



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1982 Volume VI: The Changing American Family: Historical and Comparative Perspectives

A Guide for Teaching Awareness, Attitudes and Feelings

Curriculum Unit 82.06.06
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Rationale

Anyone who reads the newspapers today is aware that crimes of violence, suicide, alcoholism, and divorce are increasing each year. According to the Hammond Almanac for 1980, over 28,000 Americans committed suicide in 1977. Nationally, suicides among youths (10-24 years) have tripled over the last two decades. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people today. It is also estimated that a quarter of a million adolescents make serious unsuccessful attempts to kill themselves every year.

The reasons adolescents take their own lives have roots in the strengths and the deficits incorporated during earliest childhood, in the nature of society, and the *family* in which they currently live, and in the conflicts and traumas they encounter in *everyday life* (Giovacchini, 1981:80)

Psychotherapists claim that the major causes of suicide are feelings of worthlessness, loneliness and hopelessness.

The Hammond Almanac also reports that all types of crime were up in 1980. The biggest increase of offenders is among the adolescent ages. They also report that there are over nine million alcoholics in the United States, many of whom are between the ages of 15-25.

It is also common knowledge to us that eighth graders “beat up” on sixth graders, large children extort from smaller children, and every school has what we call social outcasts. In my opinion, this is not a reflection of a healthy society.

I believe that directly related to the above occurrences is a definite *lack* in most *families* and *schools* today of dealing adequately with human feelings, awareness, attitudes self-images and human respect. Isn't it strange that we can maneuver a rocket to the edges of our solar system and yet we can't stop our children from killing themselves. Charles Silberman states, “Schools can be humane and still educate well.”¹ He goes on to ask should we prepare kids for life as it is today or should we try to produce another kind of life. What kind of life do we want? What do you want for your children? It seems that educators today want to cram children with lots of facts and skills yet they never seem to be concerned with how these skills will later be used. Whether a disease is cured or a stock swindle is mastered seems to be left to chance. Are we striving for a clever, powerful, \$50,000 a year lawyer with high blood pressure, no time for his children, and involved in corruption?

I would prefer my child be making \$200 a week chopping wood if he is happy, content, and has a good feeling about himself and others. I believe that over 90% of the time our conscious minds and the minds of our children are occupied with immediate concerns and worries of day to day life. Take for example an overweight child; a boy whose parents have just been separated; or a child who knows that he is going to get pushed around on the bus; or the girl with acne or the boy who shares his bedroom with five other brothers and so on. How can we expect these children to walk into our rooms, sit down and learn about the Ural Mountains in Russia or the fact that $A^2 + B^2 = C^2$? The fact is—we do, in schools all over the country.

I believe that it is essential first to lessen tensions and to develop self-image and positive attitudes. It is necessary that children spend time (meaningful time) dealing with these problems and tensions.

This unit was designed to make human awareness and feelings as important a part of the school day as Math or Science and not just a once-a-month kind of thing when a fight erupts. I believe that opportunities should be explored that would enable children to explore and evaluate their own inner world.

I believe that success can be achieved in this area by a tactful, sensitive teacher who can also “open up” and allow children to view him as a person with feelings, faults and emotions instead of some kind of teaching machine. One other factor to consider before teaching children awareness, better ways of communication and introspection is whether or not as a teacher we are treading into parental or family responsibilities. Am I one of those professionals who the family needs protection against? As an agent of the public school system I could easily be seen as interfering in the mechanics of the family. Christopher Lasch and others seem to feel that the outside interference of such institutions as schools, social workers, the courts and professional people have a harmful effect on the family. He sees this professionalism as a factor in undermining parental confidence and effectiveness. This, in turn, leads to an erosion of parental authority and a greater dependence on the same outside forces. There seems to be many suggestions made by so called protectors of the family as to policies which can be initiated to “help” the family. Lasch goes as far as to suggest that maybe a policy to contain officials of the state might be needed.

In the meantime, those who care about the future of the family would do well to follow Donzelot’s lead and to have nothing to do with the official search for a national policy on families. What the family needs is a policy on officials designed to keep them in their place. ²

While I agree with Lasch that there is too much “help” being forced onto families today, I have come to the conclusion that some support must be extended to families. This support should be willingly accepted by families and should be in the form of developing family roles and responsibilities and improving communication skills where such skills are lacking.

