



**Today  
I will:**  
TM

Put family  
first.

A guide to investing in your family this fall.



From the start of the new school year and all its new activities, fall can be a busy season for families—but it's the perfect time to invest in what really matters. And it all starts with a single step.

This free resource guide gives you everything you need to help your family thrive this season—from practical guidance to encouraging advice. What will you do today to build a stronger family?

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# Parenting

How will you help your family be intentional today? This week? Start with these five small steps to help make every day count.

What will you do today to be the best parent you can be?

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## Stay connected!

Follow us on Twitter [@FocusParenting](https://twitter.com/FocusParenting) for tips, encouragement and guidance from the experts.

## Make Every Day Count!

For practical tips to help your family thrive, visit [Facebook.com/MakeEveryDayCount](https://www.facebook.com/MakeEveryDayCount)



## Conversation Starters:

### Have a conversation with your kids

#### For school-age children:

- What is the best job in the whole world?
- If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go? Why?
- What do you most enjoy doing with our family?

#### For tweens:

- If you could live in any other time period in history, when would you live? Why?
- What do you think we need to do more of as a family?
- What is one nice thing someone has said to you recently?

#### For teenagers:

- What does it mean to be a leader?
- What is the toughest part about being a teen?
- Who, in your opinion, are the best role models for teenagers today?

*Excerpted from Focus on the Family Conversation Starters for Parents and Kids. Copyright © 1996 by Robert Crosby. For more conversation starters, visit [Thriving Family Magazine](#).*

## Dinner Ideas:

### Have dinner with your family 4-5 times a week

Whether it's gourmet or fast food, eating together is what matters most. Make dinner time fun with these simple ideas:

1. Eat barbarian style without silverware!
2. Eat backwards starting with dessert first.
3. Eat a progressive meal having each part of it in a different room of your house.
4. Try a recipe from a different culture or something you've never eaten before.
5. Turn leftovers into an "eat everything but the kitchen sink" night.



## Laugh with Your Family

Laughter is the best medicine. Whether it's jokes or watching a movie, find ways to laugh with your family. *Plugged In*® has a library of movie night ideas with family activities and devotional thoughts to make watching an old DVD fun again.



Scan the code or [click here](#) for movie night ideas for kids of all ages.

## Silly Face Sandwiches

by the *Focus on the Family Clubhouse Jr.*® staff



### Gather

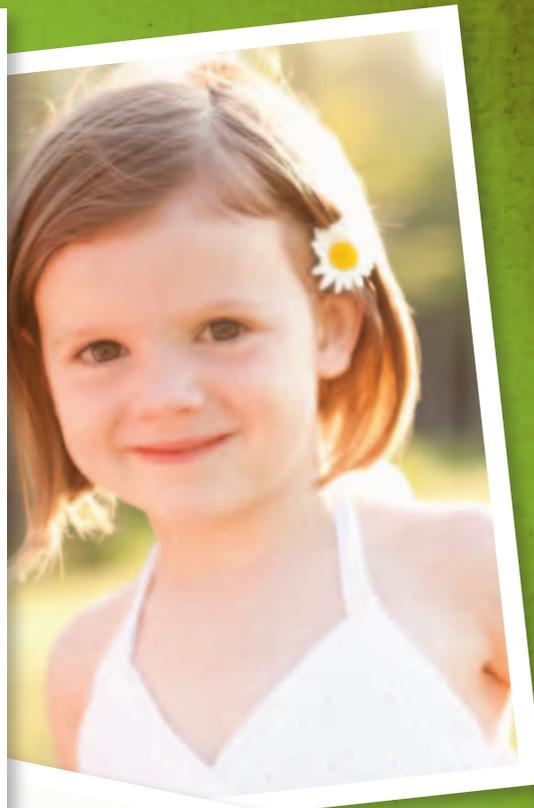
- fun-looking rolls
- mayonnaise and mustard
- sliced sandwich meat
- lettuce
- cheese sticks and shredded cheese
- green and black olives
- carrots, cucumbers, pickles
- cherry or grape tomatoes
- colorful peppers
- toothpicks

### Go

1. With a parent's help, make up your own silly face sandwiches using your favorite ingredients.
2. You might want to capture your fun moments by taking pictures.
3. Sit together as a family and enjoy your one-of-a-kind meal!



