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BYU Web Site Changing Attitudes and Behavior:

foreverfamilies.byu.edu

The Forever Families Web site operated by Brigham Young University’s School of Family Life is impacting family life by changing visitors’ attitudes and behaviors, according to a just-completed year-long study by the School.

“We wanted to create a Web site that would provide families of all denominations with legitimate, practical, research-based information and articles to strengthen and enrich their lives,” said Stephen Duncan, BYU professor of family life and Web site project lead. “Results from our study indicate that we are accomplishing our goal.”

During the study, the Web site received more than 35,000 unique visitors from more than 60 countries. Of those who participated in the study, 57 percent said the site led them to reconsider former attitudes. More than 66 percent said the site helped them change their behavior as they “decided to do something differently.”

“In the course of my professional life, I've learned how thirsty people are for good information to make their marriages and family lives better,” said Jeffry H. Larson, professor of marriage and family therapy and one of the site’s contributing authors.

“It is rewarding to see the impact this information has on families - that it is actually changing attitudes and behaviors.”

The Forever Families Web site is organized around the themes of “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” a pro-family document authored in 1995 by the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“Although the proclamation on the family is written by leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it contains principles to which many religious people adhere,” said James M. Harper, director of the School of Family Life. “At the Forever Families site, visitors will be able to discover how social science supports these principles and how to apply them in their daily lives.”

Forever Families Web site features include:
- Up-to-date, scholarly and practical faith-based information relating to the topics: marriage preparation, marriage, family, parenting, stepfamilies, extended family, family challenges and issues facing families.
- Two options for many articles—one article which discusses a topic in a concise manner, and an expanded version of the same article, which provides more in-depth information for those who are interested.
- A search engine for easy access to topics of interest.
- Links to related Web sites.
- Ease of use.
- An option to e-mail articles.

Marriage & Families is a journal for young couples, husbands & wives, parents, and professionals—including educators, counselors, therapists, psychologists, physicians, social workers, nurses, public health people, teachers, clergy, experts in family law, and everyone interested in marriage and families. Our editorial board members belong to many faiths—with a common belief in the importance of traditional families. Marriage & Families is dedicated to strengthening families. Without apology, our name begins with the word marriage—a concept that many dismiss or completely ignore these days. However, since marriage and fidelity are essentials, not options, in a healthy society, we are pleased to bring you a publication containing credible data supporting this and other time-tested principles and values related to the family.
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Rock-solid relationships are those relationships that endure when the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (Hamlet III, i, 56-68) combine with the adversary’s storms (see Ephesians 6:12) and the world’s alluring sophistries in a relentless and sinister effort to undermine and ultimately destroy love.

Rock-solid relationships are built upon The Word, who is Christ, and His words, the scriptures. The prophet Nephi taught “Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3; italics added*). All things? Yes. All things.

- How to talk with my teenage son who is suddenly pulling away from us?
- How to show love to my wife, so that she really experiences the deep love I have for her?
- How to work with my brother on our parents’ estate so that our relationship is still alive at the end of the process?

• How to respond to my sister—who seems to twist everything I say to her—so that we can be closer?
• How to help my seemingly indifferent husband think about my needs sometimes?
• How to build a bridge from my heart to my father’s and put years of conflict behind us?
• How to link arms with my colleagues so that we can accomplish the important tasks at hand and stop wasting our energies in complaints and criticisms, fears, and jealousies?
• How to be a better wife and mother?

Yes. Absolutely. Certainly. All of these. As a marriage and family therapist for 30 years, I believe the scriptures are the very best “how to” books on relationships. The scriptures are the first and last word on how to be a better husband, father, wife, mother, parent, son, daughter, sibling, friend, in-law, friend, boss, employee, or any other relationship you can name. The scriptures contain the answers on how to build and strengthen any relationship.

When we don’t know the next step to take, when we can’t see any light at the end of our relationship tunnel, the scriptures—the word of God—are the “iron rod” that we can count on and hold onto. The wisdom contained in the scriptures will guide us over the mountains of misunderstandings, through the dark nights of betrayal, and around the mine fields of destructive traditions and lethal legacies of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. And all we have to do is be willing to seek their wisdom. “Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall ... lead the man (and woman) of Christ in a strait and narrow course across the everlasting gulf of misery” (Helaman 3:29; italics added)—even that gulf of misery which is created by unhappy and stressful relationships.

Wisdom from the Scriptures Strengthens Relationships

At the most difficult time in her life, namely, the dissolution of her marriage—because her husband ran off with their young woman boarder—one woman found her daily “to do” list right within the scriptures. Each and every day she took her question for that particular day to the Lord in prayer, opened her scriptures—absolutely expecting an answer—and received abundantly! The scriptures became her personal compass, her very own Liahona, pointing the way she should go through her unexpected wilderness experience (see 1 Nephi 16:10). She discovered in her exploration of the scriptures what Nephi and his family learned about the workings of the Liahona: the more “faith and diligence and heed which [she] did give unto them,” the clearer were the instructions she received (1 Nephi 16:28).

The scriptures became her personal compass, her very own Liahona, pointing the way she should go through her unexpected wilderness experience.
And she had other experiences that paralleled Nephi’s, namely, that what was written in her scriptures was “changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which [she] gave unto [them]” (v. 29). At times a passage that she had read many times before suddenly seemed brand new. Other times she found passages that she’d never read; some, she’d never even noticed. It was as though the “scripture angels” were working overtime to insert words and phrases, counsel and advice meant just for her.

Day after day the scriptures told her how to deal with her husband, in the way the Lord wanted, so that her children would not be injured in the crossfire of the rancor of the divorce. She was tutored in how to heal the fractured relationship with her husband so that, although no longer spouses, they were able to be supportive friends to each other and continue to be great parents to their children.

Because of the marital breakup, this woman needed to seek employment. From her daily seeking in the scriptures, she learned how to present herself at a job interview for a very desirable position within her field. She got the position and then she proceeded, in a very matter-of-fact manner, to take any work related problem she was not able to solve right to her director—the scriptures—and again received her answers. She figured that since the words of the Lord had helped her get the job, they could now help her do it!

This woman prospered spiritually and temporally. And her relationships prospered. All because of the wisdom from the scriptures, which she diligently sought, found, and applied. This single-parent mother was able to testify to her sons, the truth of what Alma told his son: “For just as surely as this director [the Liahona] did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise” (Alma 37:45). Indeed, the words of Christ had consistently carried her beyond her vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise—a land complete with loving relationships.

A distinction needs to be drawn between simply reading the scriptures and regularly immersing ourselves in them. Joy comes through immersion. A little sprinkling of the scriptures in our lives will never bring us the fullness of joy that accompanies regular immersion.

Take a moment and think of how some of your relationships would be strengthened if, through your immersion in the scriptures, you found and heeded the wisdom in:

- **3 Nephi 17:5:** “When Jesus had thus spoken, he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude.”
  WISDOM: Take time to notice people’s reactions to what you’ve said. Don’t be a “hit and run” talker. Be sensitive to how someone is doing after you’ve conversed with them.

- **1 John 4:19:** “We love him, because he first loved us.”
  WISDOM: Be willing to take the first step. You go first. If you want someone to love
you, show love to them first! If you want change in a relationship to happen, you make some change—first.

• D&C 67: 10 “...strip yourselves from jealousies and fears, and humble yourselves before me, for ye are not sufficiently humble, [then] the veil shall be rent and you shall see me and know that I am—not with the carnal neither natural mind, but with the spiritual.”

WISDOM: Put jealousies and fears away and increase humility. Here the Lord sets forth clear instruction of how to get to know Him better. But could the same thing apply in our relationships with others? Are jealousies, fears, and pride blinding us? Imagine the good we might be able to see in others after we strip ourselves of jealousies and fears and humble ourselves.

Seek Rock-Solid Relationships by Study and Also by Faith

Though we embrace truth wherever we can find it (Smith, Teachings, 313), when we’ve tried everything else and discovered that neither tears nor the wisdom of the world is enough to build loving, lifting relationships that will stand the test of time, it’s time to look elsewhere. We need to look where the Savior’s disciples looked—to Him and to His words. We need to echo Peter when he said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6: 68).

I believe you will receive all the wisdom you are seeking to help you and your loved ones if you:

• Take your relationship questions to your Heavenly Father in prayer. Confide in Him the one question you most need answered through the scriptures that day.

• Ask for the Spirit to be with you as you read the word of the Lord. Plead for the Holy Ghost to be with you. Imagine Him being right there by you.

• Open your scriptures and read until you find the answer. I believe you won’t have to read very far.

Now, let’s take an in-depth look at the relationship wisdom found in a couple of scriptures.

Wisdom: Bury Your Weapons of War

Scripture:

“They buried their weapons . . . of war, for peace” Alma 24: 19

CONCEPT: If we have been hurt in a relationship, we often gather an “arsenal of weapons,” thinking they will protect our hearts from further damage. But, ironically, such weapons can injure us in addition to those we are defending against. These “weapon of war” are thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—such as harsh judgments, jealousies, and sarcasm—that keep us feeling separate, isolated, and lonely in our relationships. If you are unable to find love and peace and joy in your relationships, could it be you are carrying around thoughts that wounded love? Feelings that bruise peace? Actions that kill joy?

The only thing that these “relationship weapons of war” protect us from is loving, lasting relationships. The use of these defensive weapons can make it almost impossible for us to build open, close, caring, supportive relationships.

When we are weary of fighting with others and of not feeling loved and appreciated, perhaps it’s time to do as the converted Lamanites—the Anti-Nephi-Lehies—did. Alma 24 contains a stirring account of these remarkable people.
who so desired a permanent change in the way they related that they were willing to, and did, rid themselves of anything that might wound their brothers—brothers, who, by the way, were coming to kill them.

When we are finally ready to enjoy true love and peace and joy in our relationships, we need to be like the Anti-Nephi-Lehies who “buried their weapons ... of war, for peace.” We need to gather our sword-like thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and bury them “deep in the earth” (Alma 24:19, 16).

EXAMPLE:
Don, a married father of six grown children, wanted to establish a closer connection with them. His children were polite, but he didn't feel close to them and guessed that they felt the same way. “I've been busy with work all their lives, but that's not the real reason for the distance. I've had a bad temper and have used it against them—against us all, really,” he admitted. Like the converted Lamanites, he had become “convinced concerning the wicked traditions of [his] fathers” (Alma 23:3) who had also ruled their families by coercion and fear.

Don was ready to build relationships of genuine love and trust with his children. He started by identifying his “weapons of war”—his impatience, anger, and harsh demands—that had damaged his family relationships. Don wondered about his eldest daughter, Jill, and asked himself, “What have I done that has hurt my daughter's heart the most?”

- What thoughts of mine about Jill, about myself, about life, and so on, have bruised her?
- What festering feelings have built a barricade between us?
- What actions or inactions of mine have almost destroyed our relationship?

The task of identifying his weapons of war was more difficult to do than he initially thought. This wasn't some sanitized list of behaviors, thoughts, and feelings that he could crank out in an hour, and then walk off into the glow of a loving father-daughter relationship with Jill. Time, sweat, and tears were involved. This was hard labor, as intense as the physical labor he was used to. He discovered that working to eliminate anguish and remorse
takes a lot of energy. For days he reviewed the past, including missed opportunities to commend Jill, harsh words he regretted ever thinking, let alone saying to her—angry feelings toward her that he had chosen to nurture in his heart.

The following are some highlights from Don's soul-searching.

**Weapons I believe I've used against my daughter and our relationship:**
- I tell myself that she doesn't like me and is embarrassed to have me as her father.
- I convince myself that I'm just not very loveable.
- I focus on how misunderstood, used, and abused I feel as a father.
- I rehearse in my mind past situations where I feel she didn't respect my authority.
- I think how easy her life is compared to how difficult mine was at her age, and I choose to feel resentful about the difference.
- I look for ways to bring up situations from her youth in front of other people in order to embarrass her.
- I use sharp, cutting words when I talk with her.
- I don't really "converse" with her. I'm always on my guard to defend my "correct" position, so I never really listen to her.
- I find fault with whatever gift she gives me.
- I insult her.
- I argue with her.
- I punish her for past mistakes she made as a child or teenager by poking fun at her—but it's always "fun" with a barb attached.
- I make her beg me for financial assistance and then make her feel guilty about asking, even though my wife and I have "enough and to spare."
- I point out times she has been a disappointment to me as a daughter—sometimes subtly, sometimes not so subtly.
- I don't take an interest in her and what's happening in her life right now.
- I never let her know how proud I am of her and all she has accomplished in her life.
- I never tell her that I love her.
- I never tell her that she can always count on me to stand by her as her father and to help her in whatever way I can.

Identifying the weapons he was accustomed to using changed Don. For one thing, it opened his eyes; he couldn't believe he had done all these things, but there they were, right there in black and white and in his own handwriting. The phrase "broken heart and contrite spirit" suddenly had a new and very personal meaning for Don, and he was ready to bring both to the building of a new relationship with his daughter.

**Wisdom:**

_Do One Small Thing_

**Scripture:**

"out of small things proceedeth that which is great." (D&C 64:33)

**CONCEPT:** When you have a seemingly overwhelming problem in a relationship, or a problem that has persisted for years, it's natural to think that you need a big solution. However, your answer may be found in the wisdom of D&C 64:33: "out of small things proceedeth that which is great." Several other scriptures echo this truth: "A very large ship is benefited very much by a very small helm" (D&C 123: 16); and "by small and simple things are great things brought to pass" (Alma 37:6). (See also James 3:4; 1 Nephi 16:29).

A small adjustment in the way we think about something can often bring great changes in our feelings and behaviors. For example, viewing a particular food from the perspective of how it will increase our insulin resistance may help us manage our sugary cravings better than all the behavioral reward systems we’ve set up for ourselves in the past or all the disparaging words with which we’ve flogged ourselves. Likewise, a small change in our behavior can often make a huge difference in another person's thoughts, feelings, and actions. For example, a man who turns off his favorite TV program and says to his wife: "I'd rather talk with you than watch this" may precipitate a very beneficial "heart attack" for his wife, and begin shoring up their marriage.

Consider the great effect of seven words spoken by Nephi had on his father. "Whither shall I go to
"obtain food?" (1 Nephi 16:23) Nephi asked, awak-
eowing Lehi’s memory of who he (Lehi) really was—
a prophet of the Lord.

When we have lived for years with a problem in
a relationship, it may be difficult to concede that
the solution to our frustration can begin with one
small change in the way we think, feel, or act. We
might feel foolish for having struggled for so long
with problems that could have been solved by
small things. “You mean it’s as simple as that?” may
be our initial protest, echoing Naaman’s indigna-
tion when Elisha prescribed something as easy as
bathing seven times in the Jordan river as a cure for
leprosy (see 2 Kings 5). But the truth is that small
things can bring about great changes in our rela-
tionships, especially when the seemingly small
things catch the attention of a child, parent, friend,
sister, or spouse—signaling to them that something
is different.