Harry Aponte, the director of Philadelphia’s Child Guidance Clinic spends a great deal of time working with what he calls “underorganized” minority families. He believes that after helping a family develop roles and responsibilities, in other words giving them structure, the family then realizes its own strength and resourcefulness.

They (these families) tend to be underorganized because there are no clearly defined roles—who gives orders, who passes them along. You’re likely to have a single parent, for instance, who puts an older child in charge of the house when she goes out. But the child does not know the guidelines or the limits and neither do the other kids. Instead of having the economic and educational goals that help to organize an upwardly mobile middle-class family, they tend to be much more tied into institutions that may be hostile. We tell them—O.K., we’ll be

your community. We help them develop family roles and responsibilities. ³

I agree wholeheartedly with therapists such as Peggy Papp of New York City's Ackerman Institute and Dr. Carl Whitaker and Dr. Augustus Rapiere who believe that most family problems are between persons and not *in* individuals. One problem is our lack of training in interpersonal relationships and communication skills. I, personally, am not in a position to enter a home and foster productive communication. I can, however, by using this unit begin to develop in individuals (my students) some important concepts, such as greater personal insight, greater understanding of the self, awareness of feelings and attitudes of others, and improved skills in communication with others.

By enriching an individual in these areas it can be fed back into the family by a family member and foster growth, understanding and cooperation within the family unit.

OBJECTIVES

For each objective that I list I will try to relate it somewhat to the child's position in the family.

The objectives for this unit are as follows:

First, *to help create in each child a positive self-image or a good feeling about himself* . Many inner-city school children have very low self-esteem. A *parent* who has no job or who is having much trouble paying bills and buying food, or one who is receiving welfare has much social stigma placed on them for not being able to make it in today's world. Some of these parents have few good feelings about themselves to "pass on" to their children.

Self-esteem is educationally relevant because, "The persistence with which we pursue our dreams is sometimes an indication of how much worth we place upon ourselves." ⁴

Second, *to help create in each child a sense of value and belongingness as a member of society*. I believe that the children who write on the walls of schools or damage its property do not feel that they are an important part of that school. So also the child who commits suicide or other destructive acts feels of little value and very isolated.

Third, *to develop in children a better awareness of themselves, of their needs and their values* . By helping children to be aware of their values and needs we are inviting them to become introspective about themselves and their families, not for the sake of finding fault or inadequacies but for the sake of clarification and to understand better how they fit into the larger social setting.

Fourth, *to develop in children an awareness and concern for other members of society, their needs and problems* . If children fail to look at parents' attitudes on a certain issue, there may be misunderstanding and hostility. By trying to be aware of another's concerns, either those of another family member or someone in society at large, a person will be able to make more rational decisions and to construct less hostile relationships.

Fifth, *to facilitate growth in all academic areas by an increase of positive self - image and lessening of tensions in the student's environment* . Most teachers are well aware that many times a child comes to class brooding

about a family concern and can hardly muster the attention needed to learn the correct placement of decimal points.

Sixth, *to develop positive social attitudes through a greater self - respect and respect for others* . A child who has no respect for himself is not going to be in a position to treat his parents, siblings or friends with respect.

Seventh, *to improve communication skills* . Many family members have a sincere affection and concern for one another. Disagreements and misunderstandings often are a result of poor communication rather than of major differences in beliefs or values.

These are objectives that almost everyone has seen before and probably agrees with. But nothing seems to be done specifically to achieve them. It is as though we expect them to be achieved incidentally somehow by themselves. The strategies presented in this unit will provide some concrete ways to help achieve them.

STRATEGIES

The strategies for this unit will be better understood if the content to be discussed with students is included. The basic content of this teaching unit is composed of eight sections. They are:

A. *People*

This section deals with the likenesses and the differences between people. It includes a discussion of environment and of the common needs of all people.

B. *Emotions*

Here we take a look at a wide range of human feelings and define each. Some emotions to discuss are sadness, happiness, anger, embarrassment, anxiety, nervousness, love, hate, and joy. A class discussion of each emotion could include a sharing of everyone's experience with that emotion. Students will be encouraged to discuss what makes them, for example, sad, what they do about it, and the effects, positive or negative, of what they do about it.

