

Japan's Happy Family Program

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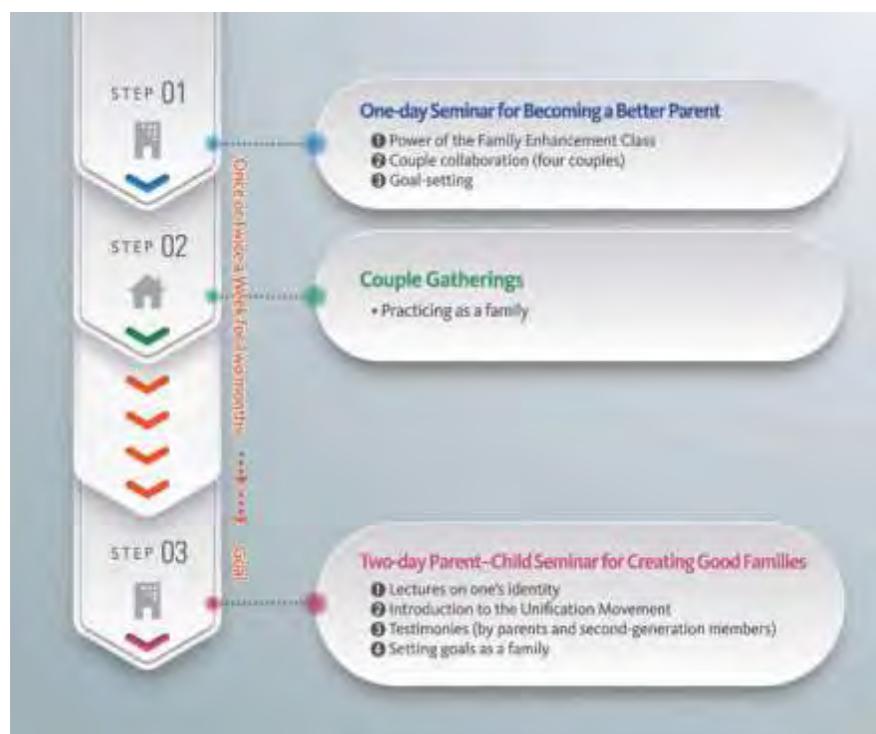


The course back to a happy family can be a wrenching, though worthwhile, process.

The Family Education Department of the HSA-UWC Headquarters in Japan has a comprehensive program to support blessed couples in their efforts to have happy, vibrant families in which the parents bequeath our beliefs and our most cherished traditions. This article outlines the process.

The Happy Family Program strives to promote happy families -- one of the visions of the unification movement in Japan -- and to guide parents and children in working together to substantively practice their faith, the values of the blessing and the family ideal across three generations. This program consists of the Seminar for Becoming a Better Parent, Couple Gatherings, and the Parent-Child Seminar for Creating Good Families.

In other words, this is a program to help people restore and complete the parental heart, thereby becoming true parents.



By practicing ways to become a better couple (in a group of four or five couple) this program aims to create a basis for couples to grow through experience, effect restoration in their families, and move toward creating a church that is an extension of a happy family. Within such a church, blessed couples can carry out our tribal mission messiah (witnessing) and develop a true family campaign that can contribute to society.

The primary aim of the program is to restore the bond of heart (trust) within the parent-child relationship, so that parents

can guide their children toward the blessing. The main points are the following: Allow participants in the Seminar for Becoming a Better Parent to share the Happy Family Program vision. Engage in discussions in Couple Gatherings. Then, based on the parents' investment in the relationship with their child, have both the parents and the child take part in the Parent-Child Seminar for Creating Good Families, so that

as a family they can make a fresh start.

The parents' seminar

The Seminar for Becoming a Better Parent identifies problems within a family as common problems within the church and society that we need to address. Dealing with these problems communally, with mutual support, helps participants build awareness and a mind-set that the underlying purpose of relating to their child is to restore the original parent– child relationship. The program encourages parents not only to engage their children head-on but also to set goals for improving their spousal relationship, so that they can show their children substantive happiness in a couple, thereby encouraging their children to go to the blessing.



Aspects of true parenthood

How long should a parent continue to raise his or her child? Childrearing is for the benefit of not only the child but also the parents. Within the family, parents develop and gradually embody the four great realms of heart. Only when that process is complete are they true parents. Childrearing continues until their child certifies that his or her parents are true parents.

I will introduce four aspects of becoming a true parent. First, is making sure the parents' love reaches the child, which means deepening the give-and-take action. Loving one's child and having that parental love reach the child are two separate things. In most cases, the parents' love does not reach the child. Consequently, in many cases all manner of walls and crevices form between parent and child. Ensuring that your love reaches your child is essential. The second aspect of becoming a true parent is creating an environment in which your child can grow. Children are simultaneously the subject-partner when it comes to growing up and the object-partner when it comes to being raised. The parents are the subject-partner when it comes to "raising a child." That a parent grows toward a certain goal is the third aspect. By goal, I am referring to the aim of becoming a true parent that embodies the four great realms of heart. The fourth aspect is having a purpose in the family. Building relationships within your family assuring that all the members in your family can talk about what kind of family they want to create is important.

Practicing three points is essential to succeeding in these four aspects of becoming a true parent. First, you must believe that your child is God's child. Second, all members of the family should engage in empathic listening within the family. Third, you must recognize that the child holds the answer to the problem.

The purpose and goal of the Happy Family Program is to build trust between the parent and child, encourage participants to hold family meetings, and for the members to engage in volunteer service activities as a family. By doing so, I believe they can become families that are owners over the mission of tribal messiahs.

Participants learn these points through the parental seminars and are encouraged to implement what they have learned.

Collaborative couples

Four to five couples form a group for two months, meeting once or twice a week. There, each couple tells the group what they did with their child and empathizes with the achievements of the other couples, while

encouraging one another, resetting their goals and helping one another to grow to become true parents. The goal of this program is to build trust among the couples so that they can talk to one another and to allow participants to see and actually feel that they have grown closer to becoming a true parent. Members of this group pray for one another and pray that the child or children join the couples in the parent-child seminar and later go to the blessing. Participants continue to help each other until their last couple gathering, with their minds set on participating in the parent-child seminar.

After two months, participants discuss whether to continue holding these Couple Gatherings. Some choose continuing meeting once a month or otherwise depending on their circumstances. We ask the leader of the group of couples to be more a facilitator and contact person than somebody dictating what to do. Essentially, the leader should not force his or her opinion on others. The leader is in a position to praise the accomplishments of each participant and encourage others to identify with the underlying heart. Members speak to the group about incidents in their family that touched their hearts or left an impression and they empathize with one another.

Practicing as a family



Merely thinking about creating a happy family is not enough; practicing love within the family is important. In order to win the trust of your children, what actions should you take? You might do many things, but here I would like to suggest three things you can do.

People say that a child cannot choose his parents nor can parents choose their children. No matter what kind of person your child is, God entrusted that child to you. Even if your child cries, complains or badgers you about something, you should always remember that God entrusted you with this child and speak to the child with that in mind. (Once again) your child is God's child.

Every childrearing book states that the parent must change. How can a parent change? Parents usually try to change their children's behavior. They try to force their children to study or to force them to go to church. Parents try multitudinous ways to change a child's behavior. Yet, the more they try, the less likely the child is to change. In some cases, parents begin to develop a negative impression of their own child, which defeats the effort in the end. Some may ask what they, as a parent, should do to change.

Instead of trying to change your child's behavior, you should first genuinely try to understand your son or daughter. Children are champions when it comes to discerning the motives of a parent. They will immediately sense your motive in trying to understand them. You will see that your love is actually reaching them, and the children will realize on their own that they need to change their behavior.

Parents love all their children. When, then, does your love actually reach your children? Children feel their parents' love when they sense that their parents understand them. Hence, I encourage you to listen to your children and hear what they are saying. If you open your heart and strive to understand what your child is saying and how he feels when he talks to you, your child will find joy and feel your love. When that occurs, your child will come to have a more positive outlook. Increasing the capacity of your children's hearts requires listening to them and empathizing with them.

Try practicing empathic listening with other parents. Two people should form a pair. One person will practice empathic listening while the other talks about the seminar, reflectively. Each person has four minutes to talk and to listen. If you practice this enough, you will gradually learn how to listen empathically.

