

THRIVING
VALUES™



HOW TO TEACH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT MARRIAGE

Creative and practical ideas

JEFF JOHNSTON

Teach your toddlers
and preschoolers

Teach younger
elementary children

Teach older
elementary children

Teach children in middle
school and beyond

A final note to parents

More trusted Focus on
the Family resources

3

5

7

9

13

14



We all want to impart biblical values to our children, values that will help them thrive and flourish in the world.

Our companion resource, **“Raising Children Who Honor Marriage,”** looks at God’s design for marriage; explains why marriage matters for kids, adults and society; and offers practical ideas for modeling a healthy marriage to your children. This Thriving Values™ resource helps you to instill **courage** and **boldness** into your children as they face these issues in our culture.

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*God designed marriage for our benefit, and marriage between a husband and wife reflects God’s heart; a heart for relationship, unity, love, children, family, commitment and trust. **These are all good things that come from healthy marriages, setting a foundation for a thriving society.***

While there are numerous resources available to help parents talk to their children about the changes in their bodies as they go through puberty, and about sex and abstinence until marriage, there are few for teaching children about marriage. **Yet marriage is the big picture, and sex is only one part of that picture.**

This resource includes **practical suggestions for imparting your values and equipping your kids to understand what marriage is and why it is so important:** from toddlers and preschoolers to younger elementary and from older elementary to middle school and beyond. We hope these suggestions will inspire your own creativity, as you and your family learn and grow in your understanding of and respect for marriage.

TEACH YOUR TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS



Young children are constantly exploring, watching and learning, and much of what they learn about marriage comes from watching and interacting with the two most important people in their lives: Mom and Dad. **Even at this young age, children can understand and learn about marriage, building a solid foundation for later life.**

TALK TOGETHER

Here are some concepts toddlers and preschoolers can begin to understand:

- *“God is so wise! He wants all children to be safe and secure. That’s why He created marriage between a man and woman—a mommy and daddy—so children are loved and cared for.”*
- *“Dads and moms look and act differently; yet both give children what they need. They help kids grow in different ways.”*
- *“What are some ways Mom and Dad are similar? In what ways are Mommy and Daddy different?”*

- *“Just like dads and moms, boys and girls are different. Both are special, both are good, and both are made to reflect God’s image.”*

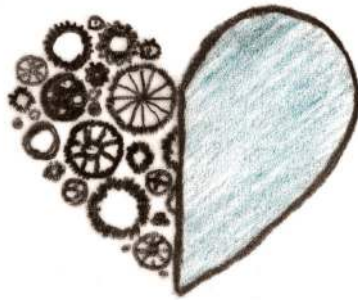
Your family may know someone without a mom and/or dad. You can reassure your children:

- *“I love you and I love Mommy (or Daddy). With God’s help, I will stay with you both.”*
- *“Sometimes bad things happen, or things can go wrong in families. It’s sad that your friend lost a parent. But God is good and kind and has a special love for children without a mom or a dad.”*

READ BIBLE STORIES

Most families have at least one Bible story book for kids. In addition, your church or local library will most likely have some to borrow. From Genesis through Revelation, the Bible shows marriage as very good. These are some stories to highlight and talk about: Creation and the first marriage—between Adam and Eve; Abraham finding a wife for Isaac; Ruth and Boaz; Jesus and the wedding at Cana.

Taking the Creation story as an example, here are some things you might say:



- *“God made everything. He made the earth, sun and moon. He made the land, the oceans and the sky. He made all the plants—trees and grass and flowers. He made fish and birds and animals. He made the animals as male and female so they could have baby animals.”*
- *“Then God made humans; He made a man and placed him in a garden. But the man, Adam, was alone, and that was not good. So God made the perfect partner—a woman, Eve. God made Eve and brought her to Adam so they could be married.”*
- *“Adam and Eve were the first husband and wife. This was the very first wedding. Now Adam didn’t have to be alone or lonely, and he and Eve could start a family. God said all this was ‘very good!’”*

BLESS YOUR CHILDREN

Parents, we highly recommend praying a blessing—out loud—over your sons and daughters. They need to hear that they have value and worth, and that they are made in God’s image. You can bless their growing relationship with God and their growing sense of identity, that they will be strong, confident and secure. Here are just a few examples to help you get started.

Pray A Blessing Over Boys:

- *“Little one—you are made in God’s image and likeness, as a boy. We bless you to grow into a healthy sense of masculinity, knowing God and reflecting His strength, love, power and goodness.”*
- *“My son—I pray in Jesus’ name that you would grow to be a thoughtful, adventurous, wise, loving man who experiences God’s grace, hears His voice and learns to follow Christ in all things.”*

Pray A Blessing Over Girls:

- *“My precious daughter—I pray you would be wrapped in our love and know the depth of God’s love and care for you. May you grow to understand Christ’s care for you as a daughter of the King, made in His image.”*
- *“My sweet girl—we bless you to know you are beloved of God. We pray you would embrace your wonderful femininity, knowing and reflecting God’s nurture, compassion and protection. We pray you would rest securely in God’s love and peace.”*

RESOURCES

- **The Blessing: Giving the Gift of Unconditional Love and Acceptance¹**, by John Trent, Ph.D. and Gary Smalley
- Our Focus on the Family online store has many children's Bibles and story books available: Store.FocusOnTheFamily.com.

