

THE 12 FREEDOMS OF HEALTHY FAMILIES

BY GREG DUNGAN



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INTRODUCTION

MY FAMILY

I was born in 1973. Nixon was president, Vietnam was smoldering, the economy was crippled, and most Americans were holding on the best they could. My parents were two of them. Childhood sweethearts, they had known each other since grade school. They graduated in 1970, married in 1971, and, by the time I came along, we lived in an old, rented farmhouse in Troy, Ohio.

Dad had started college, but dropped out because money was tight. Back then, it was common to get a job without a degree and his training in electronics helped him find employment as a maintenance electrician. It paid the bills and we spent four years in that farmhouse before we realized our slice of the American dream and bought our first home a handful of miles away in Tipp City.

It was just a two-bedroom ranch on $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre across from some scrub brush on a dead end street, but it was home - our home. In fact, I paid more for my last truck than they paid for that house. Over the years, it has endured multiple remodels more than doubling its original size. Today it stands as a testament to the staying power of the two people who still live there.

I have witnessed over 38 of the 40 years my parents have been married. It hasn't been easy and it hasn't always been fun as we've endured our share of struggles. But I can't imagine life any other way. When I started school at Broadway Elementary School, every kid I knew had two married parents who were Mom and Dad. By graduation, I could count on one hand the number of friends whose original parents were still married. By college graduation, there were even less.

I am profoundly grateful to my parents for never giving up on each other. I am in awe of their ability to hold things together in the face of all we've been through as a family. This didn't happen because they were "lucky". It happened because they built a family that would withstand any adversity. In this course, I will show you the building blocks of a healthy family so that your story has its own happy ending.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

WHAT IS IT

This book is designed to introduce families to the 12 Freedoms. The full Freeing Families program is far more detailed and comprehensive, but this gives us a place to start. Think of it as a first date. The idea is to learn enough about us to want to do this again.

We realize that families are touchy and personal subjects. This isn't like buying shoes or a latte. These are the most cherished and volatile relationships we have, so this conversation will take time to develop.

We make no assumptions or judgements about you or your family. Everyone's journey is unique and the point of relationships like these is to learn from each other over the long haul. Feel free to engage us at any time through email or by commenting on our Website, Facebook page, or Twitter feed. We value your insights and look forward to learning from your experiences.

HOW DO I USE IT?

The real answer to this question is, "Anyway you want." Freeing Families has been blogging for over a year and, as we've grown, we've noticed that the 12 Freedoms page on our website is the one people read most. So, in an effort to establish a deeper, on-going relationship with our readers, we developed this course.

It is designed to be delivered either as an ebook or as an email course. Our original thought was that people would read it and try out the ideas over a period of 12 weeks. That may seem like a long time, but remember that family issues develop over generations and require slow adjustments.

Regardless of how you decide to use this material, we hope that it will be helpful to you and those you love. Thank you for joining the discussion and welcome to our family.

PART I

NURTURE



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THE FREEDOM TO ATTEMPT FEARLESSLY

Success and failure are often separated more by confidence than competence. Members of healthy families know that, regardless of the outcome, they are supported in any endeavor.

Our society is driven by a desire for success. Often we parents stimulate, obligate, and motivate our children in a sincere effort to help them succeed. Yet, at the same time, we discourage them from attempting things that seem overly difficult. We have a conflict of interests when comes to our kids. We want them to be wildly successful, but we also want them to be completely safe. Anyone who has tasted success will readily admit that it's only possible if we're willing to take risks. The trick is teaching our children to judge the risk:success ratio and come out on top.

A generation ago we just wanted our children to be "happy". While this desire had problems of its own, it did drive us to be extremely supportive and support is an essential ingredient for success. It's no coincidence that the most successful children are often the most strongly supported. We resist the temptation to bind them with our own fears. They accomplish seemingly impossible things, because they don't know those things are supposed to be difficult. Instead of filtering each other's dreams through the tainted lens of "reality," our families become fanatical cheering sections. Life has a way of imposing limits on our dreams quickly enough and family is the single greatest influence on our developing world-view. We need to nurture one another by supporting our attempts. We'll be surprised at how often success answers support's invitation.

