

Workshop C - Parenting and Family

Sweden Bahá'í Summer School, Saturday, July 11, 2026, 14:00-17:00

Section 1: Parenting Children to Live Meaningful and Purposeful Lives (60 minutes)

Instructions: Form groups of 3-5 people. Study and consult about the guidance below (in Swedish and English) from the Universal House of Justice. Some possible discussion questions are provided.

1. "I familjens stödjande famn ger föräldrar sina barn lyhörd vägledning så att de lär sig att leva ett meningsfullt och målmedvetet liv i hängivenhet, dygd och tjänande. I detta syfte främjar föräldrarna kärleksfullt, genom att vara förebilder och genom hur de för sig och samspelar i vardagen, såväl som genom otaliga samtal, en mängd egenskaper, attityder, vanor och förmågor av ökande komplexitet i sina barn och anpassar sina metoder och tillvägagångssätt till varje stadium i barnets utveckling, från spädbarnsålder till mognad. Från tidig ålder lär sig barnen att vända sig till Gud och att älska Honom, att dagligen be och recitera Guds ord, att se sig själva som ädla själar som strävar efter att utveckla andliga egenskaper, att ge företräde åt andra framför sig själva och att ge uttryck för dessa egenskaper i relationer som karaktäriseras av omtänksamhet och samarbete. Allteftersom de utvecklas lär de sig att vänja sig vid svårigheter, att utöva självdisciplin och ansvarstagande, att glömma sig själva och att skaffa sig kunskap om konst och vetenskap. Och när de i allt högre grad tar steget ut i världen på egen hand lär de sig att utveckla en hållning av tjänande, att sprida och tillämpa de gudomliga lärorna, att lösa meningsskiljaktigheter och delta i rådslag, att förbli orubbliga i förbundet, att arbeta för att förbättra världen och att inrikta sig på de ting som leder till evig ära. Bahá'í-skrifterna erbjuder föräldrar en gränslös källa till insikter som de kan använda för att kultivera dessa och många andra viktiga attityder, färdigheter och förmågor, och träningsinstitutet erbjuder familjen ett viktigt stöd genom att öka förståelsen och förmågan hos alla dess medlemmar. Det kan även finnas andra tillgängliga resurser för att stödja den materiella, sociala och andliga utbildningen av unga människor, vilka familjen kan dra nytta av – skolor, samhällsliv, tjänandeprojekt och så vidare. Det yttersta ansvaret för att säkerställa en otadlig och komplett utbildning av barnen ligger emellertid hos föräldrarna." (Universal House of Justice, "Family Life-Marriage" letter, para #10)

"In the supportive environment of the family, parents offer attentive guidance to their children to learn to live a meaningful and purposeful life of devotion, virtue, and service. To this end, through their example and the pattern of their daily lives and interactions, as well as countless conversations, parents lovingly nurture in their children a host of qualities, attitudes, habits and capabilities of increasing complexity, adapting their methods and approaches across every stage of child development, from infancy to maturity. From an early age children learn to turn to God and to love Him, to pray and recite the Word of God daily, to see themselves as noble souls striving to develop spiritual qualities, to prefer others before themselves, and to express these qualities in caring and cooperative relationships. As they progress, they learn to become accustomed to hardship, to practice self-discipline and accountability, to become forgetful of self, and to acquire knowledge of the arts and sciences. And as they increasingly step into the world on their own, they learn to develop an attitude of service, to diffuse and apply the divine teachings, to resolve differences and participate in consultation, to remain steadfast in the Covenant, to work for the betterment of the world, and to direct themselves to those things that lead to everlasting honor. The Bahá'í Writings offer parents a boundless source of insight with which to cultivate these and so many other vital attitudes, skills, and abilities, and the

training institute provides essential support for the family by enhancing the understanding and capabilities of all its members. There may also be other resources available to assist in the material, social, and spiritual education of young people of which the family can take advantage—schools, community life, service projects, and so on. Yet the ultimate responsibility to ensure the proper and complete education of children resides with the parents.” (Universal House of Justice, “Family Life-Marriage” letter, para #10)

Small Group Discussion:

