



## The Family Touchstone: Developing a Family Mission Statement

If you work in a business or organization, you most likely have a company mission statement. By establishing a mission statement, you identify your company's values, principles and goals that determine your direction and provide a collective understanding of what, as a team of individuals, you want to be as a whole. In marriage and family life, however, we tend to take a much more casual attitude toward who we are and where we want to be as a family – even though the family is the most important organization of our lives.

Like a business mission statement, a family mission statement is a game plan, a road map to ensure that you get to the place you want to be.

"Only, a family mission is more valuable," says MOSAIC counsellor Robert Long, "because we're dealing with people that we love."

### ***WHAT DEVELOPING A FAMILY MISSION STATEMENT CAN DO FOR YOUR FAMILY***

A family mission statement is a wonderful way to create an opportunity for families to discuss what is really important to them. It acts as a touchstone that helps families prioritize and stay on course to achieve a desired end. If your desired end is to create a warm home environment and connection with family, but both mom and dad are working long hours to support a home in an exclusive neighbourhood with a backyard pool and all the amenities, your priorities are not helping you achieve that end. When you establish goals, you can go back and look at your behaviours and see if you're getting sidetracked. You ask yourself, *is this behaviour or decision helping us achieve our desired end?* A mission statement is one way of keeping what's most important foremost.

By establishing a family mission statement, you determine the course your family should take. It shapes your family and your family's actions. Rather than waiting for events to occur and allowing them to set the direction, you set the direction and respond to the events in the way you have predetermined.

A family mission statement also helps families to avoid a power struggle. It makes each family member responsible for his or her own behaviour. "It's not a rule or the ten commandments," says Robert, "it's how we said we want our relationships to be. This is what we all said that we as a family were committed to, so we have to reconcile this. There is a basic understanding because it is based on the family mission statement we all created together."

Children also benefit from the process of developing a mission statement. Because all members of the family are included in creating the mission statement, children learn that they are important, that their opinion counts. They become a valuable factor in determining who they and their family members are. "It also models for them the need for us to understand others and find a way of interacting for the shared and common good," adds Robert.

### ***WHERE DO WE START?***

To begin with, a mission statement is only effective if all of the stakeholders buy in. The parents and all the children have to be involved. There are different ways to go about establishing a mission statement, but they all begin with the entire family coming together whether at a shared meal where the subject is raised

### **A Game of Twenty Questions**

Our family used Stephen Covey's 7 Habits Family Leadership Series to help us develop our family mission statement. These were the questions we chose to discuss in our family to help us create our unique vision.

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or during a family meeting. There is no right way or wrong way, as long as each family member is involved.

You could start by discussing what values are important to your family like respect, personal growth, or health, and what principles you want to establish as family guidelines like fairness, patience and trustworthiness. You can look at people in your life that you admire and explore what characteristics and values they possess that you would like to mirror. A series of questions can help spark discussion, like *What is this family all about? How do we treat each other? What kind of home do we want?*

Another way would be to have all family members write out as many ideas of how they want the family to be. *I want to take walks together. I want my parents to be at all my soccer games.* However you choose to begin, it is essential that all family members have their say, without interruption and judgement.

Collectively, you bring all the statements or recorded notes from your discussion together and bring out the themes. From that you crystallize a simple mission statement. It might be something like, *We're committed to having an affectionate, loving and caring home in order to fully develop each individual and grow as a family.* "Whatever, the statement," says MOSAIC Counsellor Julia Swinson, "it should be brief, focused on goals and values, unique and significant to your family and achievable."

There is no ideal time to develop a family mission statement, but it should be age-appropriate in content and can be revised as children age.

### **HOW IT WORKS**

A family mission statement is simply a tool that can be used to guide families and help them decide what's right and what works for them. Your mission statement comes out of your beliefs. So when you make decisions, you fall back on your belief system.

A family mission statement is also useful for children to understand why as parents we make the decisions we do.

### **NOW WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?**

To keep the family mission statement alive, some families print and mount their mission statement. Some families make copies and hang them in each bedroom. Whether you choose to display your family mission statement or put it in a drawer, you need to talk about it. Make a commitment to setting aside time to review how it's working with the family through a monthly family meal or weekly meetings. You can discuss issues that have arisen where the mission statement can help or look at revising your mission statement if the fit isn't quite right.

For an excellent guide to help you develop your family mission statement, refer to:  
**The 7 Habits Family Leadership Series**  
**How to Develop A Family Mission Statement**  
By Stephen R. Covey  
2 Audiocassettes and 32-page learning guide.

1. What is the purpose of our family?
2. What kind of family do we want to be?
3. What kinds of things do we want to do?
4. What do we enjoy most about our family?
5. How will we treat each other and speak to one another?
6. What things don't we want in our family?
7. What makes you feel comfortable about home?
8. What kind of home do we want to invite our friends to?
9. What are our unique talents, gifts and abilities within our family?
10. How can we help each other (physically, socially, emotionally, spiritually)?
11. What do you like about us as parents?
12. How can we promote the growth and happiness of our children?
13. What characteristics do we want our children to develop as they grow up?
14. What are our top priorities?
15. What are the principles and guidelines we want our family to follow?
16. What is our responsibility to each other?
17. What is our responsibility to our extended family, to our friends?
18. How do we want to make a difference in our community?
19. How would we like to be described as a family?
20. In ten years, how do we want to see our family?

### **ONE FAMILY'S MISSION STATEMENT**

Our family mission is to support and care for one another in order that each family member can achieve health, happiness and success in their lives. In doing so, we will treat each other with kindness and respect, create a warm and loving home, share experiences, enthusiastically celebrate achievements and continue to nurture our family relationships as we grow.