EXAMPLE:

Grant and Mary were a physically active couple
in their 70s. Six months ago, Mary’s 74-year-old
sister, Clara, moved in with the couple due to
Clara’s failing health. Grant and Mary were glad to
help. “It’s the right thing to do,” they said. At the
same time, however, they felt a bit resentful
because they noticed that the more help they gave
Clara, the more assistance she requested and
required, even though her health, according to the
doctors, was steadily improving.

Our beliefs about others influence how we relate
to them (Wright, Watson, & Bell, Beliefs). Mary
believed that Clara would always need someone to
take care of her. Both Grant and Mary believed
that Clara had to be “babied” or she would become
upset. The couple came to feel they were being
held hostage in their own home. And they were—
not by Clara—but by their belief that “caring
equals doing for—and doing more and more.”

Grant and Mary were weary—bone-weary. Was this how their lives would be for the rest
of their days? What could they do? The answer
was in D&C 64: 33: “Be not weary in well doing,
for out of small things proceedeth that which
is great.”

That scripture is often quoted to encourage us to
continue doing what we’re doing. However, the
answer for Mary and Grant—and Clara—was to do
something different, to make some small changes
in what they were doing. And out of those “small
things,” proceeded the “great” relief that Mary and
Grant were seeking.

What did they do? What were the small things
that helped them “be not weary in well doing,” and
brought great relief to the couple while benefiting
Clara?

Mary and Grant began to wonder if their
helpfulness to Clara was unintentionally inviting
her to be more helpless. They were literally doing
everything for Clara. As a result, Clara was doing
nothing for herself. And seeing that Clara did
nothing for herself only reinforced for Mary and
Grant that they needed to do everything for
her. What a vicious cycle of helpfulness and
helplessness!

The couple decided to make a small change. They
decided that for one week they would stop
pouring Clara’s glass of water for breakfast and
see how she would respond. What did Clara do?
She started to pour her own water. Encouraged
by this, the next week, while making supper,
Mary said wearily, out-loud to herself, “I’m so
tired. I need some help cutting these vegetables.”
Promptly, Clara got up out of her chair and
started helping Mary. Noticing Clara’s response
to these two situations, Mary and Grant invited
Clara to take more responsibility for herself
over the next several weeks. They encouraged
her to be more helpful around the house by
showing her where clean bed sheets and the toaster were located. Within just three
weeks, Clara was helping herself and Mary and
Grant more—making her own bed, dusting the
living room furniture, and making toast for
breakfast.

The effect of these “small things” breathed life
back into Mary, Grant, and Clara. Clara continued
to make steady improvements in taking care of
herself and helping with daily life around the
home. Mary and Grant were even able to take a
trip they had been looking forward to but
believed they could never take because of Clara’s
former dependency. And all three reclaimed the
joy of being together. Several small things—
that were different—interrupted the vicious cycle
that had previously trapped them all. The
wisdom of “out of small things proceedeth that
which is great,” strengthened these three individuals and their relationships.

**Conclusion**

Do you know the children’s song:

*This is the song that never ends.*

*It just goes on and on, my friends.*

*Some people started singing it*  
*Not knowing what it was.*

*And they’ll continue singing it forever*  
*Just because this is the song that never ends.*

*It just goes on and on, my friends.......*

The wonderful truth is that when we start searching the scriptures for the wisdom that will strengthen our personal relationships, it becomes a search “that never ends. It just goes on and on, my friends.” This is so because the scriptures are multilayered. We uncover one concept or spiritual insight only to find another lying beneath it, and it becomes a search that literally never ends. Tutored by the Spirit, the deeper we delve, the more we find. We keep uncovering more. Understanding more. Discovering more. And our relationships become more and more Rock-solid!

_Wendy L. Watson, Ph.D., is a professor of Marriage & Family Graduate Programs in the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University. This article includes excerpts from her book, Rock Solid Relationship: Strengthening Personal Relationships with Wisdom from the Scriptures (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), which are used with permission of the publisher. Professor Watson is also the author of Purity and Passion: Spiritual Truths about Intimacy That Will Strengthen Your Marriage (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001)._

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Rock-solid relationships are those relationships that endure when the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” combine with the adversary’s storms and the world’s alluring sophistries in a relentless and sinister effort to undermine and ultimately destroy love.
Once I explained to a new acquaintance that as a folklorist I was researching creative date invitations—the unusual ways that young women and men ask each other out on dates, primarily dates to school dances. In response she told me about a creative date invitation that had been described to her. One of her friends, the mother of a high school age boy, received a call from a girl who wanted to ask her son to a preference dance. The girl asked permission to put the invitation in the boy’s bedroom. The mother said “yes” and soon the young woman arrived, scattered a bag of Hershey Kisses on the floor, and strategically placed a poster proclaiming, “Now that I’ve kissed the ground you walk on, will you go to Preference with me?” In order to find out who had invited him, the boy unwrapped all of the kisses until he found the one with the girl’s name on a slip of paper.

My friend loved the tale of the Hershey Kisses. I did too. I’d never heard it before. Since that time the Hershey Kiss invite has achieved prominence in the creative date invitation tradition. The invitation is so well known that it is included in books on creative dating and has been recounted in newspaper articles and on websites. Variants on the Hershey Kisses invite now exist. One requires throwing the kisses on the bathroom floor and hanging a dozen roses in the shower. The accompanying sign reads: “Now that I’ve kissed the ground you walk on and showered you with roses, will you go to the dance with me?”

Defining Self

While creative invitations are bound by traditional practices, it is through the individualization of the traditions that young people are able to express themselves outside of teenage stereotypes. This is particularly true for young women who are able to use creative dating as a tool in their creation of self. Folklorist William A. Wilson theorizes that in the late 1970s the opportunities for girls to ask guys on dates was increasing and that creative dating and especially creative invitations provided girls a comfortable way to function in what was traditionally seen as a male role.

Many of these girls—in fact, probably the majority—were raised to believe that a girl should never call a boy. If the thought of initiating a conversation with a boy you couldn’t see was taboo, imagine how horrendous the thought of looking a boy in the eye and extending an invitation for a date was. But a girl who asked a boy creatively didn’t see or hear the boy’s first reaction, so she was protected from a potentially awkward situation. These girls, engrained with strong notions of what a socially acceptable young woman could do lost some of their ability...
to express their true selves. (See Pipher, 37)

Creative invitations empowered many young women to use their talents and ideas within a socially acceptable framework.

A Pie in the Face

In October of 1997, Orem High School in Orem, Utah held a Sadie Hawkins’s dance. Creative invitations were an expectation, and for girls there was an unacknowledged, but very real pressure to come up with an invitation that was different and memorable. Shannon, a junior at Orem High, thought long and hard and came up with a solution. Given that pumpkins were plentiful at the time, it seemed natural to use one as part of the invitation. So, Shannon bought a pumpkin and wrote “Pumpkin, will you go to Sadie’s with me?” on the outside. Then she cut off the stem of the pumpkin, bought some flowers, inserted them into the pumpkin, and wrote her name on one of the flowers so that her intended would know who had sent the invitation.

