

**Right Relationship Concept:
Unconditional Love, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation
(Upper Level)**

Learning Objectives:

- To teach children that God loves us unconditionally.
- To build awareness that we are called to love God unconditionally and to love each other as God loves us.
- To explain that imposing conditions for love is not what God intended for us.
- To teach that love means respecting others and ourselves.
- To teach children that God forgives us when we are sorry and that we should forgive those who hurt us.

Outline:

- I. Opening Prayer
- II. God Love Us Unconditionally (Core)**
- III. How Do We Show Love to One Another? (Core)**
- IV. God Forgives Us and Asks Us to Forgive (Core)**
- V. Closing Prayer

Materials Needed:

- Whiteboard, chalkboard and chalk or flip chart and markers
- Pens, pencils for class members
- Handouts:
 - Grades 4 – 6: “Love is ... Crossword”
 - Grades 7 – 8: “Love is ... Word Search”
 - Grades 7 – 12: “Love is ...How Am I?”
 - Grades 4 – 12: “Understanding Reconciliation”
 - Grades 7 – 12: “Cycle of Violence”
- Activities:
 - “Love is ...Crossword Puzzle”: pens or pencils, Bible
 - “Love is ...Word Search”: pens or pencils, Bible
 - “Love is ...How Am I?”: pens or pencils, Bible
 - “Understanding Reconciliation”: pens or pencils
 - “Cycle of Violence”: no special materials are needed

Teacher’s Note: Since this lesson focuses on God’s forgiveness of sin, this may be a good opportunity to encourage students to participate frequently in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

I. Opening Prayer

In the + Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Jesus, by obeying the Father, you have shown us how much God loves us. Help us to learn how to love God with our whole heart, soul, and strength and to love one another as you have loved us. Amen.

In the + Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

II. God Loves Us Unconditionally (Core)

Discussion

If you really love me...

- **Say:** “How many times have you heard someone say, ‘If you really love me, you will (take out the trash...listen to what I say...let me do what I want...give me what I want)’? Sometimes people say these things without even thinking. They do not realize they are setting conditions for love. As we grow older and enter more exclusive friendships and relationships, it is important to keep in mind that God loves us unconditionally and wants us to love each other in the same way. In fact, God’s unconditional love for us creates in us a desire to respect, love, and serve one another. Loving relationships are always based on mutual respect, concern, and a willingness to be open to each other.”
- **Say:** “When someone creates conditions and challenges us to prove that we love them or to prove that we are deserving of their love, they are not modeling the kind of unconditional love God desires for us and that we deserve by virtue of being created in God’s image.”
- **Say:** “Personal relationships have boundaries. If someone violates your boundaries, treats you disrespectfully, or asks you to give up your values as a condition of their love; let the person know “love does not work that way.” If he or she persists, after you tell them to stop, and you begin to feel unsafe, threatened, disrespected or pressured to do something you know you should not do or do not want to do, tell a trusted adult and continue telling the trusted adult until he or she understand how you feel and does something to make you feel comfortable or safe. Similarly, if you know or suspect that someone is violating another person’s boundaries, or treating them with disrespect, or hurting them, seek help from an adult you trust.”

III. How Do We Show Love to One Another? (Core)

Discussion

Say:

*“We show love in many ways:
we treat each other with respect;
we offer each other the sign of peace;
we use kind words;
we follow the rules;
we pray for one another;
we pray together;
we help others;
we forgive each other.”*

Grades 4 - 5

- **Say:** *“As Catholic Christians we are called to love our neighbors as Christ loves us. We are called to respect all human life and to see Christ in each person. Our love is concern for others based on our faith in Christ Jesus. If we truly see Christ in others, we will treat others with respect.”*
- **Say:** *“Think about the time you spent with other people today; think about the choices you made and the things you said and did.”*
- **Say:** *“Now, picture each of these other people as Jesus. Would you have made the same choices? How would your day have been different if you had seen Jesus in them? How would your day have been different if others had seen Jesus in you?”*
- **Say:** *“You can make a difference in the world through the choices you make. If you see Jesus in others, you will love and help them and enable others to see Jesus in you.”*

Grades 9 - 12 (can adapt for 6 - 8)

