the comprehensive Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education, a process for the spiritual education of children, youth, and families. Through a grassroots process of community development, individuals from all walks of life studied the Bahá'í writings pertaining to parenting with small groups of their friends and neighbors. As these friends shared their experiences with each other and with the National Bahá'í Education Task Force, course materials were continuously tested, revised, and refined. In the early years, different versions of the course were prepared each time a new group of friends prepared to offer the material to others, as often as twice a year. Gradually the course contents and process came to reflect what group after group of parents found helpful to their own needs and purposes.

Now published in workbook format, the Core Curriculum Spiritual Parenting Program continues to incorporate the new learning gained from more and more study groups striving together to fulfill their sacred trust as parents. After completing the course, we encourage parents to continue their study of the process and practice of spiritual parenting in Course Two of the Spiritual Parenting Program, and then to consider training as facilitators to share this process of continuous striving with others. Children are the most precious treasure in any community. Together we strive to create families in which they are “most carefully watched over, protected, and trained” through “true parenthood and parental mercy.”²

The National Bahá'í Education Task Force

December 2004

¹ The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2000

² ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Education*, p. 23

Journal



Overview of the Parenting Program

Core Curriculum Learning Framework
Themes and Objectives

Station of Parents

Honoring the Station of Parents

Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

Introductory Session

Station of Parents

OPENING DEVOTIONS: THE STATION OF PARENTS

1 Blessed is the spot, and the house, and the place, and the city, and the heart, and the mountain, and the refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land, and the sea, and the island, and the meadow where mention of God hath been made, and His praise glorified.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í PRAYERS*, p. ii

2 He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My loving-kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS*, K. 48, p. 37

3 The fruits that best befit the tree of human life are trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity; but greater than all, after the recognition of the unity of God, praised and glorified be He, is regard for the rights due one's parents. This teaching hath been mentioned in all the books of God, and reaffirmed by the Most Exalted Pen. . . .

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS*, QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS, Q 106, p. 139

4 Say, O My people! Show honor to your parents and pay homage to them. This will cause blessings to descend upon you from the clouds of the bounty of your Lord, the Exalted, the Great.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, p. 386

5 It is the bounden duty of parents to rear their children to be staunch in faith, the reason being that a child who removeth himself from the religion of God will not act in such a way as to win the good pleasure of his parents and his Lord. For every praiseworthy deed is born out of the light of religion, and lacking this supreme bestowal the child will not turn away from any evil, nor will he draw nigh unto any good.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *EPISTLE TO THE SON OF THE WOLF*, p. 27

6 The newly born babe of that Day excels the wisest and most venerable men of this time, and the lowliest and most unlearned of that period shall surpass in understanding the most erudite and accomplished divines of this age. . . .

THE BÁB, QUOTED IN *THE DAWN-BREAKERS*, p. 65

7 Among the greatest of all services that can possibly be rendered by man to Almighty God is the education and training of children. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 133

8 God—glorified and exalted is He!—hath ordained mothers to be the primary trainers of children and infants. This is a great important affair and a high and exalted position, and it is not allowable to slacken therein at all!

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *TABLETS OF ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, VOL. III, p. 606

9 . . . To train the character of humankind is one of the weightiest commandments of God, and the influence of such training is the same as that which the sun exerteth over tree and fruit. Children must be most carefully watched over, protected and trained; in such consisteth true parenthood and parental mercy.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, p. 23

10 Yea, certain persons shall in this divine dispensation produce heavenly children and such children shall promulgate the teachings of the Beauty of Abhá and serve His great Cause. Through a heavenly power and spiritual confirmation they shall be enabled to promote the Word of God and to diffuse the fragrances of God. These children are neither Oriental nor Occidental, neither Asiatic nor American, neither European nor African, but they are of the Kingdom; their native home is heaven and their resort is the Kingdom of Abhá. This is but truth and there is naught after truth save superstitions (or fancy).

May all humanity welcome with open arms the children of the Kingdom!

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *TABLETS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, VOL. III, pp. 647-48

11 Know ye the value of these children for they are all My children.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, p. 54

12 O Thou kind Lord! These lovely children are the handiwork of the fingers of Thy might and the wondrous signs of Thy greatness. O God! Protect these children, graciously assist them to be educated and enable them to render service to the world of humanity. O God! These children are pearls, cause them to be nurtured within the shell of Thy loving-kindness.

Thou art the Bountiful, the All-Loving.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *BAHÁ'Í PRAYERS*, p. 35

Honoring the Station of Parents

Welcome to Course One of the Core Curriculum Spiritual Parenting Program.

We hope that the time we spend together in this course will both be enjoyable and provide a practical forum for us all to work together to become better parents by increasing our understanding of the sacred roles and responsibilities of parents, perceiving the spiritual reality of children, and by practicing some skills for guiding, encouraging, training, disciplining, and educating our children.

Naturally, this course is also appropriate for grandparents and all others who care for children.

If you have not already done so, please begin the session with a short devotional program. Then, introduce yourselves to each other.

Overview of the Parenting Program

Purpose:

To become aware of the purpose, processes and historical development of the Core Curriculum Spiritual Parenting Program.

This Core Curriculum Spiritual Parenting Program takes inspiration from the following quotations:

It is incumbent upon the Spiritual Assembly to provide the mothers with a well-planned programme for the education of children, showing how, from infancy, the child must be watched over and taught.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, p. 138

. . . There is a pressing challenge to be faced: Our children need to be nurtured spiritually and to be integrated into the life of the Cause. They should not be left to drift in a world so laden with moral dangers. In the current state of society, children face a cruel fate. Millions and millions in country after country are dislocated socially. Children find themselves alienated by parents and other adults whether they live in conditions of wealth or poverty. This alienation has its roots in a selfishness that is born of materialism that is at the core of the godlessness seizing the hearts of people everywhere.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, TO THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE WORLD, RIDVÁN 2000

Developed through an ongoing collaborative process of parents sharing their hopes and experiences with the National Bahá'í Education Task Force, the Core Curriculum Spiritual Parenting Program provides a structured format for studying the Bahá'í writings that can assist parents to fulfill their responsibilities in the upbringing of their children. Through a variety of learning activities we will:

- Explore the Bahá'í writings as a strong foundation of guidance and inspiration for our role as parents.
- Learn practical steps for implementing the guidance in the Bahá'í writings.
- Establish our own parent network to provide support and strength for the family unit.
- Realize that parents, teachers, and community members collaborate to support the ongoing growth and development of children.

During our sessions we'll explore together a number of our questions, needs, hopes, and plans as parents. Some of these questions will be addressed more fully in the second and third courses of this spiritual parenting program. In this course, we'll work together in a systematic study of the following topics:

Spiritual Parenting Program, Course One

Introductory Session: The Station of Parents

1. Standards of Parenthood
2. The Spiritual Development of Parents
3. The Spiritual Reality of the Child
4. Fostering Spiritual Development
5. Family Roles, Rights, and Responsibilities
6. Fostering Family Relationships
7. Nurturing a Spiritual Environment
8. Character Training
9. Loving Discipline
10. Family Consultation

We'll also have regular opportunities to bring up issues and questions that concern us as parents. In the next course in the Spiritual Parenting Program we will have more opportunities to study and practice the skills of parenting and we will broaden our focus to include the role of spiritual education teachers and other members of the community in fostering the development of our children.

Historical Overview of the Development of the Core Curriculum

Purpose:

Appreciate the comprehensive nature of the Core Curriculum project and its evolution from extensive research in the Bahá'í writings and the ongoing experiences of the friends.

History, current status, and future direction of the project

The National Bahá'í Education Task Force, working under the supervision of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, oversees the ongoing development and evolution of the Core Curriculum for spiritual education and training. The brief timeline on the following page provides an overview of the evolution of the Core Curriculum.

A few further points relating to the development of the Core Curriculum bear mentioning at this time:

- The Education Task Force recognizes the significant contributions of all the Bahá'í teachers and educators who have served the field of spiritual education and training since the very beginning of the Bahá'í Faith. We all stand on the shoulders of these giants.
- As a living curriculum, these spiritual education and training programs originate in study of the writings of the Bahá'í Faith and become increasingly effective in response to the experiences of the friends everywhere.
- The purpose of the comprehensive, sequential spiritual education curriculum for children and junior youth is to raise up consecrated, knowledgeable servants of God and humanity.
- The purpose of the Core Curriculum Training Programs for Community Development is to build patterns of community life that “welcome all with the light of oneness,”³ foster vibrant, unified families, and “ensure that the vision of the community fully embraces its younger members.”⁴ These programs address specific needs of Bahá'ís and seekers alike. This Core Curriculum Spiritual Parenting Program is one of the Core Curriculum training programs for community development. Other community development programs include training for spiritual education teachers, youth, married couples, and training to promote race unity and the equality of women and men.
- The purpose of the Fundamental Verities Sequence of Courses is to explore some of the basic teachings of the Bahá'í Faith and cultivate individuals' capacities for service to humanity, “according to their God-given talents and capacities.”⁵

³ Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 37

⁴ Universal House of Justice, November 26, 1999

⁵ Universal House of Justice, December 26, 1995

The Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education and Training

Historical Development

1988–1993

National Bahá'í Education Committee appointed by the United States National Spiritual Assembly to develop resources for spiritual education, and for a comprehensive Bahá'í curriculum for children

Sacred Writings systematically reviewed for themes that pertain to education

Educational material assessment process developed, which assesses over 300 existing materials

Collaboration initiated with other National Education Committees, Continental Counselors, Representatives of the Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh and agencies and committees of the National Spiritual Assembly

1990 Core Curriculum key concepts elaborated, including:

- a) Child Development Centered Community
- b) Roles of parents, teachers and the Local Spiritual Assemblies
- c) Content and Process of Bahá'í Spiritual Education
(Knowledge, Wisdom, Spiritual Perception and Eloquent Speech)

Strands on the Central Figures, the Principle of Oneness, the Administrative Order identified

1991 National Spiritual Assembly establishes National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen Bahá'í School

1992 First trainers' training session held at the National Teacher Training Center

Local teacher training sessions begin throughout North America

First Parenting Facilitator Training held at the National Teacher Training Center

1993–1996

First Race Unity Trainer Training at the National Teacher Training Center

1995 National Spiritual Assembly publishes *Foundations for a Spiritual Education*

Rapidly increasing materials for the spiritual education of children and junior youth

First Marriage and Family Life Facilitator Training held at the National Teacher Training Center

First International Teacher Trainer Workshop held at the National Teacher Training Center

1996–2001

Fundamental Verities Sequence of Courses released

Scope and Sequence Documents prepared for spiritual education of children and junior youth

First Equality Trainer Training

First Youth Empowerment Facilitator Training

Teacher Development Workshops published

Process of Core Curriculum Trainer Training decentralized

2001–2004

The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, Volumes One, Two, and Three storybooks published

Bahá'u'lláh Lesson Planning Guides, Levels One, Two, Three published

'Abdu'l-Bahá Lesson Planning Guides, Levels One, Two, Three published

Teacher Trainer trainings held in Europe, Asia, and the Pacific

Principle of Oneness Lesson Planning Guides, Levels One, Two published

The Báb Lesson Planning Guides, Levels One, Two, Three published

Fundamental Verities sequence of courses revised, expanded, and published in book form

The National Spiritual Assembly gives the National Teacher Training Center a new name:

The National Children's Education and Research Center

The Central Figures: The Báb, Volume One storybook published

Core Curriculum Teacher Training, Spiritual Parenting, and Teacher Development Workshops published in book form.

Introductory Session Themes

As a group, read aloud the themes and objectives for this introductory session of Spiritual Parenting, Course One.

Core Curriculum Learning Framework

Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception, and eloquent speech.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, REV. ED. 1999, NO. 9, P. 3

Station of Parents

Among the greatest of all services that can possibly be rendered by man to Almighty God is the education and training of children. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ABDO'L-BAHÁ*, P. 133

Introductory Session Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- Become familiar with some of the Bahá'í writings on the role and station of parents.
- Become familiar with the Core Curriculum learning model.

WISDOM

- Appreciate the bounty and honor of being a parent.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- Perceive the importance of one's station as a parent.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- Identify elements of the Core Curriculum learning model.

The Core Curriculum Learning Model

This Spiritual Parenting course assists us to learn and practice some very practical skills for effective parenting. As a first step, let's explore the learning model that we will use to learn throughout the course. This learning model is organized in accordance with the following statement of Bahá'u'lláh:

Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception, and eloquent speech.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, REV. ED. 1999, NO. 9, P. 3

While it is not possible to fully define the meaning of these words, a learning process inspired by this statement of Bahá'u'lláh can assist us to internalize spiritual principles and translate them into action in our own lives.

Let's look together at some possible meanings for some of the words used in this quotation. We recognize that these words can have many meanings. At the same time, these many meanings include the following:

KNOWLEDGE (*I Know*)

To gain **information** about facts, spiritual principles, or sacred writings on a topic.

WISDOM (*I Understand*)

To gain **deeper understanding** of facts, principles, or writings through consultation and reflection.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION (*I Perceive*)

To **reflect on the application** of facts, principles, or writings in one's own life and one's service to others.

ELOQUENT SPEECH (*I Teach, I Serve*)

To **articulate** or **demonstrate**, through words and deeds, understanding and application of facts, principles, and writings.

Read aloud the words of Bahá'u'lláh again, then briefly discuss the following questions:

- How does this quotation assist us to understand the role of volition in the learning process?
- How does it assist us to appreciate human diversity?

Purpose:

Become familiar with the guiding quotation for the Core Curriculum.

- How does it assist us to understand the importance of spiritual education and training?
- What are some inner and outer perfections that might be important for parents?

The learning objectives for each session in this, and all other Core Curriculum training programs, are organized around this learning framework. The book *Foundations for a Spiritual Education* provides more information about the Core Curriculum learning model, which is used throughout the broad range of spiritual education and training programs available from the United States National Spiritual Assembly.

Exploring the Core Curriculum Learning Model

Purpose:

Understand the Core Curriculum learning model.

Let's use an activity to explore a bit more deeply this concept of the "fruit of the human tree."

Process the Activity

As you complete your exploration of fruit, identify in the whole group which parts of this activity assist us to gain:

Knowledge _____

Wisdom _____

Spiritual Perception _____

Eloquent Speech _____

FRUITS OF THE TREE OF LIFE

1 The fruits that best befit the tree of human life are trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity; but greater than all, after recognition of the unity of God, praised and glorified be He, is regard for the rights that are due to one's parents.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS*, p. 139

2 Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception, and eloquent speech.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, REV. ED. 1999, No. 9, p. 3

3 Praised be Thou, O Lord my God! Graciously grant that this infant be fed from the breast of Thy tender mercy and loving providence and be nourished with the fruit of Thy celestial trees. Suffer him not to be committed to the care of anyone save Thee, inasmuch as Thou, Thyself, through the potency of thy sovereign will and power, didst create and call him into being. There is none other God but Thee, the Almighty, the All-Knowing.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í PRAYERS*, p. 32

4 . . . The importance of marriage lieth in the bringing up of a richly blessed family. . . . For the enlightenment of the world dependeth upon the existence of man. If man did not exist in this world, it would have been like a tree without fruit. My hope is that you both may become even as one tree, and may, through the outpourings of the cloud of loving-kindness, acquire freshness and charm, and may blossom and yield fruit, so that your line may eternally endure.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *FOUNDATIONS OF WORLD UNITY*, p. 15

5 Trees differ though they grow in the same orchard. All are nourished and quickened into life by the bounty of the same rain, all grow and develop by the heat and light of the one sun, all are refreshed and exhilarated by the same breeze that they may bring forth varied fruits. This is according to the creative wisdom. If all trees bore the same kind of fruit, it would cease to be delicious. In their never-ending variety man finds enjoyment instead of monotony.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, p. 51

6 Consider the trees: if they remain without a cultivator, they will be fruitless, and without fruit they are useless; but if they receive the care of a gardener, these same barren trees become fruitful, and through cultivation, fertilization and engrafting the trees which had bitter fruits yield sweet fruits.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS*, p. 7

Concluding the Introductory Session

1. After completing your exploration of the Core Curriculum learning model, briefly discuss the questions:
 - Are there ways that we'd like to talk with each other while we're together in this group? Do we want to make some agreements about how we'd like to function as a group?
 - What logistical arrangements will assist us to function as a group? How will we provide care for our children while we study? What about costs for course materials? How will we arrange our time together—do we need to agree to begin and end our sessions promptly? How much flexibility do we have with time? What else do we need to discuss as a group?
2. Record any agreements that you make so that you can refer to them in future sessions if you like.
3. Conclude the session with prayers and music.



Standards of Parenthood

Love in the Family

The Power of Example

Closing Activity

Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

Session One

Standards of Parenthood

Opening Devotions

Begin your session with prayers and sung or recorded music. Then please read aloud the theme quotation and learning objectives for this session.

