

Engaging Little (and not so little) Hearts

Our children need to experience the whole heart of God through the whole hearts of their parents so that they may gain clarity, courage, comfort and connection. So, as you are connecting more deeply to the heart of God and understanding your own heart more fully – how can you seek to engage the little, and not so little, hearts that have been entrusted to you?

Below are some ideas that our alumni have shared. Please feel free to email your own ideas to danas@wellspringgroup.org and I'll add them to the list! Check the footer date to see if you have the latest version.

1. **ELEVATOR MODEL**: We actually took time to teach our kids the elevator model of the heart in age appropriate ways and made different color cards for each level. As we were talking about the different feelings (I picked simple ones I know they frequently experience), I would ask “When was a time you felt this way?” to start some conversation. Same with desires – ask “When do you feel most loved?” trying to make connections along the way especially between our choices and feelings. Having this knowledge base provides a way for us to bring up these subjects when we are watching TV or reading a book (How do you think Mickey Mouse is feeling right now? What made him feel that way?). It gives them vocabulary to be able to share the state of their heart.
2. **ELEVATOR GAME**: We bring up a situation – “A new person joins my class at school.” Then I ask, “What might you be thinking about?” (i.e. They look cool, I wonder if she likes to skate, etc.), “How might that make you feel?” (excited, nervous, ugly), and each child chooses cards or verbalizes their answers. We talk about what about the situation makes them feel/think that particular way, getting to deeper desires (to love, to have value, connection, etc.). And then ask what they might want to choose. It not only helps prepare them for potentially stressful situations, but we get to know our kids’ differing personalities, insecurities, strengths, and struggles as well.
3. **3-WORD STATE OF YOUR HEART**: Do a simple 3-word state of the heart at the dinner table - 3 emotions and what makes you feel that way. Even our 3-year-old can do it!
4. **HUMILITY AND PRIDE**: We taught our kids about the Way of Humility and the Way of Pride, grounding them in why we would want to walk in the Way of Humility. When situations arise where they need to make a choice, we can ask how they are feeling, what they want, what they want to do, and then ask them to identify if that choice would be the way of pride or humility. They are able to recognize when their choice is the Way of Pride and choose Humility for themselves rather than me just telling them the right thing to do.
5. **PICTURE FEELINGS CHART**: Use a visual feelings chart and simplified desires page (see resources on the website) with the youngest children to allow them to identify their feelings.

6. UNPACKING SIGNIFICANT WORDS: Use a combination of “Unpacking Significant Words” and “What Would That Give You?” to drill down when my child expresses a strong feeling word (ex. “That was awesome!”)
7. HANDY LAMINATED FEELINGS CHARTS: We keep laminated feelings charts in a few of the living areas of our house – living room, kitchen, garage (for firepit gatherings or garage talks with dad) - so that when we are having discussions the kids can pull that out to more easily identify what they are feeling. They have found great freedom in being able to go beyond happy, sad, or mad to identify more specific and revealing feelings. It also makes them feel empowered and less frustrated in their ability to communicate.
8. MOVIES/BOOKS: After watching a movie or reading a book ask questions that will uncover feelings, beliefs about themselves, and deep desires.
 - What was your favorite scene? Or Who was your favorite character? Or Which character do you relate to most?
 - What was it about that scene/character that you liked or related to?
 - How are you like that character?
 - How does this movie/book make you feel?
 - What makes this your favorite movie/book?
9. MUSIC: What is your child’s favorite song? What makes it their favorite song?
10. CALLING OUT THE GLORY: For birthdays and special occasions we go around and each share 3 things we like or admire about the person we are celebrating.
11. USE WHAT YOU’RE GIVEN: Take situations that arise every day and walk your kids through the State of Their Heart – Conflict, celebration, loss, disappointment, discipline, etc. all produce feelings that little ones need to know how to process. You can help them verbalize their feelings and discern what they were truly longing for in that moment. As they get in touch with that, then you can discuss the choice they made and let them come up with ideas on how they might want to respond next time.