Aside from these three techniques that I just introduced, there are other techniques such as "removing the nail in your heart," "pressing the pause button," "getting off the emotional train," "leading a life that increases the balance in your 'trust' account," "accepting your family as it is," and "loving each person."

The parent-child seminar

Once you have practiced in your family what you have learned through the Couple Gatherings and have restored to a certain extent trust between you and your child, we recommended that you and your child participate in the two-day Parent- child Seminar for Creating Good Families. The purpose is to improve the parent-child relationship, increase trust in the church, and reinforce hope in the blessing. One of its features is having other second-generation members give three types of testimonies -- a testimony on when they found their faith, one on the joy they felt when receiving the blessing, and one on their

activities in the church. We interview each second-generation child separately.

The interviewer listens carefully to whatever the child is unable to tell his or her parents. At the end, we ask the parents and the children to write a letter to each other and to read it to the other. More than ninety-percent of those that participated said that their parent-child relationship improved. The children that participated reconnected to the church.

Trusting one's parents is an important factor in a second-generation child's willingness to go through the blessing. That trust itself translates into success. Therefore, if parents can win the trust of their children and grow through this process, this will lead to the formation of happy families.

Parents are responsible

Parents have inherited the victory of our True Parents' matching. Matching by parents requires that each parent have the requisite level of maturity. Understanding their child's heart is the way for the parents to grow in heart and in love. I cannot say enough about how recommending the blessing to your children is the most important event in the family's course. I have found that parents can grow through the Happy Family Program and that this has greatly increased and raised the level of matching by parents, which is True Parents' desire.

Testimonies

Minoro Fukuda (6,000-couple group)

I was blessed in 1982. I have three sons and a daughter. My wife, Yukiko passed away at fifty-four after struggling against a disease. After her Seonghwa, she often appeared in the spirit and guided our family. However, it seemed that my children, who are very sensitive, missed their mother much more than I had thought. Out of their pain and sorrow, they began to engage in problematic behavior, but I was unable to understand them and did not know how to deal with the situation.

As the hostility in our household increased, I realized that this could not continue. I took Power of the Family Enhancement classes and resolved to practice what I had learned. During the classes, I realized that I was accountable for the present condition of my family. I repented for hurting my children's feelings.

All they wanted was for me to listen to them as they expressed their pain. All I tried to do was explain the circumstances and point out the problems. I had incorrectly believed that doing that was an expression of parental love. I bowed my head in shame and asked my children for forgiveness.

During a conversation I had with my oldest son, I found myself in a situation where normally I would have scolded him. At that moment, I mentally "pressed the pause button" in my heart and refrained from shouting. Thus, I was able to see my son's pure heart. Since then, I made it a rule to listen first to my children before trying to say something to them. As a result, my children began to comment on how I had changed. They now tell me that they feel freer to talk to me because I listen to them. I remember somebody saying that children are geniuses when it comes to identifying their parent's motives. I feel that this is true.

Masami Sato (360,000-couple group)

For the past two years, I have been participating once a month in the Power of the Family Enhancement classes. Gradually, I have come to see my fallen nature. As I practiced the skills that I learned in class, such as "pushing the pause button" and empathic listening, my relationship to my husband -- which had been characterized by constant arguing -- began to change. In this process, my husband began to repent for having caused True Parents to suffer.

He related to me how he actually felt God embracing him during prayer. My relationship with my oldest son, who was in the second grade of middle school, was not the best, and one day we argued about something frivolous. His twin brother pushed the two of us into a room and closed the door, saying that we should talk it out. At first, a long silence weighed heavily in the room; however, gradually, I began to feel the bitterness my oldest son had had from when he was a child. Soon, I began to feel so deeply sorry. Tears covered my face. During the next hour, I apologized for each wrong that I had committed from when he was three until when he was fourteen years old. My son, in tears, listened quietly.

After our talk, I opened the door, and found my second son, who had been listening, in tears. I realized that my second son had been saddened whenever I quarreled with my oldest son. This caused me yet again to repent deeply. That night, my son came and sat on my lap. Being able to so naturally bond with my son again moved me to tears. Since then, all the members in my family can talk freely with one another and bond in heart.