10 ways to start living as a family with grace right now!

Grace-filled families sound like a good idea. If you're like me, you start envisioning a home that is serene and happy where everyone gets along. Something yummy is baking in the oven, children are laughing quietly as they play together and parents are able to finish conversations without getting interrupted.

But, that's not how life tends to work. Life tends to be messy with one kid stressing over homework, another one singing as loudly as possible, frozen pizza thrown into the oven and parents exhausted from work trying to manage it all and stay sane. That's my reality much of the time, and I'm guessing it's yours, too. Life is hectic, busy and all too often overwhelming. Our fuses get short and we don't act with the grace and kindness we most want to extend to those we love so completely.

However, our homes and hearts can be filled with grace in the midst of chaos. In fact, grace is needed most in the midst of chaos. If everything was perfect, nobody would need grace! Along the way of battling to keep grace, love and faith more prevalent in my home than short words, irritation and discouragement, I've learned a few ways that help us life in grace more easily. These are my favorite 10 ways to start living with grace right now. Join me on the journey!

1. Pray for love and grace.
We think to pray for so many things. We pray for our children and our spouses. We pray for their safety and health. We pray for their needs. But we forget to pray for things like being filled with more love and grace. I love using a prayer app to help keep me on track for specific prayer requests. It's basically a modern prayer journal. Included in that app is one of my favorite prayers for parents. I've made it into a nifty printable that you can find here (http://familieswithgrace.com/2018/09/26/a-parents-prayer-free-printable/).

2. Listen to Christian music.
This has helped me so many times. It's hard to be cranky with my kids when I'm humming along to a song about how much God loves us. And it has a couple of residual effects. It helps my kids learn about and focus on God, too. Just recently, my son came running out of school singing Rend Collective's "Counting Every Blessing." He continued singing as he played on the playground. That's the other effect: the music gets stuck in your head so even when you're not listening to it, it's still there reminding you of God, His love and His desires for you.

3. Speak kindly to each other.
My husband and I learned early on in our marriage to talk kindly to each other. We learned to avoid being passive aggressive. We continue to say things like "Please" and "Thank you." We ask each other for help instead of nagging and grousing. We have been the same way with our children. I can't even begin to tell you how important this one is. If you wouldn't talk to a stranger in the same tone you're talking to your family, then it's not OK. Yes, spouses have disagreements and children need disciplined, but be careful of what you're saying and how you're saying it. And when you mess up, talk about it and apologize.

4. Guard your family's time and activities.
I'm an introvert who re-energizes with downtime and I also have chronic health issues that often keep me down, so I learned this lesson early and it's helped our family. I am very protective of my time and energy because it is so limited. I won't say yes to something that is going to hinder my relationship with my husband or children by taking me away from them too often or draining me too much. I am protective of my children's time as well, because it's important to me for them to have downtime where they just play however they want. For our family that means limiting extracurricular activities to one per child, especially during the school year. And right now those activities are only one evening a week. I also do my best to run errands during the day when I can so that after school time is just for homework, dinner and play time more often than not.

5. P… …wn electronics.
…me too long into having children to learn that I was more likely to snap at them when I was …scrolling through social media. I realized that knowing what people I hadn't seen in 15 years …r dinner definitely wasn't more important than my children. But there are other things I do …nd computer. Sometimes it's for work and sometimes it's just catching up with a friend or …hat's OK, but I have also learned to have off-limits times. A couple of years ago, I also …sidual effect as I realized my negative feelings about things on social media were …avior and attitudes for a while afterward. So I instated a policy of logging off when I read …ade me angry, sad or jealous for no reason. Sometimes I've been on social media less …especially if it was a day or time I was struggling for other reasons.

…hedule for bedtime and mealtimes.
…riented person. I know that isn't true for everyone, but having some non-negotiables …r family because tired or hungry people tend to be grumpy. That's especially true for …umpy tends to zap grace. So we maintain a schedule. We eat meals around the …he kids have the same bedtime whether it's a school night or weekend. (They do …p in the summertime.) We do make exceptions for special occasions, but not on a …!

…oying an activity together aren't grumpy with one another. The one thing our …ng is time with us. My husband and I love playing games and we've shared …nd games our whole family can enjoy. Check out five our favorites here …/2018/10/18/5-cheap-games-for-small-children-the-whole-family-will-love/)! …e at the theater or watch something together at home. Lately, since our son …at together around the table coloring pictures. While we do big things …children's museum, it's the regular sort of small things we do that help our …

…with communication. When I'm struggling with something, I can't just …ll read my mind and know what's going on. I have to tell them. I've said …minutes to sit here and read. You need to find something else to do." I …being passive aggressive or angry with him. Communicating well …grace and love than irritation and grumpiness.

…try to make sure to praise them for it just like I would discipline if …aving fun at a play date with a friend but are agreeable when it's …them that I noticed their good behavior. If I see my son carrying …sn't have to, I make sure to commend him. If I see my daughter …r little brother spilled, I make sure to let her know how much I …nd. When he takes care of a computer problem I'm having, I …m.

…rself and your family.
…ort because you're human. Your family will be the same …d will get grumpy. You'll snap at all of them out of …e sure you're truly doing the best you can. Learn from your …m again, but don't keep beating yourself up!

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Tip Sheet for Families