

# Stories of us.

REAL FAMILIES, REAL LIVES

Care for the Family  
A Christian response to a world of need  
A registered charity

EDITION 01

## After 'I Do'.

*Why just plan a wedding when you can design your whole marriage?*

### WORDS OF LIFE

Online culture can have a huge impact on our children's mental health, but parents actually have more power than social media.

### OUT IN THE OPEN

With the ongoing rise in porn consumption, one couple share their story of how porn impacted their marriage.

### THE GOLDEN THREAD

How do you turn your life around when you're in prison and on drugs? Gary tells us what motivated him not to reoffend.



# Stories of us.

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Thank you to everyone who has shared their story with us.



It’s been 30 years now since Rob Parsons, the founder and chairman of Care for the Family first decided there was some major work to be done in the UK with supporting and strengthening families.

*And over the past 30 years we’ve heard some stories!*

Stories of pain and regret, of frustration, of lost love, and of lost hope. But there have of course also been many stories of encouragement. Stories of renewed relationships and of repaired families, and stories that remind you that even the most difficult situations really can change.

We’ve brought together just a few of these stories. They will give you a flavour of the work we do now, but our desire is that they will also encourage you and help you find ideas to strengthen your own family. These ‘stories of us’ are the accounts of real people in real-life situations, written by the team at Care for the Family or those we work with.

You may already be familiar with Rob Parsons, Katharine Hill or some of our speakers who have represented us in the many hundreds of events and conferences we have organised or contributed to. But *Stories of us* will also introduce you to a few of our staff, volunteers, Partners and so many others who are all part of what we do.

So whatever your family shape and size, whether you’re parenting together, on your own, or from a distance, whether you’ve been married 5 minutes or 50 years, as you read these article we hope that you will become part of our story – and that you and your family will join with us, as together we ‘care for the family’.





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Throughout history, stones have been set up in the form of statues or memorials to mark important events, people and places. Rob Parsons shares Care for the Family’s vision for the future and tells you about our important ‘stones’.



# Into Their World.

## Confident parenting in the digital age

**W**hen it comes to the digital world parents can feel overwhelmed by all that is out there; not knowing what the latest gadgets are or having a limited knowledge of social media platforms and their latest filters, features and functions. How do you begin to keep your child safe in this world when you barely understand it yourself? Our goal at Care for the Family is to come alongside parents and show that you're not the only ones feeling daunted by this, and you certainly don't have to be a tech genius to keep your child safe online.

We caught up with the Legg family in Worthing to find out how they manage the digital environment in their household. Bekah and Steve have been married for ten years and together they have five girls. They are both editors of their own magazines and Bekah is also one of Care for the Family's speakers at the *Free To Be* event for women.

We were joined by Bekah and two daughters, Megan (age 15) and Gemma (age 16). Both girls use Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. Bekah mostly uses Facebook and WhatsApp, but also has Instagram and Snapchat profiles. ►

PHOTOGRAPH: Bekah, Megan and Gemma with a family friend







Snapchat

Snapchat is a multimedia messaging app used predominantly by teenagers. The app enables them to communicate through the sharing of photos and videos which disappear from screens after ten seconds. There is also information and news from the big brands, magazines and newspapers.



Instagram

Instagram is a photo and video-sharing social media platform, and is owned by Facebook. Users choose whether to share photos privately with friends and family, or publicly with everyone.



WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a messaging service where you can share text, photos and videos with individuals or groups of people. It is also owned by Facebook.



Facebook

Facebook is the oldest of the four social media platforms. Its main purpose is to enable social networking through status updates, private messages and the sharing of photos and videos. It is also used by companies to market their products and services.

Which social media platform is your favourite, and why?

**Gemma:** I use them differently. With Snapchat I have more one-on-one conversations with my friends whereas with Instagram I post pictures of things I've seen or places I've been.

**Bekah:** Well, you have two Instagram accounts, don't you?

**Gemma:** I have a private account with close friends and family (with a maximum of 40 people) where I just mess about with my friends and post silly things. My public profile is filled with people I know, but what I post is more thought-through. People still have to request to follow me on both, though!

**Megan:** I use Snapchat similarly to Gemma, but with Instagram I just like to see what other people are up to.

**Bekah:** As a grown-up, Facebook helps me keep in touch with people that I normally wouldn't connect with. So for instance, I used to teach in Kenya and it's great keeping in touch with people who are so far away.

Do you post pictures of your girls?

**Bekah:** I used to, but I don't as much now they're older. I have posted pictures from when they first started school.

As they get older, I realised that actually I don't want the world to be able to track their lives. That, and I'm not allowed to tag them in pictures any more in case they're embarrassing!

**Gemma:** The good thing about Facebook is if she does tag me in really old photos I have to accept it before it's visible to everyone else, so I don't mind too much.

**Bekah:** In fairness, you put up some horrendous pictures of me from my birthday!

I try to be more cautious now about what I put up so it doesn't look like I show off my kids all the time. For instance, when Gemma became head girl I was caught in this catch-22 because if I didn't put something up I would've looked like a horrible mother in today's world by not celebrating my child. It seems as though parents now experience a different pressure to our kids, like there's something wrong if I don't tell my child I love her, online! I know some parents who post gushingly about their kids, but my thought is, "What if there are other parents on my 'feed' whose kids aren't as academic as mine, how has that post made them feel?" So in this instance I chose to put up two photos, one from when she was six with pants on her head, and another of her with her head-girl badge on, and I wrote "Who would have thought?" I hope that balanced posting something great about my child without bragging too much. ►

Do you think there is peer pressure on teenagers to post the perfect selfie?

**Megan:** Honestly, I cannot be bothered to post pretty pictures! People take so long to decide which photo they want to share but I’m just not bothered by it.

**Gemma:** I tend not to post pouty or perfect pictures on Instagram but I do send a few smiling pictures to my friends on Snapchat.

However, yeah, I think people feel like they have to post nice things on Instagram so they can get comments saying how pretty they look. I have a friend who if she doesn’t get ‘likes’ in five minutes ends up taking her posts down. She tries to post during what she calls ‘prime-time’, between 4pm and 8pm. On the flip side, some friends don’t have accounts or don’t post at all because they think they won’t get enough likes or posts. It makes me upset because it means something is going on outside of social media which makes them so worried and insecure. I think social media does make us constantly think about what other people think of us.

Bekah, do you ‘Snap’ with your girls?

**Bekah:** I have a profile but I don’t really use it. My girls don’t really want me on there anyway.

**Gemma:** She added me as a friend which I don’t mind too much, but then she started adding all of my friends as well!

**Bekah:** Yes ... turns out that was inappropriate so I stopped.

Girls, do you think having offline time is important?

**Gemma:** I think it’s important and I enjoy it. I remember my trip to Uganda where we weren’t allowed to use our phones. By the end of the trip you forgot you actually had a phone! I learnt that there are other ways to fill time.

**Megan:** I like having no phone during our family time – it means you can focus on each other.

Who do you think is on their phone more often, Mum or Dad?

**Gemma:** About the same – Dad is on a lot for emails and such and Mum texts people more and is often on Facebook. Dad’s all right because he will put his phone down when you’re speaking to him but Mum can’t until she’s done with her conversation.

**Bekah:** It’s true! I’m horrendous about being ‘in the zone’, so it means they can’t get my attention until I’ve done the task at hand. It’s tough when there seems to be a crisis at work and people need instant responses, but I have to be strict with the fact that if I am no longer at work then I shouldn’t respond to messages any more. Actually ... no crisis should be more important than time with my kids.

I think we live in an age when we’re always online and I feel guilty about that – there are always emails or WhatsApp group messages to answer.

I would like to get better at not having to respond to those all the time.

What boundaries do you have in place at home?

**Bekah:** There’s a rule that we have no devices at dinnertime, and also if no homework is happening! Plus we have no devices around on a family night – otherwise we might in theory be watching a film together but actually we’re all on our phones talking to other people! So for us, it’s trying to create space where we are all together, having conversations with each other. However, we have no strict daily time limits for when they can go online.

I have a friend who has trained her children amazingly, it’s phones off at 9pm and they have them charging downstairs. There is a ‘no phone zone’ upstairs. It’s great, but introducing that with our children now is probably more trouble than it’s worth. Phones can keep you up at night so there are benefits of starting something like that when they’re young. For the most part it comes down to trusting my kids.



PHOTOGRAPH:  
Bekah, Megan and Gemma with a family friend

Do you have any privacy settings or other protections for your girls?

**Bekah:** Well, the most effective in our house has always been the ‘Mum-can-always-check-your-phone-at-any-time’ privacy setting. Other than that, we don’t have any in place because I trust that my girls will tell me most things, and if they don’t, we have an understanding that I can look at what’s on their phones or on their profiles anyway.

**Megan:** Mum’s made it easy to talk to her about this stuff. I remember a situation at school where a girl had been messaging a boy she didn’t know and accidentally sent an inappropriate picture of herself to a group we were all in (instead of just to the boy). My first instinct was to tell Mum about it, though I was hesitant because I was afraid of how this girl was going to react, I didn’t want her to think I was snaking (‘snaking’ is doing something behind someone’s back).

**Bekah:** I try to frequently talk to my girls about potential dangers out there. I remember when Snapchat introduced Snapmaps that I made sure I had a conversation with them as quickly as possible! I used to work for a crisis centre, doing workshops around sexual relationships and boundaries for young people. Some girls had befriended people on Facebook and gone off to meet them – it didn’t turn out well! So I have been aware of the dangers and have made sure my girls understand that my strictness is for their safety. ►





**Snapmaps is a feature on Snapchat where people can see where snap stories are happening using a map. This means the location of the person sharing the story will be visible. Privacy settings are important here because if they aren't set carefully then anyone can see where you are – even if they aren't your friend on Snapchat. However, if settings are set to 'ghost mode' then a person's location isn't visible. Alternatively you can choose just a select, known and trusted few to see your location.**

**How have you achieved such a close-knit relationship with your girls?**

**Bekah:** I found it helps to start when they're young, because if you've always talked to them it's easier to keep it going. As ours got to the teenage years, we tried to find opportunities to have conversations that weren't too judgemental – it's not helpful if they feel as though they are in trouble when you chat to them.

