



FOLLOW HIS WAY OF LIFE:  
LIVING AS THE FAMILY OF GOD

# Series Workbook

SPRING 2024



PARK CHURCH



# Follow His Way of Life: Living as the Family of God



SERIES LINKS

## SERIES & WORKBOOK OVERVIEW

To begin, we encourage you to watch the overview video by using the QR on this page or by visiting [parkchurch.org/family](https://parkchurch.org/family). The video gives more background on why we visit the *Be With Jesus* and *Follow His Way of Life* themes each year and why we've chosen "Living as the Family of God" for this Spring. The page also includes a digital version of this workbook in addition to an explanation of the artwork, sermons from the series, and other resources.

We pray for God's kindness and character to be evident as you do this work.

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## RELATIONSHIPS & THE WAY OF JESUS

### Relationships Matter

We all live in the midst of a complex web of relationships. These relational systems are comprised of family, friends, neighbors, classmates, colleagues, and more. Some of our relationships may feel close, healthy, and life-giving. Others can be distant, dysfunctional, and painful. Some relationships feel easy and natural, while others can be incredibly challenging and uncomfortable. Relationships can be both the greatest source of pain and trauma in our lives as well the greatest source of healing and love. Whatever the relational dynamics may be for each individual, it's impossible to escape the reality that our relationships are an integral part of our lives, and they have incredible power in our process of formation.

Many in our society struggle to know how to relate to others in healthy ways. The hyper-individualism of our culture—and its impact on both the family as well as committed friendships—has contributed to the high levels of relational insecurity and anxiety that we see evidenced all around us and even inside of us. These dynamics and others have led to many of the unhealthy characteristics that mark our cultural moment including tribalism, polarizing rhetoric, vitriolic animosity, online echo-chambers, deep-seated divisions, cancel-culture, and many unhealed wounds.

These relational problems don't just exist "out there" in the world; they run through the body of Christ as well, leaving many in the church disoriented and disillusioned by relational pain and fallout. As a community that wants to grow as disciples of Jesus, we should be asking: is this what Jesus wants for His followers, or does He have a better way?

## **Following the Way of Jesus**

As you might expect, Jesus does offer a better way for us to approach our relationships, and we want to take intentional steps to learn to follow His way of life as the family of God. However, like most aspects of following Jesus, learning a new way of life doesn't come easy. We are hindered by the cultural norms of the world around us, the power of the flesh within us, and the seductive lies of the enemy. To resist these forces and to truly grow as disciples of Jesus, we need to depend on the Spirit, learn from Jesus and His Word, lean into a counter-cultural Christian community, and adopt a new set of transformative practices that will help us mature in the ways that we relate to each other as brothers and sisters in the family of God.

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## **FAMILY SYSTEMS & THE NEW FAMILY OF GOD**

### **Formed in Family Systems**

As humans, our foundational formation takes place within some sort of family system. We are discipled into a way of life, and that way of life includes how we relate to other people. We learn how to form our identity in relation to others, how to give and experience love, how to communicate our thoughts and desires, and how to interact with the thoughts and desires of others. We are given a model for how to handle conflict, how to relate to people we disagree with or differ from, how to experience and express our emotions, how to think about our own strengths and weaknesses, and how to relate to the strengths and weaknesses of others. Most of us were not discipled into these ways of relating to others with much intentionality, but there is no doubt that we were formed. Those formational values and patterns run deep within our bones and have set a trajectory for our default way of relating to others.

As we move through life, we work out these ways of relating to others in all of our relationships - with our friends, classmates, teachers, coworkers, spouse, and children. As our lives intersect with others, we learn that some of our default relational values and habits are helpful for these relationships, and others... well, not so much.

### **Brought Into a New Family**

Then, at some point along the way, we hear about the good news of Jesus, we put our faith in Him, we are reconciled to God by grace, and we're brought into a new family. Now we have a new relationship with God as our Father, and we gradually begin to learn how to relate to him - how to pray, how to read from His Word, how to worship, how to confess and repent, and how to receive His forgiveness. But how does this new relationship with God affect the way we relate to His other children? Our new brothers and sisters?

