



My Family: Middle School Survival Series

Copyright © 2007 by Kurt Johnston & Mark Oestreicher

Youth Specialties products, 300 S. Pierce St., El Cajon, CA 92020 are published by Zondervan, 5300 Patterson Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49530.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Oestreicher, Mark.

My family / by Mark Oestreicher and Kurt Johnston.

p. cm. — (Middle school survival series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-10: 0-310-27430-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-310-27430-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Middle school students—Religious life—Juvenile literature. 2. Middle school students—Family relationships—Juvenile literature. 3. Christian life—Juvenile literature. I. Johnston, Kurt, 1966- II. Title.

BV4531.3.O383 2006

248.8'3—dc22

2006024015

This edition printed on acid-free paper.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Creative Team: Dave Urbanski, Erika Hueneke, Janie Wilkerson, Rich Cairnes, and Mark Novelli
Cover Design by Gearbox

Printed in the United States of America



CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 8 |
| SECTION 1: FIRST THINGS FIRST | 11 |
| Why Is This So Hard? | 12 |
| What Has Changed? | 14 |
| SECTION 2: BASIC FAMILY SURVIVAL TIPS | 17 |
| What Is a “Family,” Anyway? | 18 |
| My Family Is a Mess! | 20 |
| Why Your Family Needs You | 22 |
| Top Seven Things That Make Families Work | 24 |
| SECTION 3: PRIVACY | 27 |
| Why Is Privacy a Major Issue? | 28 |
| Making the Most of a Shared Room | 30 |
| “Just Give Me Some Space!” | 32 |
| SECTION 4: RULES | 37 |
| Why Are Rules a Major Issue? | 38 |
| How to Get Rules Changed | 40 |
| How to Live with Rules That Won’t Change | 42 |
| Why Are My Parents So Strict? | 44 |
| Don’t My Parents Remember What It’s Like to Be My Age? | 46 |
| Why Do My Parents Give Me a Curfew? | 48 |
| Why Don’t My Parents Let Me Set My Own Curfew? | 50 |
| When Do I Get to Date? | 52 |
| Technology Rules | 54 |
| SECTION 5: FRIENDS | 57 |
| Why Are Friends a Major Issue? | 58 |
| What If My Parents Want Me to Be Friends with Kids I Don’t Like? | 60 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| SECTION 6: OTHER MAJOR ISSUES | 63 |
| School | 64 |
| Music | 66 |
| Church | 68 |
| Phone, IM, Chat Rooms, and Stuff Like That | 70 |
| TV and Movies | 72 |
| Chores | 74 |
| Courtesy, Manners, and Respect | 76 |
| Language | 78 |
| | |
| SECTION 7: HONORING YOUR PARENTS | 83 |
| What's It Mean to "Honor"? | 84 |
| Why Does God Care If I Honor My Parents? | 86 |
| How Am I Supposed to Honor My Parents? | 88 |
| | |
| SECTION 8: HOW TO NOT WASTE YOUR TIME | 91 |
| No Comparing! | 92 |
| God Has You in the Right Family | 94 |
| Don't Think Cooler Parents = a Better Family | 96 |
| Don't Think More "Stuff" = a Better Family, Either! | 98 |
| | |
| SECTION 9: HOW TO GET WHAT YOU WANT | 101 |
| Getting What You Want—What <i>Not</i> to Do | 102 |
| Getting What You Want—What <i>To</i> Do | 104 |
| | |
| SECTION 10: SIBLINGS | 107 |
| Trying to Measure Up | 108 |
| Can't We All Just Get Along? | 110 |
| My Little Brother/Sister Is a Brat! | 112 |
| My Older Brother/Sister Treats Me Like a Little Kid! | 114 |
| The Other Kids in My House Aren't My Birth Brothers/Sisters | 116 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| SECTION 11: DIVORCE, STEPFAMILIES, AND OTHER STUFF | 119 |
| My Family Is Breaking Apart | 120 |
| My Mom (or Dad) Is Dating (Yuck—Weird!) | 122 |
| A New Stepparent | 124 |
| Balancing More Than Two Parents | 126 |
| How to Live in a Blended Family | 128 |
| | |
| SECTION 12: DUMB THINGS PARENTS SAY (AND WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN) | 133 |
| “Do You Want to Be Grounded for the Rest of Your Life?” | 134 |
| “What Were You Thinking?” | 136 |
| “Why Can’t You Be More Like _____?” | 138 |
| “When I Was Your Age...” | 140 |
| | |
| SECTION 13: RANDOM QUESTIONS ABOUT PARENTS AND FAMILIES | 143 |
| Are My Parents Trying to Ruin My Life? | 144 |
| What If One of My Parents Doesn’t Go to Church? | 146 |
| What If I’m the Only Christian in My Family? | 148 |
| What If I Don’t Have a “Family” Like Other Kids? | 150 |
| What Am I Supposed to Do If My Parents Don’t Get Along? | 152 |
| | |
| SECTION 14: THINGS THAT AREN’T SUPPOSED TO BE PART OF A FAMILY | 155 |
| Abuse | 156 |
| Rage | 158 |
| Neglect | 160 |
| What to Do about This Stuff | 162 |
| | |
| SECTION 15: A FEW BIBLICAL FAMILIES TO LEARN FROM | 165 |
| Saul and Jonathan | 166 |
| David and Absalom | 168 |
| Jesus and His Parents | 170 |
| Jacob and Esau | 172 |
| Ruth and Naomi | 174 |
| Joe’s Bros | 176 |
| The Prodigal Son’s Family | 178 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| SECTION 16: KEYS TO KEEPING THINGS GOOD IN YOUR FAMILY | 183 |
| Open Communication | 184 |
| Honesty | 186 |
| Noticing Other Family Members' Needs | 188 |
| Integrity | 190 |
| Doing Your Part | 192 |
| Not-So-Random Acts of Kindness | 194 |
| Creating Good Memories and Having Fun! | 196 |
| | |
| SECTION 17: A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS... | 199 |
| (Okay... Two Pages of Final Thoughts!) | 200 |