Steve tends to bring up the serious conversations in the car. It means they can focus on the road and there's no eye contact needed. This makes conversations feel less confrontational and takes away the intensity and potential awkwardness.

I remember when one of our older daughters reached a certain age, trying to talk to her seemed to do more harm than good. I had to accept that for that period of her life I may not have been the best person to talk to her, but I made sure she was having those conversations with a close family friend. It was hard to accept at first because as her mother I wanted to be the one she spoke to, but actually, the fact that she was getting advice from someone I trusted was a real comfort – even if that person wasn't me.

**Do you ever get overwhelmed by these technological developments?**

**Bekah:** Oh, definitely! But to best protect my kids I try to make it my business to know what's out there and how these platforms function. I try to be clued-in as much as my children are. Our children might be technologically savvy, but they are not wiser, and they are not more experienced than us.

We teach our children how to behave at school and in public, and we teach them skills like how to swim – the virtual world is just another space they inhabit where we teach them how to behave. I know I don't get it right all the time, but I try to help my girls make the right choices and equip them to live in this virtual world – in essence, it's teaching them how to swim online.

**Top tips for parenting in an online world:**

1. Understand their world. Do your homework and learn about the platforms your children are using.
2. Be proactive. Keep lines of communication open. Have relaxed and frequent conversations about their online experiences, and try not to be too judgemental or confrontational.
3. Ask your internet provider how to turn on filters which will help protect your child as they search online.
4. Decide what boundaries you'll have in place in your home. If your children are in their teens, why not involve them in deciding what these should be?
5. Set a good example yourself. Model how you want them to behave in the online world and how frequently you want them to be there.
6. Set yourselves a family challenge. Perhaps try a 'no-phone-zone' for a few days and see if you can come up with alternative activities to do as a family.
7. Talk to your children about how they see themselves. If they aren't happy with who they are in the online world it's likely they'll not be happy in the real world. Try to find out why they feel the way they do and look for ways to boost their confidence.



**Keshia Firth**

Keshia Firth is a social media specialist who coordinates Care for the Family's Facebook pages and groups that help to connect our many hundreds of volunteers, supporters and partners. In addition to keeping you up-to-date online with our news, articles and other updates, Keshia also writes for other Care for the Family projects.





# Shoulder to Shoulder.

How men function in friendships

It was a damp, blustery evening in Stoke-on-Trent and the summer had become a distant memory. Light jackets were cast aside in favour of warm woolly coats and Christmas paraphernalia was already creeping onto supermarket shelves.

**I**t was on this evening that Care for the Family arrived in Stoke with a van full of equipment, a team of technicians and two public speakers, ready to stage its brand-new event for men – *In the Arena*. ►



Having braved the poor conditions, more than a hundred men arrived, took their seats and waited. Some seemed excited, others looked exhausted after a long day at the coalface. The majority, however, just sat expectantly, as though considering what the evening might hold. Would the speakers offer up the secret to a happy, fulfilled life? Might they have some insight into who keeps stealing the recycling box? Or perhaps they would simply regurgitate sentiments that had long since become tired and cliché. The lights dimmed and a smattering of conversation dissipated as the event started. The speakers began by offering practical advice about issues men face in the day-to-day, as well as giving ideas for regular ‘drills’, or habits, to equip men for the deeper challenges that test their resilience, integrity and character. As helpful as all of these topics were, it was the section on ‘shoulder to shoulder’ friendships that caused attendee

Michael to edge forward in his seat and listen with increased intent. For Michael, this event came along during an especially gruelling time. Having spent eight years in a pastoral role at a local school, he was beginning to feel the strain of speaking to an increasing number of students with mental health problems. On one occasion, he saw five young people in a single day all of whom had attempted suicide.

Already in the process of recovering from a recent stroke, the weight of speaking into so many difficult circumstances left Michael feeling crushed. Due to work-related stress, a doctor strongly advised him to take time off or he’d soon be back in hospital. Michael reluctantly conceded. In the aftermath of this news, he thought it best to resign from the school in order to move on and seek out a more befitting vocation. His heart was still to help people in some way, so the challenge was on.



Days became weeks and weeks became months. Most of Michael’s job applications weren’t resulting in interviews, and of the few interviews he did get, none were leading to employment. The impact of dozens of refusals was taking its toll. Having been a medic in the army in his twenties, Michael was no stranger to hard graft; he had always maintained a strong work ethic and he was ready to try anything – but nothing came. As Michael arrived for the event on that cold October evening, it seemed the gloomy weather perfectly mirrored his circumstances.

So why did the concept of shoulder to shoulder friendships strike a chord? A component of this topic that was of particular interest to Michael was the insight into how men operate in friendships. Now this isn’t necessarily always the case but, while generally women may be

perfectly comfortable spending time chatting face-to-face over a coffee, men tend to spend time together doing something. Yes, face-to-face conversations still happen, but it is more often centred around a shared shoulder to shoulder activity such as sport, throwing darts, playing cards, building a shed and so on.

There’s a joke that describes two women standing in a queue – within a few minutes they know more intimate details about each other than men who have been friends for years! Although these differences aren’t necessarily right or wrong, the way that many men approach friendships can have a negative effect on them. Research tells us that men generally invest less in friendships – less time, less energy, less effort. The ability to make new friends also drops off dramatically after the age of 30 and even existing relationships can drift. ➤

**It was the section on ‘shoulder to shoulder’ friendships that caused Michael to edge forward in his seat and listen with increased intent.**





Emotional support for men often comes from their partner or spouse but it can put disproportionate strain on that person. It means if there’s a problem in the relationship itself, there’s no one else to lean on; which in turn can lead to the man feeling isolated.

**As Michael listened, it dawned on him that it had been some time since he’d had a male friend to hang out with and lean on for support. In school he had loads of mates, but as life went on they simply fell out of touch.**

The event finished, the delegates began to make their way to their respective homes, but Michael stayed sitting in his seat as he pondered some of the words that were

spoken. He realised how much he needed solid male friendships. Michael arrived home full of thoughts and ideas, so he wrote down the key points that were swirling around his head. He was determined to seek out male friends that he could stand with ... shoulder to shoulder.

So is this concept something unique to a Care for the Family event? Not at all. Examples can be found all around us in popular culture. Not long ago Netflix announced that the sitcom *Friends* was being made available to stream, so naturally, episodic binges commenced up and down the country. In this sitcom, much of the screen time shows the six lead characters spending time in a group, but the women also spend time together

on their own and even the men intentionally ‘hang out’ on a regular basis. An interesting difference between the men and women, however, is that the guys almost always do something, whether putting furniture together, going to hockey games or simply throwing a ball back and forth; there is usually an activity taking place.

In fact, in one episode, Ross invites newcomer Mike over for an evening together and they don’t do anything. It doesn’t go well. They both spend the time awkwardly trying to conjure up topics of conversation with little success. While the female leads were comfortable conversing face-to-face, the men would best function when they spent time shoulder to shoulder.

This phrase also crops up in the chorus of the unifying Irish rugby anthem *Ireland’s Call*. At the start of any international match, we see 15 athletes standing side by side, singing “Ireland, Ireland, together standing tall. Shoulder to shoulder we’ll answer Ireland’s call”. When the match begins, we then see this concept on display as individuals drive forward against the opposition, only to quickly be supported by their teammates literally grabbing hold of them and driving them on towards the goal. This is a great example of what men could be doing for each other in the day-to-day. If friendships like this could be found, it could be a vital support system for the toughest of life’s challenges.

*In the Arena* sparked something in Michael and revived hopes and beliefs that were somewhat dormant. Those low ebbs have since become optimistic ambitions. In the months following the event, Michael was feeling a lot more positive about his circumstances and he was determined to pursue his desire to help people. He took a bold step, booked a church hall and put the word out that he was starting a class teaching therapeutic techniques to help

stress and anxiety. Knowing he could have easily been sat in that hall on his own all evening, Michael was thrilled when ten people showed up. Then, taking a lead from some of the notes he’d made after the event, he began to target content on his specialist Twitter account towards men, sharing with them tips for mental well-being. With interviews for other support roles starting to come in, things have certainly improved since that dreary, autumn night.

**For men, a shoulder to shoulder friendship can be a great outlet for working through the challenges of life, but it can also be about simply having fun, enjoying common interests and a good bit of banter (or ‘bants’ as some now seem to call it!).**

Perhaps if like Michael you’ve realised that you don’t have that person in your life right now, then maybe there is someone you can reconnect with, or someone you already know who you could invest time in.

Finding someone to stand shoulder to shoulder with isn’t always easy – but it is definitely worth the pursuit!

**Finding someone to stand shoulder to shoulder with isn’t always easy – but it is definitely worth the pursuit!**

#### Stephen Hayes

Stephen Hayes is one of our primary content developers. He conceptualises and scripts many of our social media campaigns and digital media, as well as writing articles. Stephen also works on new Care for the Family publications.





PHOTOGRAPH: Esgrid and Rachel's wedding day

# After 'I Do'

## Why just plan a wedding when you can design your whole marriage?



What does it take to give a marriage the best start? Maybe it's creating a fairy tale wedding day which, according to wedding planning website Hitched, takes an average of 12 months to plan and costs more than £25,000.<sup>1</sup>





With that kind of investment you could be excused for expecting great long-term results! But is a magical day and a bit of romantic chemistry enough of a foundation for a lifelong marriage?

Esgrid and Rachel decided there must be more to it. They knew that marriage was going to be one of the biggest, most all-encompassing decisions they would ever make, and that the commitment would be for a lifetime. They felt that “to go into a marriage without any seasoned or experienced advice and information felt foolish” and wanted to have “a good foundation on which to build a life”. So based on a recommendation from friends they attended *Marriage By Design*, a marriage preparation day, four months before their wedding.

And research shows that their hunch was right. Taking some time out to prepare for your marriage in the midst of wedding planning can make a great difference to your married life.

**One study<sup>2</sup> demonstrates that couples who participate in marriage preparation experience a 30% increase in marital ‘success’ for the first few years of their marriage over those who don’t.**

This includes improved communication, better conflict management, higher dedication levels, and improved relationship quality. Other studies show that spending time thinking of ‘us with a future’, talking about this commitment with one another, makes marriages much more likely to survive the long haul. <sup>3</sup>

Around 11,000 people in the UK engage in formal marriage preparation each year. <sup>4</sup> Couples who have attended preparation sessions have told us that:

“The course gave me tools to see things through my partner’s eyes”, and “It enabled us to face issues head-on that we may otherwise have avoided”.