- a. What are the goals for parents to strive to fulfill?
 - b. What are some parenting actions to help the children fulfill these goals?
 - c. What are some of the “vital attitudes, skills, and abilities” children need to acquire?
 - d. What are one or two practical changes you can make in your parenting to fulfill what is in this paragraph?
2. “Med tiden utvecklas relationerna mellan familjemedlemmarna och antar andra former. Omsorgsfullt närda band av kärlek och enighet mellan syskon ger stöd och glädje under hela livet och fungerar som ett bålverk mot den småaktiga avundsjuka och splittring som kan uppstå i familjelivet. Det är uppenbart att vuxna barns rättigheter och skyldigheter inte är desamma som när de var unga. Föräldrar måste vara öppna för dessa förändringar när de förbereder sina barn för mognad och uppmärksam främjar självständighet och ansvar inom nästa generation då de växer upp. Unga människor fortsätter under hela sin levnad att respektera och hedra sina föräldrar, men när de mognar måste de ta ansvar för sina egna liv och val. Med tiden förändras skyldigheter och omständigheterna kan i allt högre grad komma att kalla ett barn att hjälpa föräldrarna då de åldras.” (Universal House of Justice, “Family Life-Marriage” letter, para #11)

“As time goes by, the relationships among family members evolve and assume different forms. Carefully nurtured bonds of love and unity among siblings offer a lifetime of support and upliftment, and serve as a bulwark against the petty jealousies and divisions that can arise in the life of the family. Clearly, the rights and responsibilities of adult children are not the same as when they were young. Parents have to be sensitive to such changes as they prepare their children for maturity, attentively fostering autonomy and responsibility within the next generation as they grow up. Young people continue throughout their lifetime to respect and honour their parents, yet as they mature, they must take charge of their own lives and choices. In time, obligations change, and a child may increasingly be called upon by circumstances to extend assistance as the parents age.” (Universal House of Justice, “Family Life-Marriage” letter, para #11)

Small Group Discussion:

- a. How could parents help siblings build bonds of love and unity?
 - b. What are some of the transition points when children's rights and responsibilities change? What are examples of these rights and responsibilities?
3. “Bland de frågor som behöver begrundas finns följande: Vad kännetecknar bahá'íernas familjeliv och hur skiljer sig detta från hur man ser på familjeliv i dagens samhälle? Vad utmärker bahá'í-äktenskapet och hur främjar det familjelivet? Hur bidrar bahá'í-familjer till omvandlingsprocessen i grannskap och byar, och vidare? Vilka är de fallgropar och hinder som bahá'í-familjer för närvarande står inför och som hindrar dem från att uppnå detta mål? Hur kan ramverket för handling under det innevarande skedet av den gudomliga planen både stärka familjelivet och skapa möjligheter för livskraftiga familjer att bidra till

samhällsbyggnadsprocessen?” (Universal House of Justice, “Family Life-Marriage” letter, para #4)

“Among the questions to be considered are the following: What are the characteristics of Bahá’í family life and how are they distinguished from the way family life is understood in society today? What is the distinctive nature of Bahá’í marriage and how does it foster family life? How do Bahá’í families contribute to the process of transformation in neighbourhoods and villages, and beyond? What are the current pitfalls and obstacles facing Bahá’í families that prevent them from achieving this aim? How does the framework for action of the current stage of the Divine Plan both strengthen family life and create opportunities for vibrant families to contribute to the process of community building?” (Universal House of Justice, “Family Life-Marriage” letter, para #4)

Small Group Discussion:

- a. What are your thoughts in response to these questions?

Whole Group Discussion:

- a. Any key insights from the small groups to share?
- b. What are some ways that parents can support each other in these goals?

*****30 Minute Break*****

Fun Family Meetings That Build Unity (60 minutes Reading and Discussion; 30 minutes for the activity)

(Monette Van Lith, www.monettevanlith.com; Susanne M. Alexander;
www.marriagetransformation.com)

Instructions:

60 Minutes:

- In groups of 5 people, read the information below about incorporating family meetings into your family's culture. Discussion questions are at the end.

30 Minutes:

- Then practice holding a family meeting, using the scenario provided.

Principles of Family Consultation

Building consultation skills and practices as a family contributes to family unity.

1. Family members express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas with a view to understanding each other.
2. Necessary additional knowledge or information is identified and acquired.
3. Often, the process of consultation results in making a decision or deciding on a plan.
4. In the search for the way forward, no one insists on their own opinion or attaches too much weight to their own ideas.
5. All ideas are welcomed and are considered aspects of an emerging bigger picture.
6. As soon as an idea or suggestion is shared with the group, it becomes part of the whole and

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does not belong anymore to one person.

