



TOGETHER

a journal for mom & me

A Guided Experience
Connecting Moms and Kids
to God and Each Other

Kara-Kae James

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DAVID  COOK™
transforming lives together

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Dear Mom,

It's so easy for us to walk into parenting knowing exactly what we think we will and will not do. We typically take our own experiences and create in our minds the perfect-parent scenario, and that's exactly what we set out to achieve. Then we actually begin raising children and realize every child is completely different and nothing like what we expected. Even if a child is a "textbook" case of a healthy child, there's always something along the way that throws us and takes us back to step one: having no idea what we're doing.

You wear many hats as a parent, and in each stage of parenting a different hat comes into play. When your children are young, you are the caretaker. This exhausting, physically draining stage is filled with constant diapers, sippy-cup refills, Cheerios on the floor, and crayon masterpieces on your walls. It's a beautiful and trying time. Then one day that wall-drawing, Cheerio-spilling tiny person wakes up and you realize you have a fourth grader with an attitude and a mind of her own. Suddenly you're wishing for the days of scrubbing crayon off the walls, wiping dirty faces, and kissing scraped knees.

This is such an important season as you put on a new hat and your child ventures into the world of long division, friendships, hurt feelings, big emotions, and—dare we say it—the opposite sex. (Bring back the Cheerios, right?) As you step out of the season of doing it all and become a little more hands-off, you don't want to lose your child. You want to stay connected to him emotionally so he knows you are a safe space, a place to come to talk through the hard times, celebrate the good times, and grow together through it all.

You may be refusing to admit what stage comes next. Many times, children enter their teen years and build up walls against their parents. It's a basic human instinct to turn away from our caretakers and want to venture out on our own. During the years before your kids become teenagers, building trust and an environment for open communication is incredibly valuable. Instead of approaching your child's teen years with fingers crossed that it will go well, why not take intentional steps early on to open doors to a better future?

My dream for this book is that you would experience deeper connection with God, with yourself, and with your child. This is more than just a journal; this is a journey. A journey takes time; it takes work. Put in the work and you will see beautiful rewards!



How to Use This Journal

This journal is a tool to help build an unshakable foundation so you can enter the teen years together without fear or barriers. While it is geared for ages 8–12, you could use the practices cultivated here well into those teen years! We want to see communication and trust become a healthy foundation on which every mom can build a relationship with her child.

Openness with your children is so important, and learning some foundational aspects of how to communicate will help us all be more open and loving toward one another. Let's look at a few key components of communication to think about working on as we open this book.

Create spaces of open communication. Think about times you've had some really great conversations with your kids. We often think we can only have really meaningful conversations if we are sitting face to face, with no distractions, but sometimes that can make a child close down instead of open up. Creating open and fluid conversation in daily routines can help make you and your children feel comfortable talking together in your everyday space.

Be relatable. Your kids want to know that you are a human being, just like them. If they see you as a stark authority figure with no backstory, they won't see the point in sharing their own stories. Relate with them and share with them as you feel appropriate. Letting your kids see that you are a person with a story will help build trust in your relationship.

Ask specific questions. Help children build their stories. When they come home from school telling you about X, Y, and Z, ask questions about A, B, and C. This not only shows your interest in their story, but helps them grow emotionally, improve their communication skills, and better understand the story they are telling. Learning to be storytellers in whatever capacity fits their personality helps them become more open communicators. Asking specific questions also shows your interest in their story and encourages them to take their conversation with you to the next level. You can move beyond the small talk of simply what happened at school that day to really sharing in each other's lives.

Pay attention to details. Kids may run for the hills if you start asking them how something made them *feel*, but if you listen well to the details in their stories, you will gain a better understanding of what is really happening inside your children. For example, if your child says, "Math is always terrible," and then goes on to talk about two kids who had a fight during the class, you may want to follow up with, "Are kids like that why math class is terrible for you, or is it just that you are bored?" The child's answer can then lead you into deeper parts of the story. Take time

to listen, pay close attention, and ask honest questions about things that make you curious, and you'll avoid sounding like you are grilling your child.

Remember that your story matters too. Most of us make the mistake of always asking the basics, “How was school?” and your children fall into always giving the same answers, like robots. Tell your story too, inviting them to ask questions and relate how their own experiences are different from or similar to yours. Share about a hard thing at work that day and see what they follow up with. Tell about a deadline to see what it triggers with them. Think about it: Why would they want to open up to you if you aren't opening up to them?