What might seem to be a mildly clever idea didn’t stop there. Shannon asked one of the boy’s teachers if the invite could be delivered in the teacher’s class. The teacher agreed and the plot thickened. Of course, Shannon didn’t actually deliver the pumpkin herself. One of whom handed the pumpkin to the prospective date while the other expertly planted a pumpkin pie on his face.

For several days Shannon lived in fear—tinged with excitement. Friends warned her to have a change of clothes in her locker. After all, “one good turn deserves another.” Finally, the day of retribution came. The same teacher gave the young man who was now affectionately known as “Pumpkin Boy” permission to answer Shannon in her class, and the young man invited Shannon to come to the front of the room. Around 150 A Capella singers watched anxiously as “Pumpkin Boy” told Shannon that the answer to her question was in a pie tin full of whipped cream. The catch was that she would not be allowed to use her hands to find the answer. Swiftly, he attempted to grab her hands, but he wasn’t fast enough. Shannon grabbed the tin of cream and smeared it in his face. Her date wasn’t going to allow Shannon to get away.
with such a dirty deed, and so he and his friends immediately commenced spraying her with whipped cream. Eventually, Shannon saw the bottom of the pie plate and read the words, “Yes, my little cream pie, I’d love to go to Sadie’s with you.” After several days (and two unnecessary loads of laundry) the date became reality.

Shannon and her pumpkin invite provide a good illustration of Erving Goffman’s assertion in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (13) that our behavior declares our status. Shannon is generally quiet, well-groomed, and part of the group in public. Her facade belies the exuberant girl that close friends and family know. But it was only through the safety of a socially acceptable practice—creative invitations—that she was able to comfortably exert this aspect of her self in a large group.

**Creative Invite Functions**

Creative invitations provide a chance to act in ways that a young woman normally wouldn’t in ordinary life, but in a manner that is acceptable within the framework of creative invitations. Generally viewed as a socially acceptable way to engage in risk taking and unusual behavior, the invitations provide safe venues of individual expression. Teens need to explore boundaries and function in an unfamiliar sphere. Many youth are encouraged to be circumspect and maintain certain standards of prescribed behavior. Creative invitations provide a socially accept-able way for teens to act out of the ordinary.

Initially, it might seem difficult to explain the popularity of creative date invitations in the area of teen dating. However, folklorists who work with children’s lore provide a rubric that may account for the somewhat rapid appearance of creative invitations in the 1970s and their ability to endure and even thrive over the last three decades. Jay Mechling writes:

> the sudden ‘invention of tradition’ certainly no longer surprises folklorists of children’s lives. The founders of this specialty saw in their work what Gary Alan Fine much later called ‘Newell’s Paradox,’ that is, the paradox that children’s folklore is simultaneously very dynamic and very conservative. That is to say, children cling rather rigidly to the familiar forms of their folklore, but they constantly bring to those conservative forms new content. Long before others, children’s folklorists understood the naturalness of ‘invented traditions,’ of traditions invented not for political purposes of ordering experience, of making meaning, and of managing relationships. (140-41)

While the first young women involved in creative dating and invitations participated to ease a social situation, current high school girls claim that they act creatively because it is a tradition. They watched older siblings do it, and they want to have fun too.

It is certainly more complicated to use creative invitations and responses, but the
youth involved feel that it is worth it. While the actual creation of the invitation is enjoyable, part of the fun lies in the stories surrounding the invitation. Henry Glassie discusses the fact that both stories and artifacts are texts. He explains:

*Both stories and artifacts arise out of concentration, both are created in time and shaped to cultural pattern, but they differ in apprehension. The story belongs to temporal experience. It moves in one direction, accumulating associations sequentially. The artifact belongs to spatial experience. It unfolds in all directions at once, embracing contradictions in simultaneity, and opening multiple routes to significance.* (46-47)

Creative invitations involve the use of material items, but the stories about how the items are used and received often outlast the item. Let me give you some specific examples.

**Jenna**

I interviewed Jenna Knudsen when she was a sixteen-year-old junior at Springville High in Springville, Utah. Springville, a small town in the southern end of Utah County, is populated by professors and employees of Brigham Young University and Utah Valley State College, computer executives, and other professionals; as well as by personnel of the local Stouffer’s frozen food plant, agricultural workers, and other blue collar employees. Springville High consists of sophomores, juniors, and seniors with each class numbering around three hundred. Jenna’s father commuted to Salt Lake City and was an executive in a computer company and her mother was a graduate student in Utah State University’s American Studies program emphasizing folklore. Jenna had recently attended her school’s homecoming and was willing to share her experience with creative invitations and responses. Since homecoming is a boy’s choice dance, Jenna received a creative invitation from her date. Actually, she received two invitations. The first boy’s invitation was somewhat simple. Jenna relates that there was a sign that said, ‘‘my heart would break into pieces if you didn’t go to homecoming with me.’ And he gave me two bags of Reece’s Pieces and then, there were flowers and the note with the flowers said ‘Will you go to homecoming with me?’ And then he just signed his name. And it wasn’t any big search—he just left it on the front porch. My dad came up the stairs and got me ’cause I didn’t hear him knock on the door, and then I went out and got it.” (Interview, 9-30-2000)

Because Jenna mentioned searches, I asked her if many creative invitations involved searches, and she told me about her second invitation. It was delivered on a Monday night after she had gone to bed.

*So the next morning, me and my mom, were like getting ready to go workout. [Her mother found the invitation on the front*
And my Mom hands me the piece of paper that came with it and it says, “Hey toots, don’t bail out. Let’s go to Homecoming. Graze through to see who I am.”

And I got it and I’m like “What in the world?” And I went downstairs and I open up the front door and there was all this hay scattered all over the Tootsie Rolls. And so we spent the whole morning trying to find out who it was. And so that one was a search, and we looked all through the hay, and through the Tootsie Rolls and we finally found it in one of the Tootsie Rolls—the boy who asked me. (ibid.)

An unwritten rule of the creative invitation tradition is that if you need to say no, you need to do so quickly and kindly. To do otherwise is to risk condemnation from your peers. Jenna reports, “I bought him some Luvs diapers. And I did it right that day, because I didn’t want him to like think that I was going all out to answer him yes, you know? And so, I bought some Luvs diapers and I put a note on it, and I made sure it was closed ’cause I didn’t want his family to see it, and it said, ‘Bummers. I’ve already been asked to Homecoming, but I’d Luv to go on a date with you sometime.’ And I signed it.” (ibid.)

Folklorist Henry Glassie writes that studying material culture, the tangible items of folklore, requires looking for patterns because “patterns imply intentions and carry toward meaning” (47). Teens involved in creative invitations and responses frequently follow the pattern of using everyday items, such as diapers and Tootsie Rolls, in a non-traditional way. By changing the purpose of the item, the young women and men involved create a unique piece of material culture.

When Jenna sent a positive response to the first invitation, she used an idea that she had thought about for a while. She recounts, “I already had my dress. I had bought it just before, just in case I got asked to a dance, and so I went to the mall and I bought him a tie that kind of matched my skirt, and then I had it wrapped up in twine and knots and stuff and made it all kind of hard to get, but not really, but tried to. And then my note said, ‘You’ve got me all tied up in knots’ and then inside, on top of the tie there was another note that said, ‘Of course I’ll go to Homecoming with you.’” (ibid.)

Although Jenna was responding to an invitation for a date that she wouldn’t plan, she determined, to some extent, the attire of her date for the dance. She used a tangible item to assert her personality. The response was delivered to her date by her next-door neighbor. Her neighbor is close to her family and is in many ways like the little brother she doesn’t have. By involving him and his mother in her response, Jenna strengthened positive relationships.