Session One Theme

Standards of Parenthood

Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind, for the professions of most men, be they high or low, differ from their conduct. It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, QUOTED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, P. 25

Session One Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- Become familiar with some of the Bahá'í writings on the power of example.

WISDOM

- Reflect upon the meaning of “true parenthood.”

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- Identify some qualities and attributes that members of Bahá'u'lláh's family demonstrated with children.
- Gain insight into the importance and power of the example parents set for their children.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- Create a personal plan for using the power of example with children.

Reflections on Introductory Session

Reflecting on our experiences as parents since the Introductory Session, please share your responses to the following questions:

- What happened when we shared our message of hope with the person we'd selected for that message?
- Were there moments during the week when we felt confirmed in these hopes?

Standards of Parenthood

Love in the Family of Bahá'u'lláh

1. Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, was known for His deep love for children and for the love His entire family demonstrated for children from all backgrounds. In your whole group, enjoy reading aloud the following stories:

Bahá'u'lláh, The Loving Father

Rúhíyyih Khánúm's Narrative

Juliet Thompson: In the Home of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

2. After enjoying these stories, work together as a group to create a list of some spiritual qualities and attributes demonstrated in these brief descriptions of life in Bahá'u'lláh's family. How did they show love to children?

Record your insights on chart paper. If desired, you may individually record these insights in the space below.

Purpose:

Identify qualities and attributes that members of Bahá'u'lláh's family demonstrated with children.

Process the Activity

How do these examples affirm or redefine your understanding of the standards for parents?

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, THE LOVING FATHER

Bahá'u'lláh's granddaughter shares her happy memories

I remember well the greatest of our joys was to go with Bahá'u'lláh for the occasional picnics to the Ridván.

How happy we were with Him. He was indeed the brightness of our lives in that time of difficulty.

Our days were then very monotonous. We saw little of our Father, so much was He occupied with the affairs of those who constantly came to beg for His help.

We loved our early morning tea, when he would chant prayers and tell us stories of the Lord Christ and His Mother, of Muhammad, of Moses and other Prophets.

After that we were taken by a servant to the school at the Khán; it was rather dull to sit there from seven in the morning till five in the afternoon listening to readings of the Qur'án, of which no explanation was given. A little reading and writing—no pleasant breaks for play—rather tasteless and scanty midday dinner, which we took with us.

We children looked upon Bahá'u'lláh as another loving Father; to Him we carried all our little difficulties and troubles. He took an interest in everything which concerned us.

He used to send a servant to Beirut every year to buy stuff [fabric] for our clothes. Bahá'u'lláh would then call us to choose which we liked best for our frocks. My mother, my aunt, and the children would make this cotton material into garments.

He was always punctual, and loved daintiness and order.

He was very, very particular and refined in His personal arrangements, and liked to see everybody well groomed, and as neatly dressed as possible. Above all things, cleanliness was desirable to Him.

"Why not put on your prettiest frocks?" He would say.

All our holidays, all our treats and our happiness came from Him in those days; when boxes of sweets were brought to Him He would set some aside for us.

"Put that box of sweets there, or Áqá will give it away to the people," He would say in fun.

"Let the dear children come in, and have some dessert," He often said, when we were being sent off to bed—my Father and my mother not wishing that we should disturb Him—but He always welcomed us with loving words.

How we adored Him!

"Now children, tomorrow you shall come with Me for a picnic to the Ridván," He would say, and our night was so full of joy we could scarcely sleep.

TÚBÁ KHÁNUM, QUOTED BY LADY BLOMFIELD, *THE CHOSEN HIGHWAY*, PP. 97-98

SHOGHI EFFENDI'S CHILDHOOD

Stories told by the wife of Shoghi Effendi, great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh

It may sound disrespectful to say the Guardian [Shoghi Effendi] was a mischievous child, but he himself told me he was the acknowledged ringleader of all the other children. Bubbling with high spirits, enthusiasm and daring, full of laughter and wit, the small boy led the way in many pranks; whenever something was afoot, behind it would be found Shoghi Effendi! This boundless energy was often a source of anxiety as he would rush madly up and down the long flight of high steps to the upper story of the house, to the consternation of the pilgrims below, waiting to meet the Master [‘Abdu’l-Bahá]. His exuberance was irrepressible and was in the child the same force that was to make the man such an untiring and unflinching commander-in-chief of the forces of Bahá'u'lláh, leading them to victory after victory, indeed, to the spiritual conquest of the entire globe. We have a very reliable witness to this characteristic of the Guardian, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself, Who wrote on a used envelope a short sentence to please His little grandson: “Shoghi Effendi is a wise man—but he runs about very much!”

It must not be inferred, however, that Shoghi Effendi was mannerless. Children in the East—how much more the children of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—were taught courtesy and manners from the cradle. Bahá'u'lláh's family was descended from kings and the family tradition, entirely apart from his divine teachings which enjoin courtesy as obligatory, ensured that a noble conduct and politeness would distinguish Shoghi Effendi from his babyhood.

In those days of Shoghi Effendi's childhood it was the custom to rise about dawn and spend the first hour of the day in the Master's room, where prayers were said and the family all had breakfast with Him. The children sat on the floor, their legs folded under them, their arms folded across their breasts, in great respect; when asked, they would chant for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; there was no shouting or unseemly conduct. Breakfast consisted of tea, brewed on the bubbling Russian brass samovar and served in little crystal glasses, very hot and sweet, pure wheat bread and goats' milk cheese. Dr. Zia Baghdadi, an intimate of the family, in his recollections of these days records that Shoghi Effendi was always the first to get up and be on time—after receiving one good chastisement from no other hand than that of his grandfather!

AMATU'L-BAHÁ RUHIYYIH KHÁNUM, *THE PRICELESS PEARL*, pp. 7-8

IN THE HOME OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

Memories of Juliet Thompson, a Bahá’í who traveled from New York City to the Holy Land to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1909

Tea was brought in—in the little clear glasses always used in ‘Akká—and He [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] served us with His own hands. Then, seating Himself again on the divan, He called the four children who were with us: two of his own little grandsons (Shoghi Effendi and Ruhi) and the two Kinney boys, and with a lavish tenderness, a super abundance of overflowing love, such as could only have come from the very Center and Source of Love, He drew all four to His knees, clasped them in His arms, which enclosed them all, gathered and pressed and crushed them to His Heart of hearts. Then He set them down on the floor and, rising, Himself brought their tea to them.

Words absolutely fail me when I try to express the divine picture I saw then. With the Christ-love radiating from Him with the intensest sweetness I have yet witnessed, *He stooped to the floor Himself to serve the little children, the children of the East and the children of the West.* He sat on the floor in their midst, He put sugar into their tea, stirred it and fed it to them, all the while smiling celestially, an infinite tenderness playing on the great Immortal Face like white light. I cannot express it! In a corner sat an old Persian believer, in a state of complete effacement before his Lord, his head bowed, his eyelids lowered, his hands crossed on his breast. Tears were pouring down his cheeks.

JULIET THOMPSON, *THE DIARY OF JULIET THOMPSON*, PP. 40-41

The Power of Example

1. While listening to quiet background music, individually read again the quotations on pp. 16-17, Honoring the Station of Parents.
2. Individually reflect on the question:
 - Based on these quotations, what is your own understanding of the meaning of “true parenthood?”If desired, you may record your reflections in your journal, the blank pages provided at the front of this book.
3. Then, reflect upon an example of the positive influence that one or both of your parents (or a person who was like a parent to you) has had on your own life. Using words or pictures, record this example in your journal in a form that you will feel comfortable sharing with another person.
4. Working in teams of two, share your examples with each other.
5. Still in these same teams, read the quotations, The Power of Example, and discuss the focus questions.
6. Briefly share highlights of your discussion in the whole group. Then read the short example provided by Mr. Faizi of the consequences of poor modeling.
7. Next, working in small groups, brainstorm examples of the positive consequences of positive modeling by parents. Create a 1–2 minute role-play that illustrates one of your positive examples.
8. Share your positive role-plays in the whole group. Applaud all contributions!
9. Turn to the page, Drawing on the Power of Example. Record your plans to practice using the power of example with your children this week.

Purpose:

Become familiar with some of the Bahá'í writings on the power of example.

Reflect upon the meaning of “true parenthood.”

Gain insight into the importance and power of the example parents set for their children.

Process the Activity

Why is understanding the power of example a key element in exploring parental standards?

THE POWER OF EXAMPLE

Focus Topics

What do these quotations say about the power of example? How do we teach our children through example? What are the harmful consequences of poor modeling?

1 O Son of My Handmaid! Guidance hath ever been given by words, and now it is given by deeds. Every one must show forth deeds that are pure and holy, for words are the property of all alike, whereas such deeds as these belong only to Our loved ones. Strive then with heart and soul to distinguish yourselves by your deeds. In this wise We counsel you in this holy and resplendent tablet.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 76

2 Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind, for the professions of most men, be they high or low, differ from their conduct. It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, QUOTED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, P. 25

3 O people of God! That which can ensure the victory of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, His hosts and helpers on earth, have been set down in the sacred Books and Scriptures, and are as clear and manifest as the sun. These hosts are such righteous deeds, such conduct and character, as are acceptable in His sight. Whoso ariseth, in this Day, to aid Our Cause, and summoneth to his assistance the hosts of a praiseworthy character and upright conduct, the influence flowing from such an action will, most certainly, be diffused throughout the whole world.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 287

4 Whoso ariseth among you to teach the Cause of his Lord, let him, before all else, teach his own self, that his speech may attract the hearts of them that hear him. Unless he teacheth his own self, the words of his mouth will not influence the heart of the seeker. Take heed, O people, lest ye be of them that give good counsel to others but forget to follow it themselves. The words of such as these, and beyond the words the realities of all things, and beyond these realities the angels that are nigh unto God, bring against them the accusation of falsehood.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 277

5 If the friends become embodiments of virtue and good character, words and arguments will be superfluous. Their very deeds will well serve as eloquent testimony, and their noble conduct will ensure the preservation, integrity and glory of the Cause of God.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS* VOL. II, P. 2

AN EXAMPLE OF POOR MODELING

Backbiting Quenches the Spirit

From my experience I know of one calamity which pitilessly brings gradual death to the growing spirit of our children. This disaster is very often an undesired guest, but alas, sometimes is invited, given the best seat—our hearts—and is offered the sweetest moments of our precious lives. It is like the freezing breeze of mid-winter which passes through almond groves, kills the blossoms and leaves of the poor farmers who were comfortably settled in their warm rooms, poverty-stricken and sorrowful.

This hideous intruder is backbiting. . . .

The perilous effects are so imperceptible that one's own ego is not warned and the parents are not alerted to the symptoms of the spreading spiritual ailment. . . .

We think the children are playing with their toys and are not paying attention to what we are saying. It may be true that they do not consciously respond to the conversation of their elders, but their eyes see and their ears hear and register things within.

The children's hearts and souls are like clean mirrors or containers of pure, crystal and translucent water. Every word uttered by us against other friends, like a drop of ink, sinks deep into the transparent hearts. At the beginning, the color may not seem to have changed, but we know that it is absorbed with all its poisonous effects. Should the drops of poison be repeated, the child's whole existence becomes victim to a spiritual disease.

ABU'L-QASIM FAIZI, "DIVINE EDUCATION—THE ROOT OF KNOWLEDGE,"
BAHÁ'Í NEWS, NOVEMBER 1967, P. 8

DRAWING ON THE POWER OF EXAMPLE: MY PLAN FOR ACTION

Think about the powerful effects of a good example. Individually identify one area in your own life in which you'd like to set a positive example. You may share your ideas with a person near you or in the whole group if you like.

Please be specific: In which time and place would you like to demonstrate the power of example? How exactly do you plan to do so?

Remembering that small actions actually completed are more powerful than larger deeds that are only planned, do you wish to refine or adjust your plan?

Remembering that small actions increase in power when repeated, do you wish to think of more than one opportunity to complete your action this week?

How will you be able to track your progress? Can you think of a circumstance in which you might choose to adjust your plan? How will you acknowledge your successful completion of your action plan?

Concluding Session One

1. After completing your action plans, briefly discuss the questions:
 - How can we encourage each other or support each other as we complete our action plans this week?
 - How else would we like to encourage each other or help our group to be successful?
2. Record any agreements that you make so that you may refer to them in future sessions if you like.
3. Conclude the session with prayers and music.



Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

Session Two

The Spiritual Development of Parents

Spiritual Development of Parents

The Promise of Divine Assistance
Spiritual Growth Plan

Parents Helping Parents

Opening Devotions

Begin your session with prayers and sung or recorded music. Then please read aloud the theme quotations and objectives for this session.

Session Two Themes

Spiritual Development of Parents

Is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *KITÁB-I-ÍQÁN*, PP. 240-41

The Promise of Divine Assistance

Blessed is he who remembereth his parents when communing with God. There is, verily, no God but Him, the Mighty, the Well-Beloved.

THE BÁB, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE BÁB*, P. 94

Session Two Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- Become familiar with Bahá'í writings on the promise of divine assistance.

WISDOM

- Appreciate the value of a spiritual growth plan.
- Recognize the need for and assurance of divine assistance in our parenting endeavors.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- Identify one's strengths and areas for growth as a parent.
- Perceive some prerequisites for spiritual growth.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- Create a systematic personal plan for continuous spiritual development.

Opening Activity: Discuss Results

Reflecting on our learning during Session One and our efforts to teach our children through example:

- Who would like to share an experience of striving to positively influence our children by setting a positive example?
- Who would like to share an experience in which we noticed that our efforts to teach through example succeeded in positively influencing our children?
- Do we have to see results right away to know that our efforts are worthwhile?

The Promise of Divine Assistance

1. Working in small groups, read aloud the quotations on The Power of Divine Assistance. After reading, spend a few minutes quietly reflecting on the meaning of these quotations, possibly while listening to quiet music. Then share the insights you gained through reflection.
2. In the same groups, discuss the questions:
 - What can we do to receive this promised divine assistance?
 - What arrangements in the home can allow this to occur?
3. Please record your ideas on chart paper, decorate as desired, and then share your ideas with the whole group.

Purpose:

Recognize the need for, and assurance of, divine assistance in all parenting endeavors.

Process the Activity

In what ways is it useful for us to work in small groups and then share the outcome of these small working groups with each other?

THE PROMISE OF DIVINE ASSISTANCE

Focus Topics

What is the importance of establishing regular times for daily prayer in the home? How can parents create some quiet time each day for their own prayer, meditation, and reading from the Holy Writings?

1 O Son of Glory! Be swift in the path of holiness, and enter the heaven of communion with Me. Cleanse thy heart with the burnish of the spirit, and hasten to the court of the Most High.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 8

2 Put your trust in God, and commit your affairs to His keeping. He, verily, will, through the power of truth, render you victorious, and He, verily is powerful to do what He willeth, and in His grasp are the reins of omnipotent might.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, QUOTED IN *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, P. 69

3 We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS*, P. 33, NO. 38

4 . . . Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty.

THE BÁB, QUOTED IN *THE DAWNBREAKERS*, P. 94

5 It is seemly that the servant should, after each prayer, supplicate God to bestow mercy and forgiveness upon his parents. Thereupon God's call will be raised: "Thousand upon thousand of what thou hast asked for thy parents shall be thy recompense!" Blessed is he who remembereth his parents when communing with God. There is, verily, no God but Him, the Mighty, the Well-Beloved.

THE BÁB, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE BÁB*, P. 94

6 Praise be to God, thy heart is engaged in the commemoration of God, thy soul is gladdened by the glad tidings of God and thou art absorbed in prayer. The state of prayer is the best of conditions, for man is then associating with God. Prayer verily bestoweth life, particularly when offered in private and at times, such as midnight, when freed from daily cares.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 202

7 Praised be God, ye two have demonstrated the truth of your words by your deeds, and have won the confirmations of the Lord God. Every day at first light, ye gather the Bahá'í children together and teach them the communions and prayers. This is a most praiseworthy act, and bringeth joy to the children's hearts: that they should, at every morn, turn their faces toward the Kingdom and make mention of the Lord and praise His name and in the sweetest of voices, chant and recite.

These children are even as young plants, and teaching them the prayers is as letting the rain pour down upon them, that they may wax tender and fresh, and the soft breezes of the love of God may blow over them, making them to tremble with joy.

Blessedness awaiteth you, and a fair haven.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, SEC. 115, P. 139

8 When the children are ready for bed, let the mother read or sing them the Odes of the Blessed Beauty, so that from their earliest years they will be educated by these verses of guidance.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, P. 30, NO. 78

9 The father must always endeavor to educate his son and to acquaint him with the heavenly teachings. He must give him advice and exhort him at all times, teach him praiseworthy conduct and character, enable him to receive training at school and to be instructed in such arts and sciences as are deemed useful and necessary. In brief, let him instill into his mind the virtues and perfections of the world of humanity. Above all he should continually call to his mind the remembrance of God so that his throbbing veins and arteries may pulsate with the love of God.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, P. 41 NO. 100

10 Rely upon God. Trust in Him, praise Him, and call Him continually to mind. He verily turneth trouble into ease, and sorrow into solace, and toil into utter peace.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 178

Spiritual Growth Plan

Purpose:

Begin to identify one's own strengths and areas for growth as a parent.