For Jesus, our relationship with God as our Father is inseparably connected to our relationships with one another as His family. Jesus said that our experience of forgiveness from God is connected to our willingness to forgive others (Matthew 18:35; 6:12). He said that our love for one another would be the

distinguishing mark of His disciples (John 13:34-35). He prayed that God would build within His people a Spirit-filled unity and a love for one another that would reflect and extend the very unity and love that exist between the Father and the Son (John 17:20-26). And for Jesus' early followers, relational love between brothers and sisters in God's new family was foundational to their own understanding of their Christian identity (1 John 2:7-11; 3:16-18, 23-24; 4:7-8).

### **The Need for Transformation**

Yet, when we consider the state of the church today, few would say that love is our defining characteristic. Communication challenges and conflict are inevitable parts of relationships and community, but we struggle to work through conflict with mutual understanding and grace. Disagreement is healthy, but some struggle knowing how to be honest about their thoughts in healthy ways, and many have a hard time being relationally connected to those with whom they disagree. We often hurt each other, and we often don't know how to address those relational wounds in a way that leads to reconciliation and healing. So instead bitterness, gossip, unforgiveness, resentment, and broken relationships run through the body of Christ.

If love is supposed to be a defining mark of the Christian community, why do relationships seem to be so hard? It seems, as our friend Pete Scazzero would say, "Jesus may be in your hearts, but grandpa is in your bones." In other words, becoming a Christian doesn't immediately transform the generational forces that have shaped many of our default relational habits, values, and sin patterns. Like all other areas of Christian formation, this is a discipleship issue, and we need to give focused attention and energy to follow Jesus in the way that He related to the family of God. How do we communicate in the new family of God? How do we engage in conflict and disagreement in the new family of God? How do we seek and offer forgiveness in the new family of God? Jesus shows us a way, and we're called to learn to follow His way of life together.

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## **THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION**

While forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God comes by grace the moment someone turns to Jesus in faith, the experience of transformation is a life-long and multi-faceted process. The process of transformation is an ongoing work of God's Spirit that requires prayerful time in God's Word, the support of Christian community, and the incorporation of intentional practices that help reorient our values and thoughts and behaviors to be more like those of Jesus.

To help our church in this process of transformation, we are providing four weeks of Sunday teaching along with a series of exercises, reflection questions, and resources that can be engaged in personally and discussed with your community. We encourage you to engage these resources with prayer and hope,

trusting that as we participate in this work of transformation, it is God who is working within us for His glory and our joy.

As we take intentional steps to mature as relationally healthy disciples of Jesus, we also mature as a community that reflects the love and grace of Jesus to the world around us. As Jesus told his disciples, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

## **WEEKLY THEMES**

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### **WEEK 1: FAMILY SYSTEMS & THE FAMILY OF GOD**

Family systems provide the primary environmental forces that form us, both positively and negatively. They form us positively, inasmuch as they accurately reflect the love and authority of God, and negatively where they misrepresent that love and authority. These family systems especially affect the way that we relate to others. However significant these relational systems may be in our formation, they are not ultimate. One of the primary goals of Jesus’ mission was to bring people into the new family of God. In this new family, Jesus leads and instructs His brothers and sisters toward a distinct way of relating to one another. This new family of God is to be marked by love, joy, peace, patience, grace, forgiveness, humility, truthfulness, and compassion. The gracious work of Jesus provides the power to free us, forgive us, heal us, and transform us to grow as humans who can reflect His love to one another in healthy ways.

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### **WEEK 2: LOVING PRESENCE IN THE FAMILY OF GOD**

Anxiety is a regular dynamic within interpersonal relationships. If left unnoticed and unattended, this anxiety can have the power to harm relationships and hinder the healthy connection that we were made to experience. The state of our own interior lives affects how we relate to the social and emotional dynamics around us. At times, we may choose to withdraw from situations or relationships because of our own discomfort with the anxiety that we feel. At other times, we may engage in ways that can further perpetuate the anxiety and tension. Jesus gives us another way. In the midst of the intense anxiety, animosity, and polarization of his society, Jesus was fully secure in the love of the Father. He was able to engage His society with a loving presence that was parked by both conviction and compassion, power and meekness. As we learn to follow Jesus, finding security in the love of the Father, we too can grow as non-anxious people who can become instruments of healing and peace in our relationships and community.