SECTION 1

FIRST THINGS FIRST





WHY IS THIS SO HARD?

Being in a family really isn't anything new to you. The truth is, you've been part of a family for a long time...ever since you were born! Our guess is that you're reading this book because things are beginning to change, and you're trying to figure it all out. It's not that these changes are bad; they're just different, which means being part of a family is going to look a little different from now on. Because you're growing and changing, your family is going to change, too. Let us make you three guarantees:

GUARANTEE #1: IT WON'T BE EASY! One of the reasons family life can be such a challenge is that there just aren't any easy answers. Sure, this book is going to give you some stuff to think about and some lessons we've learned, but a good family life really can't be boxed up and sold or written down in a book. The family can be a complicated, confusing thing, and making it work takes...well, it takes work. Lots of middle school students make the mistake of sitting back and expecting everybody else in the family to put in the effort to make it work. Don't make that mistake! God has put you in your family for a reason, and even though it's going to be tough at times, he wants you to play a part in helping your family work.

GUARANTEE #2: YOU CAN MAKE IT! We said it takes work, and it does. But the fact that you're reading this book is proof that you're willing to work at it. You won't be able to change most of the stuff about your family, but you *can* change how you respond to your family and how you handle the challenges

of being a middle schooler. There's no such thing as a perfect family. Yours isn't, and ours aren't. But there is such thing as a family filled with members who love each other and who are working together to make it the best it can be! As you start reading this book, it's important to remember that even though you can't control everything that happens in your family, you *can* control how you choose to respond and how you choose to help make your family better. It won't always be easy, but together, you and your family can make it!

GUARANTEE #3: SERIOUSLY, YOU CAN MAKE IT! We just wanted to say that one more time because we know there will be times in middle school when you're going to want to give up on yourself and on your family. Hang in there! God has really good stuff in store for you, and your family is one of the things he is going to use to mold and shape you into the person he wants you to become. You can make it! We'll say it again...you can make it!

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Big-time change is happening in your family right now! Do you feel it? If you don't yet, you will soon.

There are a bunch of reasons for this—but the biggest reason is that *you* are changing. And when any one person in a family changes, it forces all kinds of change in everyone and everything.

You're changing in all kinds of cool ways right now. But the change that probably has the biggest impact on your family is that you're now on a fast road toward independence, toward being an adult. Sure, you're still a kid in a lot of ways, and your parents still play a *huge* role in your life. You still *really* need them to set boundaries for you and help you make decisions (in addition to needing them to give you a ride to the mall!). But your parents *want* you to start making your own responsible decisions (whether it feels that way or not). They *want* you to get to the point where they can trust you to make good decisions on your own.

But that process of getting from “parents make most of your decisions” to “you make most of your decisions” is a tough and awkward process—both for you, and for your parents.

Add to that the fact that you're going through a wild change in your emotions right now. Most teenagers are on a roller coaster of new emotions—super excitement and flashes of anger and depressed moments when everything in the world seems against you. That's totally normal; in fact, it's good. It's all part of God's great and loving plan

to give you more emotions, so you can really experience the awesome life he wants for you.

But that emotional wackiness can be pretty hard on your parents. They probably feel like they don't even know you some days (you probably feel like you don't know yourself some days!).

So your parents (and your siblings, if you have them) are trying to adjust to this “new person” in their home. Sometimes it's great, because you get to start relating to them more like an adult. But sometimes it's really difficult for everyone.

Here's the survival tip—two of them, actually:

First, cut your parents a break. They're trying to figure out how to help you grow up. And it's not very clear sometimes.

Second, keep talking. Your parents need to know what's going on, how you feel, and what you're thinking. Do this when you're not feeling super emotional, and the conversations will go better.