Create a systematic personal plan for continuous spiritual development.

1. In the whole group read aloud the quotations, Spiritual Development, and then discuss:
 - Considering the importance of parenting to the future well-being of the entire human race, what might be some benefits of creating a personal plan for one's own spiritual development?
 - What might be the value of consciously setting goals for oneself and striving to meet them?
 - What are some examples of personal development goals that a parent might select?
 - Will our personal development goals as parents stay the same or evolve as family life changes and evolves?
2. After your short discussion, recall the quotation that provides the Core Curriculum learning model:

Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception, and eloquent speech.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, REV. ED. 1999, NO. 9, P. 3
3. As a group, consider the example of one parent's personal growth plan provided on p. 47. How did that individual use the Core Curriculum learning model to translate a goal into action?
4. Work quietly and individually to practice using the Core Curriculum learning model to translate your goal into action.
5. If you like, share your goal and your "knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception, and eloquent speech" objectives with each other.

Process the Activity

How can the activities in sessions one and two of this course help us set realistic goals for ourselves?

How might we use spiritual goal-setting with our children?

1 . . . Is it not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-ÍQÁN*, PP. 240-41

2 Arise, O people, and, by the power of God's might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves, that happily the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies—gods that have inflicted such loss upon, and are responsible for the misery of their wretched worshipers. These idols form the obstacle that impedeth man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection. We cherish the hope that the Hand of divine power may lend its assistance to mankind and deliver it from its state of grievous abasement.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 86

3 Unto each one hath been prescribed a preordained measure, as decreed in God's mighty and guarded Tablets. All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition. Your own acts testify to this truth.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 149

4 . . . Make ye a mighty effort, and choose for yourselves a noble goal.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 35

5 Among the greatest of all services that can possibly be rendered by man to Almighty God is the education and training of children, young plants of the Abhá Paradise, so that these children, fostered by grace in the way of salvation, growing like pearls of divine bounty in the shell of education, will one day bejewel the crown of abiding glory.

It is, however, very difficult to undertake this service, even harder to succeed in it. I hope that thou wilt acquit thyself well in this most important of tasks, and successfully carry the day, and become an ensign of God's abounding grace; that these children, reared one and all in the holy Teachings, will develop natures like unto the sweet airs that blow across the gardens of the All-Glorious, and will waft their fragrance around the world.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, PP. 133-34

6 We must supplicate Bahá'u'lláh to assist us to overcome the failings in our characters, and also exert our own will power in mastering ourselves.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS*, No. 52

7 We must not only be patient with others, infinitely patient!, but also with our own poor selves, remembering that even the Prophets of God sometimes got tired and cried out in despair.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *LIVING THE LIFE*, No. 127

8 Souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained. Transformation is the essential purpose of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *RIDVÁN MESSAGE 1989*

9 Bahá'u'lláh has stated quite clearly in His writings the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are stressed again and again by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His talks and tablets. One can summarize them briefly in this way:

1. The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion.
2. The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention, and thought.
3. Prayerful meditation on the teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfill them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.
4. Striving every day to bring our behavior more into accordance with the high standards that are set forth in the teachings.
5. Teaching the Cause of God.
6. Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *MESSAGES FROM THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE 1963-1986*, p. 588

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

10 Florence Khánum (wife of 'Ali Kuli Khan and mother of Marzieh Gail) relates two sayings she heard from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. On one occasion He said to her "Sabr kun; mithl-i-Man bash"—be patient; be as I am. The other was when someone expressed discouragement to Him, saying they could not possibly acquire all the qualities and virtues that Bahá'ís are directed to possess. He replied, "Kam Kam. Ruz bih ruz"—little by little, day by day.

ANNAMARIE HONNOLD, *VIGNETTES FROM THE LIFE OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, No. 37, p. 27

SETTING PERSONAL GOALS WITHIN THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Sample Personal Goal: *To be more patient with my three-year-old.*

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>KNOWLEDGE (I know) To gain information about facts, spiritual principles, or sacred writings on a topic.</p> | <p>Read what the Bahá'í writings say about patience. Post quotations around the house to focus my attention.</p> |
| <p>WISDOM (I understand) To gain deeper understanding of facts, principles, or writings through consultation and reflection.</p> | <p>Read and reflect upon stories of people who display patience. Observe the actions of people who seem patient with their children. Ask others to share their ideas about how to develop patience.</p> |
| <p>SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION (I perceive) To reflect on the application of facts, principles, or writings in one's own life and one's service to others.</p> | <p>Decide on a few simple action steps to use when I need to deal with situations more patiently. Discern where I have and where I have not been patient by bringing myself to account each day concerning patience.</p> |
| <p>ELOQUENT SPEECH (I teach, I serve) To articulate or demonstrate, through words and deeds, understanding and application of facts, principles, and writings.</p> | <p>Turn to God for assistance. Recite memorized Writings about patience on a daily basis. Exert my will-power to USE my action steps in at least one potentially annoying situation each day. Prepare a short explanation of the value of patience to share with my children.</p> |

SETTING PERSONAL GOALS WITHIN THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

“ . . . Choose for yourselves a noble goal.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Set a Personal Goal:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>KNOWLEDGE (I know)</p> <p>To gain information about facts, spiritual principles, or sacred writings on a topic.</p> | |
| <p>WISDOM (I understand)</p> <p>To gain deeper understanding of facts, principles, or writings through consultation and reflection.</p> | |
| <p>SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION (I perceive)</p> <p>To reflect on the application of facts, principles, or writings in one’s own life and one’s service to others.</p> | |
| <p>ELOQUENT SPEECH (I teach, I serve)</p> <p>To articulate or demonstrate, through words and deeds, understanding and application of facts, principles, and writings.</p> | |

The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 168

Purpose:

Recognize the importance of a parent support network in problem-solving.

During each of the remaining sessions of this spiritual parenting course:

- We will have an opportunity to give a short description of a situation we would like to change at home.
- We will be able to share our experiences with parents who have successfully handled similar challenges.
- A volunteer will be invited to role-play a new approach he or she would like to practice at home, perhaps based on one or a combination of possible strategies offered by others.

1. For this session, a member of the group may choose to offer a parenting challenge or we could work with a “neutral” situation, such as:

“I’m having trouble getting a routine of daily prayers established. Sometimes I forget until the last minute, when we need to leave the house in the morning. Even when I do remember and try to give the kids plenty of time to get ready and join me for prayers, they don’t really want to and don’t see why we have to do this now when we never used to.”

2. Let’s consult about ways to resolve the dilemma: What ideas do we have that might help this parent achieve her goal?
3. Then, could an individual or small group role-play how this situation may be handled?
4. After consulting together and role-playing some possible solutions, please share your appreciation with all who offered challenges and successes. Appreciation might sound like:

I learned. . .

I felt. . .

I have the same problem, so now I try. . .

I know how hard it is to share. . .

Thank you for. . .

5. Please take a few moments to jot down the ideas that seem most useful to you.

Concluding Session Two

Purpose:

Explore ways to model behaviors studied in the session.

Identify strategies for preserving family unity.

1. As you conclude the session, briefly discuss:
 - How might we be able to explain the changes we wish to make in our own selves to members of our families who are not participating in this course? How could we lovingly enlist their support?
2. One of the ways that we can work toward our goals is to keep a journal of our own thoughts, feelings, ideas, and reflections. We will have a short time in each session to use our journals. We may also choose to use our journals at home to track progress on goals set each session, record insights or questions, and call ourselves to account each day.
3. Please take a few minutes to record your reflections from today's session in your journal. You may consider using the following questions to begin your journaling:
 - How will I use personal example to promote prayer and spiritual growth in my home?
 - What other strategies will I use to enlist family support and promote unity?



Conclude the session with prayers and music.



Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

Session Three

The Spiritual Reality of the Child

Recognizing the Spiritual Reality of the Child

The Spiritual Reality of the Child

A Perspective on Human Development

Spiritual Perspectives on Child Development

Developmental Patterns

Parents Helping Parents

Opening Devotions

Begin your session with prayers, devotional readings, and music.

Please read aloud the theme quotations and learning objectives for this session.

Session Three Themes

Recognizing the Spiritual Reality of the Child

O Son of Being! With the hands of power I made thee and with the fingers of strength I created thee; and within thee have I placed the essence of My light. Be thou content with it and seek naught else, for My work is perfect and My command is binding. Question it not, nor have a doubt thereof.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC No. 12

A Perspective on Human Development—Stages of Maturity

From the beginning to the end of his life man passes through certain periods, or stages, each of which is marked by certain conditions peculiar to itself. For instance, during the period of childhood his conditions and requirements are characteristic of that degree of intelligence and capacity. After a time he enters the period of youth, in which his former conditions and needs are superseded by new requirements applicable to the advance in his degree. His faculties of observation are broadened and deepened: his intelligent capacities are trained and awakened; the limitations and environment of childhood no longer restrict his energies and accomplishments. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, p. 438

KNOWLEDGE

- Know some of the Bahá'í writings that describe the spiritual reality of the child.
- Become familiar with ages and stages of human development.

WISDOM

- Gain a deeper understanding of the unique character of each child and the role of parents in developing the capacities of their children.
- Understand the relationships among various aspects of human development.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- Use the Bahá'í writings to form a perspective on some current secular theories of human development.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- Plan activities for multi-age groups in different settings.
- Continue to set goals for one's own spiritual development.

Session Two Reflections

Working in teams of two, listen carefully to each other as you discuss the following questions:

- What has happened this week as you have worked to fulfill the goals you set for yourself in the last session?
- What obstacles presented themselves?
- What strategies did you use to overcome them?
- What ideas for practical support could we offer each other as we continue to strive to achieve our own goals?

Allow about 5 minutes for this short discussion.

Then in the whole group, briefly respond to the question:

- Are there questions, comments, or concerns that we'd like to be sure to address in a future session of this course or during our regular Parents Helping Parents activity?

Recognizing the Spiritual Reality of the Child

Purpose:

Become familiar with the Bahá'í writings that describe the spiritual reality of the child.

Gain a deeper understanding of the unique character of each child and the role of parents in developing the capacities of their children.

1. Working in groups of two or three, carefully read aloud the quotations, *The Spiritual Reality of the Child*, from *The Hidden Words*. Then discuss the following questions:
 - How do these Hidden Words describe the spiritual reality of our children?
 - What new insights do these short quotations give us into our roles as parents of a spiritual being?
 - What are some ways that we as parents can acknowledge the spiritual reality of our children?
2. Share some of your team's insights in the whole group.
3. Then read aloud the following quotation:

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P.161

Read the quotation again, then briefly discuss the questions:

- How are our children like a mine rich in gems?
- What is the purpose of education?
- What is the role of the parents in identifying the unique characters in our children?
- How can a parent's love assist the children to develop their talents and capacities?

Process the Activity

How can we acknowledge our own spiritual reality in our interactions with children in the ordinary flow of daily life?

THE SPIRITUAL REALITY OF THE CHILD

Focus Topics

How do these Hidden Words describe the spiritual reality of our children?
What new insights do these short quotations give us into our roles as parents of a spiritual being? What are some ways that we as parents can acknowledge the spiritual reality of our children?

1 O Son of Man! Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC No. 3

2 O Son of Man! I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC No. 4

3 O Son of Being! Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy radiance and seek none other than Me. For I have created thee rich and have bountifully shed My favor upon thee.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC No. 11

4 O Son of Being! With the hands of power I made thee and with the fingers of strength I created thee; and within thee have I placed the essence of My light. Be thou content with it and seek naught else, for My work is perfect and My command is binding. Question it not, nor have a doubt thereof.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC No. 12

5 O Son of Spirit! I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC No. 13

6 O Son of Spirit! Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC No. 22

7 O Children of Man! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 68

8 O Ye Sons of Spirit! Ye are My treasury, for in you I have treasured the pearls of My mysteries and the gems of My knowledge. Guard them from the strangers amidst My servants and from the ungodly amongst My people.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 69

9 O My Servant! Thou art even as a finely tempered sword concealed in the darkness of its sheath and its value hidden from the artificer's knowledge. Wherefore come forth from the sheath of self and desire that thy worth may be made resplendent and manifest unto all the world.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 72

10 O My Friend! Thou art the day-star of the heavens of My holiness, let not the defilement of the world eclipse thy splendor. Rend asunder the veil of heedlessness, that from behind the clouds thou mayest emerge resplendent and array all things with the apparel of life.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 73

STAGES OF MATURITY

1 While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 129

2 And when the child hath reached the age where he can make distinctions, let him be placed in a Bahá'í school, in which at the beginning the Holy Texts are recited and religious concepts are taught. At this school the child is to study reading and writing as well as some fundamentals of the various branches of knowledge, such as can be learned by children.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, p. 31 No. 79

3 All created things have their degree or stage of maturity. The period of maturity in the life of a tree is the time of its fruit bearing. The maturity of a plant is the time of its blossoming and flowering. The animal attains a stage of full growth and completeness, and in the human kingdom man reaches his maturity when the lights of intelligence have reached their greatest power and development.

From the beginning to the end of his life man passes through certain periods, or stages, each of which is marked by certain conditions peculiar to itself. For instance, during the period of childhood his conditions and requirements are characteristic of that degree of intelligence and capacity. After a time he enters the period of youth, in which his former conditions and needs are superseded by new requirements applicable to the advance in his degree. His faculties of observation are broadened and deepened: his intelligent capacities are trained and awakened; the limitations and environment of childhood no longer restrict his energies and accomplishments. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, p. 438

4 It is extremely difficult to teach the individual and refine his character once puberty is passed. By then, as experience hath shown, even if every effort be exerted to modify some tendency of his, it all availeth nothing. He may, perhaps, improve somewhat today; but let a few days pass and he forgetteth, and turneth backward to his habitual condition and accustomed ways. Therefore it is in early childhood that a firm foundation must be laid. While the branch is green and tender it can easily be made straight.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 137

CAUTIONS REGARDING CURRENT THEORIES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

1. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that we must advance our understanding of the stages of life and the changes that take place across the life span. At this point in human history, almost all research regarding human development has been conducted without benefit of direct knowledge of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Many of the central concerns and controversies in the field of human development have been directly answered in these writings. Therefore, this course grounds study of contemporary research in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice.
2. Most current theories of human development are based on the works of American and Western European scientists and therefore reflect study of the white, middle-class (and often male) populations, a minority of the human beings on the planet. Although human development theory purposes to delineate universal understandings as well as variations of human cognition and behavior, these studies largely reflect the population groups immediately surrounding the scientists themselves. Awareness of these racial, ethnic, gender and religious biases, while very important for any student of human development, is crucial for those who seek to educate all the children in the world and raise a prejudice-free generation. We should therefore read broadly in the field, include cross-cultural findings in our study, and be sensitive to individual and cultural variations among the children with whom we work.
3. Human development has many aspects—social, cognitive, physical, artistic, emotional, spiritual, and moral. In most cases these various aspects of development are studied separately and reported separately. All these aspects of development affect each other and interact with one another. As we plan activities for children, a holistic understanding of child development will increase our effectiveness as parents.
4. The many theories of human development reflect both the historical and cultural environment in which they were developed and the personality, interests, and life experiences of the theorists. If we see our understanding of human development as a jigsaw puzzle, and our task as finding the pieces of this puzzle, then each theoretical perspective and each research finding provides a piece of the puzzle. If we dismiss a theory completely or if we adopt a theory completely, we may lack an important part of the picture. Gradually, one piece at a time, we can put together a more complete understanding of human development.

INFANCY

1 Among the safeguards of the Holy Faith is the training of children, and this is among the weightiest of principles in all the Divine Teachings. Thus from the very beginning mothers must rear their infants in the cradle of good morals—for it is the mothers who are the first educators—so that, when the child cometh to maturity, he will prove to be endowed with all the virtues and qualities that are worthy of praise.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, IN *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, P. 16, NO. 42

2 Exert every effort to educate the children, so that from infancy they will be trained in Bahá'í conduct and the ways of God, and will, even as young plants, thrive and flourish in the soft-flowing waters that are the counsels and admonitions of the Blessed Beauty.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 126

3 Thou didst write as to the children: from the very beginning, the children must receive divine education and must continually be reminded to remember their God. Let the love of God pervade their inmost being, commingled with their mother's milk.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 127

4 During infancy children are to receive bountiful love, begin to understand and practice the standards of excellence, and begin their divine education.