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### **WEEK 3: DIFFERENCES IN THE FAMILY OF GOD**

We live in a community full of people with different backgrounds, values, and perspectives. At times these differences can feel challenging. As a result, many in our society have settled into polarizing and tribalistic

thinking that exacerbates the divisions and animosity within our society, our church, and our families. Jesus shows us a different way. He teaches us that we can love people who disagree with us, we can show kindness to people who oppose us, and we can move toward people who may even feel like our enemies—all of this without discarding our Biblical convictions or personal opinions. This foundation of relational grace, humility, and compassion gives us the ability to have loving and healthy relationships with people we disagree with. We can learn to value one another, listen to one another and even learn from one another. This won't necessarily result in agreement, but it will demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit and the glory of Christ as we learn to reflect the Gentle and Lowly One who was full of grace and truth.

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## WEEK 4: RECONCILIATION IN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Relational conflict and division can be a source of some of the greatest experiences of pain in life. This relational conflict is often layered and complex, and it's difficult for us to find the wisdom and courage to move toward reconciliation and the healing we long for. Instead, we often avoid any pursuit of reconciliation. The unhealed emotional pain finds a home within us, the relational distance grows, and the path toward reconciliation feels even more difficult. But Jesus was a master of reconciliation. He moved toward His enemies with self-sacrificing love without ignoring the core offense. At its heart, the Gospel of Jesus is about reconciliation—not merely reconciliation with God, but also reconciliation between divided people. Jesus gives His followers a way to pursue reconciliation that both honors the pain that we may have caused or experienced, and reflects His love, forgiveness, and mercy. A Christ-like approach to reconciliation won't always lead to a restored relationship, but it can lead to an experience of freedom and grace, and it will reflect the glory of the God who moved toward us with mercy, humility and sacrificial love.

## EXERCISES & RESOURCES

**Family Genogram:** Pages 5-7

*Adapted from Practicing The Way*

**Family History Reflection Questions:** Pages 8-9

*Adapted from Practicing The Way*

**The Four Spaces of Anxiety:** Pages 10-11

*Adapted from Steve Cuss, Capable Life*

**Getting to the Heart of Conflict:** Page 12

*Adapted from Emotionally Healthy Relationships*

# FAMILY GENOGRAM

This resource was adapted from *Practicing The Way*. Learn more at [practicingtheway.org](http://practicingtheway.org).



**SERIES LINKS**

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## HOW DO WE DISCOVER THE POWER OF THE PAST?

We all inherit ways of living from our family and culture that are out of sync with the way of Jesus. So a key task in our discipleship to Jesus is being “re-parented” into the family of God. In this exercise, we will discover the power of the past by creating a family genogram. The goal is to review key events in your family history and identify generational blessings, sins, brokenness, relational patterns, and inherited values. The aim of this exercise is certainly not to stoke bitterness or to excuse our own actions or culpability. The aim is to help us uncover and acknowledge the relational dynamics that have provided the context of our formation so that we can better learn where we can show gratitude for the blessings we have received and where we need the gracious work of God to redeem us, forgive us, heal us, and transform us to become more like Jesus through the power of the Spirit.

The genogram exercise is followed by a series of reflection questions that can help guide you as you process the impact of your past, engage with Jesus, and move forward with hope. Please see the Genogram key on the next page before completing your own Family Genogram on the following page.

For additional related resources, see “Dealing With Your Past,” from *Practicing The Way*: by using the QR on this page or by visiting [practicingthewayarchives.org/practices/dealing-with-your-past](http://practicingthewayarchives.org/practices/dealing-with-your-past) .