7. The topic is open to be discussed by all, considering the pros, cons, difficulties, opportunities, and so on.
8. Every member of the family expresses their thoughts, feelings, and ideas freely and without anyone belittling, dominating, or patronizing another.
9. Everyone listens carefully to see the different parts of the idea unfold and come into focus, without interrupting.
10. Gradually, a vision for the way forward takes shape.
11. The goal is to arrive at a unified idea or consensus about what to do or not do.
12. Only if a consensus isn't clear would the family vote, and a majority would prevail. However, all would still carry it out as a unified decision.

The How

1. Create a fun and welcoming environment. You can include snacks, art supplies, music (playing or creating), and activities.
2. To prepare, have teams or pairs take responsibility for organizing parts of the meeting, such as collecting ideas for the agenda, preparing snacks, choosing prayers, and taking notes and recording any decisions.
3. Post a running agenda somewhere visible where issues and ideas can be added in between meetings.
4. Depending on the children's age and attention span, the meeting can last between 20 and 40 minutes.
5. Start the meeting with prayers and celebrate achievements that have happened since the last meeting, perhaps those based on the decisions that were made.
6. Prepare the first meeting well, to make it a success and leave everyone feeling good.
 - Agree on some simple rules and expectations, and write them down.
 - Agree to listen to understand and acknowledge everyone's contributions.
 - Agree to use a box or basket to keep everyone's electronic devices in during the meeting.
7. End the meeting with expressions of gratitude, prayers, and appreciation for the unity of the family.

The Agenda

You will likely identify a few items that are the same for every meeting and some that are specific for each meeting.

1. Start with reading the family mission statement, an affirmation, inspiration, or prayer.
2. Briefly review the family meeting rules or agreements if necessary.

3. Spend some time reflecting as a family on:

- What went well since the last meeting, what to continue doing, and what can be improved.
- Service opportunities and intentional acts of kindness for the coming week.
- A skill or virtue for every family member to practice during the coming week.
- Activity planning, examples: family picnic with neighbors, a hike, game night....

Some Guidelines

1. Avoid having a grown-up take the lead. Allow the children to take responsibility.
2. Parents agree ahead of time which agenda items require their final decision.
3. If possible, tie the meeting to another fun, regular activity, like a hike or game night.
4. If helpful, use an object like a pretty stone or wooden spoon to pass and take turns speaking.
5. Use a special notebook to record decisions and track who will do what and when.

Small Groups Discussion

1. What are your thoughts on the value of holding regular family meetings?
2. How do you think your children would respond to the idea of holding family meetings?
3. What would interfere with or prevent family meetings from happening at all or from happening regularly?
4. What elements of the arts would your family appreciate including in family meetings?
5. What would be fun to include in family meetings?
6. What would help your family make this a regular activity?

Whole Group Discussion: Any insights to share?

Family Meeting Practice (30 minutes)

Hints for Success:

- Choose the roles, such as who chairs and who takes notes
- Gather facts and ideas first before jumping to a decision
- Be clear that there is a consensus before starting to plan the details
- Agree that this will be a learning process to try out
- Determine who will do what, where, when, and how to carry out the plan
- What would success look like?
- When to meet again to review what happened

Family Group (4 people); Choose Roles: wife/mother (works from home), husband/father (works in a factory), son (12), daughter (9)

Observer/Coach (1 person):

1. Is the family meeting including elements of fun?
2. Is everyone participating? Are they using courteous speaking and respectful listening?
3. Are they strengthening ties of love and unity?
4. Do they need positive encouragement from you?

Role Play a Family Meeting (20 minutes):

- **Problem:** Everyone is too busy to spend time together as a family (after-school activities, work, social events, and religious activities). Meals are no longer shared, and it often feels like everyone is somewhere in the house on their devices and not engaging with each other. The family is drifting apart, and no one knows anymore what is happening in each other's lives.
- **Purpose of the meeting:** Come up with solutions that build unity and bring the family together.
- **Desired Outcome:** 1 plan to try in the coming two weeks

Large Group Discussion about the experience and the learning insights from it (10 minutes)