While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 129

5 Have for them an abundant love and exert thine utmost in training them, so that their being may grow through the milk of the love of God, forasmuch as it is the duty of parents to perfectly and thoroughly train their children.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *TABLETS OF ABDUL-BAHA ABBAS*, VOL. II, P. 262

6 The infant, while yet a suckling, must receive Bahá'í training, and the loving spirit of Christ and Bahá'u'lláh must be breathed into him, that he may be reared in accord with the verities of the Gospel and the Most Holy Book.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, IN *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, P. 19, NO. 49

EARLY CHILDHOOD

1 These children must be given a good training from their earliest childhood. They must be given a systematic training which will further their development from day to day, in order that they may receive greater insight, so that their spiritual receptivity be broadened.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, IN *THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD*, VOL. IX, P. 543

2 Children are even as a branch that is fresh and green; they will grow up in whatever way ye train them.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 136

3 And when the child hath reached the age where he can make distinctions, let him be placed in a Bahá'í school, in which at the beginning the Holy Texts are recited and religious concepts are taught.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, IN *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, P. 31, NO. 79

4 As to the children: From the age of five their formal education must begin. That is, during the daytime they should be looked after in a place where there are teachers, and should learn good conduct.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, IN *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, P. 30, NO. 78

5 A small child cannot comprehend the laws that govern nature, but that is on account of the immature intellect of that child; when he is grown older and has been educated he too will understand the everlasting truths.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, P. 145

6 My wish is that these children should receive a Bahá'í education, so that they may progress both here and in the Kingdom, and rejoice thy heart.

In a time to come, morals will degenerate to an extreme degree. It is essential that children be reared in the Bahá'í way, that they may find happiness both in this world and the next. If not, they shall be beset by sorrows and troubles, for human happiness is founded upon spiritual behaviour.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 127

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

1 As to the children: We have directed that in the beginning they should be trained in the observances and laws of religion; and thereafter, in such branches of knowledge as are of benefit, and in commercial pursuits that are distinguished for integrity, and in deeds that will further the victory of God's Cause or will attract some outcome which will draw the believer closer to his Lord.

We beg of God to assist the children of His loved ones and adorn them with wisdom, good conduct, integrity and righteousness.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, IN *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, PP. 6-7, NO. 26

2 Children are even as a branch that is fresh and green; they will grow up in whatever way ye train them.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 136

3 In a time to come, morals will degenerate to an extreme degree. It is essential that children be reared in the Bahá'í way, that they may find happiness both in this world and the next. If not, they shall be beset by sorrows and troubles, for human happiness is founded upon spiritual behaviour.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 127

4 As to thy question regarding the education of children: It behoveth thee to nurture them at the breast of the love of God, and urge them onward to the things of the spirit, that they may turn their faces unto God; that their ways may conform to the rules of good conduct and their character be second to none; that they make their own all the graces and praiseworthy qualities of humankind; acquire a sound knowledge of the various branches of learning, so that from the very beginning of life they may become spiritual beings, dwellers in the Kingdom, enamoured of the sweet breaths of holiness, and may receive an education religious, spiritual, and of the Heavenly Realm. Verily will I call upon God to grant them a happy outcome in this.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 142

5 I give you my advice, and it is this: Train these children with divine exhortations. From their childhood instill in their hearts the love of God so they may manifest in their lives the fear of God and have confidence in the bestowals of God. Teach them to free themselves from human imperfections and to acquire the divine perfections latent in the heart of man. The life of man is useful if he attains the perfections of man. If he becomes the center of the imperfections of the world of humanity, death is better than life, and nonexistence better than existence. Therefore, make ye an effort in order that these children may be rightly trained and educated and that each one of them may attain perfection in the world of humanity. Know ye the value of these children, for they are all my children.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, PP. 53-54

1 It is extremely difficult to teach the individual and refine his character once puberty is passed. By then, as experience hath shown, even if every effort be exerted to modify some tendency of his, it all availeth nothing. He may, perhaps, improve somewhat today; but let a few days pass and he forgetteth, and turneth backward to his habitual condition and accustomed ways. Therefore it is in early childhood that a firm foundation must be laid. While the branch is green and tender it can easily be made straight.

Our meaning is that qualities of the spirit are the basic and divine foundation, and adorn the true essence of man; and knowledge is the cause of human progress. The beloved of God must attach great importance to this matter, and carry it forward with enthusiasm and zeal.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 137

2 The need of our modern youth is for such a type of ethics founded on pure religious faith. Not until these two are rightly combined and brought into full action can there be any hope for the future of the race.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, IN *BAHÁ'Í NEWS*, NO. 104 (DEC. 1936), p. 1

3 For any person, whether Bahá'í or not, his youthful years are those in which he will make many decisions which will set the course of his life. In these years he is most likely to choose his life's work, complete his education, begin to earn his own living, marry, and start to raise his own family. Most important of all, it is during this period that the mind is most questing and that the spiritual values that will guide the person's future behavior are adopted. These factors present Bahá'í youth with their greatest opportunities, their greatest challenges, and their greatest tests—opportunities to truly apprehend the teachings of their Faith and to give them to their contemporaries, challenges to overcome the pressures of the world and to provide leadership for their and succeeding generations, and tests enabling them to exemplify in their lives the high moral standards set forth in the Bahá'í writings. Indeed, the Guardian wrote of the Bahá'í youth that it is they “who can contribute so decisively to the virility, the purity, and the driving force of the life of the Bahá'í community, and upon whom must depend the future orientation of its destiny, and the complete unfoldment of the potentialities with which God has endowed it.”

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *WELLSPRING OF GUIDANCE*, pp. 92-93

DEVELOPMENTAL PATTERNS

The following picture of developmental patterns is not comprehensive but rather is offered as a taste of the various periods of human maturity. Human existence is a social existence and therefore no person's development can be understood separate from its social context. Human development continues well beyond age twenty with exciting developmental changes throughout life. These lifelong patterns are also subject to drastic individual differences. Human development occurs in somewhat predictable patterns marked with great irregularity and exception. The developmental patterns described here offer a very general description of the unique aspects of each period of development. It must be born in mind that human development is also cumulative, that is, in each period of life all the characteristics of the previous periods are also present and active.

Some possible sources for further reading include Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, John Dewey, Benjamin Bloom, T. Barry Brazelton, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, and John Fowler.

The general characteristics of broad age groups between conception and twenty cover areas of social, emotional, cognitive, artistic, moral, perceptual, and motor development.

Conception through birth:

This is a period of rapid physical growth especially of the brain. Towards the end of the gestational period, the human fetus is able to see and hear gross variations in sound and light through the mother's body. The fetus has patterns of sleep and wakefulness, with variations in individual habitual characteristics such as the amount and intensity of movement and thumb-sucking.

Birth through approximately two years:

(infancy)

In many ways, this is the most unique period of life. It is a time of rapid physical, social and cognitive change. A span of one month covers many more changes at this time than at any other period after the birth of an individual. During this time, children grow from total physical dependency to independent walking and talking. Imitation and repetition are major forms of learning. Children of this age often repeat without distinction what they see and hear. From their original capacity to learn any and many languages, children become able to speak and understand the language (or languages) most dominant in their

immediate environment. At this stage, children are interested in gross perceptual and motor contrasts. They are not aware of the permanency and consistency of objects around them. Their world is what they see, hear, smell, touch, and taste. They form their first relationships through secure attachments to the primary people around them. These attachment relations give them the emotional stability and security to allow their exploration of the social and physical world around them. This is the period of exploration.

Approximately two through six years:

(Early Childhood)

In this exciting period of life children become gradually and rapidly aware of the social and physical world around them. They become capable of manipulating this world. They begin this phase by being centered on themselves and end it with the ability to empathetically take another's perspective. They are capable of understanding symbols and applying them to communicate their thoughts and ideas. They are very interested in the arts: music, dance, painting, and drama. Their artistic expressions are original but primitive. Their major strength during this period is fantasy and imagination, the world of make-believe. Their thoughts are spontaneous and at times illogical. They have a strong will and more freedom (in some cultures) to exercise it than at other periods in life. Everything is an extension of play and fantasy. They want to do much more than they are physically or mentally able to accomplish. This is a period of expression.

Approximately six through twelve years:

(Middle Childhood)

This is the period of life when children become participating members of society by learning rules and having obligations (e.g., homework, chores). They are very busy acquiring basic knowledge and skills. They are fascinated with the world, with questions of "how" and "why." They are logical and demand reasoning. They are attracted to their peer groups; with a rapidly expanding social world. They learn best through increasingly complex relationships and interactions with others. Children enjoy scientific experimentation and manipulation, explanation and concrete examples. They become skilled at manipulating more than one dimension and at imagining the process of previous actions. This is a period of construction.

Approximately twelve through twenty years:

(Puberty and Youth)

This is an exciting time of change and re-examination. Children begin this stage with the body of a child and end it with the body of an adult. The brain is creating a massive interlock of physical, cognitive and socio-emotional changes. The children (now youth) are mentally capable of comprehending complicated concepts both concretely and abstractly. They question premises and validate their knowledge, values and beliefs. Their bodies undergo major quantitative and qualitative changes. The children (youth) experience strong feelings and emotions. They have the intellectual and physical capacity to take on the world and the time to do it, free from major social obligations of work and family (with much cultural variation). They are capable of hypothesizing into the unknown without concrete evidence and then examining their feelings before taking actions. They want to be in charge and take control. They are critical of themselves and others and therefore require a supportive environment for effective sharing of thoughts, ideas, feelings, and work. Artistic expression is very important in this period (filled with emotions and intelligence, finally integrated) but unlike children aged two to five, their art is a private form of communication, it reflects their inner feelings and higher mental processes in such forms as poetry, stories, drawings, dance, music and sports. This is a period of cycles of production, examination, destruction, and more production.

Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *CONSULTATION: A COMPILATION*, NO. 3, P. 1

Purpose:

Recognize the importance of a parent support network in problem-solving

During each session of this spiritual parenting course:

- We will have an opportunity to give a short description of a situation we would like to change at home.
- We will be able to share our experiences with parents who have successfully handled similar challenges.
- A volunteer will be invited to role-play a new approach he or she would like to practice at home, perhaps based on one or a combination of possible strategies offered by others.

1. Who would like to share a short description of a situation they would like to change at home?
2. Let's consult about ways to resolve this dilemma.
3. Then, consider using role-play to show ways that this situation may be handled.
4. After consulting together and role-playing some possible solutions, share your appreciation with all who offer challenges and successes. Appreciation might sound like:

I learned . . .

I felt . . .

I have the same problem, so now I can try . . .

I know how hard it is to share . . .

Thank you for . . .

Concluding Activity

Purpose:

Continue to set goals for one's own spiritual development

1. Consider listening to quiet background music while you individually review the goal you set for yourself in the previous session. Reflect on your own actions and the various crises and victories that you experienced this week as you made efforts to progress toward your goal. You also may wish to reflect on the following questions:
 - What signs of progress did I see? Was there a particular high point when I could really tell I was making progress toward my goal? What was that high point? Who was involved? What led up to it and what happened afterwards?
 - Do I see ways to build on that moment of victory, however small it seemed? Do I want to try to repeat that experience? If I could take it to the next level, what would that be?
 - What do I understand about the challenges I faced in making progress toward my goal? What circumstances could I adjust? Or do I need to consider adjusting my goal to take into account my new experiences?
 - What practical support or encouragement could I enlist from other family members, fellow participants in this course, or from my own children? Is there a way we could work as a team toward this goal?
2. After all members of your group have the opportunity to record their reflections on this page or in the journal pages at the front of the course book, consider sharing some of your reflections with each other.
3. Conclude the session with prayers for divine assistance.



Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

Session Four

Fostering the Spiritual Development
of Children

The Power of Love

Fostering Spiritual Development

The Power of Encouragement
Guiding Children Using the Bahá'í Writings

Parents Helping Parents

Closing Activity

A Visit from 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Opening Devotions

Begin your session with prayers and readings, including sung or recorded music. Consider including prayers for children in your opening devotions.

Then read aloud the themes and objectives for this session.

Session Four Themes

The Power of Love

What a power is love! It is the most wonderful, the greatest of all living powers.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, P. 179

The Power of Encouragement

Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*. NO. 95, PP. 124-5

Guiding Children Using the Bahá'í Writings

I give you my advice, and it is this: Train these children with divine exhortations. From their childhood instill in their hearts the love of God so they may manifest in their lives the fear of God and have confidence in the bestowals of God. Teach them to free themselves from human imperfections and to acquire the divine perfections latent in the heart of man.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, P. 53

KNOWLEDGE

- Become familiar with some of the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the power of love.

WISDOM

- Understand the importance of encouragement in the parenting process.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- Appreciate the power of the Bahá’í writings to guide the spiritual development of children.
- Call to mind the example and presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the daily tasks of parenting.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- Plan ways to acknowledge children’s behavior that is in accordance with their spiritual nature.
- Practice acknowledging children’s positive attributes and good deeds.

Session Three Reflections

In the whole group, share examples of your efforts to progress toward your own goals as parents. Consider responding briefly to one of more of the following questions:

- How did an increased understanding of the spiritual reality of children assist us to draw out their spiritual capacities?
- How did an increased awareness of patterns of human development assist us to better understand our children’s behavior?
- What examples did we perceive of divine assistance for our efforts?

The Power of Love

Purpose:

Become familiar with some of the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the power of love.

1. Enjoy listening to quiet background music while you read aloud the quotations on The Power of Love in the whole group.
2. Then, individually re-read the quotations, marking words and phrases that especially attract your heart.
3. Reflect on your own experiences: Can you recall a particular occasion a specific time and place, when you yourself experienced the power of love, perhaps in your own childhood?
4. When you have your memory firmly in mind, share your memory, along with the words and phrases you selected from the quotations, with the person beside you.

Process the Activity

In what ways can our own experiences of the power of love help us learn to show love to our children?

THE POWER OF LOVE

1 What a power is love! It is the most wonderful, the greatest of all living powers.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, p. 179

2 Love gives life to the lifeless. Love lights a flame in the heart that is cold. Love brings hope to the hopeless and gladdens the hearts of the sorrowful.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, p. 179

3 We declare that love is the cause of the existence of all phenomena and that the absence of love is the cause of disintegration or nonexistence.

It is therefore evident that in the world of humanity the greatest king and sovereign is love. If love were extinguished, the power of attraction dispelled, the affinity of human hearts destroyed, the phenomena of human life would disappear.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *FOUNDATIONS OF WORLD UNITY*, pp. 88- 89

4 Know thou of a certainty that Love is the secret of God's holy Dispensation, the manifestation of the All-Merciful, the fountain of spiritual outpourings.

Love is heaven's kindly light, the Holy Spirit's eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul.

Love is the cause of God's revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things.

Love is the one means that ensureth true felicity both in this world and the next.

Love is the light that guideth in darkness, the living link that uniteth God with man, that assureth the progress of every illumined soul.

Love is the most great law that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle, the unique power that bindeth together the divers elements of this material world, the supreme magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms.

Love revealeth with unfailling and limitless power the mysteries latent in the universe.

Love is the spirit of life unto the adorned body of mankind, the establisher of true civilization in this mortal world, and the shedder of imperishable glory upon every high-aiming race and nation.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 27

The Power of Encouragement

Purpose:

Understand the importance of encouragement in the parenting process.

1. Read aloud the following quotations:

Joy gives us wings! In times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener, and our understanding less clouded. We seem better able to cope with the world and to find our sphere of usefulness.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, P. 109

Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, NO. 95, P. 125

The child must not be oppressed or censured because it is undeveloped; it must be patiently trained.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, P. 180-81

2. On chart paper, create two columns: “Encouragement” and “Discouragement”
3. ***Remembering Encouragement:***
Recall a situation in which you felt encouraged by a friend or family member. What did this person say or do that fostered feelings of encouragement?

Record your group’s responses in the “Encouragement” column.
4. ***Remembering Discouragement:***
Recall a time when you felt discouraged by the actions or remarks of another person. What elements contributed to your feelings of discouragement?

Record your group’s responses in the “Discouragement” column.
5. ***Changing discouragement to encouragement:***
Recalling a time when you felt discouraged as a parent, privately consider:
 - Is there a course of action in the “encouragement” column that might have improved the situation?
6. As a group, briefly discuss the questions:
 - How could we describe the power of encouragement to others?
 - What are some simple ways that we can use our words and actions to encourage our children and our own selves?

7. In your journals, use words or pictures to record your reflections on the power of encouragement. Consider setting a goal to use the power of encouragement in one or more specific parenting situations during the coming week.
8. After allowing time to write, consider sharing your goal with the person beside you.

