

Family Matters: Surviving & Thriving at Home Series

Our Beautiful Mess

Overview: Show teenagers that no family is perfect, including families from the Bible. Help them discover that even though all families have dysfunctions and challenges, we can change our perspective on our family challenges when we see them as a gift from God.

Supplies: You'll need Bibles, a way to display photos from a website, an “awkward” family photo from when you were young (if possible), poster board, marker, paper, pens, tape, and five posters with the following words:

- BAAAAAAAAAAAAAD!!! Family
- Bad Family
- Messed-up/Normal Family
- Good/Normal Family
- Perfect Family

1. Opening

Begin by showing students 10 to 20 awkward family photos from www.awkwardfamilyphotos.com that you've previewed in advance. Laugh together and lead the group in voting for the “awkwardest” picture.

Then talk about your own family when you were growing up—the things that drove you crazy, and the things that you really appreciated. Show an “awkward” family photo from when you were young, if possible. Tell a story that illustrates something hard, and something good about your family. Then ask: **What are some things that drive you crazy about your family?** (Pause) **What are some things you really appreciate about your family?** (Pause)

2. Bible Connection

Quickly draw a happy stick-figure family on a piece of poster board and write "The Perfect Family" at the top. Then ask: **Imagine what you'd consider the "perfect family"—a family that, in your opinion, is ideal. What would it be like?** Describe it.

Brainstorm ideal family traits and write the words or phrases on the poster. Then tape the "Perfect Family" poster on the wall. Stretching across the wall, add the other four posters you made earlier to create a spectrum in this order:

- BAAAAAAAAAAAAAD!!! Family
- Bad Family
- Messed-up/Normal Family
- Good/Normal Family
- Perfect Family

Have students form pairs. Explain that each pair will read a biblical account of a real family. In their pair, they'll discuss the story and write a few descriptive words on a piece of paper. (For example: For Adam and Eve's

family, words might include jealousy, conflict, and murder.) Next, they'll decide where on the spectrum (from BAAAAAAAAAAAAAD!!! to Perfect) they think that family fits. They'll tape their paper on the wall and stand by it.

When everybody understands, make assignments using the following families:

- Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16—conflict, jealousy, fratricide)
- Noah's family (Genesis 9:18-27—drunkenness, cursing)
- Abraham's family (Genesis 16—polygamy, child abandonment)
- Lot's family (Genesis 19—offering daughter to rapists, incest)
- Isaac's family (Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-45—sibling conflict, favoritism, manipulation, hatred)
- Jacob, Rachel, Leah (Genesis 29:1-30—polygamy, favoritism)
- Jacob's family (Genesis 37—favoritism, jealousy, hatred, violence, deception)
- Manoah's family (Judges 13—Prayer, care for son)
- Naomi's family (Ruth 1:1-2:17; 4:13-14—loss, loyalty, commitment, healing)
- Saul's family (1 Samuel 20:12-24—violence, attempted murder)
- Eli and wicked sons (1 Samuel 1:12-17, 22-25; 3:10-14—Lack of parental discipline; sons cheating and sexual immorality)
- David: Amnon, Tamar, Absalom (2 Samuel 13—incestuous rape, fratricide)

3. Digging Deeper

When everyone is finished, invite each pair to briefly explain about their assigned biblical family and why they chose that spot on the spectrum. Then ask: **How does all this family dysfunction in the Bible make you feel, and why?**

Talk about how (outside of severe or dangerous situations) it's common to feel disappointed with their "normal" families.

Then say: **No family is perfect, but God gave you yours. Your family is God's gift to you. Yes, all our families have dysfunctions and flaws that can drive us crazy. It's important to have a realistic perspective on all of this—we can't measure our family against a false, idealized standard. Let go of the "you-always-let-me-down-and-annoy-me stance" that's easy to slip into with our families—instead, embrace them in an attitude of gratitude and grace.**

Read aloud Ephesians 4:31-32 and Colossians 3:12-14. Then tell a personal story of how you have seen grace lived out in both your family as you were growing up, and in your family today. Invite one or two teenagers to tell their own story of grace in their family. Point out how necessary grace is in our everyday relationships with family members.

4. Closing

Wrap up by having students form new pairs to pray for each other's families. Then close in a group prayer, asking Jesus to help everyone in their unique family situations.