# GENOGRAM KEY

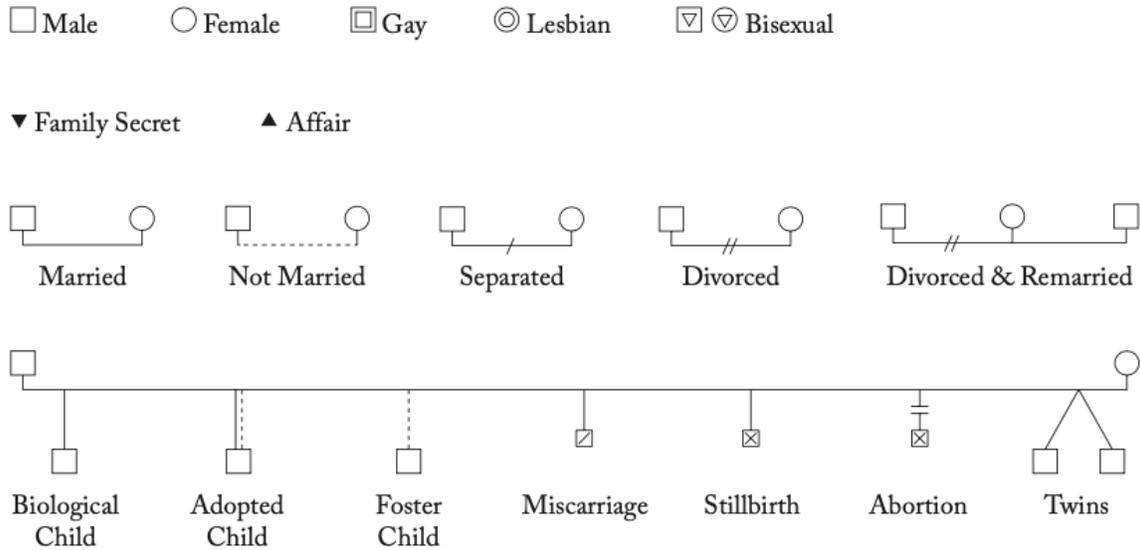
Use this key to complete the family genogram on the next page. For helpful video tutorials, use the QR on this page or visit [parkchurch.org/family](http://parkchurch.org/family).



SERIES LINKS

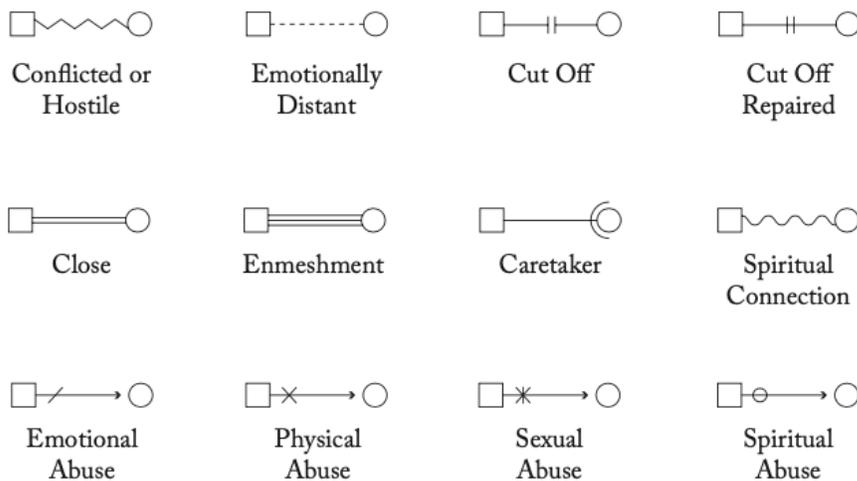
## FAMILY HISTORY

Begin by filling out your family history using the symbols below.