Guiding Children Using the Bahá'í Writings

1. Let's reflect on the times we share the Bahá'í writings or quotations from other Holy Books with our children.
2. What happens when we use a short phrase from these writings to acknowledge their positive attributes and good deeds?
For example, one parent observed the delight of her child when she said "Bahá'u'lláh tells us: '*The contented hath ever been loved and praised,*'" in response to the child's calm acceptance of the parent's refusal to buy the child a treat during a shopping trip.
3. Can we think of one or two other examples?
4. Working in small teams, use the book *The Hidden Words* to identify one spiritual quality or virtue that you'd like to encourage in your children.
 - Think of occasions you've observed your child striving to develop that quality or recognizing that quality in others.
 - Plan a way to share a quotation from the Hidden Words to affirm or encourage that child.
 - Identify a way to help the child reflect on his or her own spiritual development and further strengthen that quality. Would it help the child to set a simple goal?
5. In your same group, create a brief role-play or improvisation that illustrates how a parent could use a Hidden Word to encourage a child.
6. Share your role-plays in the whole group. Applaud all contributions!

Purpose:

Appreciate the power of the Bahá'í writings to guide spiritual development of children.

Plan ways to acknowledge children's behavior that is in accordance with their spiritual nature.

Practice acknowledging children's positive attributes and good deeds.

Process the Activity

In these brief dramatic sketches, how did the "parents" show love, patience, and verbal or non-verbal encouragement to their children?

Purpose:

Discern the importance of a parent support network in problem-solving.

Man must consult on all matters, whether major or minor, so that he may become cognizant of what is good. Consultation giveth him insight into things and enableth him to delve into questions which are unknown. The light of truth shineth from the faces of those who engage in consultation. Such consultation causeth the living waters to flow in the meadows of man's reality, the rays of ancient glory to shine upon him, and the tree of his being to be adorned with wondrous fruit. The members who are consulting, however, should behave in the utmost love, harmony and sincerity towards each other. The principle of consultation is one of the most fundamental elements of the divine edifice. Even in their ordinary affairs the individual members of society should consult.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, CONSULTATION: A COMPILATION, P. 8 NO. 15

1. Invite one member of the group to share a short description of a situation they would like to change at home.
2. Consult about ways to resolve this dilemma.
3. Then, could an individual or small group role-play how this situation may be handled?
4. After consulting together and role-playing some possible solutions, encourage the process by sharing your appreciation to all who offer challenges and successes. Appreciation might sound like:

I learned . . .

I felt . . .

I have the same problem, so now I can try . . .

I know how hard it is to share . . .

Thank you for . . .

Closing Activity

A Visit from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

1. Close your course books, relax, and enjoy listening to quiet background music. As you get comfortable, enjoy listening as your facilitator invites you to imagine a unique visitor to your home.
2. Continue listening to quiet background music as you turn to your journals and reflect on your goals as a parent for the coming week:
 - What specific actions can you practice as parents this week?
 - How can you draw on the power of divine assistance and the practical support of friends and family members—including children—as you strive toward your parenting goals?
3. As time permits, consider sharing your goals with a partner or in the whole group.
4. Conclude your session with a closing prayer.

Purpose:

Call to mind the example and the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the daily tasks of parenting.

Process the Activity

How could this sort of visualization assist children to understand the importance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s example?



Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

Family Roles

Appreciating Roles, Rights, and Relationships
Reciprocal Love and Responsibility

Parents Helping Parents

Session Five

Family Roles, Rights, and
Responsibilities

Opening Devotions

Begin your session with prayers, including sung or recorded music.

Then, read aloud the theme quotations and learning objectives for this session.

Session Five Themes

Roles, Rights, and Relationships

According to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE, P. 168

Reciprocal Love and Responsibility

The parents have the inescapable duty to educate their children—but not vice versa; the children have the duty to obey their parents—the parents do not obey the children;

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 28 DECEMBER 1980 LETTER, BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE, PP. 57-58

Session Five Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- Become familiar with the Bahá'í writings that describe the roles and relationships in the family.
- Know that God has designated reciprocal responsibilities within the family.

WISDOM

- Understand the differences between parent and child roles, rights, and responsibilities from a Bahá'í perspective.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- Perceive that love and justice are essential elements of family unity.
- Discern importance of a parent support network to assist with problem-solving.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- Demonstrate understanding of the roles, rights, and relationships in the family through creation of a model.
- Be able to recite a brief passage from the Bahá'í writings on this topic.

Session Four Reflections

In the whole group, reflect on your experiences as parents.

- Please share one brief experience since the last session that shows your efforts to encourage your children.
- Were there barriers to overcome?
- What strategies did you use to overcome them?

Allow about 5 minutes for comments.

Purpose:

Reflect on the last session and identify questions or concerns.

Appreciating Roles, Rights, and Relationships in the Family

Purpose:

Become familiar with the Bahá'í writings that describe the roles and relationships in the family.

Create a model representing the roles and relationships in the family.

1. Working in small groups, read aloud the quotations, Roles, Rights, and Relationships within the Family, and discuss the following questions:
 - How are the unique roles of parents and children described in these writings?
 - How do the roles of father and mother complement each other?

Consult or refer to dictionaries or consult as a group to clarify the meaning of words such as “prerogatives” and “arbitrary” as desired. Then also discuss:

 - How can single parents still affirm the role of the other parent?
 - How can single parents be supported and encouraged by the Bahá'í community?
2. While still in your working groups, use TinkerToys®, K'NEX®, pipe cleaners, clay, or other materials to create a model of family unity showing the roles, rights, and relationships within the family.
3. Share your models with the whole group, pointing out some of the key points made in the writings studied.

Process the Activity

How did creating a physical model assist us to understand the spiritual reality of the family?

What are some ways that we could share these ideas with our children?

ROLES, RIGHTS, AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FAMILY

Focus Topics

What are the unique roles of Bahá'í parents and children? How do the roles of father and mother complement each other? How can single parents still affirm the role of the other parent? How can single parents be supported and encouraged by the Bahá'í community?

1 He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My loving-kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS*, K. 48, P. 37

2 The fruits that best befit the tree of human life are trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity, but greater than all, after recognition of the unity of God, praised and glorified be He, is regard for the rights that are due to one's parents. This teaching hath been mentioned in all the Books of God, and reaffirmed by the Most Exalted Pen. Consider that which the Merciful Lord hath revealed in the Qurán, exalted are His words: "Worship ye God, join with Him no peer or likeness; and show forth kindliness and charity towards your parents. . . ." Observe how loving-kindness to one's parents hath been linked to recognition of the one true God!

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS*, Q & A No. 106

3 According to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, P. 168

4 The members of a family all have duties and responsibilities towards one another and to the family as a whole, and these duties and responsibilities vary from member to member because of their natural relationships. The parents have the inescapable duty to educate their children—not vice versa; the children have the duty to obey their parents—the parents do not obey their children; the mother—not the father—bears the children, nurses them in babyhood, and is thus their first educator; hence daughters have a prior right to education over sons and, as the Guardian’s secretary has written on his behalf, “The task of bringing up a Bahá’í child, as emphasized time and again in the Bahá’í Writings, is the chief responsibility of the mother, whose unique privilege is indeed to create in her home such conditions as would be most conducive to both his material and spiritual welfare and advancement. The training which the child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development.” A corollary of this responsibility of the mother is her right to be supported by her husband—a husband has no explicit right to be supported by his wife.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *BAHÁ’Í MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE*, pp. 57-58

5 Although the mother is the first educator of the child, and the most important formative influence in his development, the father also has the responsibility of educating his children, and this responsibility is so weighty that Bahá’u’lláh has stated that a father who fails to exercise it forfeits his rights of fatherhood.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *WOMEN*, p. 32

6 The House of Justice suggests that all statements in the Holy Writings concerning specific areas of the relationship between men and women should be considered in the light of the general principle of equality between the sexes that has been authoritatively and repeatedly enunciated in the Sacred Texts.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *BAHÁ’Í MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE*, p. 57

Reciprocal Love and Responsibility in the Family

1. In the whole group read aloud the quotations, Reciprocal Love and Responsibility in the Family. As you read, mark the responsibilities of parents with a “P” and the responsibilities of children with a “C.”
2. Using these quotations, compile a list of responsibilities that God has given the parents and a separate list of responsibilities He has assigned to children. Record your lists on chart paper or in the space below. Then discuss the questions:
 - How do these differing responsibilities reinforce each other?
 - How does love enable both parents and children to fulfill their responsibilities?
 - How do these responsibilities assigned by the Bahá’í writings differ from society’s understanding of family responsibilities?
3. As time permits, consider adjusting your model of family unity to reflect the reciprocal, complementary, and balanced responsibilities of parents and children.

Purpose:

Know that God has given parents and children reciprocal responsibilities in the family.

Perceive that love and justice are essential elements of family unity.

Process the Activity

How does our awareness of these reciprocal and complementary responsibilities help us to fulfill our role as parents?

How can we assist our children to understand these important ideas?

RECIPROCAL LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN THE FAMILY

Focus Topics

How do these differing responsibilities reinforce each other? How does love enable both parents and children to fulfill their responsibilities?

1 It is the bounden duty of parents to rear their children to be staunch in faith, the reason being that a child who removeth himself from the religion of God will not act in such a way as to win the good pleasure of his parents and his Lord. For every praiseworthy deed is born out of the light of religion, and lacking this supreme bestowal the child will not turn away from any evil, nor will he draw nigh unto any good.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, p. 3, No. 12

2 That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the laws of God. For lacking this, the fear of God cannot be inculcated, and lacking the fear of God an infinity of odious and abominable actions will spring up, and sentiments will be uttered that transgress all bounds. . . .

The parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consideration to anyone, and will do exactly as they please.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, p. 248

3 Schools must first train the children in the principles of religion, so that the Promise and the Threat recorded in the Books of God may prevent them from the things forbidden and adorn them with the mantle of the commandments; but this in such a measure that it may not injure the children by resulting in ignorant fanaticism and bigotry.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, pp. 3-4, No. 14

4 That is, it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son, to nurse them from the breast of knowledge and to rear them in the bosom of sciences and arts. Should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ*, p. 127

5 The atmosphere within a Bahá'í family as within the community as a whole should express "the keynote of the Cause of God" which, the beloved Guardian has stated, "is not dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation."

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE*, NO. 183

6 The parents have the inescapable duty to educate their children—but not vice versa; the children have the duty to obey their parents—the parents do not obey the children;

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 28 DECEMBER 1980 LETTER,
BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE, PP. 57-58

7 The temperament of authority in the administration of justice varies according to the degree of the gravity of each case. Some cases require . . . action that is firm or drastic. Even so, . . . authority . . . must in general be expressed with love, humility and a genuine respect for others. Thus exercised, authority strikes a natural note and accords with that which is acceptable to spiritually attuned and fairminded souls.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 19 MAY 1994 LETTER

8 Independent of the level of their education, parents are in a critical position to shape the spiritual development of their children. They should not ever underestimate their capacity to mold their children's moral character. For they exercise indispensable influence through the home environment they consciously create by their love of God, their striving to adhere to His laws, their spirit of service to His Cause, their lack of fanaticism, and their freedom from the corrosive effects of backbiting. Every parent who is a believer in the Blessed Beauty has the responsibility to conduct herself or himself in such a way as to elicit the spontaneous obedience to parents to which the Teachings attach so high a value. Of course, in addition to the efforts made at home, the parents should support Bahá'í children's classes provided by the community. It must be borne in mind, too, that children live in a world that informs them of harsh realities through direct experience with the horrors already described or through the unavoidable outpourings of the mass media. Many of them are thereby forced to mature prematurely, and among these are those who look for standards and discipline by which to guide their lives. Against this gloomy backdrop of a decadent society, Bahá'í children should shine as the emblems of a better future.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, TO THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE WORLD, RIDVÁN 2000, P. 9

Parents Helping Parents

Purpose:

Discern the importance of a parent support network in problem-solving.

The question of consultation is of the utmost importance, and is one of the most potent instruments conducive to the tranquillity and felicity of the people. For example, when a believer is uncertain about his affairs, or when he seeketh to pursue a project or trade, the friends should gather together and devise a solution for him. He, in his turn, should act accordingly. Likewise in larger issues, when a problem ariseth, or a difficulty occurreth, the wise should gather, consult, and devise a solution. They should then rely upon the one true God, and surrender to His Providence, in whatever way it may be revealed, for divine confirmations will undoubtedly assist. Consultation, therefore, is one of the explicit ordinances of the Lord of mankind.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, CONSULTATION: A COMPILATION, P. 8, NO. 13

1. Invite one member of the group to share a short description of a situation they would like to change at home.
2. Let's consult about ways to resolve this dilemma.
3. Then, could an individual or small group role-play how this situation may be handled?
4. After consulting together and role-playing some possible solutions, encourage the process by sharing your appreciation to all who offer challenges and successes. Appreciation might sound like:

I learned . . .

I felt . . .

I have the same problem, so now I can try . . .

I know how hard it is to share . . .

Thank you for . . .

Closing Activity

Purpose:

Continue to set goals for one's own spiritual development.

While listening to quiet music, turn to your journals and identify a simple, practical, and achievable parenting goal to complete this week in your home. Or, consider adjusting a longer term goal in light of your ongoing experiences as a parent. What do you want to be sure to do again? What would you like to change? Based on today's study, do you see a next step in your personal development plan?

After allowing time to write, conclude your session with prayers and singing.



Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

Families with a Purpose

Fostering Family Relationships

Working Together

Planning Service as a Family

Parents Helping Parents

Closing Activity

The Honor of All

Session Six

Fostering Family Relationships

Opening Devotions

Begin your session with prayers and music.

Then, read aloud the theme quotations and learning objectives for this session.

Session Six Themes

Families with a Purpose

Endeavour to rectify the conduct of men, and seek to excel the whole world in moral character. While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. . . . Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, No. 102, p. 129

Fostering Family Relationships

All the virtues must be taught the family. . . . The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE, p. 168

Session Six Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- Study some of the Bahá'í writings that describe the noble purposes of family life.
- Become familiar with the Bahá'í writings referring to work as worship.

WISDOM

- Understand the importance of cultivating a spirit of service within the family.
- Understand that habits of service can foster spiritual growth and teach patterns of responsibility.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- Discern the importance of using family consultation to plan service as a family.
- Discern the importance of a parent support network to assist with problem-solving.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- Memorize and recite a brief passage from the Bahá'í writings about family unity.
- Practice steps for training children to undertake family tasks.
- Plan a family consultation about service.

Reflections on Session Five

Please pair with another person in your parenting group. In your team please share with each other a highlight from your experiences as a parent:

- How did your study of family roles, rights, and responsibilities influence your family interactions this week?
- Are there particular challenges that you'd like to address during the Parents Helping Parents activity this week?

Families With a Purpose

1. Individually reflect on your experiences as a member of your family, either from your own childhood or from your time as a parent. Think of a time when you felt more confident and happy than usual, when you were engaged in purposeful activity with other members of your family. When you've identified a particular experience in your memory, please turn to the person beside you and share your memories with each other: What were you doing? What were other family members doing? What was the purpose of your activity? What was it about that experience that made it stand out as a time when you could tell that you were working toward an important purpose?
2. After allowing a few minutes to listen carefully to the other person and also to share your own memory, work in your whole group to identify characteristics of these memories. Briefly describe the elements of the experience that made you select it as a happy memory of purposeful activity. List these elements on chart paper.
3. Then, turn to the quotations, Families With a Purpose. Read them aloud in the whole group and briefly discuss the focus questions.
4. Next, work again in your same two-person teams to:
 - a. Select one of the quotations that seems linked to an experience that one of you shared with the other.
 - b. Carefully read the quotation again and discuss: How does that quotation apply to your selected memory?
 - c. Please use your own bodies to create a dramatic pose or human sculpture representing an important sentence or phrase from your selected quotation, possibly based on a memory you shared with each other.
 - d. Share your pose or sculpture in the whole group along with the sentence or phrase you selected. Applaud all contributions!

Purpose:

Study some of the Bahá'í writings that describe the noble purposes of family life.

Process the activity

How does human sculpture or a dramatic pose help us to understand more deeply the noble purposes of family life?

FAMILIES WITH A PURPOSE

Focus Questions: What are some important purposes of family life? As parents, how can we assist our children to fulfill their purpose? In what ways does our challenging role as parents assist us also to fulfill our own purpose in life?

1 The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying Their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, LXXXI, pp. 156-57

2 We have, then, called into being a new creation, as a token of Our grace unto men.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, XIV, pp. 29-30

3 Ye should consider the question of goodly character as of the first importance. It is incumbent upon every father and mother to counsel their children over a long period, and guide them unto those things which lead to everlasting honour.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, No. 108, p. 134

4 Endeavour to rectify the conduct of men, and seek to excel the whole world in moral character. While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, No. 102, p. 129

5 Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well-behaved—even though he be ignorant—is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light.

