

# Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

## Basic Training: Structure, Objectives, Parenting Gifts, Legacy

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### I. Biblical References

Eph 6:4 ~ And now a word to you parents. Don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather, bring them up with the *loving discipline* the Lord himself approves, with suggestions and godly advice. TLB

Prov 20:7 ~ The godly walk with integrity; blessed are their children after them.  
NLT

Prov 1:7 ~ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. NIV

### II. Healthy Family Structure

Healthy families begin with two components: 1) A solid spiritual base, and 2) a solid family structure. Spiritual formation in children is addressed in the chapter by that title (see [www.stlfamilyinstitute.com](http://www.stlfamilyinstitute.com), *Spiritual Formation In Children*). The first section in this chapter focuses upon helping parents understand what a healthy family system structure looks like, and how it functions.

In its most simple form, a healthy family structure exhibits the following three-level hierarchy:

**Parents**  
**Kids**  
**Everyone Else**

Let's develop these components one at a time.

**Parents:** This part of the family system is called the “Executive Subsystem.” There’s room for only two people in this subsystem: Dad And Mom. If the family is a single-parent family and the child’s other parent is not involved at all with the family, then there’s only one person in this slot: The Single Parent.

This sounds so simple, but it’s honestly not simple at all. It’s not simple because others constantly try to squeeze their way into the “Executive Subsystem.” Kids do it all the time, by trying to tell Dad and Mom how things ought to be run in the family. In-laws frequently attempt to butt in, telling Dad and Mom how to raise their kids. Grandparents are often known to stick their heads in and give their directions.

But it’s important to keep this subsystem clear of external pressures. Dad and Mom can listen to others’ input, but the final decision must always be theirs, because they are the “Executive Subsystem.” If kids, or in-laws, or grandparents, or anyone else tries to exert too much presence or pressure, then Dad and Mom, or The Single Parent, need to draw a firm boundary.

If the child’s parents are divorced, and if the ex-spouse is involved in the child’s life on anything like a regular basis, then in the best of all worlds, both spouses will occasionally collaborate as to what’s best for their child. They’ll set goals, make rules, and will support one another’s parenting. However, more often than not divorce just makes the parents’ relationships with one another worse than they were during marriage. When this happens, the kids are often confused as to who’s in charge, or whose rules they have to follow. Complicating this is “divorce guilt,” which often makes a parent feel that they must give in to their child’s every whim, because “the child has already suffered enough.” This is a mistake. Kids need boundaries and rules.

It’s also important to note that if there is tension between Mom and Dad, or if Dad and Mom disagree on some point of child-rearing, then kids will almost always sense the crack and try to squeeze in to the “Executive Subsystem.” When this happens, “triangles” are formed as kids side with the parent of their choice, against the other parent. This is unhealthy for both parents and kids, and the only ones who can stop it happening are Dad and Mom. They stop it, by thickening the walls around the “Executive Subsystem.”

**Kids:** The next subsystem is the “Children’s Subsystem.” It may sound silly to say, but the only people allowed in this subsystem, are the family’s kids. Mom and Dad have authority over this system, but they are not part of it. Healthy families are not democracies, in which everyone gets an equal vote. Healthy families are benevolent dictatorships, in which those at the top love, protect and encourage the children, but who have veto power, and set the family’s agenda. During the years of child-raising, it’s more important for parents to be parents, than it is for them to be “best friends” with their kids. Soon enough the kids grow into adults, and then the relationship between parent and child will change to a more peer-like relationship.

One can usually tell a lot about the quality of Mom’s and Dad’s relationship with one another, by observing the functioning of the kids in the “Children’s Subsystem.” If there’s a lot of bickering, triangling and power conflicts, the place to first look for answers is in the relationship between Dad and Mom, because what happens at the top of the system usually leaks down into the rest of the system. All kids are born lawyers. They naturally know how to argue a point, and bring

pressure in a way, that gets what they want. This being so, once again we state: Healthy families are not democracies. Dads and Moms have a responsibility to oversee, guide, and direct the functioning of the “Children’s Subsystem.”

**Everyone Else:** The third subsystem incorporates everyone else in the rest of the world. Certainly, one may prioritize the input given by one’s own parents (the children’s grand-parents), or one’s in-laws. But even these people are outside the boundaries of the Executive and Children’s Subsystems. The buck doesn’t stop with Grandpa Jack, or Uncle George, or In-law Sally. The buck stops with Dad and Mom.

As a general rule of thumb, if grand-parents or in-laws of any stripe try too diligently to exert their influence in the family system, it is the responsibility of one of the people in....