C. *Attitudes*

Children have often been told that they have attitudes. Discuss what this means. Discuss negative and positive attitudes.

D. *A Look At Ourselves*

This involves an identification of emotions and gaining an insight of what makes me tick. Also, what is it that makes me feel as I do (happy, sad, afraid)? Children should be encouraged to learn what they like, and dislike about themselves. This is part of an ongoing search to learn who we are.

E. *Looking At Others*

Students should begin questioning themselves on how they pick their friends, what qualities they like, dislike in others. There should be a discovering of why people act in certain ways. Role playing, which will be discussed later, can be a great aid in understanding this.

F. *Values*

Here a discussion of just what a value is should be included. Children should begin to see how values are formed. What are some family values? Different cultures encourage different values. The child should begin to see that different environmental situations or family concerns will result

in the formation of different values (i.e., a family with a handicapped child might place higher emphasis on compassion, patience, etc.).

G. Value Clarification

The child should begin to recognize his own values. Not ones that the school says he should have but ones he feels comfortable with. With an understanding of what is important, choices and alternatives will be put in better light.

H. Helping Others

After gaining insight into themselves children are in a better position to reach out to others. This has repercussions in their family environment, in the classroom, and in society in general.

Children should learn that many feelings are common to all of us. If name-calling hurts one child then that child will understand that it hurts another and that revenge doesn't solve anything.

Relating to others and communication skills also should be discussed at this time. An example of teaching communication skills will be dealt with in detail later.

The approach to the content should be ongoing and spiraling. You can come back to sections to a deeper degree again and again. It is also an experience-orientated matter instead of textbook orientated.

The particular strategies that will be discussed fall into four basic areas: Discussions, Role Playing, Independent Work, and Group Exercises or Activities.

DISCUSSIONS

The most widely used tool in this wit is the teacher-led group discussion; in fact, the teacher is the key. In discussion things get out in the open. Just knowing that others feel as we do can sometime make us feel much better. Children often tend to think in a "one against the world" way. It helps for them to see that others might have the same problem or fear (fear of darkness, of a father who drinks, etc.). As stated above, the teacher is

the key to these discussions. He has the choice, he can hide all of his feelings, he can cover up or he can be open and honest about his emotions. He sets the pattern, if he allows and encourages openness the children can be open about their feelings. However, if the teacher disapproves of strong feelings, the children quickly sense this and the lid is on. No anger, no fear, no anxiety, no joy.

In addition to large group discussions, many small discussions or what I call small guidance groups can be formed within the classroom to deal with specific incidents. Such incidents as poor attendance, moodiness, quarrels, etc. can be dealt with in these informal talks. These groups would probably be much more conducive to self-contained classrooms than departmentalized ones.

ROLE PLAYING

I have found that role playing is a very useful tool in helping children to act out their own values and to become more aware of what it is like to be in another's shoes. There are many techniques and styles used in role playing. I will discuss three.

The most common form of role playing that I use is to place certain children in a certain situation and give them a setting. They then take the situation and act it out in front of the room with the freedom to take it in whatever direction they choose. For example:

Bob, you are a father who has just come home from a long tiring day on the job. In addition, you were hollered at by the boss today and you got a parking ticket. Nancy, you are a twelve year old girl who broke the bedroom window of the house while playing baseball. Okay, take it from there.

Another type of role playing is what I call free drama. This type is not as structured as the above but interesting revelations can be made. Students are free to get up and act on their own situations by creating their own settings.

A third and tamer version of role playing I call picture talk. I show the group a large poster depicting, for example, a little boy crying. Students are asked to volunteer to tell a story about the picture or to tell what might have happened to the person. I have found this excellent in teaching children empathy and understanding others. Another variation of this is for me to start the story and have a student finish it.

INDEPENDENT WORK

One of the best methods I have found to teach children about insight and feelings is the feelings book. This is a diary of how the child is feeling. I suggest that every child have a small notebook and write in it each day at the same time beginning each entry with "I feel. . . ." It is stressed that honesty and acceptance of one's own feelings are important. Also, it is very important that a child's privacy be guaranteed. A discussion of respecting one's privacy should be conducted beforehand. I also give the children the choice of putting their books under lock and key and always leave it to their option if they wish me to read a certain entry.

