

SPEAKING TOGETHER IN LOVE

by

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Theme: Communicating in potential conflict situations without shaming others.

Target Audience: Multigenerational activity for the entire church. The following may provide program ideas for Sabbath School, AY meeting, prayer meeting, Friday evening service or a special event for Sabbath afternoon. The format is built around four pairs of brief dramatizations which depict contrasting styles in communication. Discussion after each mini-drama is designed to highlight ways in which improvements can be made so as to protect the worth and dignity of persons. Situations may need to be adapted to the cultural setting.

Cast: *Leader* (introduces scenes and leads discussions)

Actors:

Scene 1—Jon, age 7; Mother

Scene 2—Dad; Carol, age 12

Scene 3—Dad; Mom; Bryan, age 17

Scene 4—Church Member; Mrs. Smith; Suzie, age 5

Note: Actors should be chosen in advance so they can familiarize themselves with the vignettes. However, great polish is not necessary to stimulate good discussion.

Props: Simple stage props may be readied beforehand as available.

Presentation Helps:

Leader: Someone has observed that we say things to each other at home and at church that we would not say to our enemies, much less to our friends. It's not that we don't love each other, it's just that we often don't think about the effect of what we say on the other person.

All of us have a deep need to feel valued and respected. People who are affirmed and treated with respect by those they love are happier, better able to cope with life's problems, and better able to relate to others. People who are shamed in their families and by others close to them often struggle in their relationships and tend to treat others in the same hurtful ways they have experienced.

These mini-dramas will draw back the curtain on a few familiar situations.

SCENE 1

(Seven-year-old Jon is seated at the supper table with the family.)

Jon: "Mom, may I have another glass of juice?"

Mother: "Say 'please!'"

Jon: "Please!"

(Mother passes the drink. Jon pours a glass full, then knocks it over as he tries to make room to put the pitcher down.)

Mother: (Jumping up and grabbing for a dish towel.) "Jon! I can't believe you've done this again! You are so clumsy! When will you ever learn to be careful? I get so tired of cleaning up after you! Now, eat your supper, and give me your glass. I think I'll need to pour for you for awhile."

For Discussion

- How do you think Jon feels?
- How do you think Mother feels, now that it's all over?
- What kind of messages do you think Jon is getting about his value in the family and as a person?
- What potential is there that these messages will affect him over his lifetime?

Leader: Let's try it again, a better way.

SCENE 1A

Jon: "Mom, may I have another glass of juice?"

Mother: "Say 'please!'"

Jon: "Please!"

(Mother passes the drink; Jon spills it as before. Mother reaches for the dish towel and hands it to Jon.)

Mother: "Here. Catch as much as you can. I'll get you a clean plate."

(Mom returns to the table with a clean plate.)

Mother: (With understanding in her voice.) "It's so frustrating when you can't seem to pour a glass of juice without spilling it."

Jon: (Nods his head.)

Mother: "You must be growing again. Seems like your arm gets places before you expected it to lately. Don't worry, you'll get used to it."

For Discussion

- What made this scene an improvement?
- How will Mother's response build Jon's sense of personal worth and encourage him?
- In what ways might Mother's response help Jon to respond to his younger brother when something like this happens to him?

SCENE 2

(Dad is seated in a chair reading the paper. Twelve-year-old Carol approaches.)

Carol: "Do you have a minute?"

Dad: (From behind his paper.) "Yeah, sure. What's on your mind?"

Carol: "Well, I'm having some trouble with my math."

Dad: (Still reading.) "Uh-huh. What's the problem?"

Carol: "I can do the math problems all right. My problem is the teacher."

Dad: (Still reading.) "You just do what the teacher says and everything will be all right. (Dropping paper slightly to make a brief, but stern, eye contact.) And you better not be disrespectful, young lady!"

Carol: (Turns on her heel and leaves the room.) "Never mind. You don't understand anyway."

For Discussion

- How do you think Carol feels?
- What are the messages her father is sending by his response?
- How is he sending them?
- What is the likelihood her father will ever learn what is really on her mind?
- How might many experiences like this affect the relationship between Carol and her father over time?

Leader: Let's try it again, a better way.

SCENE 2A

Carol: "Do you have a minute?"

Dad: (Putting down his paper and motioning for her to sit down beside him.) "Yeah, sure. What's on your mind?"

Carol: "Well, I'm having some trouble with my math."

Dad: (Maintaining eye contact and showing interest.) "So what's the problem with your math?"

Carol: "I can do the math problems. My problem is with the teacher."

Dad: "You understand the concepts, but you're concerned about something between you and Mrs. Jones."

Carol: "Yes. She calls on me all the time in class. She embarrasses me."