Exercise: Create a family schedule for one month. Identify any events members have where the family can show support. Clear all the conflicts you can and show up to games, concerts, etc. to support one another win or lose.

This Week: Remove the word "can't" from your family vocabulary. Only allow yourselves to speak things that support and encourage each other's attempts.

THE FREEDOM TO DREAM BOUNDLESSLY

Futures are built upon a foundation of dreams. Encouraging members to dream without boundaries, allows a healthy family to become a supportive solution instead of a hindering obstacle. Think about how many of today's common occurrences were yesterday's impossibilities. Ridiculous dreams are fuel propelling us into the unknown reaches of tomorrow. By definition, dreams are impossible. They are supposed to be ridiculous. If they were attainable, they would be goals or targets or benchmarks or some other painfully boring thing. Dreams are different.

Dreams have secret and special ingredients. They possess the magic of possibilities. They speak the language of creativity and they're born in the imagination - on the right side of the brain. Dreams are inspired. They don't fit into business plans, board rooms, or brief cases. They don't come when you want them - they come when they're ready. Walt Disney built an empire on the magic of possibilities. Have you ever wondered what his parents must have thought?

"Mom, Dad, I know exactly what I want to do when I grow up."

"What's that Walt?"

"I want to build a magic kingdom with a castle in it where people come from all over the world to play with cartoon characters, storybook legends, and fairytale princesses."

"That's nice dear. Eat your vegetables and do your homework."

Great accomplishments may result from planning, but they're born from dreams.

Exercise: Make a list of dreams you once had. What became of those dreams? Did you give them up? Did someone discourage them? Are you living them now?

This Week: Have each family member declare a dream that they have. Make a plan to help each person realize their dream. Break down your plan. Where will each person be in six months, one year, or five years? The point is to encourage each other to dream.

THE FREEDOM TO SUPPORT OPENLY

Members of healthy families openly support one another. As a result, they feel less need to compete for affection, approval, favor, or status. Open support strongly encourages personal freedom.

As we work through this program, you'll notice that much of it is simply the result of selfless living. Open support is a prime example, because it is impossible to accomplish selfishly. To openly support, we have to consider the needs of others above our own. Healthy families create a culture of "others first" thinking, so each member feels secure knowing that he or she is loved. Learning to see home as a safe place and families as team members makes sure everyone's needs are met.

What causes our selfishness? Abandonment. The fear of physical or emotional abandonment crushes our ability to see beyond ourselves. There's a survival instinct that kicks in and we begin to think, "No one is going to care for me, so I have to care for myself." Soon we're stealing and hoarding the attention we receive.

Life can be a terrible struggle when we desperately strive for approval and then pretend not to care about it. Soon we begin to compete for every moment of attention regardless of whether it is positive or negative. Fortunately, we can live in the freedom of open support by prioritizing the needs of others above our own.

Exercise: Set up a safe obstacle course at home. Once the course is prepared, have each person attempt to navigate the course while only looking straight down at his or her feet. Next, have each person attempt again - while blindfolded. Have everyone else guide the blindfolded person through the course.

Afterwards discuss which was easier, alone looking down or blindfolded with help. Talk about how having support is actually easier even if we can't see.

This Week: Have each family member chose one way to put others first this week. At the end of the week, talk about how it went and celebrate your success by doing something fun together as a family.

THE FREEDOM TO THINK INDEPENDENTLY

Each person should have the freedom to his or her own opinion. Learning to think independently and disagree civilly is critical to developing personal maturity and self-esteem.

As small children, we make decisions based on our emotions. As grown-ups, we decide things based on principles and beliefs. The difference between the two is measured in maturity. Healthy families encourage maturity because they understand the role it plays in establishing and maintaining healthy relationships.