Even couples who felt a bit reluctant at first found that it made a difference. One attendee said: “I came in very negative and left very positive, and with a new ‘vocabulary’ which I can use to create a more meaningful marriage.” Spending time talking about hopes and plans for married life can have a significant impact on couples.

Esgrid, 29, and originally from Guatemala, was studying in Edinburgh when he met Rachel, a 24-year-old student living in Norwich. With 350 miles between them during their engagement they decided that a one-day marriage preparation course would fit well into their busy schedules.

So on a Saturday in April 2017 they found themselves in Norfolk, sitting at their own table in a room filled with other couples. They were excited to have a whole day together talking about ‘us’. As they worked through the sessions they discovered new ideas, which have since proved useful in their married life. They heard some great tips on dealing with conflict, as well as learning about the art of good communication, understanding each other’s ‘love language’, and the importance of continuing regular date nights once they were married.

There were some things they thought they would never need in their relationship, for example tips on how to keep making an effort with each other. Rachel recalls, “We remember thinking that this would be the last thing we expect to disappear because loving somebody is ‘natural’. However, these things could very easily slip out the window, so it was a healthy reminder not to take each other for granted.” ►

**Taking some time out to prepare for your marriage in the midst of wedding planning can make a great difference to your married life.**



They came away from the course feeling really encouraged and more confident about the future.

Having led marriage preparation courses for 12 years, Duncan and Janice MacInnes have plenty of experience in helping couples prepare for life after the big day. “We are passionate about helping couples have strong foundations for their marriage,” Duncan explains, “since we believe it provides couples with an increased likelihood that their marriage will last a lifetime. Feedback from couples continues to be exceptionally positive, with many saying they have learnt new skills to take into their relationship.” He adds that couples really benefit from having “uninterrupted quality time to talk together and build their communication skills with each other”.

Seven months after the big day, Esgrid and Rachel are already seeing the benefits of having taken a day out from wedding planning to think about their married life.

Tips they learnt that day are regularly being used, for example that trying to have a difficult conversation late at night when you’re tired is generally not a good idea!

Esgrid jokes, “It’s through making the exact mistakes they say will happen, through doing it wrong, that you can see the benefit of the course!” Rachel agrees. She says understanding that they communicate in different ways has really helped them think about ways of discussing issues so each gets their point across. They are also learning to tackle problems together rather than thinking the other person has a problem they need to fix.

Many couples take notes throughout the marriage course as they carry out the various activities. Rachel values having these notes to look back on. “We had different tasks throughout the day, like looking at primary love languages and how we could serve our partners, creating vows for each other, and writing date ideas to

work through together when we’re married. We also created a list of things that you love about each other that you can look at when you’re having a down day.”

So can a single day or few hours of chatting together about your future make a long-term difference to your marriage? Esgrid and Rachel are convinced that it can, as are 99.5% of couples who attend Care for the Family marriage preparation courses.

Rob Parsons says, “We prepare for our chosen vocation, for driving our car on the road and for a fantastic wedding day, so why not prepare to spend your whole life with the person you love? Preparing for our marriage before we begin just makes perfect sense.”

We’ll give the final word to a couple who attended a *Marriage by Design* course in 2013:

“This course should come with the diamond ring. It will never be forgotten a long time after the vows have been made.”



<sup>1</sup> ‘Our 2016 Wedding Survey Results Are In: What Makes a 21st Century Bride?’ [www.hitched.co.uk](http://www.hitched.co.uk).  
<sup>2</sup> Carroll, J. S. and Doherty, W. J. (2003) ‘Evaluating the Effectiveness of Premarital Prevention Programs: A Meta-Analytic Review of Outcome Research’ in *Family Relations*, Vol 52, No 2.  
<sup>3</sup> Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K. and Whitton, S. W. (2010) ‘Commitment and the Securing of Romantic Attachment.’ *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 2.  
<sup>4</sup> Relationships Foundation, (2010) ‘Built to Last: The Case for Couple Relationship Education.’ [www.relationshipsfoundation.org](http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org).

“This course should come with the diamond ring. It will never be forgotten a long time after the vows have been made.”

Photographer: JA Photography



PHOTOGRAPH : Esgrid and Rachel's wedding day

Kathryn Kendall

Kathryn helped to develop the *Marriage by Design* marriage preparation course while working at Care for the Family. She now works freelance with small charities, supporting them to develop more effective projects and resources.



# One Family at a Time.

## Impacting family life - the next generation

There is nothing new about family difficulty and trauma, but over the past 30 years we know that the breakdown in family life has been on the increase – and in some instances is becoming generational.

Nicki, who tells her story here, is proof that even if you've had a difficult upbringing it does not mean that you will necessarily pass on those struggles to your children. Change can happen – one generation at a time. ►





PHOTOGRAPH: Nicki, Josh and Andy

**Please introduce your family to us**

I'm Nicki and I'm married to Neil. We have two sons, Josh (22) and Andy (21). Our boys live together and work together as software developers. They have both, at various times, named their brother as their best friend.

**What was family life like for you growing up?**

My mum is, and always has been, amazing! I've never doubted her love and commitment for me, and she has always been a tower of strength for me, even when things have been really tough. I didn't meet my biological dad until he drifted into my life when I was six. He saw me two or three times a year until I was 12. At that point, his girlfriend made him choose between me and her, and he chose her. I haven't seen him since.

When I was eight my mum remarried, and I gained a stepfather and a younger stepbrother. Initially, it was great! I loved having a proper family and was excited about having a dad. In the 1970s it was more unusual to have divorced parents, let alone no dad at all, so being able to tell people about "my dad" gave me a sense of normality for a while. Soon two new siblings – who I absolutely adored – were added to the family.

Over time, though, it became clear that my stepfather was an alcoholic, and when he was drunk he could be violent. By the time I was in my early teens, home life was abusive, and I was generally very unhappy. He gave me alcohol from

a young age, and I learnt that by drinking with him, I was safer. I also learnt that being drunk numbed the pain of rejection and abuse, so by 14 years of age, I was also drinking regularly and heavily.

From early childhood, I had prayed one prayer consistently – it was all I wanted from life. I asked God for a family: a mum, a dad and children – all living together happily under one roof.

**When did you get married and what were those early years like?**

I met Neil while I was at university in Wimbledon and we got married in October 1993. Some people questioned the wisdom of him marrying someone like me. I think many assumed it wouldn't last. I was still drinking and couldn't stop. I couldn't control my emotions and often got angry or depressed.

Living so far away from home, I missed my siblings more than I could bear. This made me desperate to start a family. In the first year of our marriage, my desperation consumed me and we started our family sooner than we had planned. While I certainly don't regret having my boys, it did put extra strain on our marriage. I continued drinking, but eventually was able to stop just before Andy's first birthday, and I now don't drink at all. Neil was working long hours at this time, I was at home with young children, and finances were tight. It meant that disagreements were frequent and we didn't always communicate well. ➤

**“Family is somewhere that no matter how long you’ve been away, you can always come back, you’re always welcome. It’s where I learnt how to live in the world and how to cope when things start to become unmanageable.”**

JOSH (AGED 22)



How has Care for the Family made a difference to your marriage?

Our church minister knew of Care for the Family and supported and promoted the work. When Neil and I were engaged he asked us to attend regular sessions with him to prepare for married life. In the first few years of our marriage he also ran some Care for the Family courses which we attended.

I remember thinking how much of it was basic common sense, and yet I was learning something completely new. I loved listening to Rob Parsons (founder and chairman of Care for the Family) on the videos. He talked from experience. Growing up, communication had been an issue in both our families and we wanted to avoid making the same mistakes that our parents had made. Care for the Family equipped us to do that. We wouldn't have got through two years, let alone 25 years of marriage, without Care for the Family!

When we were new parents, we heard wise advice from Care for the Family and others about how important it was for our relationship to have regular one-to-one time with each other.

This was so difficult to do, but I'm glad we did. I remember Andy asking us once why he and his brother couldn't come out with us for a meal. I told him that Mummy and Daddy needed to spend quality time together so that we would remember how

much we loved each other. I said that one day they would leave home and I didn't want to be stuck with a stranger, not knowing what to say to him or how to have fun together – we'd become old and lonely and miserable. He laughed and said that was silly, but now that the boys have left home, I'm so pleased that we did invest in our marriage during those years.

I had a spinal injury in 2012, and I now use a wheelchair. We were building our own home at the time. All the heavy lifting took its toll on my lower back, and I'd had backache for a while. Then, one day, I got a static shock from a plastic plant at the school where I taught. Within a very short time, I couldn't move, couldn't feel my leg, and was in agony. At the time, I didn't know what had happened, but I had cauda equina syndrome, caused by a disc that had come right out into the bush of nerves at the base of my spine. It's an easy condition to treat, but I didn't get help quickly enough and waited eight weeks for surgery. By then, the nerve damage was permanent.

When we made promises in October 1993 about loving 'in sickness and in health' I was thinking more about man-flu than my husband becoming a full-time carer! We don't know what life will throw at us, so I recommend doing whatever you can to invest in your marriage while life is 'normal'.

Neil and I still go out on dates, and I still remember why I love him. He is my best friend.

“Family taught me that quality investment in people is better than material gain. A solid relationship with family and friends is much more valuable, and provides more happiness, than anything money could ever buy me.”

ANDY (AGED 21)



PHOTOGRAPH: Neil and Nicki

How has Care for the Family made a difference to your parenting and family life?

The video-based parenting courses were fantastic for teaching us about how to bring up our children with boundaries and discipline in the context of a loving home. I wanted my children to be well-behaved and respect us, but never to fear us or feel they couldn't be honest with us or talk to us about anything that worried them. I read all Rob's books and really tried to live out the things I learnt.

I realised that I lacked positive role models when growing up, and so I began to watch other families in church – those who had children a little older than ours and who seemed to be doing family life well. I began to see the value in discussing family issues and learning from others. Our children definitely benefited from the wisdom we picked up from other parents.

What valuable lessons have you learnt?