If a child swears in his feelings book I think it is a good sign that he feels secure enough with the teacher to be

honest with his feelings.

Published material such as Merrill Harmin's *Got To Be Me* books and Argus Communications *Learning To Care* series are an excellent aide in the awareness process and are listed along with some others in the Bibliography.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

There are many suggested activities listed in books in the Bibliography. I will deal here with a few of the ones I have found very useful.

Hi Strangers Game . In this game each child must go to another child with whom he has not talked recently and have a private three minute conversation. After the allotted time partners can switch or a group discussion may follow. This exercise helps to make all of the children in class feel that they belong and it helps them to care about one another. You might be surprised at how many children have spent eight years of schooling in the same class or division and do not really know one another.

Another activity I find enjoyable to students and one that helps develop empathy is the use of an interview questionnaire. Teams of two are formed with students taking turns asking a prepared list of questions (i.e., What was the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to you?). The person who asked the question must paraphrase or repeat in his or her own words what the other child has just said. Later they switch roles. Not only are the students learning more about their classmates but they are learning to be listeners.

Relaxation or meditation can be a very useful tool in helping the child to look inward and discover himself. Many children live in such a chaotic environment that they rarely if ever have a chance to sit still and listen to oneself. Playing relaxing music and instructing the class to sit back and close their eyes you can cause a great deal of learning. Encourage children to dream of what they want. Have them explore possible ways of attainment. Consider consequences. Insight is growth and it is learning about oneself.

SAMPLE CLASSROOM LESSONS

(figure available in print form)

Lesson 1— A lesson to develop better communication skills listening and hearing .

Purpose This exercise will help the child to become more emphatic with others and develop better listening skills.

Preparation Children are broken up into groups of two. One child in each group is given a paper with 2 or 3 questions on it.

Procedure The group is given the following directions. Ask your partner the questions found on your assignment sheet. Listen carefully to how your partner answers each question. When your partner is finished answering each question you are to say back to that person in your *own* words (paraphrase) what you feel

that the person is trying to say. Then your partner is to tell you whether you heard him correctly or not. If not, he will again answer that question with the first person listening a little harder until you can correctly paraphrase what that person has said.

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When one child has done this successfully the partner will switch roles and the interviewer becomes the interviewee.

Sample Questions

1. What was one of the most embarrassing things that has ever happened to you?
2. You have lent your best coat to your cousin. He or she has returned it with a cigarette burn on the sleeve. What would you do?
3. You are very attracted to a boy/girl who only ignores you. What do you do?

Suggestions

Teacher should circulate around to different groups to facilitate conversation and to make sure each has had a chance to “listen” to the other before time period runs out.

This exercise usually takes about 20 minutes but can vary.

COMMON FEELINGS

(figure available in print form)

Lesson II— An example of role-playing in the classroom .

Purpose To place children in a common life situation in order to elicit and share feelings and responses.

Preparation The group is introduced to a situation or predicament. (Some books listed in Teachers’ Bibliography give many possible role-playing situations.) Children are asked to listen carefully to the situation.

Procedure -“Actors” are then chosen to act out the different character of the situation. “Actors” can take the situation in any direction that seems suitable to them.

Sample Situation

Carol is a 15 year old student. She is trying to tell her mother about problems she is having with the other girls at school. The others at school are angry at her because she would not give them the answers to an English Quiz. Carol is trying to get some help from her mother.

Mother has just come in from work. She is tired and upset because the car broke down on her way home. She is also distracted by a younger child, Bobby, who is running around the house with his dog Charley. Okay. Who wants to be Mom? Assign volunteers to act out the parts of each character.

Suggestions

I will usually prepare the class beforehand of any special directions such as not hitting each other or no cursing, etc.

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I would also be ready to cut or stop the action when the “actors” have run out of alternatives to act out or have provided enough action to allow for a discussion.

Always allow time for discussion afterwards and invite non-actors to offer alternatives, insights or personal experiences.

Lesson III— *Picture talk* .

Purpose To help children develop empathy towards others and to share common emotions and attitudes.

Preparation The group is shown a picture (large posters are available from most libraries) depicting an emotional scene.

