



Rely on God During Uncertainties

Family life has its fair share of challenges, and unexpected crises can knock us flat. Sometimes, these things can threaten the unity of our family itself. Illness, a broken marriage, job loss, and financial problems all bring uncertainty and anxiety. Even positive changes such as a new baby or a planned move can disrupt schedules and affect our relationships with each other and with God.

Although you can't control everything that comes your family's way, you can minimize the impact of stress and change. During uncertain times, children have three primary needs:

Consistent Relationships—When life gets tough, your children need reassurance and familiarity. Model the positive qualities of God, who's consistently present, unconditionally accepting, attentive, affirming, and reliable.

Lots of Boundaries and Structure—Keeping the same rules and schedules, as much as possible, helps children feel safe. When new or different situations arise, let kids know ahead of time what to expect. Then provide extra attention during transitions.

A Safe Place—Children need an accepting place where they can talk about what's happening in their lives. Be real and encourage kids to open up about their thoughts and emotions.

This issue of "The Parent Link" offers ideas for surviving and growing through life's challenges. For another helpful resource, read *Group's Emergency Response Handbook for Parents*. It's available at



Challenges Children Face

- In America, a divorce occurs every 30 seconds.
- Every day, 1,300 stepfamilies are formed.
- 31% of children ages 9 to 12 say they "worry a lot."
- 47% of children ages 9 to 12 suffer from insomnia.



PowerSource



Ask God:

1. To protect your family members and their faith during challenging times.
2. To make his love real to you during life's difficulties.
3. To help you trust him and cast all your cares on him (see 1 Peter 5:7).

Parenting Insights

In *Children's Ministry Magazine*, Greg Baird, founder of Kids in Focus ministries, offers five simple principles to give stressed-out children a **B.R.E.A.K.**

Be an example. Minimize any unnecessary stresses and learn to handle stress in a God-pleasing manner (see Philippians 4:6).

Relate. Spend time with children, share an interest, listen, and cheer them on.

Educate yourself. Learn what stressors your children face each day. What goes on at school and with their friends?

Ask questions. Concerned questions help you understand what children need and show that you really care.

Keep praying. Jesus works in children's lives. Pray fervently and without ceasing for your kids as they face life's challenges.

OpenTheBook

For you are my hiding place, you protect me from trouble. The Lord says, I will guide you along the best path, way for your life. I will advise you and catch you. Psalms 91:1-2

Troubles come to everyone, even Christians. But God promises shelter during all of life's storms.

Teachable Moments

1. **Play Hide and Seek** With younger children, unwind by playing a fun game of Hide and Seek as a family. Then talk about how God always comes looking for us and always watches over us.



2. **Lick Life's Problems** When life gets messy, it's more important than ever to spend one-on-one time with your children. If possible, take each child on a simple outing (for example, to an ice cream shop). Let your child air what's on his or her mind. Then share ways you can stick together and work out problems.
3. **Create a Smile File** Stress is exhausting and removes our focus from life's many joys. Make a file, box, or journal where family members can put pictures or notes about God's blessings. Then look through it together when your family



"So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are **ON THE ROAD**, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up." **Deuteronomy 11:18-19, NLT**

God calls on us to bear one another's burdens and lift each other up. Make a heart-to-heart chat with your children so they can hand over their worries to God. Start with these questions:

1. What is your biggest worry, and how does it make you feel?
2. Why does God let us all face tough times? What are some positive things that have come out of your struggles?
3. What are some ways God helps us when we're hurting?
4. How can we know and trust that God will always take care of us?

Family Experience: God Protects and Saves

Use this excerpt from **Group's Crocodile Dock Vacation Bible school** to remind your family of God's power amid life's struggles.

Say, "The Israelites, God's special people, were slaves in Egypt. Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, had been working God's people so hard, and they were so tired. God told Moses to go tell Pharaoh, 'Let my people go.' Moses went 10 times. Each time Pharaoh wouldn't let God's people go, God sent a plague on Egypt. A plague is a horrible thing that happens to a whole land. But God kept the Israelites safe from all these plagues."

Re-enact the first nine plagues, using these simple props and actions:

1. Blood to water—Drop red food coloring into water.
2. Frogs—Crawl around the room.
3. Gnats—Make high-pitched buzzing sounds.
4. Flies—Make a lower-pitched sound and zoom around the room.
5. Diseased livestock—Moo and moan, then lie on the floor with your arms and legs sticking up in the air.
6. Boils—Use a washable red marker to put dots on your skin.
7. Hail—Throw paper wads at each other.
8. Locusts—Cobble on some snacks, pretending to be hungry insects.
9. Darkness—Turn off the lights or wear blindfolds.



After each plague, have everyone shout, "Let my people go." Close by saying, "God is powerful. Only God could send those plagues and protect his people like that." Have family members each share a time they saw God's power in action. End in prayer, thanking God for using his power to protect and save your family.



Movie: Playing at the Movies

Movie: *Night at the Museum* / *Battle at the Smithsonian*

Release Date: May 22

Genre: Action, Comedy

Rating: PG for mild action and brief language

Cast: Ben Stiller, Robin Williams, Amy Adams, Dick Van Dyke, Owen Wilson, Frank Azaria

Synopsis: Security guard Larry Daley returns to the big screen to rescue an exhibit sent to the Smithsonian by mistake. The famed Institute comes alive, as presidents and historical figures (such as Amelia Earhart) help battle an evil pharaoh.

Discussion Questions: Which historical figures do you admire most, and why? What does it take to become famous or memorable? Read Hebrews 11. What stands out about your life and your faith? Even though you're young, what impact do you have on other people?

Music: Christian Music Release

Artist: Phillip LaQue

Album: *Get the Road Paved Itself*

Artist Info: At age 16, Phillip LaQue picked up a guitar during a bout with mono. In 2000, he and his sister, Catalie, formed a Christian-music duo known as LaQue. The group, which had several hits, disbanded when Catalie got married.

Summary: Phillip LaQue's debut solo album has an honest, personal feel. Several songs are real-life musical stories. "Erase and Rewind" was inspired by a friend's admission of suicidal thoughts. The hopeful "Mountains High and Valleys Low" explores doubt and faith. "Chasing the Daylight" addresses faith and resilience during dark times. "It's in the unraveling of life that we find God even more."

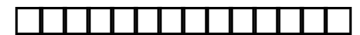
Discussion Questions: What type of doubts do you struggle with? What makes you feel hopeful, and why? Read Romans 8:31-39. How does it feel to hear that nothing can separate you from God's love?

What Games Are Out

Culture Trends

What's happening right now that may affect your children and family:

- Girls are buying and using beauty products earlier than ever. Among girls ages 6 to 9, 43% use lipstick or lipgloss and 39% use hairstyling products. Each month, girls 10 to 12 spend \$40 million on beauty products.
- While families are discovering the benefits of libraries, public-library budgets across America are shrinking.



Quick Stats

- As of 2007, 40% of U.S. births were to single mothers. That's up 25% from 2002.
(Cat'l Center for Health Statistics)
- A whopping 99% of moms give themselves a parenting grade of excellent or good.
(Good Housekeeping)
- Four in 10 moms talk with their own mothers at least once a day.

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