I wish I'd learnt earlier (and I am still learning!) that responding in the heat of the moment, when I'm emotional and tired, is usually not helpful.

I've discovered that it's OK to explain to your spouse that if something has upset you or made you angry, you need to calm down before discussing it.

I may go for a walk, cry or pray, then come back and have a rational conversation. We might still disagree, but we're less likely to feel like we are arguing and to say things we regret.

One of the most encouraging things I heard Rob say when my kids were young is, "Don't take your child's school report as a prophecy of their future life." It's so true!

One of the things we learnt to be particularly careful about is how we speak to and about each other. It's too easy to be critical and talk negatively about your partner, but this is so destructive! My advice to any married couple and to parents is to speak positively to each other.

And try telling someone outside the family something good about your partner or children – preferably within their hearing, so that they know you speak well of them. ►





“Care for the Family’s resources are a brilliant starting point for discussions – they break down the mirage of the ‘perfect family’, get people talking about what life is really like, and are an opportunity to ask honest questions and be encouraged by others.”

**Describe your involvement in Care for the Family’s Additional Needs Support (ANS) initiative.**

I wish I had discovered this group when my son Josh, who has Asperger’s, was at primary school. When I first connected with ANS – through Facebook – Josh was almost an adult and had survived childhood. He understood himself well and had learnt to embrace his Asperger’s, using it to help him succeed and be happy. Reading so many posts from people caring for young children with additional needs, I just wanted to support them.

I started posting about Josh and used his story to try to encourage other parents to keep going.

**When I was asked to become a befriender, I was happy to help. I love encouraging other parents because I remember how difficult it is when all you can see is the stresses of school and the meltdowns.**

I wish I’d known then what a wonderful, calm, peaceful adult my ‘little monster’ would grow into.

**Why is it important to pass on what you’ve learnt about family life?**

So many families today are spread out geographically and many are broken and damaged. Being a good husband, wife or parent isn’t easy. We need role models and people to guide us along the way. I believe this is best done through friendships and, for us, the church was a great place to build those relationships.

Care for the Family’s resources are a brilliant starting point for discussions – they break down the mirage of the ‘perfect family’, get people talking about what life is really like, and are an opportunity to ask honest questions and be encouraged by others.

Nicki’s view of ‘family life’ has been transformed over the years, and now she is passing on the values of a loving home to the next generation.

**Strengthening family life today really can have an impact on generations tomorrow – and Care for the Family is committed to investing in the future.**

**Nicki Berry**  
**Befriender for Care for the Family’s Additional Needs Support.**

Nicki Berry volunteers with Care for the Family as one of our team of befrienders who support families with additional needs. Having raised a child of her own with Asperger’s syndrome, she now encourages other parents in similar situations through our Additional Needs Support initiative.



# Out in the Open.

## The impact of porn on marriage

**Karen knew that something was ‘off’; that her husband John seemed disconnected and distant from her. She just couldn’t put her finger on the problem. She asked and asked, meeting with reassurance from John each time. But her gut instinct was spot on. There was indeed a barrier between them; a secret that only John knew, and one that was about to be revealed ...**

**I**n a world in which pornography is both accessible and acceptable, it can be a challenge to consider whether the content we are consuming via our screens is serving us well. However, with the ongoing rise in porn consumption and ever-increasing volumes of free content available online, we are starting to see a rise in the number of people speaking out about the less-than-positive effects of pornography on their lives and relationships.

With thousands of people populating online forums dedicated to stopping porn use – often prompted to do so because of porn-induced sex-related problems – it seems the time has come to explore the impact porn can have on our relationships. The Naked Truth project speak to hundreds of men and women who are dealing with the unwanted, and often unexpected, fallout of pornography usage within the context of a marriage or relationship. One couple, John and Karen, shared their story with Naked Truth, and it was pretty typical of those they so often hear.

### A guilty secret

John started watching porn in the same way many men of his age do. He and his schoolmates would talk about girls and pass around magazines or video tapes for a bit of naughty fun. It was a normal and natural boyhood curiosity; a bit of ‘harmless fun’.

But during his late teens and early twenties, John experienced a growing sense that porn was harming his prospects of developing a healthy relationship. It was something he no longer wanted to be a part of his life, so he decided to get rid of his video and magazine stash.

For a number of years John did not view any porn at all. During this time he met Karen, fell deeply in love with her and decided she was the most amazing woman he had ever met. They were happily married and John felt they had a good, active sex life; their relationship seemed to be flourishing.

However, things began to change once John and Karen installed an Internet connection in their new home. For the first time, John was exposed to the unlimited and largely unregulated content available online. He realised the internet had changed his view of porn. It was no longer a ‘naughty magazine’ shared with friends; he was able to access a lifetime’s worth of hardcore content whenever he desired.

No longer was he looking at still images or watching cheesy VHS tapes. At his fingertips was an infinite supply of moving images and graphic content he never could have imagined before. He found himself hiding away with his laptop, often while Karen was in the other room, consuming graphic online content for hours at a time. With his wife working in the evenings, John found he could use as much porn as he wanted without the risk of being caught.

As his porn consumption increased, John started to experience feelings of guilt and shame. He felt bad for keeping this secret from his wife and sensed that she knew something was going on. He tried to stop watching many times, but only ever managed to stay away from the computer for a few days at a time. ►





Out in the open

Once John had decided to quit and repeatedly tried to do so, he realised that the likelihood of finding freedom from this habitual porn problem without support was minimal. He decided to take action. He would tell his wife and a close friend in the hope of banishing porn from his life and marriage for good. John went out to a meeting, leaving a letter on the laptop in which he confessed all to his wife.

This action was fairly unusual as most secretive sexual behaviour is discovered by the partner rather than confessed. A study conducted by Dr Barbara Steffens<sup>1</sup> found that 84% of disclosures relating to porn use and other secret sexual behaviour were unplanned and ‘accidental’. The research showed that, of those disclosures, 75% occurred when the partner uncovered evidence of the behaviour.

On reading the letter, Karen’s first feeling was one of shock and numbness. Even though she had sensed for a long time that something wasn’t right between them, she never would have guessed that she was dealing with a porn dependency. Over the years, Karen had repeatedly tried to find out what was wrong. She had attempted to talk to John about the sense of distance between them, but had always been assured that there was nothing wrong.

As is the case for many women in her position, Karen experienced a strange feeling of relief just in finally knowing what she was dealing with. However, in the following days that relief gave way to anger as she realised this secret had been lurking in the background of their marriage from the off. The enormity of that fact gradually sank in. She remembered all the times John had brushed off her concerns about their lack of connection as newly-weds; the number of lies he had told over such a long period. That hurt a lot. It felt like a huge betrayal.

Karen describes, painfully, how she had felt that even as newly-weds their sex life had been ‘cold’, despite John’s intense sex drive. However, having nothing to compare it with, she had no idea whether his behaviour was normal. She started to wonder whether she was good enough, whether she was attractive or sexy enough given that even in those first years of marriage she had been unable to keep him satisfied.

**Never having withheld anything, and having kept up with John’s full-on sex drive, Karen wondered what more she could have done to stop this from happening. The realisation that she was likely being compared to the women her husband had been viewing online was particularly difficult to shake, and she became increasingly reserved and self-conscious.**

According to Dr Jennifer Schneider, these feelings are commonplace among those impacted by cyber-sexual betrayal. Her report, ‘Effects of cybersex addiction on the family: Results of a survey’, found that those affected often feel hurt, betrayed, rejected, abandoned, lonely, isolated, humiliated, jealous and angry. She claims that: “Partners often compared themselves unfavourably to online images. Partners overwhelmingly felt that cyber affairs were as emotionally painful as offline affairs.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, the impact of discovering a sexual secret within a marriage or significant relationship appears to have been severely underestimated. A survey involving 63 wives of self-identified sex addicts found that 70% met most of the criteria for a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder. Many of these women experienced traumatic memories and flashbacks, and a high proportion struggled with basic self-care such as eating and sleeping as they tried to adjust to the new normal of their relationships.<sup>3</sup> ►



“Partners overwhelmingly felt that cyber affairs were as emotionally painful as offline affairs.”

DR JENNIFER SCHNEIDER

<sup>1 & 3</sup> Barbara A. Steffens and Robyn L. Rennie, The traumatic nature of disclosure for wives of sexual addicts', *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 13 (2006): 247–267.  
<sup>2</sup> Jennifer P. Schneider, 'Effects of cybersex addiction on the family: Results of a survey', *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 7 (2000): 31-58.



### Seeking support

When asked how they have gone about healing their relationship, John and Karen agree that they could not have done it by themselves. The support they received from close friends, who didn't judge but treated them with respect and love, has been invaluable. There has been a consistent commitment to honesty in their relationship since the issue was brought out into the open. The understanding they have gained of their own and each other's vulnerabilities, and the commitment they have made to address these together, have played a major role in their individual and relational healing.

Sadly, Naked Truth has found through its work that John and Karen's story is not unique or even exceptional. More couples than ever before are seeking support through the organisation. And more couples than ever before are divorcing as a result of the porn use of a partner.

Illustrating the most salient factors behind divorce cases, statistics from as far back as 2002, statistics from the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers show that:

- 68% of divorces involved one party meeting a new lover over the Internet
- 56% involved one party having "an obsessive interest in pornographic websites" <sup>4</sup>

The *Journal of Adolescent Health* reported that prolonged exposure to pornography leads to diminished trust between couples and an exaggerated perception of sexual activity in society. It promotes the belief that promiscuity is the natural state and leads to abandoned hope in sexual monogamy. It can also lead people to believe that abstinence and sexual inactivity are unhealthy, and foster cynicism about love or the need for affection between sexual partners. As a result of consuming pornography on a regular basis, some start to believe that marriage is sexually confining and find the idea of family and bringing up children less attractive.

It's worth remembering that men are not the only consumers of pornography. According to a Nielson report, a third of porn site visitors are female. Barna Group's 2014 'Pornography Addiction Survey' revealed that access levels are even between the genders, with 76% of men and 76% of women aged 18 to 30 watching it at least once a month.