For more ideas like this, visit [ClubhouseJr.com/recipes](http://ClubhouseJr.com/recipes)



## Prayer

Take time to pray together and pray for your kids. Here are prayers for your kids:

- Pray that your children would notice the needs of others and respond with helpful words that build them up. (Ephesians 4:29)
- This week, pray that your children would let their light shine to others through good deeds that bring glory to God. (Matthew 5:16)
- Pray that your children would be an example for others in the way they speak and act despite the fact that they are young. (1 Timothy 4:12)
- Pray that your children will use their gifts to serve others, faithfully showing God's grace through their gifts. (1 Peter 4:10)
- Pray that your children would acknowledge God's presence in their lives as He makes their paths straight. (Proverbs 4:11)





# Marriage

A strong marriage is the foundation of a thriving family—and we’re here to help you build the relationship God planned for you. From good times to challenging times, how you respond to these situations each day can bring you one step closer to a stronger marriage.

What will you do today to help your marriage thrive?

## In this section:

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## Daily inspiration for your marriage!

Follow us on Twitter [@FocusMarriage](https://twitter.com/FocusMarriage) for inspiration and guidance to help your marriage thrive.

<b>Today I will:</b> <small>™</small>	<i>Show my love.</i>
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## Make the Most of Everyday Moments

*A broadcast with Dr. Greg Smalley*

The last thing married couples want is one more thing to add to their “to do” list. So, how can couples plan time to nurture and strengthen their marriage? Focus on the Family’s marriage expert, Dr. Greg Smalley, explains how couples can make the most of everyday moments. It begins with the way we greet one another at the start of each new day.



Scan the code or [click here](#) to listen now.



## Date Guide

(Print this and take it on your date!)

# Road Trip!

**Step 1: Go someplace *different* for dinner.**

**Step 2: Hit the road.**

- Venture outside the city limits—even drive to a neighboring city for dinner.
- Explore the world around you—find scenic by-ways in the area; explore the backroads.
- Consider driving to a romantic scenic overlook.
- Drive in search of famous buildings, landmarks or historical sites.

**Step 3: Make it meaningful.**

- What are some ways I can show you that I'm interested in you and knowing you better?
- What are some ways I can communicate more effectively that I love you?
- Did you go on "family drives" with your family as a child? How did that make you feel?
- Out of all our Date Nights thus far, which one has been your favorite? Why?

**Step 4: Relax and Unwind. *Ready for a few questions?***

- What was your favorite part of the evening?
- What is one thing you learned about me tonight that you didn't know before?
- Over the coming week, what are some ways we can maximize Windshield Time to help stay connected?

**Step 5: Home sweet home. *Let's plan our next date!***

- Think about ways you can maximize Windshield Time in the days to come—with every member of the family, but especially with your spouse.

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Remember ...

1. Don't "administratate." 2. Try something new. 3. Be curious and ask questions.



# Finances

Every family faces financial challenges from time to time. Whether you're looking to find a budget that works for your family, teach your kids about wise money management or find help for a difficult season, fall is the perfect time to get started. And these resources can help.

What will you do today to stay on top of your finances?

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**Today I will:** *make a list.*

## Financial Fitness Quiz

How financially fit is your family? This easy online quiz will help you assess your strengths, target your challenges and get you started on a path to wise money management.



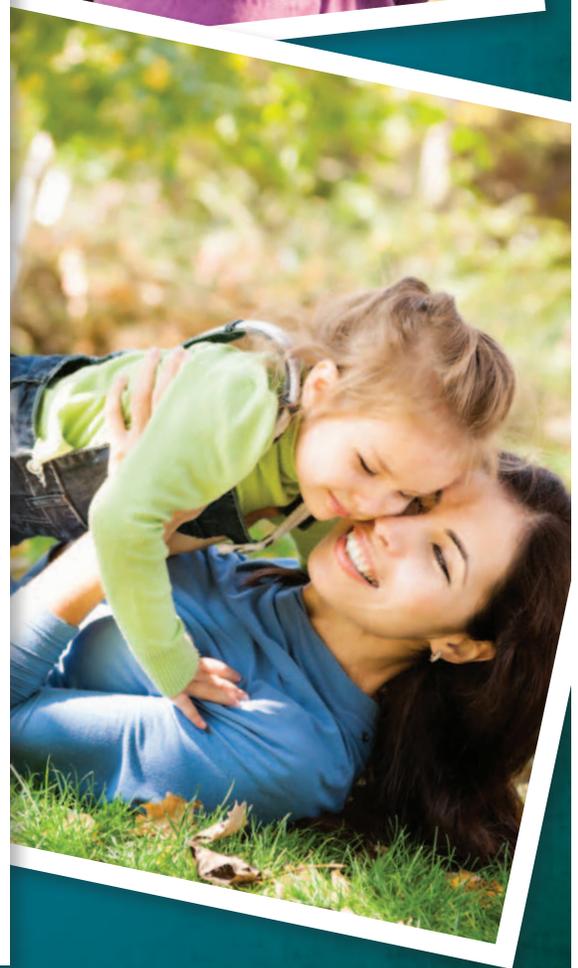
Scan the code or [click here](#) to take the quiz.