Children are even as a branch that is fresh and green; they will grow up in whatever way ye train them. Take the utmost care to give them high ideals and goals, so that once they come of age, they will cast their beams like brilliant candles on the world, and will not be defiled by lusts and passions in the way of animals, heedless and unaware, but instead will set their hearts on achieving everlasting honour and acquiring all the excellences of humankind.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, No. 110, p. 135-36

1. In the whole group, read aloud and discuss the following quotation:

. . . Work, specially when performed in the spirit of service, is according to Bahá'u'lláh a form of worship. It has not only a utilitarian purpose, but has value in itself, because it draws us nearer to God, and enables us to better grasp His purpose for us in this world.

WRITTEN ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI TO THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA, MARCH 22, 1937, *LIGHTS OF GUIDANCE*, NO. 2106

Consider the questions:

- What is the relationship between service and worship? How can the cultivation of a spirit of service assist children to fulfill their purpose?
2. Then, enjoy reading the following reminiscence of Bahá'u'lláh's daughter, Bahíyyih Khánum, who shared Bahá'u'lláh's life of homelessness and exile from her early childhood.

This uncle, Mírza Músá, who came into exile with us, was a very kind helper in everything. At one time he did almost all the cooking, for which he had a talent; he would also help with the washing.

Ásíyih Khánum, my dear mother, was in delicate health, her strength was diminished by the hardships she had undergone, but she always worked beyond her force.

Sometimes my father himself helped in the cooking, as that hard work was too much for the dainty, refined, gentle lady. The hardships she had endured saddened the heart of her divine husband, who was also her beloved Lord. He gave this help both before His sojourn in the wilderness of Sulaymáníyyih, and after His return.

We led a very difficult life at this time as well as a lonely one. . . . Nobody was permitted to come to the house to help us, and the work therefore was very hard.

For hours every day I had to stand drawing water from a deep well in the house; the ropes were hard and rough, and the bucket was heavy. My dear mother used to help, but she was not very strong, and my arms were rather weak.

BAHÍYYIH KHÁNUM, QUOTED BY LADY BLOMFIELD, *THE CHOSEN HIGHWAY*, PP. 47, 51

Purpose:

Become familiar with the Bahá'í writings referring to work as worship.

Understand the importance of cultivating a spirit of service within the family.

Understand that habits of service can foster spiritual growth and teach patterns of responsibility.

Practice steps for training children to undertake household tasks.

3. Note that effort may be more important than results with young and inexperienced workers, as illustrated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's response to His granddaughter:

It was observed how He listened so attentively one day to a young granddaughter of His. . . . Though she was only about two years old, she chanted a Tablet in His presence. If a word failed her, he 'gently' chanted it. She won from Him a glorious smile for her effort.

ANNAMARIE HONNOLD, VIGNETTES FROM THE LIFE OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, p. 87, No. 75

4. Share the idea that family work builds unity, fosters the spirit of service, and promotes self-reliance. For new workers, effort is more important than results. With continued effort, skill develops.
5. In the whole group, read and discuss some **steps for training children to complete household tasks**:
 - a. Model the steps while the child observes.
 - b. Work with them, providing direct instruction.
 - c. Work near them. Do the same tasks in the same room, separate but near enough to observe and provide immediate positive or corrective feedback.
 - d. Work in the next room. Invite the child to take responsibility for the task. Stay close enough to check in from time to time and acknowledge achievement.
6. Working in small groups, take turns while one person in your small group teaches the others a simple skill, game, song, or dance.
7. As time permits, select one new skill for your group to teach the whole group. Enjoy learning from each group and applaud all efforts!

Process the Activity

How could we use this process to teach our children specific acts of service around the house?

1. In the whole group, create a list of specific tasks that any family member can do. Briefly, share your ideas and experiences about how these jobs can be organized for children of different ages and abilities.

Consider such questions as:

- What are some ways that toddlers and very young children can be involved in service? What additional tasks become achievable as children grow and mature? Why is it important to identify a variety of tasks that children can learn to do themselves?
- What is the value of defining tasks with a clear beginning and end point? Is the same level of definition always necessary?
- What is the value of a task that can be completed within a clear time frame? What is the value of tasks that can be repeated or become routine?

2. In the whole group, read aloud the following quotation:

Man must consult on all matters, whether major or minor, so that he may become cognizant of what is good. Consultation giveth him insight into things and enableth him to delve into questions which are unknown. The light of truth shineth from the faces of those who engage in consultation.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *CONSULTATION: A COMPILATION*, p. 8 No. 15

Briefly discuss the question: How can family consultation assist the family to plan household tasks?

Please note that we will return to the subject of family consultation in the next session of this Spiritual Parenting course.

3. Then, work individually or in small teams to plan your family consultation. Consider creating a “Family Service” poster with your family while you consult as a family about household tasks and other service. Identify old magazines that include pictures of families carrying out household tasks. You may choose to cut out the pictures ahead of time or simply provide the magazines your children would enjoy. Or would your children prefer to create simple line drawings of these acts of service? If your children are youth, could you draw on their artistic talents to make the poster truly beautiful—or would they prefer to simply list the tasks? If your children are very young, do you need to begin making the poster before the consultation and simply invite the children to help you finish it? Would you like to include a short quotation about service?

Purpose:

Discern the importance of using family consultation to plan service as a family.

Plan a family consultation about service.

4. In your family consultation plan to share your understanding of the importance of service as a family. Then, plan your consultation with your family to decide:
 - Who will do which jobs? How often?
 - When should the jobs be rotated to another family member?
 - What training is necessary?
 - What support and encouragement do we need?
 - What will make family work fun?
 - How can we feel the joy of service as we work?
5. Please bring your completed posters to the next session to share with the whole group. You will also have the opportunity to share highlights of your family consultations about service.

Process the activity:

How will my attitude influence both the process of family consultation and its outcome?

What are some ideas for cultivating the joy of service in ourselves and in our families?

1. Please read again the quotation about consultation on p. 95. Then briefly discuss the questions:
 - How have we noticed our consultation skills gradually improving as we use the tool of consultation each session for Parents Helping Parents?
 - Have we also noticed that we're able to offer new ideas to each other that are based on the specific topics we study each week?
2. Invite one member of the group to share a short description of a situation they would like to change at home.
3. Consult about ways to resolve this dilemma.
4. Then, could an individual or small group role-play how this situation may be handled?
5. After consulting together and role-playing some possible solutions, encourage the process by sharing your appreciation to all who offer challenges and successes. Appreciation might sound like:

I learned . . .

I felt . . .

I have the same problem, so now I can try . . .

I know how hard it is to share . . .

Thank you for . . .

Purpose:

Discern the importance of a parent support network to assist with problem-solving.

Closing Activity

The Honor of All

Purpose:

Memorize and recited a brief passage from the Bahá'í writings on family unity.

1. In your whole group, memorize the following brief quotation using a method led by your facilitators:

All the virtues must be taught the family. . . . The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all."

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

2. Then if you like, individually recite the passage for the whole group.
3. Conclude your session with a closing prayer.

Process the Activity

In what ways could this method help our children to memorize brief passages from the Bahá'í writings? How did this method assist us to memorize this short quotation?



Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

Session Seven

Nurturing a Spiritual Environment

Nurturing a Spiritual Environment

A Spiritual Environment in the Home

Creating Habits and Routines

Engaging Volition

Daily Deeds of Constructive Spiritual Living

Parents Helping Parents

Closing Activity: A Home of Joy and Delight

Opening Devotions

Begin your session with prayers, devotional readings, and music.

Then, read aloud the theme quotations and learning objectives for this session.

Session Seven Themes

Nurturing a Spiritual Environment

My home is the home of peace. My home is the home of joy and delight. My home is the home of laughter and exultation. Whosoever enters through the portals of this home, must go out with gladsome heart. This is the home of light; whosoever enters here must become illumined.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *STAR OF THE WEST*, VOL. 9, NO. 3, P. 40

Creating Habits and Routines

. . . The purpose . . . is not only to impart knowledge of the Teachings, but to infuse in the hearts of all those present such spirit as will enable them to translate the ideals of the Cause into daily deeds of constructive spiritual living. . . .

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *CENTERS OF BAHÁ'Í LEARNING*, P. 10

Session Seven Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- Read some of the Bahá'í writings referring to a spiritual home.
- Identify the characteristics of a spiritual environment.
- Read the Bahá'í writings referring to work as worship.
- Appreciate the role of volition in spiritual education.

WISDOM

- Understand the importance of nurturing spiritual qualities in the home.
- Understand how routines contribute to orderliness and harmony in the home and assist children to develop a sense of responsibility.
- Understand the value of creating joy and delight in the home.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- Discern the importance of wisdom and spiritual perception for engaging volition.
- Discern the difference between constructive and destructive ways of living with children.
- Apply spiritual principles in setting routines in the home.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- Plan ways to strengthen a spiritual environment in the home.
- Experience the role of volition in spiritual education.
- Demonstrate useful strategies for setting routines in the home.
- Plan ways to create joy and delight in the home.

Session Six Reflections

Working in teams of two, reflect on your experiences since Session Six. In your teams, share with each other your experiences with family consultation about service, as well as your efforts to work together as a family. Some possible questions to ask each other might include:

- What success did you experience? What did this success look like and sound like?
- Did anything unexpected happen?
- Were there barriers to overcome?
- What helped overcome these barriers?

Purpose:

Reflect on the last session, acknowledge efforts, and note any questions or concerns that have emerged.

After about 5 minutes of sharing in pairs, please return to the whole group and share an insight that you gained from listening to your partner's experiences.

Then, enjoy the display of any Family Service posters that members of your group may have brought to share.

Nurturing a Spiritual Environment in the Home

Purpose:

Read some of the Bahá'í writings referring to a spiritual home.

Identify characteristics of a spiritual environment.

Understand the importance of nurturing spiritual qualities in the home.

Plan ways to strengthen a spiritual environment in the home.

1. In the whole group, listen to quiet background music as your facilitators alternate reading the quotations, *A Spiritual Environment in the Home*.

While listening, use the art materials provided to express concepts presented as well as your own thoughts and feelings about a spiritual home. After listening, share your creative expression with each other in pairs or in small groups.

2. Continue listening to the background music as you individually read through the quotations a second time. This time mark the words and phrases that particularly appeal to you.
3. After re-reading and marking the quotations, individually identify one aspect of spiritual living, a spiritual quality, or a virtue—such as unity, love for beauty, trustworthiness, orderliness, respect, service, peacefulness, or love—that you feel would increase the spiritual joy in your home. How could you link that quality or virtue to your creative expression of your thoughts and feelings about a spiritual environment in the home?
4. Working again in teams of two, share the spiritual quality or virtue you selected and how it relates to your creative depiction of a spiritual home. Then work together to identify one simple line of action to nurture this quality in your home.
5. Briefly share your plans in the whole group, then take a few moments to record your plan in your journal.

Process the Activity

What is the value of using art materials to express spiritual feeling?

A SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE HOME

1 Blessed is the house that hath attained unto My tender mercy, wherein My remembrance is celebrated, and which is ennobled by the presence of My loved ones, who have proclaimed My praise, cleaved fast to the cord of My grace and been honored by chanting My verses.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *FAMILY LIFE*, P. 3

2 My home is the home of peace. My home is the home of joy and delight. My home is the home of laughter and exultation. Whosoever enters through the portals of this home, must go out with gladsome heart. This is the home of light; whosoever enters here must become illumined.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *STAR OF THE WEST*, VOL. 9, NO. 3, P. 40

3 I beseech God to graciously make of thy home a centre for the diffusion of the light of divine guidance, for the dissemination of the Words of God and for enkindling at all times the fire of love in the hearts of His faithful servants and maidservants. Know thou of a certainty that every house wherein the anthem of praise is raised to the Realm of Glory in celebration of the Name of God is indeed a heavenly home, and one of the gardens of delight in the Paradise of God.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *FAMILY LIFE* (CANADA) P. 10, (INDIA) P. 17

4 Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquility, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honor, as day succeedeth day.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 279

5 In this glorious Cause the life of a married couple should resemble the life of the angels in heaven—a life full of joy and spiritual delight, a life of unity and concord, a friendship both mental and physical. The home should be orderly and well-organized. Their ideas and thoughts should be like the rays of the sun of truth and the radiance of the brilliant stars in the heavens. Even as two birds they should warble melodies upon the branches of the tree of fellowship and harmony. They should always be elated with joy and gladness and be a source of happiness to the hearts of others. They should set an example to their fellow-men, manifest a true and sincere love towards each other and educate their children in such a manner as to blazon the fame and glory of their family.

ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *FAMILY LIFE* (INDIA) P. 28, (CANADA) PP. 15-16

Engaging Volition

Purpose:

Appreciate the importance of volition in spiritual education.

Experience the role of volition in spiritual education.

Discern the importance of wisdom and spiritual perception for engaging volition.

1. Explore the meaning of the term “volition” through a brief demonstration; then, using consultation or a dictionary, define “volition.”
2. Read aloud the quotations on the following page.

Then briefly discuss the questions:

- How many of us have ever felt that we must “make” our children do certain things? How successful have we felt?
 - How many of us have ever found ourselves “going the extra mile” to achieve a goal we’ve personally chosen? Have we ever noticed our children also making this sort of choice? When?
3. After another short demonstration by two volunteers in your parenting group, discuss the questions:
 - In the “knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception, and eloquent speech” learning model, what is the connection between developing a deep understanding of a spiritual principle (wisdom) and the cultivation of volition?
 - What connection do we see between the recognition and personal application of spiritual principles (spiritual perception) and volition?
 - What happens when a child develops his or her personal meaning of a spiritual principle in a profound way?

Process the Activity

Please share your insights into practical ways that we can engage the volition of our children.

1 Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception and eloquent speech.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, P. 3 #9

2 Unto each one hath been prescribed a preordained measure. . . . All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 149

3 The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming there is no execution or accomplishment.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *FOUNDATIONS OF WORLD UNITY*, P. 101

4 Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, NO. 79, P. 115

Creating Habits and Routines

Daily Deeds of Constructive Spiritual Living

Purpose:

Become familiar with Bahá'í writings referring to work as worship.

Understand how habits and routines can contribute to orderliness and harmony in the home and assist children to develop a sense of responsibility.

Discern the difference between constructive and destructive ways of living with children.

Apply spiritual principles in setting routines in the home.

1. In the whole group, use slips of paper to briefly describe any challenges you have with daily routines, such as getting ready for school in the morning, getting ready for bed, managing homework, etc. Place all problem descriptions in a basket.
2. Then, work in small teams to:
 - Select a problem from the basket.
 - Take a few minutes to discuss the problem and develop a very brief improvisation or role-play to demonstrate how the problem might look and sound.
 - Share your improvisation with the whole group.
3. After all groups have shared their improvisations, discuss the questions:
 - To what degree do these problems reflect such negative processes as lack of routine, lack of taking responsibility, lack of courtesy, use of criticism or nagging, giving in to demands, offering excessive praise or rewards, or even verbal or physical hostility?
 - What were the thoughts, feelings, and decisions of the “parents” in these problem scenes?
 - What were the thoughts, feelings, and decisions of the “children” in these problem scenes?

4. Then carefully read aloud the following quotations:

The man who makes a piece of notepaper to the best of his ability, conscientiously, concentrating all his forces on perfecting it, is giving praise to God. Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, PARIS TALKS, PP. 176-77

. . . The purpose . . . is not only to impart knowledge of the Teachings, but to infuse in the hearts of all those present such spirit as will enable them to translate the ideals of the Cause into daily deeds of constructive spiritual living. . . .

SHOGHI EFFENDI, CENTERS OF BAHÁ'Í LEARNING, P. 10

5. Brainstorm a possible meaning of the term “constructive spiritual living.” Then, discuss the questions:
 - What are some ways that we could apply the tools we’ve learned so far in this course to help solve these problems?
 - How could a routine (vs. “when we feel like it”) assist children to take responsibility for their actions?
6. Return to your small teams, discuss the problem in light of the term “constructive spiritual living.” Identify some constructive ways to establish a more spiritual habit or routine. Then develop a second improvisation or role-play to demonstrate “constructive spiritual living” in this circumstance.
7. Share your improvisations in the whole group. Applaud all contributions, then identify how the role play demonstrated routines and other constructive ways of living with children. Please also identify the new thoughts, feelings, and decisions of the “parents” and the “children” in these improvisations.

Process the Activity

Please turn to your journals and record your own reflections on the positive value of habits and routines, including your reflections on setting or enhancing your own family routines.

Parents Helping Parents

In your parenting group, decide if the activity just completed during this session adequately addressed the hopes, questions, and concerns that you intended to raise today.

If desired, please follow the instructions for last session's Parents Helping Parents, p. 97.

If desired, please add any additional reflections to your journals and then proceed to the Closing Activity on the next page.

A Home of Joy and Delight

1. Using either recorded music or the assistance of a musical friend, sing as a group the following passage over and over again until all have memorized it.

