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a division of Baker Publishing Group Grand Rapids, Michigan © 2019 by Tim Shoemaker

Published by Revell a division of Baker Publishing Group PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287 www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Shoemaker, Tim, author.

Title: The very best, hands-on, kinda dangerous family devotions: 52 activities

your kids will never forget / Tim Shoemaker.

Description: Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2019. Identifiers: LCCN 2018045152 | ISBN 9780800735555 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Christian education—Home training. | Christian education of

children. | Object-teaching. | Families—Religious life. Classification: LCC BV1590 .S56 2019 | DDC 249—dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018045152

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Take a Stab at Kindness

THEME: Talking kindly to and about others

THINGS YOU'LL NEED
Gallon-size plastic food storage bag
Small rocks, marbles, or something similar—enough to fill about half of the plastic storage bag. <i>Important</i> : you're going to poke holes in the bag, and you don't want any of the rocks or marbles to slip out. So be careful not to use something too small. I used smooth river rock that I picked up at a pet store (for aquariums). Being a little bigger, the stones worked especially well.
One or two small, sharp objects with which to puncture the bag. I find a nail or scratch awl works best. The hole is big enough to let water out of the bag without the marbles or rocks slipping out.
Pitcher of water
Box of standard adhesive bandages
Towels for cleanup

Advance Prep

This lesson is really easy, but you'll want to test it out ahead of time.

- Fill the storage bag about half full of rocks.
- Poke some holes in sides and bottom of the plastic bag with the nail or scratch awl. Plenty of holes is best—but not so many that you lose any of the rocks inside the bag.
- Now grab a full pitcher of water and pour it into the bag. A second person is advisable here. One holds the bag, the other pours. The bag should spout fountains of water all over the place. Perfect.

Running the Activity

Carefully pick the spot where you intend to do this with the kids. If all goes well, you'll have a bit of a flood. Keep the pitcher of water out of sight.

Invite the kids to take turns using the nail or awl to poke holes in the bag of rocks. Remember—take the bag back before any of its contents actually drop out of the bag.

Now hold the bag up and ask the kids some questions.

- It felt kind of good to stab the bag like that, didn't it?
- Even with all that stabbing, how many rocks did we lose? None, right? The bag is still holding all the rocks just fine, right?

Let's see what kind of shape this bag is *really* in. I'd like one of you to hold the bag open with both hands. (Once they do, pour water in from the pitcher. If you want to be kind, have them stand. If not, have them sit and hold the bag over their lap while you pour. Water will spout all over, so you may want to have a bucket nearby to drop the bag of rocks into.) Be sure to have a towel handy.

Okay, so it didn't *look* like we did all that much damage at first, but in reality, we made a pretty good mess of the bag, didn't we?

Teaching the Lesson

- Can any of you share a time you really were hurt by something somebody said to or about you? It could have been me, a friend, a coach, a teacher, or maybe some kid who you can't stand. How did you feel?
- Did you show how much it affected you, or did you try to cover it up by ignoring the comment or laughing it off?
- So, in reality, even though we may not act like the comments had a lasting effect, they did. Do I have that right?

Sometimes we're like this bag of rocks. We look like we're holding it all together, but in reality, we're full of holes. The hurtful things people say cause damage.

- Is it possible that we do the same things to others?
- Is it possible that we make hurtful, unkind comments to others, and they cover it up with a laugh or by seeming to ignore it just so we don't know how much our comment hurt them?

Why do we say things that hurt others? Sure, sometimes we don't realize when we say something unkind, but other times we *want* to hurt that person. Or we want to make ourselves look better by putting someone else down. Sometimes we say something nasty to pay them back for something they said or did to us. Listen to this yerse.

If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. (James 1:26 NLT)

What does this verse say about your Christianity if you're careless with how you talk? Where do you find it particularly hard to watch what you say?

Listen to another verse.

Watch your tongue and keep your mouth shut, and you will stay out of trouble. (Prov. 21:23 NLT)

All right, let's try something. Take this box of bandages and patch up the holes. (Give them a chance to work at this.)

Even if you put a bandage over every one of these holes, the bag will likely still leak—and it will look like a mess.

It's the same with trying to patch up the damage we do when we say something mean to someone else. It's very, very hard to fix the wounds we inflict with our tongues.

Kids, we've all experienced the pain or embarrassment of something said to us that was unkind, rude, or insensitive. Let's make sure *we* aren't doing the same to others.

- As Christians, the things we say and do should be kind.
- When we're kind with the things we say, we keep ourselves from trouble.

Let's take a look at a great verse in Proverbs.

Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing. (12:18 NLT)

According to this verse, the person who watches what they say is *wise*, and the things they say actually *help* other people. Their words encourage others.

- Does that sound like the kind of people we want to be, with God's help?
- How can we do that at home? With friends? At school? At church?

Summing It Up

Let me read you a verse from Ephesians.

Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. (4:29 NLT)

Wouldn't that be a great thing, to be known as one who encourages and helps others rather than one who carelessly hurts people by the things they say?

I'd like each of you to take one of these rocks. Stick it in your backpack, a drawer, or your pocket. And every time you see it, remember to watch what you say. *The words of the wise bring healing*.