

College Guild
PO Box 696 Brunswick, Maine 04011

Families

Unit 3 of 5: Movie Families

Remember: Some of the questions may ask you to put yourself in the place of another gender (for example, asking you how a mother or father would feel in a certain situation). Please answer these questions regardless of your gender - just try to put yourself in their shoes!

* If there are any questions about family, friends, or anything else that you feel uncomfortable answering - just make up fictional characters for these questions. *

Siblings and Step-siblings

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being the oldest child in the family? The youngest? In the middle? An only child?

2. Think of and explain some ways siblings can bond.

Of course, many families are not limited to your biological parents, sisters and brothers. If either one of your parents remarries, you have a stepmom or stepdad and that new family member may bring along kids of their own, resulting in stepsisters and stepbrothers. If you share only one parent with a sibling then they are your half-sister or half-brother.

3. Do you think you would treat a stepsister or brother differently than a biological sibling? Why? (If you have a stepsibling, feel free to draw from experience.)

These "blended" families (i.e. stepmoms, stepdad, stepsiblings, half siblings, etc.) have become increasingly common in the United States. Unfortunately, more and more marriages are ending in divorce. However, it can be an advantage when you are introduced to a whole new family if one of your parents remarries.

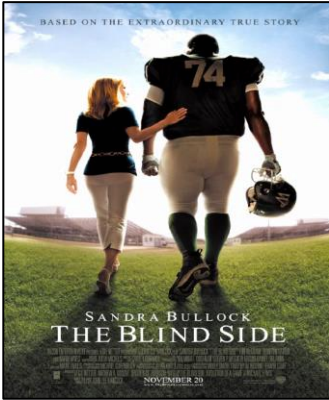
4. Why do you think divorce is more common now than it was in the 1900s?

5. Why do you think the official act of "marriage" is so important to some people vs. simply living together?

6. Draw a picture of your ideal family (include all siblings, step-family, extended family, even pets!)

Movie

We talked about TV shows in Unit 1 and a famous musical in Unit 2. Now, we're going to discuss the family dynamics within a popular movie that came out in 2009, called *The Blind Side*.



The Blind Side is a sentimental story about a well-off, white southern family that takes in a homeless African American teenager and through care and love tries to build him a brighter future. The movie, which is based on a true story, revolves around the homeless teenager, Michael Oher, and how he must overcome his past of an absent father and drug-addicted mother. Through the guidance of Leigh Ann Tuoy (the mother of the southern family), Michael tries to pursue a career in football, and succeeds - becoming the first-round pick of the Baltimore Ravens in the 2009 NFL draft.

7. Would you take a homeless teenager into your home? What are some of the risks and rewards?

8. Michael learns he has a talent for football. Change the movie and make Michael good at, or work hard at, something else. Write a plot summary, like the one above, with his new dream.

9. Michael was able to gain confidence through playing this sport. What are other ways a teenager might gain confidence?

For all parents, there's a fine line between control and independence. A child needs to have guidance, and possibly boundaries, but also needs to learn how to live on his/her own.

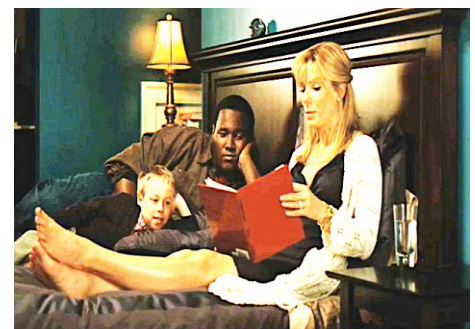
Leigh Anne Tuoy also had a husband, Sean, who helped encourage Michael. They had two children, a daughter named Collins, and a son named S.J. The two kids ended up embracing Michael fully, and he became like a brother to them.



10. How do you think Collins and S.J. felt when Michael was first introduced to their family?

11. Pretend you are either Collins or S.J. Write a paragraph in your journal about Michael after he has been living with you for three months.

12. Michael was adopted by a wealthy, traditional family. Imagine a different family he could have been adopted by. Describe the family and explain how this family would have changed Michael's life.



13. List three rules you would set for your child. Why are they important?

Story

Taken from *Frontiers of Justice, Volume 3: The Crime Zone*, you read excerpts from Russell in Unit 1 and Diane in Unit 2. In this Unit, you'll see excerpts from Willie's story.

I have three teenage boys from three different relationships. Communication hasn't been easy for me because of the complexities associated with each of their individual family lives. Parenting from behind bars is seemingly impossible. For success, both parents must maintain a healthy line of communication. When there is resentment and anger between the parents, they must be set aside for the children's sake. Understanding this situation and being a father incapacitated by incarceration, I've had to continually redefine the art of parenting. Similarly, I've had to undergo a series of growth changes within myself before I could fully grasp the magnitude of the responsibilities I hold toward my children. I didn't want my boys to inherit a legacy of shame and continue to perpetuate the vicious cycle of crime. I wanted to be an active participant in their lives, but how?

The only means of communication available was visits, letters, and phone calls. Many times visits were impossible because of the great distances and for economic reasons. Phone calls are extremely costly and presented an extra financial burden to the mothers. So I opted to write letters as much as possible. When I wrote, I expressed my love and I tried to convey to them the importance of an education and the dangers of anti-social behaviors. Even before they were able to read, I would send them greeting cards for their mothers to read to them. Whenever possible, I would divert funds sent to me by friends to my sons. It wasn't much, but the gesture did more to bridge the gap than I had anticipated. There were times, many times, I went without so that I would be able to perform this act. But isn't that what parenting is all about, sacrifice?

If physical contact and financial support are impossible, prisoners must become active participants in their children's emotional lives. There is no one formula for parenting behind bars. Each and every one of us who have children must follow our hearts and discover new ways to cross the physical barriers of prison. In many instances, our children are all we have accomplished in our lives that are inherently good. It's easy for absent fathers to say that they love their children; love is the easy part. It's turning the love into loving that makes the real difference to the child. When your children respect you and voluntarily do what is expected of them, this is your reward.

It is my greatest fear to wake up one day and see one of my sons walking into prison. I've cried and prayed many nights that God will protect them and keep them from suffering the same fate as mine. They too, like myself, have not had the benefit of being reared by both natural parents, which increases their risk of continuing the cycle. It is a circle that must be broken here, now and forever, and I guess it all begins with me - their father."

14. List three pieces of advice Willie gives for fathering and how each benefits a child.

15. Do you think an absent father is more harmful to a son than to a daughter? Explain.

16. Explain at least three ways children are affected by having one or both of their parents in prison.

17. How would a prisoner explain to his/her child that s/he is in prison and can't be a bigger part of the child's life? You could write this in the form of a letter to the child if you want.

18. If a class on parenting were offered at your prison, what should be included and who should teach it?

Willie focuses on how to maintain a healthy relationship between prisoners and their children. It may be equally challenging to maintain a healthy relationship between prisoners and their parents.

19. Write a story about a prisoner and a visit with his or her:

- mother,**
- father,**
- step-mother, or**
- step-father.**

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes