

# **Creating Family Freedom: Table of Contents and Chapter One**

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## **1.1 GETTING STARTED**

Living in a family can be sometimes wonderful and sometimes terrible. We have experienced both, and you probably have too. If we all get along, like each other, have fun together, and leave for work or school in the morning feeling good, our family can be a great resource. But when people are mad at home, family members don't feel cared about, and challenges build up, we may leave home in the morning feeling like there's a black hole inside. Then our family becomes a burden that threatens to sink us. That's the bad news. The good news is we can do something to make things better. That's what this book is about. It provides a map for family members to follow to start overcoming conflicts, understanding and caring about each other more, and creating a home providing strengths rather than challenges.

What is a family? The dictionary definition says "the collective body of persons who live in one house." But that doesn't tell the whole story. Modern families come in all shapes and sizes. "Family" may include neighbors or relatives, one or more parenting adults, and one or more children living together. Adults providing parenting may be parents, grandparents, foster parents, Uncles or Aunts, or guardians. When we use the terms "Parents" or "Parenting" in this workbook, we mean everyone who has responsibility for raising children or teenagers. We use the words "son or daughter, children and teenagers" to include biological children, adopted children, foster children, or grandchildren who are in school but still living with adults.

### **Who this Workbook is For**

This workbook is for "families" facing challenges, particularly families that have middle and high school age children, whose family members decide to attend this class to make things better. The workbook can be used as a class by members of one family, or by members of several families who meet together. A trained Family Coach guides you through the workbook. It covers important principles about families, and gives common sense guidance that has been helpful to us through the years as we worked to make things better in our own families. We tell you about challenges other families have faced and overcome, and we give you a series of assignments to complete as you sort things out in your family.

### **Class Privacy**

Privacy is an important dimension of the class. Class privacy doesn't apply to situations involving concern about suicide, threats to harm others, child abuse, or doing things that endanger you or others. In these situations, your Family Coach will communicate with appropriate authorities. He or she won't discuss private details of your life. If you're in class with members of other families, privacy in the class

includes respecting the privacy of other participants. This can be summed up with the phrase “When you leave, don’t repeat whom you see here or what you hear here.” We ask each of you to commit to keep private the information shared by others in the class.

## **Common Family Challenges**

Every family today faces challenges related to the world we live in. Common challenges include financial insecurity in changing economic times, with many people losing jobs, family conflict, relationship challenges and divorce, health or mental health challenges, drug or alcohol use by a parent or child in the family, children living in step-families and foster families, death of a family member, or arrest and imprisonment of a parent or child. Every family will face some of these challenges sooner or later.

We don’t know the details of your family situation, so you have to take what makes sense to you and put it to work. One thing we can say for sure is if you do your best, you can make things better in your family, no matter what anyone else in the family does. We’ll explain this more later. No matter how troubled things are today, keep trying and don’t give up. Millions of families throughout history have made it through hardships of every variety. You can too.

### ***Class Introductions***

**Introduce yourself and tell others why you are taking this class, how you feel about being here, and what you’d like to get out of the class.**

## **Steps to Creating Family Freedom**

You don’t have to wait until family challenges become severe to start the journey to family freedom. The sooner you do something about family troubles, the better. No matter how difficult things have become, the important thing is deciding you want to change things for the better. It all comes down to the choices you make today. We suggest new thinking and behavior options for you to consider as you go through the class. The class offers you:

1. A chance to look at how you want things to be for your family.
2. Practical exercises to assess your family challenges and become clear on what everyone needs.
3. Guidelines for reducing family conflict and arriving at fair solutions.
4. Steps to change your choices and behavior to make things better.
5. Practice applying positive family communication and behavior.

The workbook and class are organized into the four steps shown in the chart below. You and your family can work through all 25 class exercises in 15-20 class meetings, depending upon how long you meet each week, the time you take for each exercise, and the number of families in your class. Sometimes your Family Coach may suggest that you repeat an exercise or chapter you have already completed to get a deeper understanding. That's perfectly OK—most of us don't completely master new ideas the first time we hear them. Some family members will also be working through other SRT™ workbooks at the same time in parent support classes, or in classes at school. Here are the four steps this class covers.

<b>STEPS TO CREATING FAMILY FREEDOM</b>	
<b>1.</b>	<b>CREATE THE FOUNDATION FOR FAMILY CHANGE</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>TAKE STOCK IN YOUR FAMILY</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>DEVELOP A FAMILY AGREEMENT</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>CARRY OUT YOUR FAMILY AGREEMENT</b>

### ***The Williams Family Crisis***

*Things had gone steadily downhill for the Williams family over the past year. Jason, the father, was laid off from his manufacturing job in April when the company moved the manufacturing plant to Mexico. His unemployment insurance had run out, but Jason hadn't been able to find a new position paying enough to support the family. He was working part time now in a convenience store but was feeling hopeless about being able to make a living. Jason drank beer all day on the days he wasn't working.*

*Jean, the mother, continued her nursing assistant job at the hospital, but the family wasn't making enough money to make ends meet. They were charging expenses on their credit card and wondering if they would go bankrupt. Jason and Jean were worried and stressed. Their arguments were destructive, with shouting, name calling and blaming. Their son Matt, in high school, didn't like to be at home because the atmosphere was so tense. He spent time after school at a friend's house, and often came home stoned. Sarah, in middle school, tried to intervene in her parent's fights, but couldn't get them to stop arguing. Sarah felt trapped at home and had become*

*depressed and hopeless because she was very sensitive to her parent conflicts.*

*Family challenges reached a peak when Jason was arrested for drunk driving while going to the store to buy beer. After going to court, he faced a big fine, alcohol classes and probation. Jean was furious and talked about filing for divorce, but even that would cost money the family didn't have. A counselor told Jason he needed to stop drinking completely. He decided to give it a try. Jason's decision encouraged Jean. The couple decided they had to cash in what was left of their retirement savings, and Jason started classes to become a medical transcriber. The parents asked their priest to help them sort out things with Matt and Sarah. The family met four times with Father Norman at their home.*

*At first Matt and Sarah were really angry and didn't want to participate in family meetings. But, when they got the chance to tell their parents what it the last year had been like for them, the tension in the family began to ease a little. Jason and Jean apologized to Matt and Sarah for their destructive fighting. Sarah could accept their apology, but she couldn't pull out of the depression that developed over the past year. Her parents tried to support her, but after a couple of weeks realized Sarah needed more help. Her teachers at school had noticed that Sarah didn't seem enthusiastic the way she was before. She was referred to a class at school for kids who were facing challenges in their lives. This helped Sarah not feel alone with what was happening in her family. Later, her family doctor put Sarah on anti-depressant medication for two months. This helped Sarah feel better.*

*Matt was still mad at his parents and wasn't ready to forgive them. His parents let him know he had a right to his feelings. They told Matt they wanted him to stop smoking marijuana or get counseling if he needed it. Matt initially told them to "go to h---!" After a few days of thinking about it and a lot of tension at home, Matt accepted that stopping pot might be a good idea. He knew his grades had dropped from Bs to Ds over the last few months and he was having a hard time concentrating. Matt finally said he thought he could stop smoking on his own. The family was now moving forward in rebuilding their lives after a very long year.*

***Your Perspective on the Williams Family***

Which member of the Williams family do you most relate to? Write below why you identify with this person. What you think they were feeling as the family went through this challenging time?

**Discuss your thoughts on the Williams family with the class.**