- **Say:** *“1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 provides a description of Christian love. Many couples select this reading when they celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony but these qualities are not limited to marital or romantic love.”*
- **Say:** *“Patience, kindness, humility, truthfulness, perseverance, dignity, and respect for others are qualities of all right relationships. Paul’s words to the Corinthians provide us with a good means of evaluating our relationships with others. Scripture helps us discern if we are making good choices in our actions toward others and if our choices are helping us to steer clear of hurtful or abusive relationships.”*

- **Say:** *“Some signs of an abusive relationship are clear:*
 - *when someone is hurtful to another;*
 - *when someone insists on his or her own way with little regard for others;*
 - *when someone degrades or humiliates others.”*
- **Say:** *“Other signs of an abusive /controlling relationship are less clear and, in fact, some of the things that indicate that a relationship is not right may be confused with similar things in a right relationship.*
 - *We may feel flattered if someone expresses jealousy or is possessive of our time and attention. Although we like to spend time with those that we love, exclusive relationships are not healthy. Jealousy or possessiveness can be a sign of a desire for control that can quickly turn into abusive behavior.*
 - *We may experience a sense of excitement in wrongdoing, or may feel arrogance / pride in gaining the attention of someone who seems unattainable or unapproachable. Unfortunately, a relationship built on these qualities is likely to be hurtful to one or more of the individuals involved.”*

Activities

Read: 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7.

- **Ask:** *“What does this passage mean?”* Discuss the passage.
- **Say:** *“Now we’re going to read the passage a second time. This time, when you come to the words ‘Love is’ substitute ‘I am’ to help discern how you are showing love to others.*
- *Substitute the name of someone significant in your life to help you determine if the relationship is really a ‘right’ relationship.*
- *If you think that you are involved in a relationship that is abusive, you may need help getting out. Tell a trusted adult about your concerns and ask for their help.”*

Grades 4 – 5: “Love is ...” Crossword Puzzle

Grades 6 – 12: “Love is ...” Word Search

Grades 7 – 12: “Love is....How am I?” Worksheet

IV. God Forgives Us and Wants Us to Forgive (Core)

Discussion

- **Say:** *“Through Baptism, we belong to Jesus and should try to be like him. Throughout his life, Jesus forgave the sins of many people. When he was dying on the cross he forgave the thief who was sorry for what he had done. Even though they were not sorry for their actions, Jesus even asked his Father to forgive the people who crucified him. Jesus wants us to be sorry when we do something wrong and ask the forgiveness of the person or persons we have hurt. Jesus also wants us to forgive others when they hurt us even if they are not sorry for what they have done. James 5:16 encourages us to confess our sins and pray for one another so that we may be healed. Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a way to be reconciled with God.”*
- **Read: Mt 6:14-15:** *“If you forgive others the wrongs they have done you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done.”* Discuss.
- **Say:** *“Think about what our lives would be like if God held grudges. What hope would we have if God decided that, because we are not perfect, we cannot be trusted to ever do the right thing? Sometimes we can feel discouraged when, in our human relationships, we cannot forgive. But how do we forgive?”*
- **Say:** *“When we are sorry for something we know we did wrong, we feel bad and try not to do it again.*
 - *Would you believe someone who took one of your CDs, said ‘I am sorry’, then took another one?*
 - *If someone called you a name and they were still laughing when they said ‘I am sorry’, would you believe them?”*
- **Say:** *“When we are truly sorry, we do more than say ‘I am sorry.’ We do something to try to make things right.*
 - *If we make a big mess, we don’t say ‘I am sorry’ and leave everything for someone else to clean up. We clean it up.*
 - *If we hurt someone by what we say or do, we say ‘I am sorry’ but we also try to help the person we have hurt.”*
- **Say:** *“Even though God loves us and does not want any one to hurt us, sometimes they do. If someone is hurting you, even if they say ‘I am sorry’ and you have forgiven them, God does not want you to be hurt.*

