



## Preparing Children for Highly Relational Lives

By Ken Sande | [www.rw360.org](http://www.rw360.org)

FREE DOWNLOAD

## Relationships Are More Challenging than Algebra

When Corlette and I were raising and educating our children, we struggled far more with relational challenges than we did with academic content. Put sinful people together in the same home and the relational tensions will easily eclipse educational issues.



Our background in conflict resolution was helpful (both Corlette and I have written books on peacemaking), but we realized it would be far better to *prevent* conflict than it would be to spend hours *resolving* it. So we started searching for resources that would help our entire family develop relational skills that would enable us to “get upstream of conflict.”

## Emotional Intelligence Provides Valuable Insights

During our search, we came across several books on “emotional intelligence,” also known as “EI” or “EQ” (for emotional quotient). EI is typically defined as the ability to identify, assess and manage the emotions of oneself, of others and of groups.

This concept originated in psychology circles in 1920 but did not gain wide attention until Daniel Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence*, made the New York Times Best Seller List in 1995. Goleman describes EI as being made up of four core skills: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and relationship-management.



Thousands of studies have shown that improving EI yields a wide variety of benefits in a work setting, including increased productivity and team cohesiveness, better balance between work and family life, less conflict, reduced staff turnover, higher customer satisfaction and increased impact and profitability.

As a result, EI is now being taught in multinational corporations, medical and business schools, grade schools (as “social/emotional learning”), universities, seminaries, law enforcement and military academies, and even on NFL sports teams (see [100+ sample articles](#)).

None of the top selling books on EI are written from a Christian perspective. Even so, through [general revelation and common grace](#), God has given many of these authors helpful insights into the neurology and hormonology that drive human emotions and

relationships. As a result, I've found these books to provide valuable insights that I've applied at home, as a professional mediator and as a Certified EI Instructor.

## The Dark Side of EI

Unfortunately, EI has some major deficiencies. The most popular books and courses on EI ignore God's existence as well as the reality of sin and the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. As a result, these resources lack an objective moral compass. The primary motivation for improving EI is usually personal advancement. And apart from the transforming power of the gospel, change depends entirely on human effort.

Moreover, an increasing number of articles are highlighting "[the dark side of EI](#)," namely, that unprincipled people with exceptional emotional intelligence often use those skills to manipulate others for their own advantage.

## Relational Wisdom Surpasses Emotional Intelligence

Believing that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (Prov. 9:10), Corlette and I decided to develop a God-centered, biblically-grounded and gospel-driven form of emotional intelligence. We call it "relational wisdom" or "RW" for short. This discipleship paradigm captures all of the proven benefits of traditional EI while addressing its typical deficiencies.

RW paradigm is built around two organizing principles. First, the Bible teaches that relationships are inherently **three-dimensional**: we are designed to be in constant relationship with God, self and others (see Matt. 22:37-39; Eph. 4:30-32).

Second, healthy relationships involve **two essential dynamics: awareness** (what do I know about God, myself and others) and **engagement** (how will I act toward God, myself and others). Jesus displayed these dynamics constantly in his relationships, both with those who loved him and those who hated him (see Matt. 12:15; 16:8; 26:10).

These organizing principles give rise to a set of six key relational skills or disciplines that are [commended throughout Scripture](#): **God-awareness** (remembering), **God-engagement** (faithfulness), **self-awareness** (humility), **self-engagement** (discipline), **other-awareness** (compassion) and **other-engagement** (service).

These skills have the potential to impact every area of life. In addition to improving workplace performance and advancement, they can enhance worship, marital intimacy and church unity. RW can also help us to bring the gospel to our children instead of condemnation (see [Penetrating Barriers](#)) and reduce the tensions inherent to educating our children (see [My Wife's Punch List Was Driving Our Son Crazy](#)).



## Reducing Parental Guilt and Regrets

Corlette and I found that one of the greatest benefits of developing better relational wisdom was that it helped us to avoid being “hijacked” by our emotions when our children aggravated us and we were tempted to say things we would later regret (see [Four Ways to Defeat Hijacking](#)). RW also improved our ability to ask engaging questions instead of lecturing our children (see [Spanglish](#)) and to respond with compassion instead of judgment when they made foolish choices (see [The Compassionate Boxer](#)).

These same skills are now enabling us to develop close relationships with our grandchildren (see [Clean Me, Papa!](#)).