One positive by-product of creative invitations and responses is interaction with peers, family friends, and family members. To answer one date Jenna had her brother, Tyler, dress up “as goofy looking and really weird looking so if my date was home he’d answer the door and see this goofy looking guy standing there with his answer to the dance.” (Interview, 3-21-03). Parents desire to strengthen bonds between brothers and sisters, and creative dating invitations can provide one venue. While dressing goofy might not seem like a big deal,
sharing the experience and discussing it later develop bonds between brother and sister.

While some youth prefer to pair off in couples during high school, creative dating invitations and the rituals surrounding it generally promote dating a variety of different people. This practice allows teens to experience a wide range of individuals and strengthens interpersonal skills. When I asked Jenna if she would take her homecoming date to the next girl’s choice dance, she replied, “I was thinking about it, but then, I don’t know if I want to, ’cause two dances in a row are too much, like just, I had a lot of fun, and I want to ask him to another dance. But, you know, you need to date different people.” (Interview, 9-30-2000)

And it is okay to date different people. The type of dating that is part of the creative invitation tradition rates a variety of dating partners as more important than having a steady boyfriend. In fact, even teens who are in a steady relationship are fair game when it comes to the dances.

Girls may have started creative dating practices, but now both boys and girls participate. Girls still set the standard to some extent, but it is a standard that boys realize they must maintain. Jenna’s mother, Ronda, sees mothers as being influential in their sons’ participation in creative invitations. Ronda has a friend from Mexico who learned about creative invitations from the girls she taught at church and the women with whom she socializes. Recently, her son asked a girl out to a dance. Just asked—no flowers, no diapers, and no elaborate treasure hunt—just will you go to the dance with me? His mother was horrified. She called Ronda for advice. How could her son save face? She wondered if her son should deliver brownies or perhaps something more romantic like flowers. Surely there must be some way her son could remedy the situation and make the girl feel special. She was very concerned that her son not be out of place in the culture.

Because creative invitations and the material culture that accompanies them is part of teen culture in certain areas, it is important for teens to understand how the custom works and how to use physical items to create a memorable invitation. The tradition is passed through stories and material culture. But the tradition is ever changing. Jenna told me that the week after the dance, she left another message on her date’s doorstep. She “got a whole bunch of ... hot food like fire drink and cinnamon gum and hot tamales. [She left a note that read], ‘Thanks for being my hot date to Homecoming. I had a lot of fun. Thanks again.’ And he liked that, he thought it was cool.” (Interview, 9-30-2000)

And when you’re a teenager, being cool is of utmost importance.

Forging Connections and Self

Deborah Tannen asserts that many women approach the world “as an individual in a
network of connections” (25). Shannon and Jenna’s dating experience demonstrate this principle. As they participated in creative date invitations they strengthened connections with friends and family. This use of a network of connections is demonstrated by young women looking to their peers as they create their sense of self. In Women’s Ways of Knowing the authors argue that it is through feeling connected with others in learning situations that women are able to learn new things and see old things in new ways (113).

The sharing of stories is not the only connection creative daters experience. They also involve each other in the actual experience thus sharing ideas and exposing the inner self. Since I began my research in 1977, teen informants have generally embraced creative dating practices wholeheartedly. In item after item lodged in the William A. Wilson Folklore Archives at Brigham Young University, the informants communicate that planning and delivering the invitation is often more fun than the actual date. Perhaps one of the reasons the custom of creative invitations and acceptances is so memorable is because of the narratives that are the result of the custom. Teens often derive the greatest satisfaction and benefits from creative invitations after they are done. As the stories are told by the participants and others who hear them, the experiences are not only internalized by the participants, but they enter into a larger body of traditional lore.

But friends aren’t the only people who teens connect with through creative invitations. Once I had lunch with a woman who had no idea that I was studying creative dating. For some reason she got on the subject of creative invitations and replies and spent almost an hour regaling me with stories about her daughters. Her daughters are all married now and have children of their own. But the custom of creative invitations and replies are now family stories that express family solidarity and ingenuity.

Parents often help their offspring with their creative dating. Several years ago, I welcomed a complete stranger into our home and allowed him to trash my daughter’s bedroom. He arranged toilet paper on the ceiling above her bed to spell the word “yes.” Then I waited anxiously for her to return home. It was fun to see her happy face as she complained about the mess he had made. As I helped her clean up the newspaper, I discussed her first preference dance with her and felt part of an exciting moment of her life.

The Importance of Creative Dating

While creative dating invitations yield great stories, it is essential to not neglect the “why” behind them. Creative invitations and the resulting dates help young people keep their dating relationships casual, fun, and on a teen rather than an adult level. As parents become involved by asking about the dates, offering subtle advice, and encouraging wholesome and imaginative possibilities, bonds with their children are strengthened. In a 1977 interview, Alison Hobbs voiced her opinion that her friends “are trying to have fun in a different way than other kids.” They were looking for “wholesome, ... fun activities” that can be provided by creative dating. Creative dating also allows an acceptable way of “acting out” and testing limits appropriately. Involvement in creative dating can be a great safety valve. Anthropologist Jacob Pandian writes,

Perhaps it is a truism to state that people who participate in different cultural universes differ in how they represent the self. Human beings acquire their self conceptions by becoming symbols to themselves and others; they exist in a world of symbols,
which invokes taking the role of the other and organizing thoughts and feelings in a culturally coherent and appropriate manner. Cultural coherence and appropriateness are achieved by learning to deploy the structures of meaning embodied in the public symbols that constitute a culture or way of life” (507).

Creative dating is an application of Pandian’s assertion.

The skills that those participating in creative dating acquire help them to express their true selves, participate in their current culture, and prepare them for functioning in future roles by reinforcing the appropriateness of creativity and individuality.

In fact, there is evidence that both young men and women are developing the confidence and social skills that make direct asking and answering a desirable alternative to creative invitations. Many students at Orem High, for example, eliminate creative asking from their dating practice at some point during their senior year as they grow weary of the time and effort involved in creative invitations.

Conclusion

Creative date invitations developed into a recognized and popular custom over the last three decades. Whether it will remain a viable custom depends on adolescents’ needs and whether the custom continues to meet those needs. It has always been true that daters in their twenties tend to discontinue creative dating invitations. Although, there are isolated accounts where the custom continues to thrive, most non-teen daters who want to continue being creative tend to focus on creative dating rather than creative invitations. It is inevitable that the custom will comply with folklorist Barre Toelken’s twin laws of folklore and remain both static in that the custom will continue and dynamic in that it will take a different shape. At the moment, I have a sixteen-year-old daughter who can’t imagine a more romantic way to be asked to her first Prom than to find her bedroom floor covered with Hershey Kisses.

Kristi A. Young, is the curator of the William A. Wilson Folklore Archives at Brigham Young University. She has documented and published on Mormon folklore, particularly the courtship and wedding customs of Mormon adults. Young co-chaired the planning committee for the American Folklife Center’s annual summer field school, which in 2004 was held in Utah for the first time.