My home is the home of peace. My home is the home of joy and delight. My home is the home of laughter and exaltation. Whosoever enters through the portals of this house, must go out with gladsome heart. This is the home of light; whosoever enters here must become illumined.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *STAR OF THE WEST*, VOL. 17, NO. 7, P. 232

2. Then, individually recall a happy memory when you were with your family (or friends so close they felt like family).
 - Who was involved?
 - What exactly were you doing?
 - How could you tell that everyone was happy?
3. When you have your memory in mind, turn to the person beside you and share your memory.
4. Allow two minutes for each person to share while the other person listens attentively. Take turns, so that each person has the opportunity to listen attentively and to share during a five minute period.
5. Next, work in the whole group to brainstorm a list of possible activities that bring joy and delight, laughter and exultation to the family. Record your list on chart paper.
6. Individually identify one fun activity (however brief) that you can commit to doing with your family this week. Remember to consider the different stages of maturity—choosing appropriate fun for the 2-year old, the 10-year old, and the 15-year old.
7. Using the note paper provided, create an invitation to your family (using words, pictures, and possibly the quotation above) for the joyful activity that will assist in creating your spiritual environment.
8. Conclude your session with prayers and once again singing together.

Purpose:

Discern the importance of creating joy.

Plan a family fun activity.

Prepare an invitation to families for a fun activity.



Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

The Purpose and Process of Character Training

“I Wish to Train You”

An Exploration of the Writings

The Necessity for Character Training

Laws of Nature, Family Rules, and Obedience to Divine Law

Setting Family Rules and Consequences

Parents Helping Parents

Session Eight

Character Training

Opening Devotions

Begin your Spiritual Parenting session with prayers and music.
Then, read aloud the theme quotations and learning objectives.

Session Eight Themes

Process of Character Training

Have for them an abundant love and exert thine utmost in training them, so that their being may grow through the milk of the love of God, for as much as it is the duty of parents to perfectly and thoroughly train their children.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *TABLETS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ ABBAS*, VOL. 2, P. 262

Necessity of Character Training

O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS*, No. 3

Session Eight Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- Identify the steps in a training process.
- Read the Bahá'í writings on character training.

WISDOM

- Identify the purpose of family rules.
- Find examples of laws of nature and the need to understand them.
- Reflect on the appropriate consequences for breaking rules.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- Discern the spiritual qualities that need to be cultivated by parents to promote success in character training.
- Discern the value of limiting the number of rules.
- Discern the importance of a parent support network in problem-solving.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- Design a character training process.
- Set goals for the training of one's children.

In the whole group, please share a brief description of your fun activity as a family or a highlight of your efforts to establish or refine a spiritual habit or routine. Please also make note of issues to address during Parents Helping Parents.

“I Wish to Train You”

1. Enjoy reading aloud the following story in the whole group:

I wish to train you until you have no other thought, no other motive, no other wish than service in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. The Divine Educators who have brought the Light of Guidance to this world found neither rest nor comfort by day or night.

It was so likewise with their disciples and followers. All of them walked in the pathway of God and drank the cup of martyrdom with thanksgiving. They sought no rest but service and hastened to the Supreme Concourse in the utmost joy and ecstasy.

Through my training you must become so fitted to spread the Glad-Tidings of the Abhá Kingdom that you will follow in the footsteps of these blessed ones in gladness. In Persia, there is a wonderful breed of horses which are trained to run long distances at very great speed. They are most carefully trained at first. They are taken out into the fields and made to run a short course. At the commencement of their training, they are not able to run far. The distance is gradually increased. They become thinner and thinner, wiry and lean, but their strength increases. Finally, after months of rigid training, their swiftness and endurance become wonderful. They are able to run at full speed across rough country many parsangs of distance. At first this would have been impossible. Not until they become trained, thin and wiry, can they endure this severe test.

In this way, I shall train you, “kam-kam, kam-kam” (little by little, little by little) until your powers of endurance become so increased that you will serve the Cause of God continually, without other motive, without other thought or wish. This is my desire.

. . . For by exercise the spirit grows stronger, more capable of withstanding, just as the muscle of the outer body increases its fiber through continual action.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *STAR OF THE WEST*, VOL. IV, NO. 6, PP. 104-5

2. Discuss the question: How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá describe the training process? Record the steps on chart paper.

Purpose:

Identify the steps in a training process.

The Purpose and Process of Character Training

An Exploration of the Writings

Purpose:

Read the Bahá'í writings on character training.

Design a character training process.

Set goals for the character training of one's children.

Discern the spiritual qualities that need to be cultivated by parents to promote success in character training.

1. Working in small groups, read the quotations, *The Purpose and Process of Character Training*, and record your insights into the purpose and process of character training. Please also note the spiritual qualities that need to be developed in parents as part of this process.
2. Then, create a poster, using the art materials provided, to illustrate key points in the training process as discerned from the writings. Consider focusing your poster on one quotation.
3. Next, share your group's poster in the whole group or set up an "art gallery" featuring the work.
4. After enjoying the posters, return to your same small group to design a training process to prepare the family for one of the following situations:
 - Visiting a house of worship in your town or in another city.
 - Going out to dinner in a restaurant.
 - Participating in a devotional meeting or Nineteen Day Feast.
 - A visit to the home of elderly relatives or a sick neighbor.
5. Share your designs with the whole group. Applaud all contributions!

Process the Activity

Turn to your journals and record your reflections on the following questions:

- In what area would I like to provide training for my children?
- Seeing "the end in the beginning," what will success in this process look like?
- What qualities do I need to cultivate in myself to promote success in this endeavor?

THE PURPOSE AND PROCESS OF CHARACTER TRAINING

1 . . . First train the children in the principles of religion, so that the Promise and the Threat recorded in the Books of God may prevent them from the things forbidden and adorn them with the mantle of the commandments; but this in such a measure that it may not injure the children by resulting in ignorant fanaticism and bigotry.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 68

2 Have for them an abundant love and exert thine utmost in training them, so that their being may grow through the milk of the love of God, for as much as it is the duty of parents to perfectly and thoroughly train their children.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *TABLETS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ ABBAS*, VOL. 2, p. 262

3 These children must be given a good training from their earliest childhood. They must be given a systematic training which will further their development from day to day, in order that they may receive greater insight, so that their spiritual receptivity be broadened.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, IN *THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD*, VOL. IX, p. 534

4 The child must not be oppressed or censured because it is undeveloped; it must be patiently trained.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, pp. 180-81

5 So long as the mother faileth to train her children, and start them on a proper way of life, the training which they receive later on will not take its full effect. It is incumbent upon the Spiritual Assemblies to provide the mothers with a well-planned programme for the education of children, showing how, from infancy, the child must be watched over and taught. These instructions must be given to every mother to serve her as a guide, so that each will train and nurture her children in accordance with the Teachings.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 138

6 Therefore must the individual be trained from his infancy in such a way that he will never undertake to commit a crime, will, rather, direct all his energies to the acquisition of excellence, and will look upon the very commission of an evil deed as in itself the harshest of all punishments, considering the sinful act to be far more grievous than any prison sentence. For it is possible so to train the individual that, although crime may not be completely done away with, still it will become very rare.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION* No. 42

7 Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible

to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, pp. 124-125

8 . . . Bahá'í education, just like any other system of education is based on the assumption that there are certain natural deficiencies in every child, no matter how gifted which his educators, whether his parents, school masters, or his spiritual guides and preceptors should endeavour to remedy. Discipline of some sort, whether physical, moral or intellectual, is indeed indispensable, and no training can be said to be complete and fruitful if it disregards this element. The child when born is far from being perfect. It is not only helpless, but actually is imperfect, and even is naturally inclined towards evil. He should be trained, his natural inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary suppressed or regulated, so as to insure his healthy physical and moral development. Bahá'í parents cannot simply adopt an attitude of nonresistance towards their children, particularly those who are unruly and violent by nature. It is not even sufficient that they should pray on their behalf. Rather they should endeavor to inculcate, gently and patiently, into their youthful minds such principles of moral conduct and initiate them into the principles and teachings of the Cause with such tactful and loving care as would enable them to become 'true sons of God' and develop into loyal and intelligent citizens of His Kingdom.

WRITTEN ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, JULY 9, 1939, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, p. 56, No. 140

9 Refrain from severe punishment, but to some extent punishment is required, though not necessarily bodily punishment. Severe punishment paralyses the faculty of the child. Discipline, though is necessary. Society cannot function without the principles of punishment and reward given by Bahá'u'lláh in His Tablets. Discipline always implies punishment and reward. Encouragement is not sufficient. Encouragement without punishment spoils the child, and punishment without encouragement kills initiative. Keep the balance between the two.

WORDS OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, AS RECALLED BY AGNES ALEXANDER IN HER PILGRIM'S NOTES, AVAILABLE ONLINE AT [HTTP://BAHAI-LIBRARY.COM/PILGRIMS/ALEXANDER.HTML](http://bahai-library.com/pilgrims/alexander.html). ALSO PRINTED IN *GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS* BY MARGARET RUHE, p. 23

10 You should also be fearful of laying down too many rules and regulations. . . . When you feel that certain actions may become trends with harmful consequences, you may, instead of making a new rule . . . [choose to work on] educating the friends in a manner that will improve their understanding and their conduct.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 19 MAY 1994 LETTER

11 . . . A large margin for mistakes must also be allowed. . . . [You] must not react automatically to every mistake, but distinguish between those that are self-correcting with the passage of time and do no particular harm . . . and those which require . . . intervention.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 19 MAY 1994 LETTER

The Necessity for Character Training

Laws of Nature, Family Rules, and Obedience to Divine Law

1. Participate in an activity introduced by your facilitator, then reflect a moment: What is an example of a law of nature?
2. Share your reflections, then briefly discuss:
 - What is the benefit of understanding laws of nature?
 - What are the consequences of not understanding these laws?
3. Next, read aloud the following quotations:

O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDÁS*, NO. 3

Were men to strictly observe that which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed in the Crimson Book, they could then well afford to dispense with the regulations which prevail in the world.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 90

Briefly discuss the question:

- What do these writings tell us are the benefits of obeying divine law?

Purpose:

Identify the purpose of family rules.

Find examples of laws of nature and the need to understand them.

Perceive the bounties and benefits of obeying Divine Law.

Setting Family Rules and Consequences

Purpose:

Recognize appropriate consequences for breaking rules.

Discern the value of limiting the number of rules.

1. In the whole group, continue your discussion with the following questions:
 - What are some rules that you have found helpful in your family, and why are they helpful?
 - Why is it useful to not have too many rules in the family?
 - What are some appropriate consequences for breaking family rules?
 - What are some occasions when we can appropriately let our children experience the natural outcomes of their choices?
 - What are some occasions in which we might choose to provide a reasonable and meaningful consequence to help our children learn?
 - Are there occasions when we could let our children choose their own consequences?
 - What are some circumstances in which we might choose to observe silence rather than comment on a child's mistake?

Process the Activity

How does understanding divine law, natural law, and family rules assist me as a parent?

How could I share this understanding with my children?

The purpose of consultation is to show that the view of several individuals are assuredly preferable to one man, even as the power of a number of men is of course greater than the power of one man. Thus consultation is acceptable in the presence of the Almighty, and hath been enjoined upon the believers, so that they may confer upon ordinary and personal matters, as well as on affairs which are general in nature and universal.

'ABDU'L-BAHA, CONSULTATION: A COMPILATION, P. 8, NO. 17

Purpose:

Discern the importance of a parent support network to assist with problem-solving.

1. Briefly discuss the question:
 - How do our consultations with each other demonstrate that the views of several individuals can be preferable to the understanding of any one of us?
2. Invite one member of the group to share a short description of a situation they would like to change at home.
3. Consult about ways to resolve this dilemma.
4. Then, could an individual or small group role-play how this situation may be handled?
5. After consulting together and role-playing some possible solutions, encourage the process by sharing your appreciation to all who offer challenges and successes. Appreciation might sound like:

I learned . . .

I felt . . .

I have the same problem, so now I can try . . .

I know how hard it is to share . . .

Thank you for . . .

Closing Activity

Please turn to your journals and record your reflections on this session of the Spiritual Parenting course:

- What progress do you see toward your long-term goals as parents? What adjustments or enhancements do you feel you should make in your own spiritual development plan?
- What specific line of action would you like to undertake this week?

Conclude your session with prayers and singing.



Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

Session Nine

Loving Discipline

Loving and Effective Discipline

The Power of Utterance

Parents Helping Parents

Opening Devotions

Open with prayers and devotional readings, including sung or recorded music.

Then, read aloud the themes and objectives for this session.

Session Nine Themes

Loving and Effective Discipline

That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, PP. 128-129

The Power of Utterance

. . . An enlightened man of wisdom should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may be nurtured and edified thereby and may attain the ultimate goal of human existence which is the station of true understanding and nobility.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 173

Session Nine Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- Read the Bahá'í writings regarding the purpose and practice of discipline.
- Identify characteristics of a slight verbal chastisement.

WISDOM

- Recognize the power of utterance to guide and train children.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- Discern the need for an appropriate balance of encouragement, reward, and punishment in a loving family.
- Discern the importance of a parent support network for problem-solving.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- Practice using the language of effective discipline.

Session Eight Reflections

Please briefly discuss the questions:

- What have been the results of your efforts to encourage, guide, and train your children this week?
- What has brought you joy?
- What have you noticed about the power of divine assistance in your life this week?
- Are there issues that we'll want to address in Parents Helping Parents?

Loving and Effective Discipline

1. In your group, discuss the question, "What image comes to mind when you hear the word 'discipline'?"
2. Record your responses on chart paper. Note that the concept of discipline is richly described in the Bahá'í writings. Discipline can include education, training, consultation, establishing routines, reward, punishment and more.
3. Read aloud the quotations from Bahá'u'lláh and the passage from the Universal House of Justice on the topic of Effective Discipline in the whole group.
4. Consult together about the meaning of these passages and their implications for our role as parents. Each of us has probably used or observed ineffective discipline. With our experiences in mind, please discuss the following questions:
 - What are some ways children respond to ineffective discipline?
 - How does this differ from effective discipline?
5. Then, enjoy reading aloud the following story of an early American Bahá'í who visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land early in the twentieth century.

Purpose:

Read the Bahá'í writings regarding the purpose and practice of discipline.

Discern the need for an appropriate balance of encouragement, reward, and punishment in a loving family.

One day when Lua Getsinger was in 'Akká to see the Master, He said to her, that He was too busy today to call upon a friend of His who was very ill and poor and He wished her to go in His place. Take him food and care for him as I have been doing, He concluded. He told her where this man was to be found and she went gladly, proud that 'Abdu'l-Bahá should trust her with this mission.

She returned quickly. "Master," she exclaimed, "surely you cannot realize to what a terrible place you sent me. I almost fainted from the awful stench, the filthy rooms, the degrading condition of that man and his house. I fled lest I contract some terrible disease."

Sadly and sternly 'Abdu'l-Bahá regarded her. "Dost thou desire to serve God," He said, "serve thy fellow man for in him dost thou see the image and likeness of God." He told her to go back to this man's house. If it is filthy she should clean it; if this brother of yours is dirty, bathe him; if he is hungry, feed him. Do not return until this is done. Many times had He done this for him and cannot she serve him once?

ANNAMARIE HONNOLD, *VIGNETTES FROM THE LIFE OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, PP. 92-93

6. Please discuss the question: How did 'Abdu'l-Bahá show love and encouragement while providing effective guidance?

Process the Activity

Either in pairs or in the whole group, briefly discuss the question: How can we maintain a loving environment while providing children with necessary guidance?

1 Man is even as steel, the essence of which is hidden: through admonition and explanation, good counsel and education, that essence will be brought to light. If, however, he be allowed to remain in his original condition, the corrosion of lusts and appetites will effectively destroy him.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, No.10, p. 3

2 That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, pp. 128-129

3 Ye have been forbidden in the Book of God to engage in contention and conflict, to strike another, or to commit similar acts whereby hearts and souls may be saddened.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS*, pp. 72-73

4 The use of force by the physically strong against the weak, as a means of imposing one's will and fulfilling one's desires, is a flagrant transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. There can be no justification for anyone compelling another, through the use of force or through the threat of violence, to do that which the other person is not inclined. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written:

O ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned.

Let those who, driven by their passions or by their inability to exercise discipline in the control of their anger, might be tempted to inflict violence on another human being, be mindful of their obligation to exemplify a new way of life distinguished by its respect for the dignity and rights of all people, by its exalted moral tone, and by its freedom from oppression and from all forms of abuse. . . .