- *If someone is hurting you, tell your parents or another trusted adult so they can take action to make it stop.*
- *If someone keeps doing something that hurts you after you ask them to stop, or after they say they are sorry, tell your parents or another trusted adult so they can take action to make it stop.*
- *If you have hurt someone and are sorry you hurt them, if you have said to him or her 'I am sorry' and you have tried to make it right but the person you hurt will still not forgive you, remember that God forgives you."*
- **Say:** *"Being able to forgive is an important quality of right relationships. You may have experienced a relationship where a parent, a sibling, or a friend just could not forgive. Sometimes the relationship becomes manipulative: one person is controlling the other's feelings and behavior by continually bringing up past mistakes, accusing the other of wrong intentions, labeling the other as untrustworthy, and blaming the other for everything that goes wrong. This type of relationship is not a 'right' relationship; this is not the type of relationship God wants for us. Regardless of whom the relationship is with, every right relationship has room for each person to make mistakes and make changes for the better."*
- **Say:** *"Forgiveness does not mean giving up your values, allowing yourself to be hurt or accepting blame that does not belong to you. If you are being hurt in a relationship - physically, emotionally, or sexually - seek help."*

Activity

Grades 4 – 12: "Understanding Reconciliation"

- Hand out the "Understanding Reconciliation" worksheets for the students to complete. Once completed, discuss their responses considering the following possible reconciliations:
 1.
 - a) Apologize to the person about whom you are gossiping.
 - b) Next time you hear gossip, tell the person who is gossiping that you do not want to gossip.
 2.
 - a) Apologize to the person to whom you lied.
 - b) Make amends for any consequences of the lie.
 3.
 - a) Apologize to the person you hurt
 - b) Try to make amends for the injury
 4.
 - a) Apologize to the person you hurt

- b) Try to make amends for any damage you may have done
5. Let the person who lied to you know, in a non-confrontational way, that you prefer to be told the truth, even when it hurts. Relationships built on trust are *right relationships*.
 6. I may have mixed feelings when someone forgives me for something I have done. I may be happy that I am forgiven but I may also feel ashamed or feel deep regret for having done the harmful act to begin with. The negative feelings may help keep us from doing the harmful act again.
 7. We always feel better when we reconcile relationships that are damaged but some relationships may have been so hurtful that the process of forgiveness may take a long time, even years, to complete. Knowing that God wants us to forgive should never make us feel guilty that we have not reached the point of forgiveness.

Discussion

Grades 7 – 12: “Cycle of Violence”

- **Say:** *“It is often common for an abuser to act remorsefully, to promise to change, to beg for forgiveness, and to appear to change their behavior. This pattern is known as the ‘Cycle of Violence’.* Distribute the “Cycle of Violence” handout.
- **Say:** *“Generally, abuse does not occur constantly but rather in a cycle. The cycle consists of three phases: the tension building phase, the acute battering incident, and the kindness, contrite, loving behavior stage. This latter stage is sometimes referred to as the “honeymoon” stage.*
- **Tension-Building Phase.** *During this phase of the cycle, tension builds up in the relationship. There may be verbal, emotional, or physical abuse during this phase. This abuse can increase and escalate in frequency and severity over time. The person abused may attempt to “control” the abuse through various coping techniques such as avoidance, placating, or “giving in” but these methods do not work for long. Once the tension reaches an unbearable level, the abuser loses control and initiates the violence.*
- **Acute Battering Incident.** *This is an uncontrollable discharge of built-up tension; the abuser cannot respond to any control. The “trigger” for moving into this phase has nothing to do with the victim’s behavior; rather it is usually an external stressor or the internal state of the abuser. The type of abuse that occurs is usually much more serious and intense than in the tension-building phase and the victim may be severely injured.*
- **Honeymoon Phase** *(apologies, excuses, promises to reform). The abuser realizes they have gone too far. They typically exhibit loving, kind behavior*

while apologizing and promising that it will never happen again. Both the abuser and victim want to believe that it won't happen again.

- *But the cycle will happen again unless there is outside intervention.”*
- **Say:** *“If you or anyone you know is in an abusive relationship, you may need help getting out of it. Continue telling trusted adults about the situation until they understand what is happening and help you. It may be humanly impossible for survivors of abuse to forgive their abusers, but God’s love, operating in the power of the Holy Spirit, can heal broken spirits, reconcile ruptured relationships, and give meaning to lives that appear to be without hope.”*

V. Closing Prayer

In the + Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Our Father, who art in heaven hallowed be thy Name;
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil. Amen*

In the + Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.