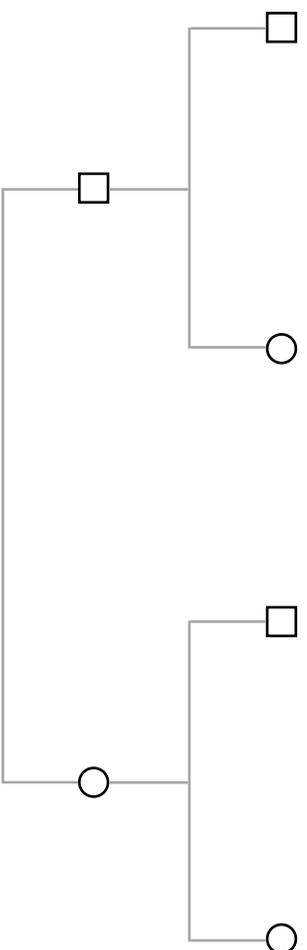


## RELATIONAL PATTERNS

Next, use the symbols below to complete your genogram by adding any relational patterns you are able to identify in your family. It may help to use a different color pen or pencil for these relational patterns.



# Family Genogram



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## REFLECT ON YOUR PAST

You may need to ask your parents, grandparents, or extended family members to get answers to these questions. Some questions may be hard to ask, so only go as far as you're comfortable.

1. What, if any, mental or physical health conditions or diseases are in your family of origin?
2. List the religious background in your ancestral history (Atheism, Buddhism, Freemasonry, Islam, Hinduism, Mormonism, the Occult, etc.).
3. Has there been any substance abuse or addiction in your family?
4. Has anyone had, participated in, or sponsored an abortion?
5. Has there been any notable sexual promiscuity? Affairs? Divorces?
6. Has there been any sexual, emotional, physical, or spiritual abuse?
7. Has there been any abandonment (physical or emotional absence) in your family of origin?
8. What are the notable strengths or examples of virtue in your family?
9. How would you describe your parents' and grandparents' marriage?
10. Did your parents show affection? To each other? To their kids? To you? In what ways?
11. Was your family more patriarchal or matriarchal? Or a healthy balance?
12. Which parent are you most like? With whom were/are you closer?
13. Were there any traumatic losses (sudden death, prolonged illnesses, stillbirths, bankruptcy, etc.)? Were those losses talked about openly and mourned? Or swept under the rug?
14. How well did you get along with your siblings growing up? How about now? If you were an only child, how did that affect your relational values or behaviors?
15. Which role did you play in your family (responsible eldest, baby, black sheep, rebel, caretaker, etc.)?
16. How did your family deal with conflict (fight, flight, freeze, etc.)?
17. Was your family open in talking about feelings, especially negative feelings?
18. Were there any heroes or heroines in the family? Any scapegoats? Why?
19. Were there any family secrets or topics that you felt were off-limits or taboo?
20. How did your family define success? How did you navigate those expectations?
21. How was money viewed or handled?
22. Were there any other key events (positive/negative/neutral) from your family history that have shaped you or your family? Consider adding these events to your genogram next to the identified family members.

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## REFLECT ON THE IMPACT OF THE PAST

In what ways might some of these experiences or dynamics from your past impacted your current relational values or behaviors?

As you reflect on your past, what blessings did you receive from your family that you appreciate?

What areas of generational sin, brokenness, or trauma do you see in your family history?

Are there areas of sin, brokenness, or trauma that you have seen God redeem or use for good in some way?

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## BRING IT TO JESUS

As you consider your past and your present, are there any areas of sin, brokenness or pain that you need to bring to Jesus for forgiveness and/or healing? Take time to bring these thoughts, memories, and experiences to Jesus in prayer.

Are there areas of confusion, disorientation or complexity where you could ask Jesus for wisdom or insight? Ask Jesus to give you wisdom and guidance in how to process these thoughts and feelings?

Where can you see God's grace, kindness and faithfulness evidenced in your past? Take time to thank Him.

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## MOVE FORWARD

Is there something that you want to explore further, either personally or with a friend, mentor, pastor, or counselor?

Is there a step that the Holy Spirit may be leading you to take to help you heal and grow as a follower of Jesus?

Where could you invite prayer or support from a friend?

# THE FOUR SPACES OF ANXIETY

This resource was adapted from Capable Life. Learn more at [capablelife.com](http://capablelife.com).