Naked Truth founder Ian Henderson says: **"It's fair to say that online pornography use has changed the landscape of tens of thousands of men and women beyond recognition. We can no longer think of the porn user as a man with a stash of dirty mags under his bed. Today a porn user may simply be any man or woman with access to digital media."**



**So, what can you do to protect your marriage? The following tips could really help:**

#### **Go to bed together.**

It sounds obvious, but couples who go to bed at the same time significantly reduce the likelihood of lone, late-night Internet surfing.

#### **Use filters or blockers.**

You can protect your family from exposure to explicit content by installing Internet filters and blockers on all household devices. These may be available from your Internet service provider or can be purchased independently.

#### **Try accountability software.**

This allows individuals or couples to send a report of their Internet usage to chosen accountability partners. Doing so encourages people to make good choices and to discuss these choices in an environment of trust.

#### **Communicate.**

Talk to each other openly about sex and pornography. Decide where your boundaries lie and keep the conversation alive. Don't assume that this couldn't happen to people like you. It can and does!

If you are struggling with your own pornography use or that of your partner, Naked Truth can help.

Visit [www.clicktokick.com](http://www.clicktokick.com) to find out about our recovery groups for porn users.

**Catherine Etherington**  
**Head of Spouse and Partner Development, Naked Truth**

Catherine Etherington works for Naked Truth, an organisation that offers a range of education and support programmes to help deal with the problem of pornography and its impact on the family. Catherine is trained to support the partners of porn addicts and has helped women in several parts of the world.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Dedmon, 'Is the Internet bad for your marriage? Online affairs, pornographic sites playing greater role in divorces' Press Release from The Dilenschneider Group, Inc., Nov. 14, 2002. [www.prnewswire.com/news-releases](http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases).



# Words of Life.

## Why parents have more power than social media

I was chatting over coffee with a forty-something father of two. Our café provided the day's newspapers for its customers, and as I returned to the table with a flat white and a skinny cappuccino (no chocolate) I found my friend engrossed in a leading article from *The Times*. It reported that the Children's Commissioner was calling on the Chief Executive of NHS England for urgent action to address the negative impact of social media on our children's mental health.



Similar news items seem to occur almost on a daily basis, and as we reflected on the issue our conversation turned to the pressures on iGens (aka most of our children). iGen is the name given to the generation following the Millennials, with the 'i' representing both the technology of choice (iPhone, iPod, iPad, iTunes) as well the fact that these devices are mostly individualised in the way they are used. With scant regard for the barista's masterpiece, my colleague stirred his coffee, looked up and said something that has stayed with me ever since: "The thing is ... we never were their age."

**He's right.**

The pressures on our children and young people are completely different to the pressures on Gen X or Millennial parents (and Baby Boomer grandparents) when they were children.

The digital age is here to stay, and it gives our young people some incredible opportunities – connection, communication and information at the touch of a screen. But it also ushers into their lives significant challenges, many of which directly impact their sense of identity and self-worth.

Parents have many concerns, but two at the top of the leader board in terms of how they impact mental health are cyberbullying and the selfie culture. ➤



‘Night, love! Sleep tight. Don’t let the bedbugs bite.’ Crystal paused on the stairs. Her mum said the same thing every night. It got on her nerves a bit – though she admitted to herself that she’d probably miss it if Mum suddenly didn’t say it. It was 10.30pm and her heart was hammering. As she opened her bedroom door, she felt sick. She undressed slowly and climbed under the duvet. Her comfy mattress felt like stone. The minutes ticked by and she stiffened – waiting. Perhaps tonight would be different ...

But then it came: the familiar beep from the depths of her school bag. She’d left her phone there deliberately rather than putting it on her bedside table, a visible threat. She screwed her eyes tight and desperately tried to sleep, but after some minutes, the beep came again. It was impossible to ignore.

She crawled out of bed, her stomach cramping. Unearthing her phone from her bag, she clicked on the message. It was, of course, from one of her tormentors. Since escaping them at the end of school, she’d seen the Facebook comments, but in the last couple of hours there had been silence. She’d known it would be short-lived. Her phone beeped again. She read the text and stuffed the phone under her pillow. And then she waited, her eyes wide open in the dark.



**But then it came: the familiar beep from the depths of her school bag. She screwed her eyes tight and desperately tried to sleep ... it was impossible to ignore.**



If we were bullied at school when we were young, by and large, the bully would stay in the school grounds; home, at least, would be a refuge at the end of the day. For today’s children, smart phones mean there is no escape. The bully can sit next to them on the bus, follow them home, be at their side as they do their homework, lurk as they eat their meal, and force their way into the bedroom at night. There is no safe haven.

A programme on Radio 4 recently discussed online safety and featured an interview with Matteo who is in year 5. Matteo played a game online where one person has to draw something while the other person guesses what it is. He told the interviewer “They couldn’t guess what I drew, and then someone called me an a-hole. I felt really upset, so I told my mum straight away,”. Matteo’s mum said she blocked the person but could do ‘absolutely nothing’ about what they had said. She said, “I feel extremely guilty that he had access to that.”

While some children will take the odd joke or insult in their stride, if bullying is repeated and abusive it can have a devastating effect on their mental health. Schoolwork can suffer,

and some may resort to coping mechanisms that lead to self-harming, eating disorders, drug or alcohol abuse.

Added to this is the selfie culture which encourages children to document their lives on social media – ‘I post therefore I am’. It’s all too easy for them to end up comparing their behind-the-scenes life with everyone else’s showreels and edited highlights. The pressure to look perfect (with a six pack/thigh gap/‘hot dog’ legs/tiny waist/big bum/big chest/doleful eyes) is immense. The online world gives young people an unprecedented opportunity to establish their identity, but it also allows them to redefine it – to write a new script. They can tweak, amend, and edit their social media identity until it bears little relation to real life.

But here lies the danger: as the gap between real life and their online identity increases, it fuels their anxiety that even if they get lots of ‘likes’, they won’t be able to live up to the self they have created. And as a mother of three boys, I am acutely aware that the pressure for boys to live up to stereotypes and flaunt macho/six-pack/gym bodies is just as great as the stereotypes faced by girls. ►





The writer of the ancient book of Proverbs could have been speaking to a culture 3,000 years ahead of his time when he wrote that “the tongue has the power of life and death.” Cyberbullying and the selfie culture are just two examples of how negative words can powerfully impact a child’s sense of self-worth. As parents, it can be easy to feel overwhelmed, but we don’t have to stand helplessly on the sidelines, wringing our hands. Research repeatedly points to the fact that as their parents, we are the greatest influence on our children’s lives – greater than any social media platform. Whilst there may of course be some issues which need additional help, one of the most powerful tools we have at our disposal is actually very simple. We can let them know that their value doesn’t lie in how many ‘likes’ they have on social media or how many followers they have on Instagram. We can give them a different message: *we can tell them that they are loved for who they are.*

Speaking words of life is about seizing all the opportunities we can to point out to our children what we love about them. We can praise achievement, character and effort. When culture is giving them the opposite message, our kind, affirming words can be literally life-giving.

When they are little, it’s not hard to praise them – “Well done!” “Great goal!” “What a lovely painting!” “You are such a kind girl!” As they get older – particularly in the teenage years – it’s easy to get into a downward spiral of nagging and criticism, but it’s just as important to find opportunities to speak positive words to them. ►

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How we speak to each other in the home matters. Our words are powerful.



A couple of years ago, I witnessed an incredible example of the potential of words to bring about change. I had been speaking to a group of parents about the power of words, and a young mum came up to me in the break and started to cry. She told me that she had two children; the older one was a delight, but the youngest was driving her crazy. She explained:

**She argues with her sister, her bedroom is a mess, she's rude and inconsiderate and she's always in trouble at school. In fact, her behaviour is causing conflict between me and my husband. We are so exasperated with her that for the last year instead of calling her by her name, 'Grace', we call her 'Disgrace'. I know now it's wrong, and I'm going to go home tonight and try to do things differently.**

A year later at the same annual event, as I walked through the bookshop, I saw a familiar face coming towards me. Its owner was beaming and she held the hand of a beautiful little girl with curly blonde hair who, like her mum, was grinning from ear to ear. Before I could greet them, the mum started to speak:

**I'm so glad to have met you again. After your talk last year, my husband and I agreed to change the way we spoke to our daughter. Even when she was behaving badly, we didn't call her 'Disgrace' but gave her her real name – 'Grace'. That one decision kick-started a number of other changes and our home is now a different place. Thank you!**

Of course, the change didn't happen overnight, but that decision to speak positively to their daughter was a catalyst for a new beginning. How we speak to each other in the home matters; our words are powerful.

None of this is rocket science. When she was in the sixth form at school our daughter wanted to earn some money to go travelling, so she got her first holiday job as a lifeguard at the local pool. The first two weeks didn't go well and she wanted to give up. In an attempt to encourage her, I put a note in her bag before she left for work. It was a little yellow Post-it note on which I scribbled: "We think you're great!" I thought no more about it, but about eighteen months later, after she'd been travelling, we were at home and my daughter asked me to get something out of her purse. As I looked for it, I couldn't believe what I saw. Alongside the Topshop receipts and bus tickets was that Post-it note. She had kept it with her all that time: four simple words that had spoken powerfully into her life.

I remember meeting a dad at a Care for the Family event. He had four stepchildren who divided their time between two homes. He told me about a special wall they had in their kitchen. They called it the 'sticker wall' because they stuck things they could be proud of on it. He said the children weren't top of the class at school, nor were they great at sport. Nevertheless, all kinds of achievements were celebrated – achievements that were special just for that family. When visitors came to the house, the children would grab them by the hand and drag them through to the kitchen to see the wall. He would watch their hearts swell with pride as visitors read the words on those stickers.

As parents, we can be encouraged. We have at our disposal the ability to speak affirming and empowering words to our children: words that build their resilience and emotional wellbeing; words that challenge the negative messages of today's culture; words that remind them who they were made to be. Words that bring life.



Katharine Hill

Katharine Hill is Care for the Family's UK Director. She writes widely on family issues and has addressed thousands of people across the UK on marriage and parenting issues. She is the author of several books on marriage and parenting including her most recent book *If You Forget Everything Else, Remember This – Building a Great Marriage*. She is married to Richard and they have four grown-up children.

Katharine gives further help and advice on this topic in her book *Left To Their Own Devices? – Confident Parenting in a World of Screens* and is currently on tour with an event addressing similar issues.