References
3 B’s of Effective Parenting: Be Proactive, Be Positive, and Be Consistent

by Michelle Marchant and K. Richard Young
Parenting is a role that many people undertake with both joy and trepidation: eager to provide effectively for their children's physical and emotional needs, but often feeling fearful that they may lack the necessary skills. Parents often approach educators, school psychologists, social workers, and others who are trained in parent/child issues seeking solutions for their children's problem behavior. Researchers and practitioners have examined and recommended a wide variety of strategies for attending to children's social and emotional development, as well as correcting their children's problem behaviors. In an effort to identify strategies that are feasible, acceptable, and effective for parents the authors reviewed several approaches suggested by professionals.* Their search uncovered three simple strategies: be proactive, be positive, and be consistent.

**BE PROACTIVE**

All behavior is learned, sometimes incidentally and other times through formal or informal teaching. There are three ways in which parents can proactively teach acceptable behavior while attending to their children's emotional and social development: (a) Establish expectations, (b) promote social development through pre-teaching, and (c) prepare the child by teaching and prompting appropriate behavior when occasions arise.

**Establish Expectations**

Teaching children reasonable expectations gives direction and helps set limits so children and youth do not have to “guess” what it is their parents (and others) expect of them. If parents expect their children to complete their homework before they can play with their friends, then it is wise for the parents to state that expectation to their children at the beginning of the school year and explain why it is important. Establishing and discussing expectations up front is also likely to minimize the chance for conflict between children and parents. The ultimate purpose of establishing expectations with children and youth is to give them the necessary skills and allow them to be responsible for managing their own behavior.

**Pre-teach**

Teaching an expected behavior or social skill before a child needs to use that skill is another proactive method of promoting social development. When a child is developmentally ready to learn how to tie his shoes, the parent takes time to model for and practice with the child so that he learns how to tie his laces. When it is time for a child to learn to read, a parent might engage the child in reading activities. No one expects a child to tie shoes or to read by instinct. Yet somehow it is assumed that a child will automatically “know” how to behave in public, as well as in school and home environments. Recently, one of the authors witnessed a mother discuss with three of her teenage children the proper etiquette they should use in public places, such as assisting the elderly and opening doors for women. In this situation the mother verbally rehearsed with her children the appropriate and expected behavior for given contexts—an excellent, proactive form of promoting social development.

A proactive approach to discipline offers opportunities for a child to actually rehearse the expected behavior in a safe and structured environment prior to using it in a more formal setting (Young, Black, Marchant, Mitchem, & West, 2000). Taking a proactive approach to teaching allows the parent to identify a needed skill, break the skill into steps, describe and model the steps, and then have the child practice each step as the parent provides prompts, feedback, and praise. For example, when a child is learning to tie his shoes the parent divides the process into simple steps, models the steps, and then helps the child to practice each step until he can successfully tie his shoes. A similar process can be effective in teaching children social behavior.
The following format is a useful guide for parents when teaching a child social skills:

- Name and describe the skill (e.g., how to show gratitude, make polite requests, invite someone to play)
- Give the child a reason why the social skill is important
- Model the skill
- Have the child practice the skill
- Give positive and corrective feedback and praise for practicing the skill (Young et al., 2000).

This method can be used to teach a variety of social behaviors, such as, how to ask for help, how to share toys, and/or how to introduce oneself to dinner guests. This teaching approach works well in family group meetings or as a one-on-one interaction.

Prepare the child

A proactive approach to teaching behavior is more likely to lead to successful use of appropriate social skills by children when the occasion arises. Consider this example of a mother teaching her child how to introduce himself to invited dinner guests prior to the guests’ arrival: “Mark, I am going to teach you how to introduce yourself to people because tonight we have guests coming to dinner, and I want you to greet them politely. When they come, I want you to look them in the eye, shake their hands, and say, ‘Hello, my name is Mark. Welcome to our home.’ This helps guests feel more relaxed and helps us make friends.” The parent then models these steps for the child and also has the child practice. After the child correctly performs the skill, the parent says, “Mark, you did a great job of showing me how you will introduce yourself to our guests tonight.” Imagine the satisfaction a mother would have when watching her children appropriately introduce themselves to the dinner guests after giving them this prompt for the desired behavior!

If your child has already been taught the acceptable behavior, prompts are still good reminders. For example, “Mark, do you remember how I taught you to introduce yourself to guests?” Mark responds, “Yes.” Mother has Mark repeat the steps and then encourages him to repeat
the behavior with new neighbors.

**Be Positive**

Positive feedback serves a variety of functions when teaching children pro-social behavior. One function is that it strengthens the desirable behavior that parents want their children to learn and use. For example, a three-year-old boy was told by his mother to stay close to his aunt while visiting a zoo. Returning home, this three-year-old said, “Mom, I didn’t go away from her,” to which the aunt immediately replied, “Yes, I didn’t have to worry because you stayed close to me and held my hand! This helped make our trip fun.” It is highly probable that during the next excursion only a brief reminder from the child’s mother to “stay close” will be required, because his previous behavior was recognized and praised in a genuine and specific manner. Sincere praise increases the likelihood that a behavior will be repeated.

Another benefit of praise and commendation is the development of strong, positive relationships. When a person calls attention to the positive actions or characteristics of another person, this behavior typically creates a positive relationship between the two people. Negative criticism tends to have the opposite effect. Praise is an investment in a positive relationship; criticism has a weakening effect (Young, West, Marchant, Morgan, & Mitchem, 1997). A person who invests money wisely increases his credit rating. The same is true when building a relationship with a child—the wiser the investment, the higher the returns in trust, respect, and gratitude.

Children who regularly receive sincere praise and have a positive relationship with an adult are more likely to accept constructive criticism when it is necessary. Children who are complimented give compliments in return. They are also more inclined to recognize praiseworthy acts and give genuine praise to others. Furthermore, praise is often reciprocal, a process which develops a positive attitude and self-confidence in the child. One mother reported to the authors that when she praised her child she noticed that her child began to express appreciation for her service to him; whereas he had rarely acknowledged such acts in the past.

But not all praise is equally effective. Immediate praise, rather than delayed praise, is more likely to improve a child’s appropriate behavior and help strengthen the parent-child relationship (Marchant & Young, 2001). Consider the following: A parent asks a child to pick up the toys in her room and she quickly does the task. An example of effective praise is for the parent to immediately say to the child (in
a calm, pleasant voice), “Marcia, you're so fast and you picked up every toy!” Immediate positive feedback helps maintain children’s behavior; therefore, parents must be attentive to their children's socially appropriate actions and follow through with specific praise as soon as possible.

In addition to being immediate, effective praise must be sincere, specific, and contingent upon the occurrence of the desired behavior (Marchant & Young, 2001). In a research study conducted by Willner et al. (1977), children indicated to the researchers that they appreciate adults who use a calm voice, compliment them, and demonstrate enthusiasm. Furthermore, adults should praise less when it is not deserved, reserving praise for times when the child exhibits appropriate behavior. If a teenager arrives home at the designated time, a father could say, in a sincere manner, “I appreciate the way you respected your curfew time.” If the teenager was late for his curfew, it would be inappropriate for the father to deliver the same praise “in hopes” that the child would change his behavior in the future.

Be Consistent

All behavior, whether appropriate or inappropriate, is followed by consequences (positive, negative, or neutral). A consequence is a direct result of behavior. Consequences may be natural or planned (Latham, 1994). Latham indicates that a natural consequence is a result that is likely to occur due to the nature of the person's behavior; in contrast, a planned response is arranged by another individual. Within the contexts of natural and planned, consequences can be either positive or negative. The table below provides illustrations.