Procedure The class is asked to study the picture and then to explain what is happening or has happened or what will happen. A variation of this, especially good for younger children, is to begin the story of what happened and ask children to fill in gaps or to predict what might happen or what could be done.

Sample Situation

Show class a large poster of a boy sitting on his front steps dressed up obviously waiting for someone to show. He has a tear on his face and has obviously been forgotten or left behind. Ask children to respond to picture. What has happened? Is the boy sad? Why? What other possibilities could happen? Have you ever felt this way? What did you do about it? What can the boy do? Is it possible that his dad will still come? Why didn't he telephone? How long should he wait? Is the boy angry? How would you feel?

Suggestions

Always try to elicit from children their own feelings of what is happening. Give anyone wishing to respond time to have his say. Bring out the fact that many of us have common feelings. Some of us may have different methods of dealing with emotion but there are no right or wrong ways to feel.

Notes

1. Lavetelli, ———. *Elementary School Curriculum* . New York: Holt, Rinehart and Wiston, Inc., 1972.
2. Lasch, Christopher. *Life in the Therapeutic State* . New York: Review of Books (June 1980), pp. 24-32.
3. ———. "Saving the Family," *Newsweek* . Special Report (May 15, 1978), pp. 63-93.
4. Tanner, Ira. *Loneliness: Fear of Love* . New York: Harper Rowe, 1974.

TEACHERS' BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chesler, Mark and Fox, Robert, *Role-Playing Methods in the Classroom* . Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1966.

A collection of methods and sample situations to facilitate role-playing in the classroom.

Lavatelli, Celia, *Elementary School Curriculum* . New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1972.

Begins with a study of how children learn and deals with alternative teaching methods available today.

Maier, Norman. *The Role-Play Technique* . La Jolla, Calif.: University Associates, 1975.

A handbook for management and leadership practice.

McPhail, Ungoed-Thomas, Chapman. *Learning To Care* . Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications, 1975.

A teachers' guide for using the Learning To Care Series. Gives many methods and examples of teaching value clarification and sensitivity training.

McVickar, P. *Imagination : Key to Human Potential* . Wash., D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1972.

Report of conference sponsored by National Association for Education of Young Children takes a different view of traditional classroom experiences.

Shaftel, Fannie, *Role - Playing for Social Values , Decision Making in the Social Studies* . Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: 1967.

Discusses the process of role-playing and introduces the many situations, classified by growth areas, to

facilitate role-playing in the classroom.

Stanford, Barbara, *Roles and Relationships* . New York: Bantam Books, 1976.

A practical guide for teaching about masculinity and femininity.

———. *Sources of Identity* . New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1977.

Excellent textbook making a study of society from the focus of the individual.

Williams, Frank. *Classroom Ideas For Encouraging Thinking and Feeling* . Buffalo, N.Y.: DOK Publications, 1970.

List of 387 ideas designed and field tested by teachers across the country in encouraging children to think and feel.

CHILDREN'S BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berger, Terry, *I Have Feeling* . New York: Human Sciences Press, 1971.

Each page consists of a picture, a short paragraph and ends with the feeling that is being felt.
Excellent—Elementary Level.

Boeckman, Charles, *Surviving Your Parents' Divorce* . New York: Franklin Watts, 1980.

Frank advice for children to help them deal with such things as custody, visitation rights, guilt, loneliness, step relatives, etc .

Burns, Marilyn, *The Book of Think* . Boston: Little, Brown and Little, 1976.

Invites children to be constructive about problem solving. Presents problems and gives alternative methods to help bring about a solution. Intermediate and Secondary.

Conta, Marcia and Reardon, Maureen, *Feelings Between Brothers and Sisters* . Milwaukee, Wis., 1974.

Explores relationships between brothers and sisters. Each page ends with a thought provoking question.
Elementary Level.

Dunn, Iris and Phoebe, *Feelings* . Minnesota, Creative Educational Society, Inc., 1971.

A look at some emotions that we all feel. Consists of beautiful, sensitive photographs and short paragraphs of thirteen different emotions from guilt to frustration.

Erickson, Russell, *A Toad for Tuesday* (Fiction). New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, 1971.