## Family Budgeting

From regular bills to unexpected expenses, it can be hard to stick to a budget. This guide will help you understand God's "big picture" perspective on finances, learn key steps to getting out of debt and help you create a practical budget that works for your family.



Scan the code or [click here](#) to start your family budget.





# Media Safety

In today's culture, making wise internet and entertainment choices is more important than ever. How can you take advantage of the great things the media has to offer without compromising what you believe in? How do you keep your kids safe from negative content without alienating them from their peers?

Our media resources can help keep your family safe from inappropriate content, connected to the best family entertainment and engaged in your community.

What will you do today to help your family make wise media choices?

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## Online Text Decoder

What are your kids saying online? This list of common online text and chat abbreviations will help you understand what your kids are saying.

### A few abbreviations

F2F — face to face

GMBO — giggling my butt off

HTH — hope this helps

IC — I see



Scan the code or [click here](#) for the complete Text Decoder.

## Media Memory Verses

Why is it so important to monitor what we see and hear on TV, online and on the radio? This article is full of practical guidance to help you teach your teens about healthy media discernment—plus great memory verses from the Bible.

*(Example Verses)*

### Avoiding Indecent Exposure

Psalms 11:4-7 — The dangers of loving violence

Psalms 101 — David's pledge of purity

Philippians 4:4-8 — Your heart's best defense

Colossians 2:8 — Watch out for deceivers



Scan the code or [click here](#) to read the full article.







# Back to School

The back-to-school season can be a busy time for families—but it's full of opportunities to start fresh and invest in what really matters.

This fall, stay on top of the stress while keeping family first with these practical resources and creative activities for parents, kids and teens.

What will you do to start the school year right?

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## The Shirin Family: An Intentional Parenting Plan

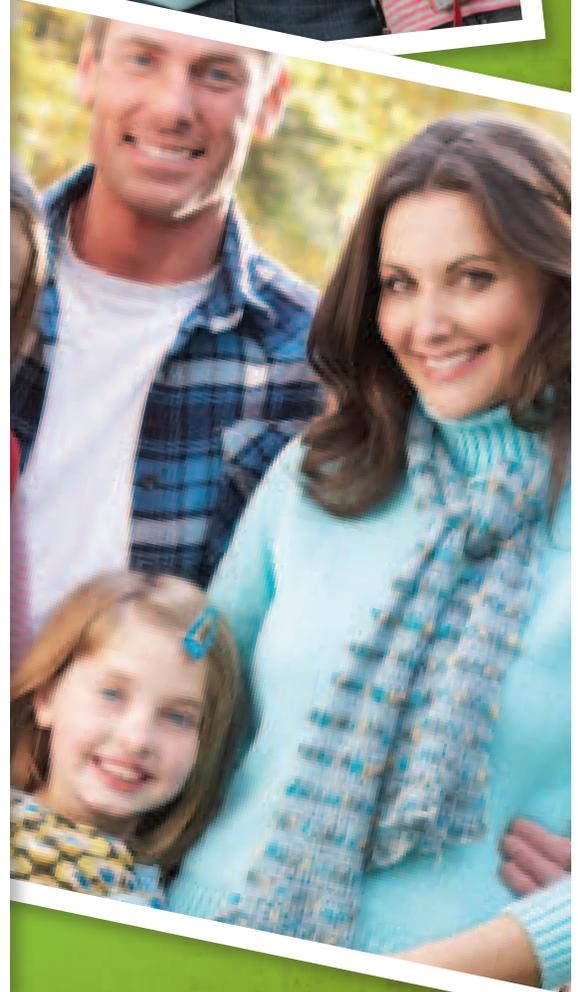
Ever feel like you're reacting to life? Kevin and Julie Shirin, a dad and mom of seven, found a simple way to stop reacting and start reviewing their children's strengths and weaknesses. Amid the busy pace of their family life, this couple sets annual goals for the personal growth of each child. Just as their plan helps them to be more intentional with their parenting, it can help you, too.



