

FEBRUARY

# WINNING YOUR CHILD'S HEART

ACTIVATION GUIDE



homeroom

MARRIAGE & FAMILY MENTORING MEMBERSHIP

Building and maintaining a deep bond of parental attachment to each of your children is a crucial element of parenting.

Each stage of development provides new opportunities to create that bond.

Many parents will find certain stages obvious and intuitive but other stages confusing and frustrating.

We've found that learning specific tools and practices is the best way to help parents work through a challenging stage.



## Infants

Because infants are so simple during this stage I like to think of the challenge being, how deeply can both the father and mother attach their heart to the infant. The rest of these challenges are more focused on the child's heart but this is where we have 12-18 months to make sure our heart is fully attached which provides the foundation for all the ways we'll work to win our child's heart in the stages to come.

### TOOL 1: Titles Matter

Call your infant "son" or "daughter". What we call our kids at this stage can carve out a particular place in our heart. Sometimes we have unconscious negative associations with family identities and will struggle using son and daughter language. Try to push through any of that discomfort. As you speak son and daughter language over your child, you'll begin to find that father or mother place in your heart beginning to attach to your baby. You can also take this a step further by saying "my son" or "my daughter".

### TOOL 2: Speaking Blessings

Pray specific blessings over your infant as they sleep. When you're holding your sleeping baby or as you watch him or her in their crib you can speak blessings over them. Start with a topic and then say a few sentences. Topics like, their relationship with God, their future spouse, their place in the family team, their future friendships etc. These kinds of blessings help attach your heart to the future unfolding destiny of your child instead of getting too rooted in this stage. This helps us transcend what we are experiencing and losing as our kids grow and focuses us on the man or woman they are becoming. This can prevent a future detachment as sometimes it's a shock to see your precious baby turn into a moody teen.

**Example Blessing:** "Samantha my daughter I bless you with deep faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. May you experience his presence early in your life and frequently. May your faith in Jesus banish all fear from your heart and bring you into a place of abiding peace."

### TOOL 3: Baby Wearing

This is a great heart connected trend. The more physically close we can be with our infant the more often, the better! I especially encourage dads to do this if they get to spend less time with their baby than their wife.

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## Toddlers

### TOOL 1: Quantity Time

One of the biggest disconnects begins when we start to reduce the sheer amount of time we spend with our toddler because they are getting mobile and disruptive. In previous challenges we talked about the importance of training toddlers but this is one of the main reasons why that training is important. I spent 2-3x more quantity time with my toddlers than most dads but taking them into restaurants, meetings and work trips meant they had to be well-trained early. But there's no replacement for sheer time in the process of winning and keeping the heart of your kids.

### TOOL 2: Physical Play

A great way to bond with kids is through rough and tumble play. It's good to push your kids a bit and make this a challenge both to get their energy out and for them to fully explore the range of physical and emotional challenges this creates. If you're worried it's too rough just see how the child acts toward the parent afterward. If they seem more attached it was probably fine even if there were moments they found it challenging. Keep increasing the challenge as they get comfortable so that this stretches the child. Toddlers will feel a deepening attachment to those who provide an appropriate level of challenge especially when followed up with a cuddle.

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### **TOOL 1: High Challenge / High Support**

It's good to find one area where you can really push your kids to excel. This can be something the child expresses interest in but more kids will quickly quit and lose interest when it begins to require self-discipline. This is an opportunity for parental bonding. Like we talked about above regarding physical play kids really attach to an adult that calibrates challenges right at their level that cause them to be appropriately stretched. It's important to also provide a high level of support and affirmation in order to help them reach their highest potential without exasperating them. Being present and their #1 cheerleader during peak moments of frustration is crucial. But as your child begins to really experience the fruits of sticking with a challenge this will provide a deep bond between you as the coach and your child.

### **TOOL 2: Spontaneous Fun**

In the battle between blessing your kids and avoiding creating a spirit of entitlement, spontaneity is your friend. Suddenly announcing a trip to go grab a treat or leading your family on a fun outing does a lot to endear your kids to you. Following up those fun moments with a little heart to heart conversation and sharing is often perfect timing to see your kids soft enough to share deeper thoughts.

### **TOOL 3: Sharing your Passions**

There's just something special about having your parents suck you into their passions in a winsome way. It also can be painful when you feel left on the outside. Patiently expose your kids to your passions breaking everything down to their level and creating a fun, relaxed association with things you love. This will provide so many ways to bond for years to come.



## Teens

### TOOL 1: 1 on 1 time

Taking the time to go down all the layers of the onion with your teen is the real work of this stage. Scheduling 1 on 1's and getting good and creating a relaxed, relational environment can give you both the time and space to have a meaningful conversation. My favorite questions include, "What's been on your mind?" "How's your relationship with \_\_\_\_?" "Describe a strong emotion you've recently felt." This doesn't have to be super creative. Often having a favorite restaurant, park, coffee shop or even walking route can help you stay consistent and make that place associated with going deep.

### TOOL 2: Trips

Teens need to be regularly plucked out of their world. They can get hardened in this phase and after a couple of days in a new environment they often start to soften up. Any trips like going camping, work trips, quick getaways, road trips or vacations are great opportunities but they still require you initiating an intentional conversation through asking great questions (see above).

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**Winning the hearts of kids does take some work but when you have great tools and you build the skills over time to use them well, you can keep that connection strong.**