Deals with friendship. A toad is captured by an owl who plans to eat him on his birthday, but the intervening five days changes his mind. Excellent. All ages.

Hautzig, Esther, *Life With Working Parents* . New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978.

Presents practical hints to children who are home alone without parents in coping with everyday situations. Comical drawings. Intermediate and Secondary.

Krementz, Jill, *How It Feels When A Parent Dies* . New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981.

Eighteen children speak openly and honestly of their experiences and feeling at the loss of a mother or father. Intermediate Level 4-8.

LeShan Eda, *What Makes Me Feel This Way ?* New York: Collier Books,1972.

An invitation to explore, understand and enjoy your own feelings. Helps child to understand that his feelings are natural and shared by just about everybody in the world. Intermediate Level.

LeShan, Eda, *You and Your Feelings* . New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975.

Frank discussion of problems children face with family, friends and school. Also invites the reader to accept their feelings. Intermediate Level and Secondary.

Micklish, Rita, *Sugar Bee* (Fiction). New York: Delacorte Press, 1972.

Discoveries of beauty and friendship are made by a young black city girl while visiting a white family in the country.

Pick, Christopher, *The Mind and Body* . New York: The Warwick Press, 1980.

Shows how people are different, the various functions of the mind. Chapter on dealing with yourself and others. Excellent fact. Index in back. Intermediate and Secondary.

Richards, Arlene and Willis, Irene, *How to Get It Together When Your Parents Are Coming Apart* . New York: David McKay Co., 1976.

Addressed to young people who might need help in coping with stresses and confusion of their parents' marital troubles.

Rogers, Pamela, *The Rare One* (Fiction). New York: Nelson Co., 1974.

Unhappy about his father' s re-marriage, a thirteen year old finds friendship with an old man living alone in woods.

Smith, Doris, *A Taste of Blackberries* . New York: Crowell Publishing Co., 1973.

Deals with a young boy trying to come to terms with the accidental death of his best friend. (Fiction)

Stein, Sara, *About Phobias* . New York: Walker and Co., 1979. Clever book dealing with children's fears. Written with two texts, one for children to read, another for parents. Excellent photography. Elementary or Intermediate.

Stein, Sara, *On Divorce* . New York: Walker Publishing Company, 1979.

Separate text for parents and children. Explores various emotions aroused by divorce.

Wallace, Art, *Toby* (Fiction). New York: Doubleday, 1971. Young bright boy attempts to win friends by showing how smart he is but defeats his purpose every time.

Wallace, Barbara, *The Secret Summer of E.B.* (Fiction). Chicago, Ill.: Follett Publishing Co., 1974.

Young girl becomes friends with a social outcast and risks friendships of the rest of sixth grade class.

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Harmin, Merrill, *Got To Be Me*. Illinois: Argus Communications, 1976.

An unfinished book to be authored by the student. Deals with realizing and to accepting our own individuality.

Lifeline Program, Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications, 1976.

Designed for students in grades 7-12 to help them learn how to make decisions, resolve conflicts, and care about themselves and others. Includes sensitivity cards, consequence cards, and point of view cards.

16 MM FILMS

(All available from New Haven Audio-Visual Department.) (P—grades K-3, I—grades 4-8, M—grades 7-9 and H—grades 9-12)

Acting With Maturity. 11 min.—color—(mh)

Deals with a discussion of dating, family life, friendship and school. Presents different types of behavior to deal with situations.

Are You Popular? 11 min.—color—(mh)

Presents children with a helpful guide to the personal and social problems commonly faced by teenagers.

Being A Good Sport. 11 min.—b & w—(pi)

Presents alternatives to how conflict can be resolved involving youngsters and their underlying motives.

Can A Parent Be Human? 11 min.—color—(mh)

Shows parents and children how contact can be made and gives examples of good communication.

Families. 10 min.—color—(mh)

Deals with the interdependence of all human beings everywhere.

I Owe You Nothing. 10 min.—color—(mh)

What do parents and children owe to each other? Deals with ways they can agree on what is fair.

Mom , Why Won't You Listen ? 13 min.—color (mh)

Shows children positive ways to relate to parents and to get them to listen.

Wait Until Your Father Gets Home . 11 min.—color—(mh)

Deals with male vs. female roles especially dominance. Should the man run the family?

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