Scan the code or [click here](#) to read the Shirin Family's story.

### Get Started!

The next pages include some great goal setting resources to get you going.



# Ideas for Your Child's Growth Plan

Need help getting started with your annual parenting review? Consider this list of ideas as you reflect on your child's development:

AGES	PHYSICAL (discipline and motor skills)	SOCIAL (character qualities and manners)	EDUCATIONAL (organized learning)	SPIRITUAL (one's relationship with God)	PRACTICAL (life skills)
0 to 3	Walk without parents' help Go to sleep on her own Sit still at the dinner table Stay in bed at naptime	Come when called Don't bite others Stop hitting and pinching others Stop spitting Take turns and play nicely with others	Color neatly Learn animal sounds Recognize shapes and colors Increase vocabulary Develop phonemic awareness	Understand God made him Understand God loves him Understand God loves others, too Develop a love for Bible stories Find joy in praying with parents	Play independently Cope without a blanket Learn not to use a pacifier Pick up a few toys
4 to 7	Ride a bicycle Learn to swim Practice personal hygiene (brush teeth, etc.) Sleep in his own room at night Learn to swing on his own	Obey cheerfully Respect authority Learn to be polite with your words Learn to help and not hurt others Begin learning table manners	Learn to read Learn to print neatly Learn to recognize numbers Engage in schoolwork Follow worksheet directions	Pray aloud Understand the basic Gospel message Grow in relationship with God Trust in God's power Hide God's Word in her heart	Pick up toys Do daily chores Make a bed Don't cry over every little owie Straighten room daily
8 to 12	Go out for team sports Comb hair and clean face daily Eat more fruits and vegetables Learn to skateboard or roller-skate Take showers or baths more often	Be sincere Be a friend to others Practice table manners Talk less and listen more Balance emotions	Improve in cursive Set a reading goal Play an instrument Be responsible for schoolwork Be honest about grades and time spent on homework	Pray on his own Cultivate a heart for service Regular Scripture memorization Express the truth of salvation Turn to God for comfort	Learn to sew Learn to cook Clean bedroom weekly Take care of belongings Do chores without being asked
13 to 18	Eat less junk food Commit to his team in sports Have a daily exercise routine Take better care of facial skin Get enough sleep each night	Recognize the influence of peer pressure Lead with humility Tell the truth to friends but consider their feelings Treat parents respectfully and truthfully Care about others by reaching out to kids at school	Show diligence in learning Be punctual for classes See the connection between school-work and a career Challenge herself to do more than the bare minimum Acquire good note-taking habits	Take personal ownership of her faith Model a fruit of the Spirit Cultivate a heart for missions Be honest before God Apply scriptural truth to relevant issues	Be responsible for what he says Be responsible for actions Understand basic financial concepts Demonstrate a good work ethic Do his own laundry

# A PERSONAL GROWTH PLAN FOR \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

## Physical development

What my child does well:

What my child needs to work on:

## Social development

What my child does well:

What my child needs to work on:

## Educational development

What my child does well:

What my child needs to work on:

## Spiritual development

What my child does well:

What my child needs to work on:

## Practical development

What my child does well:

What my child needs to work on:

# social social social

## GOALS FOR YOUR TEENS

from thrivingfamily.com

**Directions for parents:** As you create your parenting goals for the year, set aside time to work with your teen on this. Although the questions may only take half an hour to answer, the assessment and planning may invite parent-teen conversations that take longer. Your teens should answer the questions honestly and from their perspective. Your job is to help them translate their ideas into realistic goals.

### ASSESS LAST YEAR

List where you have served or reached out to others.