## Raising Empathetic Children Who Are Ready for the Workforce

One of our greatest joys today is seeing how our children are applying the principles of relational wisdom in their own lives (see [A Wise Son Makes a Glad Father](#)) and passing them on as they seek to develop both affective and cognitive empathy in their own children (see [Raising Empathetic Children](#)).

These skills are also valuable as our children enter the workforce, compete for jobs and learn how to work with other people. Why? Because modern corporations have learned that the value of an employee depends on both technical (hard) skills and relational (soft) skills.

In fact, every employee's soft skills have the power to magnify—or diminish—the value of not only their own hard skills but also those of the people with whom they are working.



For example, if one member of a team is arrogant, insensitive, or insecure, and tends to discount or criticize others' accomplishments or ideas, the cohesiveness and creativity of an entire team can be undermined ( $10 \times 0 = 0$ ).

Corporations are increasingly aware of this dynamic and are putting a higher value on soft skills like emotional intelligence. This is why I constantly tell young adults, “Earn good grades, because they will get you the job interview. But also [develop good relational skills, because they will get you the job](#) ... and the promotions ... and the higher salary.”

## Acrostics Make It Easy to Learn and Practice RW

Although relational wisdom involves complex theological and neurological concepts, the basic principles are so simple that a young child can learn and apply them. One of the best ways to start imprinting these concepts at an early age is to use these simple acrostics.

### PRACTICE THE SOG PLAN

- **Self-aware:** How am I feeling and acting?
- **Other-aware:** How are others feeling? How am I affecting them?
- **God-aware:** What is God up to?

### FOLLOW A TRUSTWORTHY GPS (GOD POSITIONING SYSTEM)

- **Glorify** God (Trust, obey, worship)
- **Pursue** God (Seek him earnestly)
- **Serve** God (Do what pleases him)

### READ Yourself Accurately

- **Recognize** your emotions
- **Evaluate** their sources
- **Anticipate** consequences of following emotions
- **Direct** them on a constructive course

### SERVE EVERY PERSON YOU MEET

- **Smile** (Home, workplace, store, telephone)
- **Explore and Empathize** (Show interest and compassion)
- **Reconcile** (Be a peacemaker)
- **Value** (Express appreciation and respect)
- **Encourage** (Give heart, inspire, put wind under their wings)

## Preparing Our Children for Life

If we educate our children to obtain high SAT and ACT scores but fail to equip them with godly relational skills, we are not preparing them to thrive in their friendships, marriages, jobs or in their witness for Christ.

If you'd like to equip the children in your life with both academic and relational skills, there are three ways you can begin doing so today.

**First, print copies of the articles listed above and discuss them as a family or ministry team** over the next few weeks, sharing ideas and setting goals on how you can apply these principles in your home, church or ministry.

**Second, subscribe to our weekly RW Blog ([details here](#))** and use the teachings and video clips to trigger mealtime discussions and classroom assignments throughout the year.

**Third, download the RW360 Smartphone App for yourself and your older children ([details here](#))** so you can easily review and share these concepts as you interact with one another and other people in daily life.

**Fourth, enroll your entire family or ministry team in our interactive online course ([details here](#)).** If you'd like to do this training as a family, you may all use a special [50% scholarship](#). As indicated in these [testimonies from eight children in a single family](#), children as young as eight years of age can understand and apply biblical principles for healthy relationships. A certificate of completion can enhance their resumes!



These investments in relational training could make your school year far more enjoyable and productive ... and set your children up for happy marriages, rewarding careers, and a compelling testimony about the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

– Ken Sande

### Reflection Questions:

- What are young people learning from entertainment channels and social media about how to build and preserve relationships?
- How is this influence affecting young people's ability to enjoy enduring relationships and have an inviting witness for Christ?
- How effectively is the modern church teaching practical relational skills to young Christians?
- What are some of the relational skills you'd like to see the young people in your life develop more fully? How would their lives be different if they learn how to live out God's teachings on relationships?
- Has God placed you in a position to promote or teach principles of relational wisdom to any children in your family, church or community? If so, make this one of your highest priorities in the coming months!

Permission to distribute: Please feel free to download, print, or electronically share this message in its entirety for non-commercial purposes with as many people as you like.

To receive future blog posts like this, subscribe at [www.rw360.org/subscribe/](http://www.rw360.org/subscribe/)