



Parenting: “WE” in a “ME-first” Culture

By David and Kathy Ludwig

Are children really happy if you give them everything they want? Are they happy if they have every possible advantage in life? Do they always need to be **first**...to come out on top...to be the winner?

In today’s culture, parents can be made to feel guilty if the child is not put first. Moms drive their kids around from lesson to lesson; dads spend endless hours at school sporting events and other opportunities for their kids. The danger is that this parenting lifestyle can produce a “ME-focused” child. Is that what you want?

Which of the following would you rather have as your child?

ME-Focused

- Self-centered
- “Me” first
- Rebellious
- No respect
- Complaining
- Deceitful
- Self-indulgent

WE-Focused

- Concern for others
- Willing to share
- Obedient
- Respectful
- Loving
- Honest
- Self-controlled

How do you develop a ME-focused child?

This happens when parents misdirect their focus on a child’s individual rights and insist that the child possess an unrealistically high sense of self-esteem. This ME focus is likely to produce self-centered children who are good at looking out for “me-first.” It’s a natural occurrence; it’s called the old self, our

sinful nature. After all, you didn't have to teach your child to say, "That's not fair!" did you?

How do you develop a WE-focused child?

Try something new. Shift from "ME-first" to "WE-first" in your parenting!

The Lord teaches us to love one another and to live lives of service: *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus* (Philippians 2:1-5). This is what Christ's Spirit leads us to do. *We are to put on the new self* (Ephesians 4:24).

"WE-first" parenting teaches the child to be concerned about the good of others, beginning with the family. The child learns the comfort and security of everyone looking out for one another. The child learns selfless love.

Where do you start the shift to "WE-first" parenting?

You can start today by thinking and saying WE.

As situations arise, your first words can be, "How are WE going to handle this?" Emphasize that WE will handle it. This gives the child a sense of security. The child learns, from your example, to think WE firstly in the sense

"Heavenly Father, how are WE going to handle this one?" and secondly in the sense "How are WE as a Christian family going to handle this?"

The parents are responsible for forming the WE.

Of course you want your child to obey. You want respect. But so often this produces a power struggle between you and your child. You resort to anger and threats — and end up feeling frustrated and upset.

There is another way. There doesn't have to be a power struggle.

Try something different! Stop using your anger to get your child to obey. Stop the power struggle. Remember the Lord's admonitions to the Colossians: *Rid yourself of all things such as these: anger, rage, malice...since you have taken off your old self with its practices and put on the new self* (3:8-9) and *Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged* (3:21). Shift inside from your old self to your new self. Shift your thinking to what is best for the family and others. Think WE!

Instead of focusing on your anger or frustration, focus on what is best for everyone. Allow yourself to feel a quiet determination, and it will show in your voice. You can say in a quiet, firm, yet loving voice, "Going to bed that late is not good for our family."





One of the best gifts you can give your child is a solid foundation, built with God's Word, of love and respect for Jesus, the family and the world...a true sense of WE!

While the ME to WE strategy is effective in both one- or two-parent families, in a two-parent family, you have the opportunity to express the WE as a united front. Whenever a situation with your child needs to be addressed, you first look at each other and say, "How are WE going to handle this?" You can even ask for input from the child, for they are part of the WE.

Later, say to the child, "WE have talked it over, and WE have decided that it is not good for us that you go to bed that late, so your bedtime will be 8:30." Your child will feel the security of the WE. They may push against it, but when the WE holds firm, they will respect it. Also, always remember to say "We love you" and "We forgive you" — when the opportunity presents itself — and to explain to your child what love and forgiveness means and from where it comes (1 John 4:18-19). Then your child will

learn both respect and mercy come from God and result in the new self, which the Holy Spirit continually restores for us through Word and sacrament.

As your child matures, he will internalize these loving yet firm boundaries and attitudes shaped by God's Word. They will become the basis for healthy self-control when he begins to function outside the sphere of your parental influence.

One of the best gifts you can give your child is a solid foundation — built with God's Word — of love and respect for Jesus, the family, and the world...a true sense of WE!

Married for 46 years with three married sons and seven grandchildren, Dr. David and Kathy Ludwig have traveled extensively, giving presentations on family relationships. David has served over 40 years as a university professor, published author, licensed psychologist, and Lutheran minister. Kathy Ludwig, a past president of Carolinas District LWML, taught in Lutheran Schools for 22 years and has been active in LWML all of her life.

Editor's Note: *Conducted in a small group setting, Parenting Families: From ME to WE gives parents a chance to discuss and practice the strategies in between video segments featuring Dr. Ludwig, experienced mom and principal Monique Nunes, brief family dramas, and real life dad, Pastor Ben Gonzales. Six sessions in all, the life-changing message of forgiveness in Jesus is also shared, and in such a way that people will feel comfortable inviting unchurched friends and neighbors to attend the series with them. For more information, visit Lutheran Hour Ministries at www.lhm.org/equipping or call 800-944-3450.*