# A Space to Mourn.

## Social media and bereavement

Sometimes it's hard to remember just how far social media has come in the last decade or so. Popular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have completely transformed how we communicate and stay in touch with family and friends as well as with wider networks of people we may never meet in person.

Since it was launched in February 2004, Facebook in particular has created a place where millions of us can create a profile, connect with others and then share with them all sorts of content, messages and information that includes both the mundane and the momentous. Whether we are just posting a brief link to an article or video or sharing something far more significant such as our wedding, announcing a new baby or other major life event, social media has rapidly become part of the fabric of our lives. Using just the phone in our pocket, many of us are now our own media producers, choosing and sharing content and our favourite moments with the world. ►



Social media is also a place where we can choose to share the most difficult of our experiences, for example, at times of personal loss and bereavement. Not everyone likes to be public at such painful times but, whether you choose to use it or not, Facebook is a new place where we can express and share our grief. It provides that outlet not just through anything we might post on our own social media, but often also through the Facebook profile that once belonged to our loved one. The page that they built up with the posts that they wrote and the content they created during their lifetime still carries their words, photos and personal memories even after they have gone.

**It is a new reality that when we die we leave behind traces of ourselves not just in the physical objects or mementos that we owned, but in the digital world as well.**

Our online activity and social media accounts leave a digital footprint, highly personal fragments revealing our identity and individuality that remain online and in view for others to see and to read. We bequeath digital memories that speak of who we were,

what we did and what we like, through Facebook posts and Instagram photos, through Spotify playlists and Netflix watch lists, and so many other online materials that were once an expression of our daily lives. Just like a photograph, a watch or other personal possession, a social media account can trigger feelings and memories that are at once both a painful reminder and a cherished connection to that special person who is no longer in our lives.

Handling social media is not always straightforward, especially when we or others are grieving. The challenges of online communication are compounded by the vulnerability and pain of loss and the swell of emotions that can be so vivid and raw. Sometimes it's hard to know how much we should share online. What do we do about a loved one's social media accounts? Should I even use Facebook at a time of bereavement? How do I respond when someone posts about the death of a friend or family member? Particularly if you are recently bereaved, you will know how difficult it can be to navigate these challenges. There will always be sensitivities, and people grieve and respond to loss in many different ways, but social media can have very real benefits.

**“I was overwhelmed with messages of love and support. Even people I hardly knew found out about my loss but showed such kindness through their comments.”**

– Reflections from a Facebook user

#### Letting people know

One of the most painful things to do when someone close to you dies is to let other people know. Before social media, this usually meant making upsetting calls to a whole range of family members, friends and an extended list of contacts – a difficult, emotional task that often needed to be repeated time and again announcing both the loss and perhaps later, all the funeral arrangements. There will certainly be some people you will want to speak to in person or by phone and who may find receiving such difficult news by Facebook both insensitive and upsetting. And you might consider asking close family and friends not to post anything online until you have been able to make all those most important visits or calls. Now if you choose, so many of us are on Facebook that you can take just a few minutes to let wider friends and family know about a bereavement by adding a post to your page. If you are a Facebook ‘legacy contact’ – someone chosen to manage someone else's page after they have died – you can easily pin a post to their profile that gives details or other information for everyone they were friends with on Facebook. It's worth remembering that as soon as you post, you may well be inundated with messages, comments or phone calls from family and friends, and perhaps even friends of friends. Of course, most will be well-meaning and supportive but the speed with which news is shared can feel overwhelming. Don't feel you have to respond immediately to every message, people will understand that you are going through a difficult time and are simply finding a way to express their love and concern. ►





Memories and mourning

Facebook used to simply delete the profiles of someone who had died but now their page can be ‘memorialised’ and left open as a place where friends and family can continue to gather and share memories of the person they loved.

You can choose someone to act as your Facebook ‘legacy contact’ so that after you have gone they have limited access to manage your page. This allows people to leave messages of condolence, share memories or photos or browse the posts, comments, links or other content in your feed. It can be a really helpful way of remembering and celebrating someone’s life, particularly as you can still read their words, see their photos and join with others as they add their thoughts and memories to the page. Other people’s comments and contributions can be a real source of comfort. It can mean a great deal to know that people care and share something of your grief and loss, kind words, positive memories or other tokens of love and understanding. A personal profile or a page set up to remember your loved one can be a shared, almost sacred space for mourning and commemoration; a place to honour and celebrate the life of the deceased. Be aware though that leaving a page open for people to post whatever they choose does mean that some people might come across as insensitive, express things you may find inappropriate or they may become overly emotional. This can be exceptionally difficult to handle when you are still experiencing the raw emotions of grief and coming to terms with the death of a loved one, so do consider carefully whether this is a way of sharing grief that you and your family you would find helpful.



“I would hate to lose her Facebook profile. So many wonderful memories are saved there that help me remember who she was and the times we spent together.”

- Facebook user following a bereavement

“I will never see the little green dot on Messenger come up for them again.”

- Facebook user on the loss of a friend

Finding support

Social media is frequently a connection that brings people together from many different parts of someone’s life and so a Facebook profile or other account may connect immediate family, close friends, distant relations, work colleagues and often just occasional contacts. Because of this wide reach, Facebook can also be helpful for expressing your own grief and for asking for support.

**At difficult times, it is OK to ask for help or for privacy, or for some other consideration that would really help you.**

Sometimes people may ask for practical support as they carry the burden of arranging a funeral or for information as they act as an executor. At other times the request may be simply for friends to share their happiest memories as a way of remembering the loved one, and in many cases, there are often joyful surprises as you learn of how others’ lives have been touched.

Our own work at Care for the Family has shown that Facebook does provide a place of help and comfort. This is true not only through the connection to existing friends and family,

it also makes it easy to reach out to others at times of loss.

Care for the Family provides direct support to bereaved parents who have lost a child as well as to those who have been widowed at a young age by putting them in touch with a network of befrienders. Our befrienders provide a personal connection; someone to hear your story and provide genuine understanding, empathy and emotional support. Our team of carefully chosen and trained volunteers understand what people are going through because they have also experienced similar tragedy or loss themselves. This regular contact is frequently by phone but private Facebook pages also have a place in our network of support that is now available across the UK and the Isle of Man. Sometimes, being able to express your feelings, ask a question or share your experience and ideas during your own grieving process is easier online. Although you may only know others in the Facebook group through what you see of their profile online, you can still experience the kindness of relative strangers and the understanding of others who share something of your situation. Perhaps it is enough to realise that you are not alone in struggling with grief.

**Facebook in particular is a helpful way to connect to other people at times of bereavement and loss.**

It can be an effective way to express mourning and memory, love and loss but it does need handling with the greatest of sensitivity. Everyone copes with grief differently and many people become intensely private at times of bereavement and could be highly sensitive to anything posted online on a group or Facebook page, even if posted with the best intentions. Social media has provided new channels for us to express and share our grief, making it easier than ever before to remain in touch with others and it may be a tool that provides much practical help and support at times of loss. Some will prefer to grieve completely out of view of the online world, but for others, it provides a straightforward, measured way to connect to people and perhaps also to be helped in their own grief. At times of personal loss it is well worth remembering that it is possible for your social media network to become just one means of finding help and support.

Dr Hugh Griffiths

Hugh Griffiths is the Editor and Creative Lead for *Stories of us*. He is responsible for Care for the Family’s digital engagement team and is a specialist in strategic brand communications and digital culture. In his spare time he teaches at Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media and Culture.



# The Golden Thread.

## One good reason prisoners don't want to reoffend

When Gary\* smoked his first joint at the age of 15 he had no way of knowing that this would lead to over 20 years of intensive drug use, numerous arrests and prison sentences and ultimately almost cost him his life.



\*Names changed to protect identities

From a stable family background this wasn't an obvious path that Gary was carving out for himself, but once he was on that road of drug use he found that from the age of 17 onwards he struggled to focus on anything other than getting his next fix of amphetamines, his main drug of choice.

He describes his daily drug use as being as normal as "putting sugar on your breakfast every day". To feed his habit, crime soon became a way of life and over the years he spent several terms in prison, where even on the 'inside' his drug use did not stop. "Sometimes," he explains, "you just had to change what type of drug you took".

During a two-year sentence at Parc prison, Bridgend he was offered the chance to attend an M-PACT course which would help him face his drug problem. He accepted a place on the course and found himself challenged to acknowledge what he was putting his family through. In the family home he had often been angry, or just 'out of it'. His partner Kelly\* would sometimes return home to find him lying on the floor, dribbling, in a drug-induced state, or she would answer the door to find the police there coming to arrest him again. Gary wanted the best for his two girls, aged 8 and 14, but as a drug user he was caught up in a

world where he was largely out of control, and where he was the centre of his own universe, not his family. He realised that things could not go on the way they were if he was going to keep his partner and be a good father to his girls.

So from his prison cell in 2015 Gary decided it was time for things to change. He applied to go onto the Family Intervention Unit and got his transfer in August that year, but within a couple of weeks his life would take another dramatic turn. Through the daily use of drugs over the years his body eventually gave way and on the night of 22nd August he had a severe reaction to the build up of the drug 'Spice' in his system; as he lay on his cell floor vomiting he suffered a heart attack. Before he moved to the new prison wing he had a cell on his own, now he shared a cell. Had he had not moved to the new wing he would have died that night. His cellmate sounded the alarm and Gary was taken to hospital where he spent a week barely hanging onto life in the Intensive Care Unit. Following heart surgery he was placed on a cardiac ward for a further week, where his youngest daughter visited him.

However, seeing her father so unwell and handcuffed to the bed was too upsetting for her and it all added to Gary's wake-up call. Things really did need to change. ►



Behind the scenes, in politics, Lord Farmer was writing a report on prison reform where he was demonstrating that family ties are vital in motivating prisoners to not reoffend – and Gary was about to prove the truth of this. On re-entering prison he determined to make the most of his time on the Family Intervention Unit. Through the Invisible Walls Wales (IWW) initiative he began an intensive programme that would ultimately see him drug-free and bring a struggling family closer together.