One of the greatest tests of maturity is disagreement. The most immature type of disagreement is one where each party is simply “against” what the other is “for”. It amounts to a rather pointless argument were the neither person states a position or claims a belief, but merely attacks with a passionate, “Nuh-Uh!”

On the other hand, the most mature type of disagreement is one where each party is clearly “for” something specific. Each person sincerely and effectively states a point of view. It just so happens that these two views conflict with one another. This produces a passionate discussion that may or my not lead to compromise, but deepens the perspective of all involved.

It is important to encourage our loved ones to think independently, because it leads us down the path to maturity and healthier relationships for a lifetime.

Exercise: Go for ice cream and have everyone order a cone. Ask, “What is the right way to eat an ice cream cone?” Let each person share his or her personal method of cone consumption and then try to convince the group he or she is right. They may state their cases passionately, but they may not correct or say someone else is wrong. Let it go as long as it’s fun. Then just enjoy your ice cream.

This Week: Refuse to allow any family member to correct another’s ideas or opinions. Instead, teach each other to state personal opinions passionately and with conviction while allowing others to think differently.

PART II

PLAY



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THE FREEDOM TO PLAY INNOCENTLY

Too often, we adults forget the play skills we learn as children fearing the opinions of others or the impact of play on our busy schedules. Innocent play is a powerful and honest interaction. Remembering to play is remembering to live.

When was the last time you let go of the encumbering pressures of adulthood and played? I'm not talking about the kind of play that leaves you with fuzzy recollections, moral regrets, and hangovers. I mean the kind of play we knew as kids - back when it didn't matter what people thought of us. When the most important things were spending time with people we cared about and having fun.

More importantly, when was the last time you prioritized play in your schedule? Setting aside time for the things we enjoy and marking it as sacred gives us something to look forward to. It's an oasis in the desert of our everyday lives. It's one thing to consider it, but until we schedule it, that oasis is just a mirage. We can travel long distances through the arid sand only to see it disappear under another obligation when we arrive.

When was the last time you played with the children in your life? Are they sons, daughters, nieces, nephews, neighbors? Playing with children at their level releases us and communicates a powerful message. It says, "You are important to me." There is a reason why adult baggage doesn't fit into Barbie's Dream House.

Exercise: Make a list of your favorite playtime activities from childhood. What were the things you remember as carefree and fun? What made those activities special enough to remember?

This Week: Go back over your list of favorite activities and choose a few to incorporate back into your life. Now find someone to play with who will enjoy those same activities and schedule time to play this week. Make a special point to do this with the children in your life.

THE FREEDOM TO EXPERIENCE FULLY

Our closest relationships are the ones we consider to be the most “real”. Healthy families learn to appreciate and encourage each member’s natural uniqueness.

You may have heard that true friends are the people who know everything there is to know about us and love us in spite of it. I like to think that true friends know everything about us and love us because of it. The greatest friends that I’ve had have been the ones who were able to appreciate the weird things about me. They are the ones who are still part of my life after 20 or 30 years or more.

Family often works in reverse. We are part of each other’s lives forever because we are related and, unless we make an effort to build a deeper relationship, we can end up settling for nothing more than a shared branch of the family tree.

When I was a kid, I knew my dad. He was that guy who went to work, made the money, fixed the broken stuff, enforced the rules, drove the car, and protected us from danger. But, since I’ve become an adult, I’ve come to know him as so much more. As it turns out, he has dreams and goals, struggles and regrets. I was in my thirties before I realized just how much we have in common.

I want to let my kids in on who I am while they are still young. They deserve to know what makes me tick - not just what ticks me off. I love my father, he’s an amazing man. And now that I know his person and not just his position, I love him even more.

Exercise: Make a list of stories from your life that you feel your family members should know - ones that let them in on your opinions, your dreams, your failures, and your victories.