You have raised several questions about the treatment of children. It is clear from the Bahá'í Writings that a vital component of the education of children is the exercise of discipline. Shoghi Effendi has stated, in a letter written on his behalf about the education of children, that:

Discipline of some sort, whether physical, moral or intellectual, is indeed indispensable, and no training can be said to be complete and fruitful if it disregards this element. The child when born is far from perfect. It is not only helpless, but actually is imperfect, and even is naturally inclined toward evil. He should be trained, his natural inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary, suppressed or regulated, so as to ensure his healthy physical and

moral development. Bahá'í parents cannot simply adopt an attitude of nonresistance towards their children, particularly those who are unruly and violent by nature. It is not even sufficient that they should pray on their behalf. Rather they should endeavor to inculcate, gently and patiently, into their youthful minds such principles of moral conduct and initiate them into the principles and teachings of the Cause with such tactful and loving care as would enable them to become 'true sons of God' and develop into loyal and intelligent citizens of His Kingdom.

While the physical disciplining of children is an acceptable part of their education and training, such actions are to be carried out 'gently and patiently' and with 'loving care', far removed from the anger and violence with which children are beaten and abused in some parts of the world. To treat children in such an abhorrent manner is a denial of their human rights, and a betrayal of the trust which the weak should have in the strong in a Bahá'í community. . . .

Bahá'u'lláh has placed great emphasis on the duties of parents toward their children, and He has urged children to have gratitude in their hearts for their parents, whose good pleasure they should strive to win as a means of pleasing God Himself. However, He has indicated that under certain circumstances, the parents could be deprived of the right of parenthood as a consequence of their actions. The Universal House of Justice has the right to legislate on this matter. . . .

However, it should be recognized that the ultimate solution to the problems of humanity lies not in penalties and punishments, but rather in spiritual education and illumination. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written:

It is incumbent upon human society to expend all its forces on the education of the people, and to copiously water men's hearts with the sacred streams that pour down from the Realm of the All-Merciful, and to teach them the manner of Heaven and spiritual ways of life, until every member of the community of man will be schooled, refined, and exalted to such a degree of perfection that the very committing of a shameful act will seem in itself the direst infliction and most agonizing of punishments, and man will fly in terror and seek refuge in his God from the very idea of crime, as something far harsher and more grievous than the punishment assigned to it.

It is toward this goal that the community of the Greatest Name is striving, aided and reinforced by the limitless power of the Holy spirit.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 24 JANUARY 1993 LETTER

The Power of Utterance

1. Working in small groups, read aloud the quotations, *The Power of Utterance*, and then consult on the focus question.
2. Then in the whole group, please each share one key word or phrase from the passages studied.
3. Enjoy the following story about 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

I would like to tell you the story of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. . . . On Fridays, 'Abdu'l-Bahá expected the children to stand in a row at about 11:00 in the morning. He would come down from his room, he would see their penmanship and their weekly work of their lessons and everything. And each child had prepared things for 'Abdu'l-Bahá. One of them said to me: "One week I was truant. I didn't do anything and on the night before Friday, I was tired and slept. In the morning I took the very same thing I had taken the week before. . . . The moment He started to come downstairs, He looked at me and I bent down my head. He took my papers. He didn't say anything. He said greetings to everyone. Everyone was served tea in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. I was very happy 'Abdu'l-Bahá could not understand. He didn't say anything to me in front of them. Then, when He wanted to go out of the room, He called me. He said, 'I don't think you made much progress in your writing this week.'"

He was beautiful. He really created something in the boy. He showed him that He is not deceived but He overlooked. He never said anything in front of other children but just remarked what the child doesn't know. Of course, He said, the travail, the work of each person must be appreciated, but . . . we must be very careful not to create any competition amongst the children, or God forbid, favoritism, or something like that.

TRANSCRIPT OF TALK ON CHILD EDUCATION BY A. Q. FAIZI

4. Recall a time that you were guided by the speech of another. What are the characteristics that made that utterance powerful for you?
5. Share the highlights of that experience with a person next to you, allowing 2 minutes for each person to share while the other listens.
6. Reconvene the group and discuss the question: What are the characteristics of a 'slight verbal chastisement' that leaves us feeling encouraged? Record your comments on chart paper.
7. Then work in teams of two to write an example of a slight verbal chastisement for situations that may arise in your families. After allowing time to work, share your examples in the group.

Purpose:

Recognize the power of utterance to guide and train children.

Identify characteristics of a slight verbal chastisement.

Practice using the language of effective discipline.

Process the Activity

Please turn to your journals and record your reflections, using images or words, in response to the question, "How can we create a climate of discipline *and* encouragement in our homes?"

THE POWER OF UTTERANCE

Focus Topic

How can we use the power of utterance to guide our children?

1 Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the impression which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible. The Great Being saith: One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world. Therefore an enlightened man of wisdom should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may be nurtured and edified thereby and may attain the ultimate goal of human existence which is the station of true understanding and nobility. And likewise He saith: One word is like unto springtime causing the tender saplings of the rose-garden of knowledge to become verdant and flourishing, while another word is even as a deadly poison. It behoveth a prudent man of wisdom to speak with utmost leniency and forbearance so that the sweetness of his words may induce everyone to attain that which befitteth man's station.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, PP. 172-73

2 Even as it hath been said: "Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it."

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 176

3 Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.

ʿABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ʿABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 125

4 . . . If you wish to give admonition or advice, let it be offered in such a way that it will not burden the bearer.

ʿABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, P. 453

5 Rather they should endeavour to inculcate, gently and patiently, into their youthful minds such principles of moral conduct and initiate them into the principles and teachings of the Cause with such tactful and loving care as would enable them to become "true sons of God" and develop into loyal and intelligent citizens of His Kingdom. This is the high purpose which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has clearly defined as the chief goal of every education.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, P. 303

Settle all things, both great and small, by consultation. Without prior consultation, take no important step in your own personal affairs. Concern yourselves with one another. Help along one another's projects and plans. Grieve over one another. Let none in the whole country go in need. Befriend one another until ye become as a single body, one and all. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *CONSULTATION: A COMPILATION*, p. 22, No. 7

Purpose:

Discern the importance of a parent support network in problem-solving.

1. Invite one member of the group to share a short description of a situation they would like to change at home.
2. Consult about ways to resolve this dilemma.
3. Then, could an individual or small group role-play how this situation may be handled?
4. After consulting together and role-playing some possible solutions, encourage the process by sharing your appreciation to all who offer challenges and successes. Appreciation might sound like:
I learned . . .
I felt . . .
I have the same problem, so now I can try . . .
I know how hard it is to share . . .
Thank you for . . .
5. In your Spiritual Parenting group, please begin a list of unresolved issues or challenges you'd like to address in a special session in Course Two dedicated to the challenges of parenting.

Closing Activity

Listen to beautiful soft music while dedicating at least five minutes to complete your reflections on this session and to identify at least one specific goal for the coming week.

Conclude your session with prayers and singing.



Spiritual Parenting

COURSE ONE

Session Ten

Family Consultation

Consultation

The Power of Listening

The Transformation Process

Opening Devotions

Begin your session with prayers, inspirational readings, and music.
Then, read aloud the themes and learning objectives for this session.

Session Ten Themes

Consultation

Bahá'u'lláh also stressed the importance of consultation. We should not think this worthwhile method of seeking solutions is confined to the administrative institutions of the Cause. Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 1 AUGUST 1978 LETTER, *FAMILY LIFE*
(INDIA) P. 60, (CANADA) P. 32

Listening

The members . . . must learn to express their views frankly, calmly, without passion or rancour. They must also learn to listen to the opinions of their fellow members without taking offence or belittling the views of another.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, LETTER DATED AUGUST 26, 1965, TO A NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY, *DEVELOPING DISTINCTIVE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES*, P. 129

The Transformation Process

. . . The individual draws upon his love for Bahá'u'lláh, the power of the Covenant, the dynamics of prayer, the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts, and the transformative forces that operate upon his soul as he strives to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, RIDVÁN 153, 1996

KNOWLEDGE

- Study the Bahá'í writings on consultation.

WISDOM

- Discover the many benefits of practicing consultation in the family.
- Understand the organic nature of the spiritual transformation process.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- Discern the value of listening in character education and family life.
- Discern the importance of consultation as a means of problem-solving and decision-making in the family.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- Practice the skills of consultation.
- Determine the next steps in one's own spiritual transformation process as a parent.

Session Nine Reflections

In the whole group, please share one brief experience from the past week that illustrates your efforts to use the power of utterance with your children, or another effective discipline strategy that you have used. Please carefully listen to each other as you share your experiences.

Consultation

Purpose:

Further study the Bahá'í writings on consultation.

Discover the range of benefits of practicing consultation.

Discern the importance of consultation as the means of problem-solving and decision-making in the family.

Practice the skills of consultation.

1. Working in small groups, read aloud the quotations on Consultation and answer the focus questions:
 - How is Bahá'í consultation similar to and different from brainstorming or group problem solving?
 - What effect do spiritual principles have on the discovery and implementation of practical measures?
 - What are the conditions required for effective consultation and how can these be established in the family?
 - What are the outcomes of consultation?
2. Please share your group's answer to one of these questions in the whole group.
3. After sharing, reconvene in your small groups to prepare a visual representation or poster showing either:
 - a. the importance of consultation to family life—its benefits to individual members as well as to the family as a whole, or
 - b. the conditions for effective family consultation.

If desired, you may choose also to include representations of the roles, rights, and responsibilities of parents and children in your poster.
4. Then, please share your group's presentation in the whole group. Enjoy all presentations, then discuss:
 - In what ways does consultation alter the dynamics of decision-making in the family?
 - How does our time working in small groups in this Spiritual Parenting course provide opportunities to practice the skills of consultation?

Focus Topics: How is Bahá'í consultation similar to and different from brainstorming or group problem solving?

What effect do spiritual principles have on the discovery and implementation of practical measures?

What are the conditions required for effective consultation and how can these be established in the family?

What are the outcomes of consultation?

1 Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmutes conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *CONSULTATION: A COMPILATION*, #3

2 Settle all things, both great and small, by consultation. Without prior consultation, take no important step in your own personal affairs. Concern yourselves with one another. Help along one another's projects and plans. Grieve over one another. Let none in the whole country go in need. Befriend one another until ye become as a single body, one and all. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *CONSULTATION: A COMPILATION*, P. 9 #20

3 . . . The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden. Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be non-existent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that assembly be brought to naught. The second condition: They must when coming together turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honored members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth, and should differences of opinion arise a majority of voices must prevail, and all must obey and submit to the majority. It is again not permitted that any one of the honored members object to or censure, whether in or out of the meeting, any decision arrived at previously though that decision be not right, for such criticism would prevent any decision from being enforced. In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness. . . . If this be so regarded, that assembly shall

be of God, but otherwise it shall lead to coolness and alienation that proceed from the Evil One. . . . Should they endeavor to fulfill these conditions the Grace of the Holy spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and the assembly shall become the center of the Divine blessings, the hosts of divine confirmation shall come to their aid, and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION*, PP. 22-23

4 There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is imminent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *THE PROMISE OF WORLD PEACE*, SECTION 2

5 Bahá'u'lláh also stressed the importance of consultation. We should not think this worthwhile method of seeking solutions is confined to the administrative institutions of the Cause. Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 1 AUGUST 1978 LETTER, *FAMILY LIFE* (INDIA) P. 60, (CANADA) P. 32

6 It should be borne in mind that all consultation is aimed at arriving at a solution to a problem and is quite different from the sort of group baring of the soul that is popular in some circles these days and which borders on the kind of confession that is forbidden in the faith. On the subject of confession the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf to an individual believer: "We are forbidden to confess to any person, as do the Catholics to their priests, our sins and shortcomings, or to do so in public, as some religious sects do. However, if we spontaneously desire to acknowledge we have been wrong in something, or that we have some fault of character, and ask another person's forgiveness or pardon, we are quite free to do so. The Guardian wants to point out, however, that we are not obliged to do so. It rests entirely with the individual."

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 19 MARCH 1973, *CONSULTATION: A COMPILATION*, P. 22 #47

1. Enjoy reading aloud the following illustrations of the power of listening.

Consider the way in which the Master teaches the people. He listens very carefully to the most hollow and senseless talk. He listens so intently that the speaker says to himself, "He is trying to learn from me." Then the Master gradually and very carefully, by means that the other person does not perceive, puts him on the right path and endows him with a fresh power of understanding.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, QUOTED IN *STORIES FROM THE DELIGHT OF HEARTS*, P. 110

Purpose:

Discern the value of listening in character education and family life.

A Personal Reflection

That was just it! 'Abdu'l-Bahá seemed to listen with my ears. . . . And when, under His encouraging sympathy, the interviewer became emptied of his words, there followed a brief interval of silence. There was no instant and complete outpouring of explanation and advice. He sometimes closed His eyes a moment as if He sought guidance from above Himself; sometimes He sat and searched the questioner's soul with a loving, comprehending smile that melted the heart.

HOWARD COLBY IVES, *PORTALS TO FREEDOM*, PP. 194-5

2. Working in teams of two, share one of your happy experiences as a parent that you feel has been enhanced by your study and practice of the spiritual principles and practical skills of parenting through this course. Taking turns, listen to the other person for 2 uninterrupted minutes—listening as you feel 'Abdu'l-Bahá might listen.
3. Then in the whole group or in your teams discuss the questions:
 - Why is listening such an important tool in the education of our children?
 - How can we use the power of listening with our children?
 - How does careful and caring listening contribute to the process of consultation?

Process the Activity

Please listen to quiet music as you turn to your journals and record your reflections on the bounties provided to your children and to the family as a whole through more effective listening and consultation.

Please also record your ideas for more systematic use of the power of listening and consultation in your family.

Parents Helping Parents

Purpose:

Discern the importance of a parent support network in problem-solving.

1. Read again all or part of one of your favorite quotations about consultation on pages 135-36. Then, invite one member of the group to share a short description of a situation they would like to change at home.
2. Consult about ways to resolve this dilemma.
3. Then, could an individual or small group role-play how this situation may be handled?
4. After consulting together and role-playing some possible solutions, encourage the process by sharing your appreciation to all who offer challenges and successes. Appreciation might sound like:
I learned . . .
I felt . . .
I have the same problem, so now I can try . . .
I know how hard it is to share . . .
Thank you for . . .

Concluding Activity

The Transformation Process

1. Enjoy reading the following quotation and story about the process of spiritual transformation:

These journeys have no visible ending in the world of time, but the severed wayfarer . . . may cross these seven stages in seven steps, nay rather in seven breaths, nay rather in a single breath, if God will and desire it.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *SEVEN VALLEYS*, P. 40

Purpose:

Understand the organic nature of the spiritual transformation process.

Hand of the Cause William Sears and Robert Quigley recount this story about Lua Getsinger on her pilgrimage in 1898:

It was on one of her many visits to 'Abdu'l-Bahá that her impatience for spiritual growth caused her to exclaim, "Oh, My beloved Master, I want to be perfected! I want to be perfected quickly!"

'Abdu'l-Bahá looked at her with a loving smile and gently shook His head.

Lua repeated her request more urgently. "Quickly! I want to be perfected quickly so that I may truly serve Thee."

'Abdu'l-Bahá warned her that she could not stand the process of being "perfected quickly."

"Oh yes, I can," she cried, "if it will make me a better servant to Thee."

'Abdu'l-Bahá was firm. The creation of Almighty God is perfect, but the perfections appear gradually. The seed comes to fruition through growth of the tree.

THE FLAME, P. 50

2. Then discuss the questions:
 - At what speed can transformation take place?
 - At what speed does it usually take place?
 - What points do these passages suggest about the difference between a quick, superficial change and organic, lasting transformation?
3. As a group discuss: When would we like to schedule Course Two in the Core Curriculum Spiritual Parenting program? Would we like to take a break before resuming our study together? Would we like to plan a picnic, trip to a playground, potluck dinner or other outing with our families to celebrate our completion of Course One?

Evaluations and Closing Devotions

Please complete the Course Evaluation form on p. 141 and give it to your facilitators who will return it to the National Children's Education and Research Center to contribute to the ongoing development of this program.

Conclude your Spiritual Parenting Course One with devotions and music.

Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education

held on

in

Spiritual Parenting, Course One

facilitated by

Evaluation

sponsored by

This opportunity to study, consult, and strive with you to increase our capabilities as parents has truly been a pleasure. Please candidly share your feelings and reactions. This information will be *invaluable* to the National Bahá'í Education Task Force in planning future workshops.

Excellent Good Fair Poor

The presenters were organized and clear in their presentation.

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The purpose of the training and the individual sessions was made clear.

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The materials and learning activities supported the goals of the Spiritual Parenting program.

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Adequate time was provided for reflection upon and recording of your observations.

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The training demonstrated the use of different teaching methods, teaching tools, and modalities of learning.

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Sacred Writings were sufficiently utilized to elevate the spirit of the participants and lay the foundation for the work before them?

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You felt supported in your role as a parent and free to raise questions and concerns about your role as a parent throughout the course.

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Please take time to expand on any of the items listed above, particularly if any are rated fair or poor so that we might improve the quality of the learning experience.

What was most helpful to you?

What was least helpful to you?

What would you recommend for future Spiritual Parenting workshops?