Latham offers four guidelines for selecting and implementing consequences. First, consequences need to be understood up front by parents and children in order to reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings and to prevent parents from imposing illogical consequences during frustrating moments. It is wise to hold a family meeting in which the parent and child discuss consequences that align with family expectations. These consequences must meet the needs of each particular family and child. Examples of positive consequences might include reading together, enjoying a physical activity such as bike riding, playing a game, watching a video, or enjoying a treat; negative consequences may include having no friends over that day, having toys taken away, or being refused use of the car or access to the television, the phone, and/or the computer.

Second, consequences must be reasonable, and parents need to select consequences that are aligned with the child’s behavior. For example, if the child plays

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<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>CONSEQUENCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planned Positive</td>
<td>Teenager completes homework.</td>
<td>Parent gives the youth phone privileges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned Negative</td>
<td>Child throws a tantrum at the toy store.</td>
<td>Parent immediately walks the child out of the store and takes the child home without purchasing a toy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Positive</td>
<td>Child eats food that is on dinner plate.</td>
<td>Child feels is satisfied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Negative</td>
<td>Teenager leaves bicycle outside in the rain for an entire week.</td>
<td>Paint on the bike begins to chip and peel. Rust begins to form.</td>
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...consequences need to be understood up front by parents and children in order to reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings and to prevent parents from imposing illogical consequences during frustrating moments.
with his toys and walks away without picking up the toys, a logical consequence would be to have the child return and clean up the toys; in contrast, an illogical consequence would be for the child who does not pick up his toys to be put into timeout. The consequence would be logical if a teenager who arrives home late to complete chores and homework even though she is very tired. This is a more natural consequence of her behavior than withholding all of her social privileges for an entire week.

A third guideline for establishing consequences is that they must be manageable. If a father promises a child that if he cleans his room the parent will play a game with him, the father must be sure that he has time in his schedule to play the game. If the consequence for a teenager breaking his curfew is that he will lose his driving privileges for a week, the mother must be certain that she can transport him (or arrange transportation) to critical events. When selecting a consequence, a parent must make sure the rest of the family is not “penalized” when the consequence is put into effect.

Finally, consequences need to be delivered in a precise, accurate, and consistent manner. If a father promised a son five dollars for mowing the lawn, the money should be given at a scheduled time after the lawn is mowed. If the father does not have the money at that exact moment, it is critical for the father to inform the child when the money will be delivered and to deliver it in a timely manner.

This is similar to the principle of immediacy previously discussed in relation to praise. Follow-through is critical for all parent behavior. If a child is noncompliant to his parent’s instructions, the parent should immediately deliver the predetermined consequence. A parent who follows this guideline increases the probability that the child will adhere to the family’s boundaries and expectations. A parent who is inconsistent in delivering consequences tempts the child to test the parent’s limits through inappropriate behavior.

These strategies are useful in helping parents enhance their parenting skills. Through the consistent application of these strategies, parents will experience positive family relationships,
well-balanced and socially
cOMPETENT CHILDREN, AND
A PLEASANT HOME. IN ADDi-
ITION, FAMILIES WILL enjoy
an atmosphere of respect
WITH LESS CONTENTION.
CHILDREN WHO ARE TAUGHT
WELL AT HOME AND ARE
APPRECIATED AND recog-
NIZED BY THEIR FAMILY ARE
BETTER ADJUSTED, Happier,
And more confident. CHILDREN truly benefit
FROM PARENTS WHO LEARN TO
BE proactive, positive, AND
CONSISTENT.

Michelle Marchant is an
assistant professor of coun-
SELing psychology AND Spe-
cial education in the David
O. McKay School of
Education at Brigham
Young University.

K. Richard Young is a pro-
fessor of counseling psychol-
ogy AND special education at
BYU.

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BEYOND THE MOMMY TRACK:
SUCCESSFULLY INTEGRATING WORK
AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES WITHOUT
SACRIFICING JOB STATUS AND PAY

Families with plenty to feast on are facing another kind of famine—time. Today’s dual-earner couple now has a combined work time of 91 hours per week. The long hours make it difficult for professional women with small children to successfully integrate work and family responsibilities. While it is not uncommon for these women to bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, and then ... change a diaper, run to soccer practice, and fax a business proposal, it is often accompanied by great sacrifice—not to mention fatigue.

New research from Brigham Young University, published in the current issue of *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, investigates how the growing trend of “new-concept, part-time employment” is helping professional women battle the time famine, and companies win the war for talent.

In contrast with typical part-time jobs, these custom hour positions are high-status, career-oriented, reduced-hours options that maintain prorated professional salaries and benefits. These new-concept, part-time positions reach a large segment of professional women who previously were not willing to work part-time because they would have to sacrifice status, pay, and opportunity.

“While part-time work has always been an option, many professional women did not view it as a viable choice because often these jobs were of lower status, with less pay and fewer career opportunities,” said E. Jeffrey Hill, BYU professor and lead researcher. “However, the new-concept, part-time option allows professional women greater opportunity to customize their work while preserving job status and family life, not to mention they earned slightly more per hour than those in fulltime professional positions.”

According to the research, professional women with pre-school age children who worked in these new-concept, part-time positions reported working approximately 47 percent fewer hours per week with only a 41 percent reduction in personal income. They also reported greater harmony between work and family responsibilities.

For the part-time professionals, this translated into a reduction of 23 hours of work per week. “A real benefit is that these extra hours enable these women to get sufficient sleep, recreation, and other renewal activities to avoid the burnout often associated with raising preschoolers while forging ahead in a professional career,” explained Hill.

“Of course, the extra time for the primary care of their children is highly valued by these mothers, and may be renewing in and of itself.”

Other findings include significantly more flexibility than full-time employees in the time and place they work and, surprisingly, no significant differences in career opportunity.

“Overall, new-concept, part-time work can facilitate greater work-life harmony for professional women with pre-school age children,” Hill said. “And, if companies want to avoid losing this valuable talent pool, it is important that they make the new-concept, part-time option more available to their employees.”

—Tonya Fischio

BYU PART OF NEW NATIONAL MARRIAGE CENTER

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has selected the Brigham Young University School of Family Life along with the National Council on Family Relations and a team of four other major universities to create and operate the first-ever National Healthy Marriage Resource Center.

With a $900,000 grant per year, the comprehensive, national center will collect and make accessible all reliable marriage research and resources over the next five years.

In commenting on the center, Wade Horn, U.S. assistant secretary for children and families, noted, “The most important
object of the healthy marriage initiative is to benefit children,” Horn said. “Children do better in married households than unmarried households and do better in stable homes than in unstable homes.

“We want to increase the number of children in married, stable households and decrease the number in unmarried, unstable households.”

“We with the ever increasing interest in the institution of marriage and related public policy, there is a great demand for a centralized, national clearinghouse of reliable, nonpartisan, research-based information,” said Alan Hawkins, BYU professor and BYU team director for the center.

This project will allow those working to strengthen marriages in their communities to access tools to help them in their work. In addition, the center will help them keep up with the growing body of research related to healthy marriages,” he said.

To create the center, BYU is collaborating with NCFR, a nonpartisan professional family organization; Child Trends, a nonpartisan research organization, located in Washington, D.C.; and four other universities: Syracuse, Texas Tech, Norfolk State, and Minnesota.

BYU will be the center’s western region and research hub. The School of Family Life will assume primary responsibility for the efforts to collect and synthesize research related to healthy marriages. This research will then be published in various forms to ensure the information is readily available to federal, state, and local governments; educational institutions; private and public agencies; faith-based and community organizations; and interested individuals.