Dad: "The way she talks to you makes you feel singled out."

Carol: "She doesn't do it just to me. She does it to everybody. It's like she enjoys putting us on the spot. She never used to be this way."

Dad: "She's not herself."

Carol: "We know her husband's in the hospital and all that, but why does she have to take it out on us?"

Dad: "It's hard to be understanding, even though you have a hunch her behavior is connected to the stress that she and her family are under."

Carol: "Yeah. It must be pretty tough. We should probably get together and make a big card for her husband like we did for Mr. Johnson when he was sick. Then she'd at least know we care."

For Discussion

- What makes this scene better?
- What messages is Dad sending Carol this time?
- How would you analyze Dad's responses? What common elements do they have?
- How do Dad's responses affirm Carol as a person?
- How do they encourage Carol's respect for her father?

SCENE 3

(Father and Mother are seated together. Seventeen-year-old Bryan pulls up a chair.)

Bryan: "I don't know how to tell you this, but I won't be going to church with you tomorrow."

Mom: "What do you mean you're not going to church? Have some of your friends talked you into this?"

Bryan: "No, I made this decision by myself."

Dad: "Well, I don't know what this is all about, but I can tell you this. As long as I pay the school bills and you put your feet under our table, we expect you to live as a Seventh-day Adventist, and that includes going to church on Sabbath. Is that clear?"

For Discussion

- What messages have Mom and Dad sent Bryan in this exchange?
- What do you think will happen Sabbath morning?
- Is there any way the likely outcome could have been prevented?
- What should Mom and Dad do now?

Leader: Let's try it again, a better way.

SCENE 3A

Bryan: "Mom and Dad, I don't know how to tell you this, but I won't be going to church with you tomorrow."

Mom: "Something's happened to make you not want to go to church."

Bryan: "Not really anything in particular. I just don't want to go any more. It's not for me."

Dad: "Church just isn't very appealing right now."

Bryan: "It's just boring, that's all."

Mom: "Nothing much going on to hold your interest."

Bryan: "Mr. Jones tries. I just don't like to discuss things in Sabbath School, okay? I feel guilty if I don't cooperate, but I don't have anything to say."

Mom: "You feel pressured to say something when you don't want to."
Bryan: "Yeah. And if I do say something, the other kids laugh."
Dad: "It's hard to risk your thoughts when you're afraid you'll be put down."
Bryan: "Let's just say I'm shy."

For Discussion

- How do you feel about Mom's and Dad's responses this time?
- Are they really better?
- How do you think Bryan is feeling?
- What do you think will happen Sabbath morning?
- What choices do the parents have?
- What will be the likely outcome of each of these alternatives?
- How do you feel about the way the scene ended?
- What do you predict for the future as far as Bryan's commitment to the church is concerned?
- What hopeful signs are there?
- What will increase the likelihood that Bryan will keep talking to his parents?
- How do you think he pictures God?
- How might their acceptance of his feelings and listening to his opinions open the way for Bryan to want to come to church?

SCENE 4

(Set two rows of chairs to simulate pews.)

Narrator: The Smith's have had a hectic morning and arrive at church at the last minute. They are forced to take seats in a pew near the front and crawl over several members because all the back seats are taken. Little Susan begins to squirm and talk aloud almost immediately and has to be taken out. People seated around them turn and stare, looking very annoyed. A church member meets Mrs. Smith as she comes through the back door of the church.

Member: (Annoyed.) "We do try to keep it quiet and reverent in the sanctuary, Mrs. Smith."

Mrs. Smith: "I'm sorry. Susan is having a hard morning."

Member: "Well, when my children were small, they learned to sit still and be quiet. Children can be taught, you know."

Mrs. Smith: "Yes, I know. I'm trying, believe me, I'm trying!"

Member: "Well, I do hope you can get here earlier next week and sit in the back where your children will cause less of a commotion. I always sat in the back when my children were small."

For Discussion

- How is Mrs. Smith feeling when she has to leave the sanctuary?
- How is she feeling after her exchange with the church member in the hall?
- What effect will all of this have on Susan?
- What might happen to this family if many of these experiences occur?
- What may be the reasons the church member reacts as he/she does?

- In what ways might the church member be of encouragement to Mrs. Smith?
- In what practical ways might she help?

Note to Leader: Give your group a chance to rewrite the script this time. Encourage volunteers to take the parts of Mrs. Smith and the church member to dramatize some better scenarios. Discuss the improved responses, remembering to affirm all participants. You may wish to close by observing that by our communication with each other at home and at church we either encourage or discourage one another. "Therefore," as Paul writes, "pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify (build up) another" (Romans 14:19).