With only 20 beds available each year on the Family Intervention Unit, a prisoner needs to demonstrate a real desire to modify their behaviour just to get onto the unit. The IWW programme then arranges for families to get together more often and begin to talk about what adjustments need to be made. Even simple things like visiting times were transformed for Gary's family. Rather than simply being a time when Dad was confined to a chair, family visiting times now included the opportunity to be in a lounge together, where they could interact and play as a normal family. He and Kelly began to talk about his drug use and its impact on the family, and Kelly and the children were able to share how they felt.

Support staff from the unit who have attended Care for the Family's training courses were able to talk to the families about concepts such as understanding your own parenting style or discovering your child's 'love language'.

Gary shared how there is sometimes a stigma amongst other prisons about transferring to the family unit, and how some prisoners just don't want to go there and face family issues. Above the door as you enter the unit are words from the *Sixty Second Father* book that firmly answer this stigma, "Parenting is not for cowards!" Along with others on the unit, Gary has proven that you do indeed have to be tough to face up to your own failings as a dad, and it takes hard work to become a good role model for your children.

As part of the IWW programme Gary even had to opportunity of completing a Duke of Edinburgh award together with his teenage daughter. They took on each challenge side by side, and united they worked towards a common goal. Gary recalls the great opportunity this gave him

for open conversations with his daughter as they cooked together in the kitchens or as they did activities in the gym, he remembers it fondly as a "good bonding time". It was a proud day for the whole family, including Gary's parents, when Prince Edward came to the prison to present them with their award.

Gary's life was slowly changing. Having ended his drug use, he could now think clearly and focus on his family instead of just himself. With a phone installed in each prison cell in Parc, Gary had a further lifeline to his family. Once a phone number has been approved, prisoners may call that number whenever they like and this gave him the freedom to call his girls every morning at 8am before they went to school, and each night at bedtime to say goodnight. With support workers also visiting his partner Kelly, and keeping the school involved, the whole family was supported over the year that Gary was on the unit – the programme was completely transforming this family's life.

**When asked if prison is a bit 'cushy', Gary responds by sharing how it is incredibly hard to be a dad locked away in prison – knowing what his partner is going through at home but not being able to help, listening to his girls crying on the end of the phone but not being there to comfort them.**

He concludes by sharing a common fear amongst prisoners, "You're constantly thinking about your missus, and thinking is she going to still be there when you come out?"

Kelly and the girls did stand by Gary, and at the end of his two-year sentence he returned home. Returning to the same neighbourhood where Gary had accessed drugs and been involved in crime however was a huge test of his resolve to put his family first. Those first few months were hard, and he describes how he initially thought about drugs all the time; and nearly slipped on a few occasions. Old friends would invite him to join them in crime and he'd tell them "I don't do all that now." As time went on things did get easier though, and now two years on, Gary, Kelly and the girls are truly carving out a new future for themselves. Kelly works full time and Gary is currently a stay-at-home dad; though one day he'd like to put to use mechanical skills that he learnt in prison. ➤



**“Harnessing the resource of good family relationships must be a golden thread running through the processes of all prisons.”**

– Lord Farmer



Apart from looking after the girls, he spends his time visiting drug-related projects to share his experience, and a short film has been made telling his story and warning of the dangers of Spice. Gary even goes back and speaks to prisoners attending the same drugs course he took back in 2015, and tells them, “I was once where you’re sat.”

In August 2017, exactly two years after Gary’s near miss with death, Lord Farmer published his report on ‘*The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners’ Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime.*’ Here he recommends that “harnessing the resource of good family relationships must be a golden thread running through the processes of all prisons.” And should even be “explicitly stated as part of the purpose of prison”.

Care for the Family trustee Dr Samantha Callan is the Parliamentary Advisor to Lord Farmer and the lead writer of this report. She says, “Care for the Family have the privilege of working at both ends of the spectrum, from parliament to prison, and they have seen the evidence that both areas of work are vital for strengthening family life. Increasingly their work with parents is extending to other prisons throughout the UK and Isle of Man.”

**On the family unit in Parc sometimes the things that have the biggest impact are the simplest and inexpensive things, like brightening up the decor in the visiting rooms and making the atmosphere family friendly.**

Displayed on one wall of the family unit is a large noticeboard covered in paper butterflies. On each butterfly is a simple message from a child to their dad. Messages like “I want a hug from my dad at bedtime” and, “When my dad comes home I want to go to the park with him”, tug at the heart strings of fathers as they live on the unit. Practical resources are available to help dads in prison to build the best possible connection with their family and there is a stack of Care for the Family’s parenting books readily available for prisoners to take as needed. When they first arrive on the unit, each prisoner receives two books, *The Sixty Minute Father* by Rob Parsons and *Daddy’s Working Away*. Corin Morgan-Armstrong (Head of Family Interventions – Custody & Community at Parc prison), who established the Family Intervention Unit speaks of the role that Care for the Family has played:

**“I’m done with all that life. There’s too much to give up, too much to lose.”**

PHOTOGRAPH: Butterfly message from the family unit noticeboard



PHOTOGRAPH: Prisoners and their families at HMP & YOI Parc



“The Care for the Family training along with the suite of Rob Parsons’ books have over the years become part of the fabric that makes up our Family Interventions strategy at HMP & YOI Parc. The learning, exercises and practical wit and wisdom is such that staff and those in our care have been able to easily access the benefits. Having founded the unit in 2010, and seen it replicated in other prisons, even outside the UK now, I can personally attest to the importance of Care for the Family’s influence behind the scenes. And speaking for myself, as a father, I owe Rob a debt of thanks for what I have learnt; a debt I cannot repay.”

Five years into the programme the effectiveness of the IWW initiative was reviewed by the University of Wales who concluded that, “Reoffending rates

will not be available until sufficient time has elapsed for them to be calculated. However, significant reductions in substance misuse, improvements in accommodation and employment, and positive change in measures of attitudes to crime ... suggest that reoffending rates will be lower than actuarially predicted.” Further, “even if it emerges that there was zero reduction in reoffending, the project will still be shown to be cost-effective.”

Gary’s story is evidence of the ‘golden thread’ of family in causing prisoners to turn their backs on a life of crime. He testifies to the fact that his family are the single biggest motivating factor for him not to reoffend. He wants to stay with them ... and out of prison, “I’m done with all that life. There’s too much to give up, too much to lose.”

#### Esther Holt

Esther Holt is the Managing Editor for *Stories of us*. She spends her time at Care for the Family developing new resources and assisting with content for its many public events. Her work involves writing, editing and project managing the creation of Care for the Family’s parenting and marriage resources.



# Stones Matter.

**Building Care for the Family's future on past foundations**

**When people say to me, "How did Care for the Family grow so big?" I find it hard to give them an answer. I feel a bit like the little girl who was asked how she'd become so tall.**

**S**he said, "I don't know. I just grew!" In the same way, I can't really explain how we've become the organisation we are today, but I do know that 30 years ago, I was called to work to strengthen family life in the UK, and my colleagues and I have carried on trying to do that ever since. Sometimes you just have to do the things you're called to do and see what happens. ►





PHOTOGRAPH: The staff of Care for the Family



I collect stones when I travel, and one of them is a piece of the Berlin Wall. I was fortunate enough to be in Germany when the Wall fell. I can remember so clearly standing there at midnight and trying to knock chunks off. One British newspaper had prophesied on a Monday that within 10 years the wall would be down. By the Friday afternoon that week, it was gone! If you ever go to Berlin, be sure to visit the museum at Checkpoint Charlie where you can see how people tried to get from the East to the West. One exhibit is a radiogram in which a baby was hidden as people tried to make it across. Halfway over, the baby cried out, and they were discovered. You can also see the Mini that someone hid in and photos of lots of other attempts.

Another stone I have is from Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 17 years. I had somehow managed to get lost from the rest of the tour group I was with and found myself outside Mandela's cell. A little bed with a blanket on stood against the wall, and when I looked out of the window through the bars, I could just see across the bay. It was an incredible moment.

**But why do I tell you all this? Well, stones are important. Throughout history, they have been set up in the form of statues or memorials to mark important events, people and places. These monuments will ensure that each is remembered by generations to come.**

The next couple of years will be incredibly significant for Care for the Family. As well as continuing with all that we're currently doing to help families, we will be relocating our national headquarters. When an organisation – especially a charity – talks about moving to a new building it can seem a bit mundane and uninspiring, but buildings are important. Our new offices will be a key part of our future work; we will be building on the past. And that's why I've been talking about stones – I want to take this opportunity to remember the last 30 years.

**Back in 1988, I had just left a legal practice in Cardiff to start Care for the Family. The practice gave me a tiny room to use in one of their offices – it was like a broom cupboard!**

For the first time in years, I found myself licking stamps onto envelopes and getting to grips with a photocopier that had a mind of its own. My wife, Dianne, and I started running marriage events and almost before we knew it, Care for the Family was on the road. After about 18 months, we moved to a slightly larger office at the back of a hairdresser's, and shortly after that we relocated again to converted offices in a large terraced house. Twenty years ago, we moved to our present building, which has served us incredibly well.

As well as responding to family issues that affect all generations, our aim in Care for the Family has been to try and sense where the world is going – to get ahead of the curve. When Katharine Hill wrote her book *Left To Their Own Devices? – Confident Parenting in a World of Screens*, it was in response to this ethos. The revolution in digital technology we've experienced over the last few years has brought us so many benefits, but it has also come with incredible dangers. I am sure you will be all too aware of online bullying, the negative effects of social media on mental health, and easy access to pornography. Society as a whole has been slow off the mark in countering these dangers. ►

**As well as responding to the type of family issues that affect all generations, our aim in Care for the Family has been to try and sense where the world is going – to get ahead of the curve.**

PHOTOGRAPH: Filming Rob Parsons and Gerrit Bantjes for men's event in the Arena







On a more positive note, digital technology is presenting Care for the Family with new possibilities. We will continue to run our live events, but we also have a vision to live-stream events, training and resources into people's homes or other places such as churches, schools or prisons. It would mean that we could say to you, "Get 50, 60, or 100 people together and we'll beam a live seminar to you – one that will help you invest in your marriage or help you navigate your way through your children's teenage years."

One of the main reasons we are moving to a new facility is to fulfil that vision to live-stream.