This Week: Schedule some one on one time with your family members throughout the week. During your time together, look for opportunities to share the stories from your list. You may even want to journal the results of your conversations, so that you can reflect on the progress of your relationship later.

THE FREEDOM TO RELAX COMPLETELY

Families naturally spend much of their non-work & non-school hours together. Allowing each person to relax without the pressure of unspoken expectations is healthy.

Believe it or not, people need down time. We struggle with this now more than ever before. Instead of carving out time to rest and relax, we tend to go full speed in a dozen directions until we crash.

The world around us is never going to let us off the hook. Work will never tell us to come in if we want to. The television will never ask us to watch if we can. Advertisers will never invite us to a sales event if we have nothing else to do. We are rarely asked what we want, but constantly told what we need.

The true danger of this go, go, go lifestyle is that we learn to live out of balance and see the chaos as normal. We see other people's need to rest as denying us something we deserve. We begin to think we know better what others need than they do. We develop unspoken expectations of the people in our lives. When these expectations go unmet we're disappointed. Our disappointment festers into anger and resentment, and soon we find ourselves harboring bitterness.

Trust is essential. In order to grant freedom to someone, we must trust that person's ability and willingness to make good personal choices. We can trust and verify, but we cannot trust and control. We must relinquish control and develop an attitude of trust in our relationships if we are to operate in freedom.

Exercise: Consider where you've allowed bitterness to develop from unspoken expectations. Do you find yourself resenting people who live more balanced lives than you? Do you find yourself telling others what is best for them? Make a list of any unspoken expectations that are causing you to struggle in relationships.

This Week: In a family discussion have each member share about an area where he or she would like to have more freedom. Discuss whether it would be healthy to grant that freedom. Develop a plan to safely grant some freedom to each person.

THE FREEDOM TO LIMIT CAREFULLY

Families often feel that they are “missing out” or “falling behind” by placing limits on demands for their time, talent, and treasure. Carefully prioritizing and limiting ourselves teaches self-control.

When was the last time the television, radio, or internet urged you to limit the amount of time, talent, or treasure you spend each day? Why does it seem that the whole world is in the business of keeping itself in business? Because it is!

If we wait for life to limit itself, we'll wait forever. We have to be the ones who say, “Enough!” It's up to us to tame the beast and bring our lives into balance. It's called moderation and no one seems to be teaching it anymore. So let's talk.

The first step to moderation is seeing our lives, our homes, our work, and everything else we do regularly for what it is - a small universe. We need to remember that the really important things are local. We will feel the effects of a school board election far more than a presidential one. The economy that matters most is the one we live and work in. After all, we don't fill our photo albums with magazine and newspaper clippings. We fill them with memories that we make with the real live people we see most.

This is why we must exercise the freedom of limitation. It's OK to unplug, disengage, log off. We'll be surprised at what we've been missing as we've been making sure we weren't missing anything.

Exercise: Make a list of all of the things you give attention to regularly. Next to each one record the amount of time you think is healthy. Examine your schedule and see how your life compares to your idea of healthy balance.

This Week: Have a family meeting where each member brings a copy of his or her schedule. Make a list of all the items on the schedules. Prioritize the list into High, Medium, and Low importance. Now fill a new master schedule beginning with the High items, then the Medium items, and finally the Low items. Try to live out your new schedule for a week and then talk about how it went. Make adjustments where necessary and continue working toward a more balanced life.

PART III

COMMUNICATE



THE FREEDOM TO QUESTION RESPECTFULLY

Questioning is a natural expression of freedom and marks healthy interaction between people. If done respectfully, questioning leads to beneficial conversation and teachable moments.

There are a some universal truths about marketing that I feel apply to this section. 1) Buyers will always have objections. 2) In order to get buyers to buy, the salesperson must overcome their objections by communicating value. 3) Buyers are much more likely to buy when they see the salesperson as their advocate. 4) Buyers always have the freedom to say, “No.”