Evaluate your current friends. How are they good for you? Do any of them have potential to hurt you? Which ones have not been friends?

Are you involved in a romantic relationship? What are the positives and negatives of that relationship?

How strong are your family relationships?

How much time do you spend on social networking sites and texting?

How have you set yourself up for being hurt or unsafe?

### PLAN FOR THE COMING YEAR

To whom do you plan to focus on being a good friend? Which "friends" will no longer be considered friends?

What can you do to strengthen your relationship with your parents and siblings?

Name one person you will work on being kind to.

What boundaries will you set regarding social networking sites, gaming and texting?

What will you do to show commitment to personal integrity in relationships?

Who would you consider asking to be a mentor or an accountability partner?

### ASSESS LAST YEAR

What has helped you most in your walk with God?

In what way did you grow closer to God?

What hindered you in your walk with God?

### PLAN FOR THE COMING YEAR

How will you ask honest questions, seek biblical answers and surround yourself with wise counsel?

Do you want to go on a missions trip? If so, what do you need to do to make this happen?

How would you like your family, church and youth group to encourage you to grow in your faith (family devotions, serve others, show mercy, offer prayer)? What will this require from you?

## SPIRITUAL

What did you learn about personal budgeting?

What part-time job did you have? How did it help or hurt you financially & socially?

What were your personal improvement goals last year? Did you reach them?

List your responsibilities and chores.

How will you take the next step to learn more about financial concepts and personal budgeting?

How can you be a better worker in your job and home life?

What goals will you set (find a job, learn to drive, learn a foreign language or play an instrument)?

How will you take better responsibility for your own schedule and chores?

## PRACTICAL

## ASSESS LAST YEAR

Record your height, weight and body mass index.

(NOTE: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers a body mass index counter at [nhlibisupport.com/bmi/bmicalc.htm](http://nhlibisupport.com/bmi/bmicalc.htm))

What was most stressful?

In what sports, hobbies or activities were you most involved?

What were your grades?

What were your strongest subjects?

What were your weakest subjects?

## PLAN FOR THE COMING YEAR

What are your weight goals and how do you intend to accomplish them through diet and exercise?

How many hours a night will you commit to sleep?

What can you do to minimize stress?

What books would you like to read? Make a list of fiction and nonfiction titles that interest you.

What are your grade goals? How do you intend to accomplish them (for example, attend class regularly, do your homework, read assignments, seek help when you need it)?

What do you want to do when you graduate? Which career choices interest you? Do you have a college preference?

What activities will you do to stay on track for going to college (i.e., complete assessment tests, work to maintain grades, avoid at-risk behaviors that could derail college plans, research AP classes, explore majors and colleges, apply)?

# educational

# PHYSICAL

## ELEMENTARY GRADES by Andrea Gutierrez

### Get Started

- Make sure your child is enrolled and all registration paperwork is complete.
- Find out when the semester starts and what time to arrive.
- Obtain school policies and review them with your child before school begins (school closures, disciplinary action, procedures, etc.)
- Determine which preparations for the school day are best accomplished in the evenings and which should be part of the morning routine.

### Medical Requirements

- Ask your family physician if your child is up-to-date on immunizations. (You can obtain a list of required immunizations from the school district.)
- Inform the school of your child's medical needs, allergies or medications (if any) that will require special attention.
- Schedule a physical exam if it's required for PE or extracurricular sports participation.

### To and From School

- If your child will ride the bus, become familiar with the pick-up and drop-off times and locations.
- If you will be driving your child to school, find out the school's policy on pick-up and drop-off times and locations.
- Inquire about carpooling groups if you're interested in making arrangements with other families.
- If your child will walk to and from school, determine the safest route, and find out if there are crossing guards at busy intersections. Walk the route with your child. Practice crossing the street at designated crosswalks and review pedestrian safety.

### Meals and Snacks

- Inventory your pantry to determine which items you'll need to purchase for sack lunches and snacks. Make a shopping list.
- Have quick breakfast options available for your child. Determine if the school has a breakfast program, if you're interested.
- Find out if your family qualifies for free lunches or reduced pricing based on household income.
- Find out the cost of breakfast and lunch menu items and the method of payment.
- Make note of whether your child will be required to bring his own healthy snack each day or if the teacher wants students to contribute to a shared snack cabinet.
- Inform the teacher of your child's food allergies (if any).