The world tells us that we can't have a good relationship with our teenagers. We are taught that we are just expected to have hard years with them, but we want to break down those stereotypes. It's our desire to build strong relationships and communication during the early years with our children so by the time they enter the teen years, we've already built a foundation to grow on.

Share in this journal with an open heart and an open mind, and your child will follow. Be creative with your communication, and then step outside this book to build an even deeper foundation. We are praying for your journey as you take steps toward more intimate communication with your children!

You will find three main sections in the book, each divided up into categories of their own. Get to know these categories, and then find a pattern that works for you and your child. Maybe you homeschool and can implement this book into your morning routine. Or maybe you are in an extremely busy season of life and can only find time to do it on Saturday afternoons. There's no pressure or expectation here—you do you!

Below you will find a breakdown of each section so you can better understand how to navigate this journey to benefit you and your child.

JUST FOR US

This is where things get really fun. This is the heart and soul of the book, where we really connect with our kids and spend quality time TOGETHER—because that’s what it’s all about after all, right? In this section, you will find four categories:

TALK Together

Fun and creative guided-conversation prompts will help you and your child journal and/or talk back and forth with each other. Stretch your imagination and share exciting stories. Be sure to use the blank pages provided to create your own prompts!

Have FUN Together

Games, silly questions, and other fun interactive experiences will give you a chance to laugh and play together. This is a place for moms to be kids again and kids to enjoy their moms!

Go DEEP Together

Write out prayers for each other. Read, interpret, and apply Scripture together. These pages offer a safe space to ask for prayer or help.

CREATE Together

Get your creative juices flowing! From coloring pages to recipes and more, these creative inspirations will give you opportunities to connect with each other in new and fresh ways.

JUST FOR KIDS

Freedom for children to explore their faith, read Scripture, journal, and pray for their family can all be found in the Just for Kids section. Sons and daughters of all ages need to know they are important and seen by God and by their moms, and these pages will help them do that. Every kid will also be given the opportunity to face hard situations with Scripture and prayer.

Encourage your child to own her section and spend time in it, but be available to guide as needed. Kids can also use this space to track memories and special things happening in their lives.

JUST FOR MOMS

For Mom only—find prayer prompts, Scripture, and more in these pages. Reflect on who God made you to be as a mom, and focus on praying for your child. There's also a place to track memories and moments of gratitude to record this special season with your child. Feel free to clip this section out to keep it just for you ... for now. Later, this will be a meaningful keepsake for your child—allowing him to read your words and know how loved he was, and still is!

Fun Tip

We encourage you to create a “mailbox” space in your home to keep the journal so you can pass it back and forth with your child easily and keep it safe, undamaged by daily life. This journal will be a great keepsake for parents and children to remember the childhood years—together!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What if I have multiple children?

If you have more than one child, we recommend going through the journal with one child at a time. An idea for your family could be to choose a specific age (age 10, for example) and go through the journal with your kids when they reach that age. This will give you dedicated time to walk through it with each of them.

You will want to get a journal for each child so they may make it their own and have it as a keepsake. However, while you'll want to use the journal as a tool to connect with one child at a time, you can use some of the activities or craft suggestions to involve other children, if that works for your family.

Should I use it daily?

It's really up to you and what fits your schedule. You could plan to use it daily, or during a season. If you have more time in the summer when your kids are out of school, maybe that's the best time to dig into it. If you homeschool, maybe you can implement it into your daily work. Find what works for you; there's no set of rules to follow!

How long will it take us to complete the journal?

That's the beauty of this journal experience—it will be different for everyone. There are enough activities within the journal for you and your child to fill up at least three months of time together, if you just do one activity each day or so (summer vacation, anyone?). But we recommend experimenting to find a pace that works best for you and your child.

What's the best place to start?

Right here is the best place to start! The Just for Us section is the bulk of the journal, and we recommend just starting on the first page and doing at least one of each of the four activity categories to give you an idea of what works for you. Be sure to take a look through the entire journal experience together so your child knows about the section especially for her and that there are great things to fill out throughout her section.

“Two people are better off than one,
for they can help each other succeed....

A person standing alone can be
attacked and defeated, but two can
stand back-to-back and conquer.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12 NLT