These principles work the same way in our relationships. Human beings are born with the ability to reason and make choices. With this in mind we are fooling ourselves if we think that everyone will just agree with us all the time.

There will always be questions. And if our goal is agreement, we have to address them. When we are open to discussing their questions, our friends and family are much more likely to see us as their advocate. This is critical considering that they always have the freedom to say, “No.”

Keep in mind, however, that questioning is only healthy if done respectfully. The goal of the discussion must be to reach an mutual understanding that benefits all parties involved. We should welcome questions, but avoid selfish manipulation.

Exercise: Are there areas where you are not open to being questioned? Why do you think that is? What needs to change in order for you to receive respectful questioning?

This Week: Have a family discussion about questioning one another respectfully. Discuss the difference between respectful and disrespectful questioning. Agree to practice respectful questioning for a week. Then talk about how it went. Make adjustments and continue to work at granting each other the freedom to question.

THE FREEDOM TO CONFRONT SAFELY

A safe confrontation is one where both parties understand from the beginning that, regardless of the outcome, their relationship will be preserved. Healthy families confront safely.

I learned early on that there are two kinds of fights. The first kind is with someone we know and the second kind is with someone we don't. These are very different confrontations with very different dangers.

In a fight with someone we know, we are much more likely to fully engage because we're fairly sure what the limits are. In other words we have a good idea of how much damage that person is willing to create and how much wreckage he or she will leave behind. This is why these kinds of fights are the most honest reflections of what we truly think and feel. It's also why they can be the most destructive if they escalate out of control.

In a fight with someone we don't know, there are no certainties. This is why they usually consist of strong talk, threats, and posturing. It is rare for us to fully engage in a no-holds-barred, knock-down drag-out with a stranger because we have no idea how far that person is willing to go.

Confrontation is part of any relationship. This is why it is important for us to create rules of engagement. If we understand from the beginning that the relationship will be preserved regardless of the outcome, we are free to honestly express our feelings and work through conflict productively.

Exercise: Create rules for safe confrontation within your family. What must be avoided? How far is too far? Are there options that need to be off the table?

This Week: Choose an issue you have been avoiding and confront it using your new rules of engagement. Work it through and then talk about how it went. Modify the rules if necessary before the next confrontation.

THE FREEDOM TO CONTRIBUTE GENEROUSLY

Encouraging family members to freely determine their own contributions of time allows generosity to bring its own rewards. Giving freely allows for choice, generosity, and growth. By starting small we learn that personal rewards are proportional to the significance of the gift. Here are five rules of healthy giving.

Rule 1 Give First: Giving occurs in chain reactions. One gift inspires another as each person shares freely out of gratitude. When we give first, we start the chain.

Rule 2 Give Freely: If we give without preconceived expectations, we cannot be disappointed by the experience. Joy comes from the act of giving not the gift itself. When we give freely, we remain free.

Rule 3 Give Best: Just as generosity inspires generosity, excellence inspires excellence. By only giving the best we inspire others to do the same. This increases the quality of giving altogether, making our world a richer place. When we give best, we improve things.

Rule 4 Give All: Our culture tries desperately to convince us that we should collect, conceal, and consume. However, the secret to true fulfillment lies not in gathering things in, but in giving things away. The world says, "Live full," but givers say, "Die empty." When we give all, we maximize our impact.

Rule 5 Give Credit: The practice of giving credit works two ways. It helps the giver to maintain humility and the receiver to feel valued. Everyone wants to be recognized for hard work and contribution. By giving credit, we affirm the value of those around us. When we give credit, we keep things in perspective.

Exercise: Make a list of the people you encounter most often. What are some ways that you could practice the five rules of giving with the people on your list?

This Week: Choose five people from your list and plan out how you will practice the five rules of giving with them using your ideas from this week's exercise.