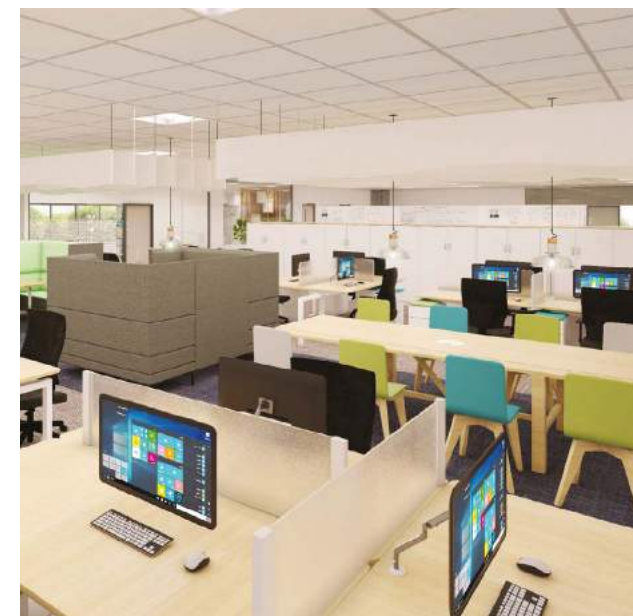
It involves building a small auditorium equipped with state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment. We thought we might be able to put this auditorium on the back of our existing building but that wasn't possible, so after a long search we have found our new building. It's got room for all our staff, and it will give us the fully-equipped auditorium we've been longing for. We'll also have a special room to record podcasts and radio interviews. As I write, we have almost reached our fundraising target.

I believe we are standing on the verge of a great opportunity – one that will make a difference to a new generation of families on a bigger scale than ever before. Here's to the next 30 years!



## Digital technology is presenting Care for the Family with new possibilities.

From 2019 we will be in our new home.  
If you'd like to contact us there, the address is:  
**Care for the Family, Tovey House, Cleppa Park,  
Newport, South Wales, NP10 8BA**



### Rob Parsons, OBE

Rob Parsons is the founder and chairman of Care for the Family. He is an international speaker and best-selling author who has spoken to people in corporate and family life events around the world. Rob has written over 20 books on a variety of topics. To date, almost a million copies of his books have been sold worldwide. Rob is married to Dianne, and they have two adult children and five grandchildren.



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*If Care for the Family can do anything to help and support you, or if you would like an extra copy of the magazine to pass on please do get in touch:*  
***mail@cff.org.uk***

**Care for the Family** is a national charity which aims to strengthen family life and help those who face family difficulties. Working throughout the UK and the Isle of Man, we provide marriage and relationship, parenting, and bereavement support through events, courses, a volunteer network, online and other resources. Our work is motivated by Christian compassion and our resources and support are available to anyone, of any faith or none.

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If you would like to support the work of Care for the Family, visit our website at **[cff.org.uk/donate](https://cff.org.uk/donate)**

You can keep in touch by subscribing to our newsletter or following us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.



*Care for the Family*  
A Christian response to a world of need.

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Registered in England and Wales.

Registered office:  
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Newport, South Wales, NP10 8BA

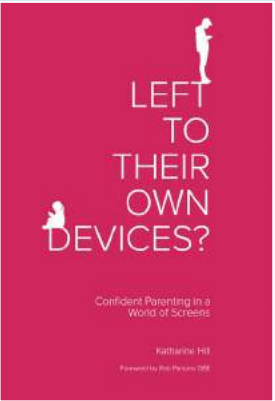
# We hope you've been encouraged and motivated by these stories

*Why not encourage others by sharing your own story of how Care for the Family has impacted your family life*

 **careforthefamily**



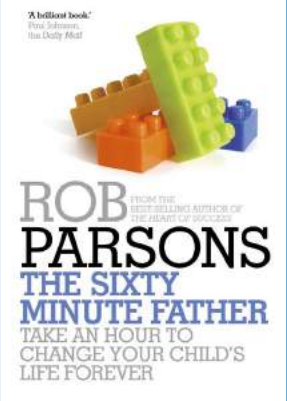
Books:



Left to Their Own Devices? – Confident Parenting in a World of Screens

Katharine Hill  
£9.99

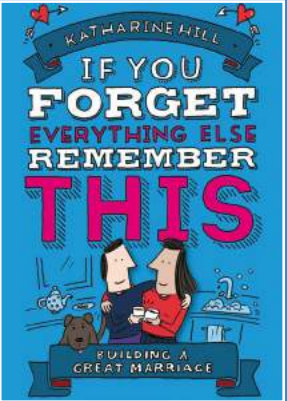
Katharine explores the impact of devices and the digital age on our children, giving practical advice on screen time, social media and consumer culture as well as how to tackle some of the more serious issues such as cyberbullying, grooming and pornography. Whatever the age of your children, this book is for mums and dads who not only want to ‘cope’ with bringing up children in the world of digital technology but to be on the front foot – confidently parenting in a world of screens.



The Sixty Minute Father

Rob Parsons, OBE  
£7.99

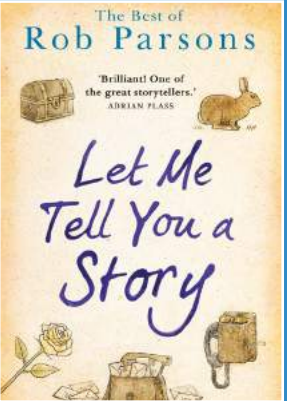
Rob seeks to establish goals to help every father ensure that he doesn’t miss out on the greatest opportunity of his life. No one was ever heard to say on their deathbed, “I wish I’d spent more time at the office.” And yet so often that’s how we live. This practical, down-to-earth book helps fathers to see how they can seize the day, laugh more with their children, and give love without strings.



If You Forget Everything Else, Remember This – Building a Great Marriage

Katharine Hill  
£9.99

Covering a range of topics from communicating well, embracing differences, handling in-laws, dealing with financial pressures, and sex and intimacy, Katharine Hill provides wisdom in bite-sized chapters. With real-life stories that will alternately make you laugh and cry, her honest and practical look at marriage is both engaging and encouraging.

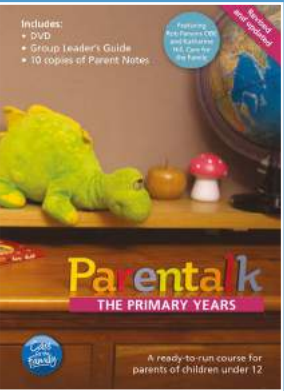


Let Me Tell You A Story

Rob Parsons, OBE  
£12.99

Rob is a bestselling author who has enthralled audiences around the world for more than 30 years telling stories of the ups and downs of life and faith. *Let Me Tell You a Story* brings together some of the very best of these heart-warming and challenging stories – a wonderful compendium of insights on faith and family, love and loss, money and priorities, dreams and goals. Pull up a chair and settle in to enjoy as a master storyteller begins.

Ready-to-run courses:

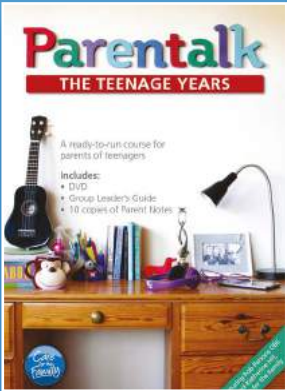


Parentalk The Primary Years

£39.99

Both Parentalk courses are DVD-based and are in a ‘plug-and-play’ format. They come in a pack with a Group Leader’s Guide and ten copies of Parent Notes, giving you everything you need to run a complete course.

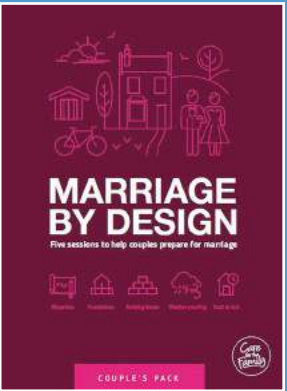
A ready-to-run course for all parents of children aged up to the early teenage years. In six sessions, this course explores topics including: understanding your child’s ‘love language’, communication, setting boundaries, and preparing children for the outside world. Presented by Rob Parsons and Katharine Hill and joined by special guests, including broadcaster Diane Louise Jordan and paediatrician Dr Kunle Ayonrinde.



Parentalk The Teenage Years

£39.99

A ready-to-run course for parents of teenagers. In six sessions, this course explores topics including: understanding your teenager, staying connected, identity, communication and conflict, big pressures ... good choices and letting go. Presented by Rob Parsons and Katharine Hill, joined by special guests, including broadcaster Carrie Grant and educational psychologist Dave Lumsdon.



Marriage by Design

Couple's Pack  
£19.99

Group Leader's Pack  
£34.99

Recently updated, this five-session marriage preparation course is packed with practical ideas and insights. It provides engaged couples the opportunity to take time out from planning the wedding to focus on their future relationship. The course guides couples through the DVD content and activities in the accompanying handbooks. *Marriage by Design* can be used for marriage prep with a group of couples, with an individual couple, or by a couple working through the material on their own.



The Marriage Sessions

£29.99

A flexible, four-part resource that explores how a couple can build a strong relationship. Whether newly-weds or married for years, this is a fantastic opportunity for couples to invest in and enrich their marriage. Each stand-alone session provides the content for a two-hour couples’ event, and the pack includes everything you need to run an event (a Leader’s Guide and four separate DVDs). Alternatively couples can buy the pack and watch it together from the comfort of their own home.

Train to run our courses.

Time Out For Parents

Our courses are here to support you and to help parents build a strong and secure relationship with their child, whatever their age. They include group discussions and practical tasks to help build on parents’ strengths and give them time and space to think about any changes they want to make. A helpful, easy-to-read handbook is

included with each course. Our courses are run in community venues and are usually made up of six two-hour sessions, each led by trained and experienced facilitators. Find out more about each of our parenting courses on our website or by contacting us directly at [learning@cff.org.uk](mailto:learning@cff.org.uk)



For more great resources  
get in touch or visit our  
online shop

[cff.org.uk/shop](http://cff.org.uk/shop)

[mail@cff.org.uk](mailto:mail@cff.org.uk)

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# Stories of us.

REAL FAMILIES, REAL LIVES

*Care for the Family*

A Christian response to a world of need

*A registered charity*