Anxiety is a common dynamic within interpersonal relationships. If left unnoticed and unattended, this anxiety can have the power to harm relationships and hinder the healthy connection that we were made to experience. This framework and practice is designed to help you notice the spread of anxiety, first in yourself and then in others.

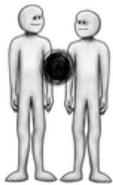
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## THE FOUR SPACES OF ANXIETY

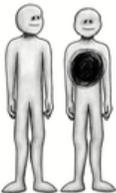
In order to better notice and diffuse relational anxiety we need to understand the four different spaces where relational anxiety may be present.



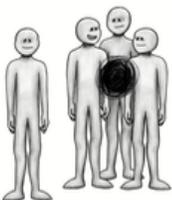
**The space inside you.** This is the anxiety that exists within yourself. What triggers you? What types of people irritate you? What assumptions do you have about yourself that you cannot live up to? 90% of all anxiety management is first paying attention to what is going on in you.



**The space between you and the other** is where you catch and spread anxiety, often in a conversation. Second space anxiety often turns into predictable recurring patterns where each person can settle into a particular “role” within the relationship.



**The space inside the other** is when your brain has crossed into someone else's brain. You are thinking about what someone else is thinking about. This is the one space that you cannot change. Only God can change a person. The difficult skill is to learn when you've crossed into third space, pause and give that person to God. You cannot worry another person into change, and thinking about what they are thinking about cannot lead you to peace.



**The space between others** is the space that already exists before you walk into a room or the space that changes when another enters the room. Most of us infect every space we enter, so learning to be aware of the existing space and how a person changes it can be powerful.



**Learn to bring these anxieties into the presence of God.**

5. Take a moment to pause, breathe, and pay attention to what is going on inside you when you think of these relationships. Name it to God, casting your burdens, anxieties, and concerns on Jesus, knowing that He cares for you.

6. As you learn to give your anxieties to Jesus, how might He call you to be a non-anxious presence in these relationships? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow as a peaceful and healing presence in your relationships.

"You can be a connected presence. Curious. Non-reactive. Keeping anxiety from spreading to others, sifting assumptions and false expectations. Connecting to self, others and God. This is difficult and life-giving work."

-Steve Cuss, *Capable Life*

# GETTING TO THE HEART OF CONFLICT

Conflict is a normal part of human relationships. Conflict can stem from all sorts of places including misunderstandings, competing values, differences of opinion, selfish desires, or sinful behaviors. Wherever conflict comes from, the way we navigate through the conflict can determine whether the relationships involved will move toward more pain and separation or toward healing and reconciliation.

Jesus has a lot to say about how we relate to one another, and He gives some clear instructions about how His followers are to address conflict. For followers of Jesus, it's vital to begin by inspecting what is going on inside of us before we move to address what might be going on inside of another (Matthew 7:1-5).

Use the series of prompts below to help identify what might be going on within your own heart in a particular area of conflict. Prayerfully reflecting on these insights can help you approach a challenging area of conflict in a way that reflects the love, truth, humility, and grace that Jesus has modeled and instructed for His disciples.

The following tool is an adaptation of "The Ladder of Integrity" from *Emotionally Healthy Relationships* by Pete and Geri Scazzero. Learn more at [emotionallyhealthy.org](http://emotionallyhealthy.org)

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## QUESTIONS TO GET TO THE HEART OF CONFLICT

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|-------------------------------------|--|
| What is going on inside of me (1-4) | 1. Right now the issue on my mind is... (I'm anxious in talking about this because...) |
|                                     | 2. My part in this is...   |
|                                     | 3. My need in this issue is...   |
|                                     | 4. My feelings about this are... (What my reaction tells me about me is...)            |
| What I value (5-8)                  | 5. This issue is important to me because I value...and I violate that value when...    |
|                                     | 6. I am willing/not willing to...  |
|                                     | 7. One thing I could do to improve the situation is...                                 |
|                                     | 8. The most important thing I want you to know is...                                   |
| What I hope (9-10)                  | 9. I think my honest sharing will benefit our relationship by...                       |
|                                     | 10. I hope and look forward to...  |