THE FREEDOM TO SPEAK TRUTHFULLY

Complete honesty is rarely easy, enjoyable, or effortless. However, healthy families understand that truth is the foundation for all loving communication.

Remember when someone told us growing up that honesty is the best policy? Well, it's more than that - so much more. We've also heard, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." Honesty is freedom.

Regardless of what anyone tries to tell us, we must remember that lies will always enslave us. We may think that we're sparing our friends feelings or keeping our family from worry, but lies only compound an existing problem by binding us to a well-meaning falsehood. Sooner or later, truth will fight its way free and shed its light on the painful wreckage of our cowardly dishonesty.

We cannot love apart from truth. It may lead us to confrontation from time to time. It may make us explain, apologize, and work through our issues. It may cause upheaval, but it will also bring peace and lies can't do that. Only truth can lead to peace and freedom because it has nothing to hide.

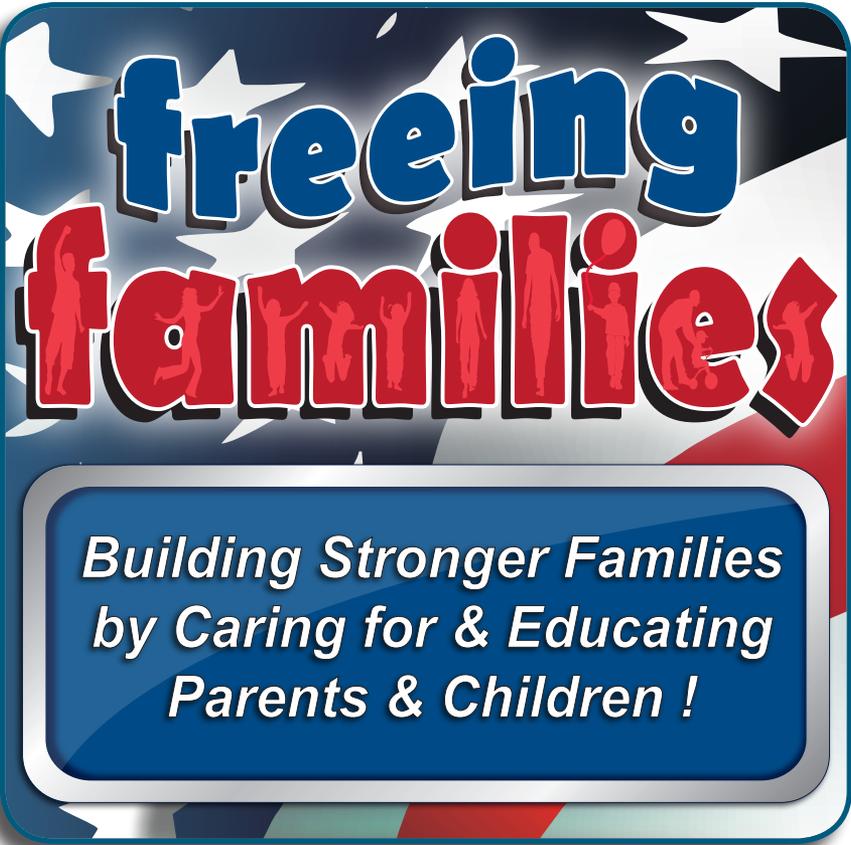
Loving means prioritizing others above ourselves, doing what is best for them even if it is difficult for us. Truth may bring some temporary pain, but it ultimately leads to healing and wholeness.

Truth is also the essential building block of trust. It's much easier to trust people, even if we don't like what they are saying, as long as we are confident that they are telling the truth. We know that truth is dependable and we need not fear the inevitable blind-siding that come from deception.

Exercise: Consider the people closest to you. Are there areas where you have not told the truth? List the situations that need to be corrected in order to go forward truthfully with those you love.

This Week: Think of at least one area where you need to be more truthful. Plan out how you will correct this situation and fix it this week.

THANK YOU!



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by Caring for & Educating
Parents & Children !*

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