### School Clothes

- If your child's school has a dress code or guidelines for gym class attire, shop for needed apparel.
- Involve your kids in purging closets of outgrown clothes, shoes and coats. Donate items to charity.
- Organize wardrobe and determine items that need to be purchased. Write out a shopping list of needed items.

### School Supplies

- Search the school's website or call the office for a supply list.
- Go through your school supplies from last year to see what can be reused.
- Follow back-to-school sales to get the best price on each school supply.

- Buy extra supplies to keep at home for homework assignments. Keep them in a central location.
- Label your child's supplies, as well as his coat and lunchbox, with his first and last name.

### Teacher and Classroom

- Find out who your child's teacher is and where the classroom is located. Tour common areas such as the nearest restrooms, the library, the cafeteria and the gymnasium.
- Ask your child's teacher how he or she prefers to communicate with parents. Obtain the teacher's and principal's phone number and email address.
- Ask the teacher for the scope and sequence of what your child will be learning in this grade level.
- Update your calendar with scheduled parent-teacher conferences, fundraising events, volunteer opportunities, etc.

### After-School Schedule

- Establish a consistent routine for homework, snack time, playtime and bedtime.
- Set limits on screen time for the TV, computer and video games.
- Limit the number of organized activities that they will be involved in during the semester.
- Decide which school activities your family will participate in.

## KINDERGARTEN by Katrina Cassel

Use the following guidelines to assess your child's readiness for kindergarten:

### Motor Skills

- Can your child . . .
- throw a ball?
  - walk in a straight line?
  - color, draw, use a pencil and scissors?

### Academics

- Can your child . . .
- tell a short story in sequence?
  - count to 10?
  - recognize basic shapes and colors?
  - spell her name?

### Social Skills

- Can your child . . .
- share with others?
  - play alone?
  - focus on schoolwork around other kids?
  - stick to a single task for several minutes?

### Personal Skills

- Can your child . . .
- use the restroom?
  - fasten her pants?
  - wash her hands?
  - put on her coat?

To enroll your child in school, you'll likely need to provide the following:

- documentation of a physical exam by your pediatrician
- record of up-to-date immunizations
- your child's Social Security number (preferred but often not required)
- birth certificate
- proof of residency in the school district

*This article first appeared in the Discovery Years edition of the August 2008 issue of the Focus on Your Child newsletters. Copyright © 2008 Katrina Cassel. Used by permission. ThrivingFamily.com.*

**Encourage your tween!** Do you want to connect with your tweens? Cut out, complete and then leave these cards for your tween to find.

I enjoyed our summer together! One of my favorite memories is when ...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Love,



I'm excited about a new school year and have no doubt that you'll excel in ...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Love,



I enjoy being with you! Remember when ...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Love,



Do you know what I love about you? It's the way you ...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Love,



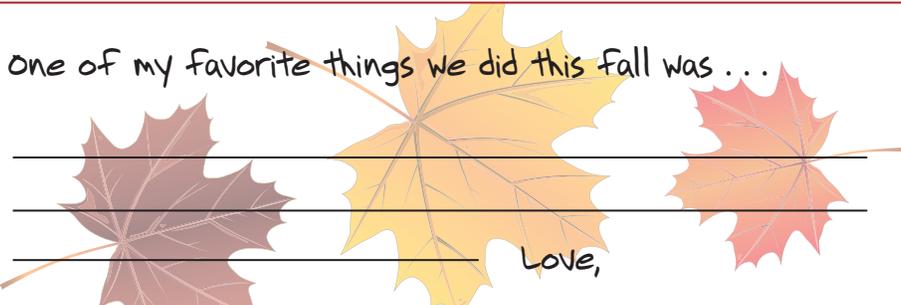
One of my favorite things we did this fall was ...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Love,



Guess what?

You're the best!

Especially how you ...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Love,



You're sweet! I love when you ...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Love,



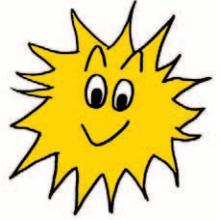
Your light shines bright. I love how you ...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Love,



You amaze me! I am so proud of how you ...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Love,





**1-800-A-FAMILY (232-6459)**  
**FocusOnTheFamily.com**