

# Five Steps to Great Parenting



# Steps

## About the 5 Steps Series

The books in the 5 Steps Series are useful for anyone seeking bridge-building solutions to current issues. The 5 Steps series presents positive approaches for engaging with the problems that open up gaps and divisions in family, school, church, and society. Each volume presents five short chapters (or “steps”) on a single topic. Each chapter includes a relevant “excerpt”, “insights” from the author(s), and an “example” to consider. The “example” is a real-life story that illustrates how each step can be applied in daily life.

Topics include:

- Facing Suffering
- Living Christian Unity
- Effective Student Leadership
- To Positive Political Dialogue
- A Fulfilling Marriage

# Five Steps to Great Parenting

Insights and Examples

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# Introduction

At the beginning of creation there is a man and a woman. God entrusts them with the commandment of mutual love and he invites them to multiply and to use all created things. It is a beautiful image; it is the discovery of the existence of the other and the birth of the family.

*Chiara Lubich'*

**W**ITH VERY FEW EXCEPTIONS, all parents want what is best for their children. They want their children to be happy, healthy, responsible, loving, respectful, courageous, generous, and grateful. In other words, most parents aspire to be *great* parents.

Many of us parents may remember hearing our grandmothers say, "It's harder to raise kids today than it was when I was growing up." Whether this is true or not doesn't really matter because the ultimate task of raising children and maintaining a close-knit family remains in the hands

of every parent. We have the gifts for raising our families, and if we have children, we certainly want the best for them in every way.

If it is true, however, that it is harder today than before, parents' *active* vigilance is even more necessary. Our role as models becomes much more essential because the world offers many other models— attractive things to get involved in at the expense of building a united family. So many things tend to create little islands within a family that reduce and limit personal interactions.

I remember when our children were young and Nintendo's *Mario Brothers* came out for the first time. That program was so interesting that for several weeks, I found that my children and I sat in front of the TV eating our dinner and challenging each other to master the game. It was indeed fun but what we lost during that time was the wonderful communication we had before when we sat around the table talking over the day, sharing our joys and concerns. We found ourselves completely engrossed in the game and not in each other. Moreover, one member of the family was often left out because my wife, JoAnn, didn't really like the amount of time we spent at the game. For the kids and me, it really seemed like a good thing because we were doing something together. But were we all together?



So many things that seem good have the power of eating away at the unity of the family. The things that all parents want for their children get pushed aside or blurred, leaving gaps between the parents and their children, between the siblings too, and even between the husband and wife.

After speaking with single parents and couples who are raising or who have raised children, I made a list of the chief “enemies” of family life. Here are a few of the things they told me. Most of us have experienced them first-hand: Television; YouTube; online programming; sports programs; work schedule; social media; technology; games; cell phones; friends; dating; and a sense of entitlement.

It would be tempting to demonize these things, but are they bad? We can certainly acknowledge that they can and many times do become distractions for a family, but when put into a structure of well-thought-out priorities, these things can be useful to building up a family.

As a husband of 52 years and a father of five children, I would say that I have tried most of the time to be motivated by my faith and my deep desire to love each member of my family. That is why the primary focus of this little book is love.

One may ask, “But what is love?” Is it a feeling, an emotion? The definition of love that I find most useful is simply this: “putting the needs

of the other ahead of my own.” This means putting the other in first place. Loving means adhering to the Golden Rule, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” Our pastor refers to love as “the opportunity to seek the good of the other above our own needs.”

Each member of my family has a different personality, and thus different needs and ways of thinking. It is amazing that children brought up in essentially the same atmosphere can be so different. Therefore, I try to treat each person in the family in a way that expresses personal love and acceptance.

Every family has common characteristics as well as being very different. We have known families with very difficult challenges that become stronger because of them. On the other hand, we have known families that have collapsed over similar challenges. It very much depends on whether a family is built on solid loving relationships between its members.

It is our hope that the 5 steps in this small book will help readers examine their own families in order to discover in them what is true, good, and beautiful. With these steps we hope that parents will build better and stronger relationships among themselves and their children. We hope this will provide a firm foundation for your children as they grow up in an alluring world so full of distractions where hearts are hardened and feelings are dulled.

When parents become true models and when love is maintained over everything else, a family becomes a living witness to others. This is what great parenting is based on. They will demonstrate what family life can become. The world needs strong families based on love because we are living at a time in which parenting and family values have become weak and distorted.

Let's see if it is possible to enjoy what the world has to offer in a new way, a way that helps our children navigate through the many obstacles that distract them from understanding how to build lasting and strong relationships in their family and with others. Let's take these 5 steps together and discover how they lead to greater parenting.

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I dedicate this book to all families.



# Steps

## Step 1

### **Love One Another**

Devised by God as a masterpiece of love, the family is able to inspire the guidelines that can contribute to changing tomorrow's world. In fact, if we look at the family, if we were to take an X-ray of it, we would discover enormous and precious values, which if projected and applied to all of humanity have the potential to transform it into one big family.

*Chiara Lubich<sup>2</sup>*