“We are committed to bringing the highest level of scholarship to this task,” Hawkins said. “BYU brings to this task the largest concentration of marriage scholars and educators of any university in the nation. In particular, three scholars from three different disciplines along with three graduate students will donate nearly 70 hours a week to keeping the public informed.”

The center will:
• Collect and disseminate information on healthy marriage.
• Create resources and tools to aid marriage educators, practitioners, community activists, and other interested individuals and groups.
• Collect, organize, synthesize, and disseminate research findings about how to build and sustain healthy marriages.
• Collect, foster, and articulate best practices for practitioners, such as marriage counselors, social workers, clergy, and mental health professionals.
• Communicate information about healthy marriage to practitioners, policymakers, legislators, and the general public.

The center will offer a regular listserv for electronic news and will publish newsletters and other publications targeted at specific populations and audiences. Beginning in 2006, the center will host an annual Marriage Summit. NCFR will convene participants from across the political, regional, cultural, and educational spectrum to coordinate healthy marriage efforts, advise the center, and discuss the current state of marriage.

“Family life and marriage are crucial for the well-being of society,” said William J. Doherty, author of The Intentional Family: Simple Rituals to Build Family and past president of the National Council on Family Relations. “Government ends up picking up the tab in welfare, health care and prisons for families that fall apart. You can basically guarantee that the whole productivity of our nation rides on the ability of men and women to come together in marriage and raise children successfully.”

Doherty is a professor of family social science at the University of Minnesota, which is tasked with supporting grass-roots efforts to encourage premarital education. He added that BYU is uniquely positioned to benefit the Healthy Marriage Resource Center. “BYU has a critical mass of marriage researchers,” he said. “They are as good as any or better than any academic program in the country. That’s why they’re perfect for what they’re doing.”
The year 2004 has marked the tenth anniversary of the United Nations’ International Year of the Family, an anniversary that brought renewed attention around the world to issues affecting the traditional family and that led to the U.N. General Assembly adopting a consensus resolution in support of the family.

One of the many significant outcomes of a wide range of international activities came to fruition in late November as representatives of governments, scholars, and leaders of numerous family movements met in Doha, Qatar, for the Doha International Conference for the Family.

The Doha Conference was the concluding event of a series of meetings that took place during 2004 in Mexico City; Stockholm, Sweden; Geneva, Switzerland; and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The Doha Conference process was proposed by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al-Missned, Consort of His Highness the Emir of Qatar and President of Supreme Council for Family Affairs. The Doha Conference was designed to collect the International Year of the Family work products of academicians and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide, bringing to the public’s attention constructive academic research on the family and funneling all these efforts to an international intergovernmental meeting.

The Organizing Committee for the Doha Conference included representatives from the World Family Policy Center at Brigham Young University, the Family Research Council, the Catholic Family and Human Rights Foundation, and CARE, Inc. On December 15, 2003, The Conference was recognized as an official event of the UN International Year of the Family by a Resolution of the UN General Assembly.

In outlining the aims of the Conference, the Organizing Committee stated that it hoped “to identify not only what is already known about marriage and family life, but what is not known, and to make concrete proposals for positive future action in the development and implementation of family policy (as well as the completion of needed future research). Topics of particular interest include the social role of marriage, developmental needs of children, the impact of media on family life, governmental policy and the family (both economic and social), the family and human dignity, and historical and global perspectives on the family.”

The Doha Conference reiterated the objectives of the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, which included efforts to:

• Strengthen the capacity of national institutions to formulate, implement and monitor policies in respect of families;
• Stimulate efforts to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families;
• Undertake analytical reviews at all levels and assessments of the situation and needs of families;
• Strengthen the effectiveness of efforts at all levels to execute specific programs concerning families; and
• Improve collaboration among national and international nongovernmental organizations in support of families.

In opening the Conference, Her Highness Sheikh Moza bint Naser Al-Missned stated, “There is no common denominator
better able to bridge the gap between different people from around the world despite conflicts and diversity, than the firm belief in the sacredness of the family. All divine laws have blessed this sacred institution, forging a strong bond between males and females which conforms to human nature in bearing and raising new generations that contribute to building civilizations.”

She then added, “The concept of the family, as we all know, has, at times, been defined in a manner contrary to that of religions, social rules and human consciousness. We should combat these notions, especially those that try to disguise them under the guise of modernity. Modernity cannot be accepted as a pretext to bypass religious, social, and cultural values which have long shielded and maintained the family.

“No less dangerous than these challenges is the fact that the family today has new tasks in addition to the traditional ones of bearing and raising children. The most important new responsibility is the duty towards contributing to the development and progress of society. It has been ascertained that the enlightened family is not only a safety net to the individual but has become even more so for society.”

Noting that efforts to strengthen the family result in the strengthening of nations and the ideals of democracy, Her Highness continued, “It is within this context that the UN General Assembly’s decision to celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family emphasizes that the fate of today’s families may be influenced by leaders in the international arena. Because of the leaders’ ability to shape public opinion, they advance the agenda facilitate progress through the active promotion of mutual dialogue and understanding.”

In concluding her comments, Her Highness emphasized that “It is not possible to guarantee the safety of the family — keeping it from disintegrating — by merely solving the problems of poverty and illiteracy. We must turn the solutions themselves into strategic tools for reconstruction and development.

“It is imperative to coordinate among national programs in connection with the family, the basic social unit, in order to guarantee the care it deserves. It is practically impossible to deal with family issues and problems through individual programs or separate systems. Rather, what is needed, is a comprehensive policy capable of dealing with the larger tasks related to the family which go beyond limited social responsibilities and awareness; safeguarding the family as a prerequisite for promoting national progress and consolidating the spirit of universal cooperation.”

Richard G. Wilkins, a professor of law at BYU’s J. Reuben Clark Law School and managing director of the World Family Policy Center, explains that “The Doha International Conference for the Family was a complex, year-long series of events organized by the World Family Policy Center with the assistance of various governmental and non-governmental partners. At the November meeting, governmental representatives negotiated and adopted the Doha Declaration, which reaffirms long-standing legal norms related to religious and ethical values, human dignity, marriage, parent and child relations, and the right of children to be raised within a loving and caring family. The Declaration is consistent with, and substantially furthers, the values and objectives set out in ‘The Family: A Proclamation to the World.’

“Then On December 6, 2004, the UN General Assembly adopted a consensus resolution formally noting the Doha Declaration. As a result of this action, the Declaration takes its place in the canon of declarations, platforms and agendas from which international legal norms are derived by political leaders, judges and lawyers.”

Wilkins adds, “The first International Year of the Family in 1994 ended with international assertions that were deeply troubling. The UN General Assembly concluded the 10th Anniversary Celebration of this Year in 2004 by taking note of a Declaration that charts a completely contrary course. This development is significant, indeed, astonishing.”

Numerous BYU faculty members were involved with the yearlong activities that culminated in the Doha Conference. Included among those is Thomas B. Holman, a professor of Marriage, Family and Human Development and recently appointed chair of the MFHD department, who, together with A. Scott Loveless, a professor in the J. Reuben Clark Law School, will edit a scholarly publication that contains the scholarly proceedings from all the international dialogue conferences held throughout 2004.

Additional information on the Doha Conference and related activities, including the complete text of the Doha Declaration, is available at www.dicf.org.qa/english/ and at www.worldfamilypolicy.org.”
“The home is the rock foundation, the cornerstone of civilization.”

—Spencer W. Kimball