TEACH YOUNGER ELEMENTARY CHILDREN

TALK TOGETHER



As your children grow and mature, continue to talk about and build on the basic ideas discussed earlier. Here are a few additional concepts to introduce and discuss:

- *"When we follow Jesus, we become God's sons and daughters. God is the perfect father."*
- *"Just as children run to their father, we can run to God when we need help. We can also respond in thankfulness for good things He gives us."*

- *"We are made in God's image and likeness; He created men and women, boys and girls to reflect Him in different ways."*
- *"God loves children who don't have a mom and a dad. When we help these children, we are doing something God loves."*

OBJECT LESSON

Look at a mirror with your child. Ask, "Is that you in the mirror? Or is that a reflection of you?" Explain that in the same way a mirror reflects an image, God designed us to reflect His image. You can choose to be like a mirror, showing others what God is like: good, loving, honest, generous, patient and forgiving. Jesus, of course, reflected God's image perfectly, demonstrating what God is like. Ask your child, "What are some things Jesus did that show us what God is like?" (Some possible answers: fed the hungry, prayed, healed the sick and welcomed children.)

READ TOGETHER

Younger kids typically love to have someone read to them—and as they are learning to read, they'll also want to read to you. Look for opportunities to point out the good of marriage and family. For example, the *Little House on the Prairie* series, by Laura Ingalls Wilder, offers inspiring lessons about marriage and family. The books depict strong values, showing families that work hard together;

“Focus’ ‘Teach Your Children About Marriage’ resources have really helped me be intentional when it comes to talking with my children about the beauty of God’s design for marriage and family. Thanks to the tips the resource provides, I can make the most of teachable moments.

“For example, one day my four-year-old daughter and I were holding hands when she noticed my wedding and engagement rings and told me they were beautiful. What a great opportunity to explain how these rings are special, because of the promise Mommy and Daddy made to love God, love each other, and to raise our children to know and follow Jesus.”

—MONICA FROM COLORADO

persevere and overcome obstacles; are grateful, generous and loving; protect and care for the weak and the sick; and graciously handle differences between siblings.

FAMILY OUTREACH

Many children are without a mother or a father in the home, and there are sure to be single-parent families in your church, child’s school or neighborhood—or among your extended family. Talk about this with your children, and pray together, asking God how He would want your family to respond. You might ask a single parent if your family could come alongside and help in a practical way. Here are just a few ideas:

- Find out their favorite foods (and any possible food allergies). Have your children help in preparing and delivering a meal.
- Have your kids make a card, and place inside a gift card to a favorite restaurant or store.

- Invite them over for a meal at your home, making sure your children are a big part of preparing the meal and cleaning the house.
- Offer to come over for a few hours on a Saturday and help around their house and yard.
- Invite the children over for dinner and games or a video, in order to give Mom or Dad a break.

SUPPORT FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Your family might decide to come alongside families who are providing homes for kids in foster care or adopting orphans. Here’s a resource to help your family get started:



Wrapping Around Adoptive Families²

WHAT IF I’M A SINGLE PARENT?

You can still teach your children about God’s creation of humans as male and female, and how God designed a man and woman to come together in marriage to form a family. You can also find healthy role models and families

in your extended family, church and community to show your children how men and women are different and how they parent differently. Speak well of the opposite sex, so your children grow up understanding that both men and women are good and valuable, but different from each other.

BLESS YOUR CHILDREN

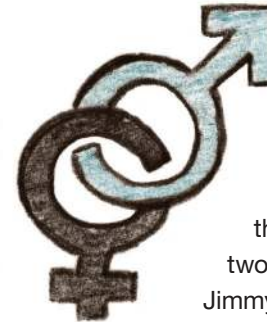
Pray A Blessing Over Boys

- *“We pray you would grow strong as a son of God, our King. Be filled with His Spirit and demonstrate His character: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We bless you in the strong name of Jesus as you grow into manhood.”*

Pray A Blessing Over Girls

- *“Be blessed, in the name of Jesus, to know the Father loves you. You are His precious daughter, made in His image. Receive His love and demonstrate the fruit of His Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. God bless you as you grow and become a young woman.”*

TEACH OLDER ELEMENTARY CHILDREN



LISTENING TOGETHER

The Focus on the Family *Adventures in Odyssey*® radio program is loved by both children and adults. In the episode **“The Vow,”**³ the two Barclay kids, Donna and Jimmy, hear about a friend whose parents are getting a divorce. They see some of the same signs of a breakup in their own parents’ marriage, and start to worry. Although this episode deals with a serious subject, young Jimmy’s humor helps lighten the mood.

Consider listening to this episode as a family, and discuss issues related to marriage and family, such as the importance of marriage vows, how much kids need a mom and a dad, and how your children can be open and honest about worries or fears.

Other *Adventures in Odyssey* episodes have great stories about values and family. Check out our Adventures in Odyssey Club™ at AIOclub.org.

IT'S TIME FOR AN ADVENTURE— IN ODYSSEY



“The Vow”

#140: Digital
Download

ORDER NOW

RESEARCH TOGETHER

Each year, when February 14 rolls around, we celebrate Valentine’s Day with cards, candy and flowers. But who was St. Valentine? And why is he celebrated?

Do a little research with your children to see what you can find out about St. Valentine.

While there have been several St. Valentines throughout history, check out the story of Valentine the priest who lived during the reign of a particularly evil and bloody Roman emperor known as Claudius the Cruel. Valentine defied the emperor’s decree and performed Christian marriages. As a result, he was martyred for upholding God’s design for marriage.

DISCUSS AND ASK QUESTIONS

St. Valentine held the Christian view of marriage: A husband and wife should serve, love and respect each other as they raise a family together (see Ephesians 5). At that time, the pagan view of marriage was selfish: “Take what you want and kids are disposable.” Here are a few questions to get you started:

- “Why do you think marriage is so important?”
- “What good things come from marriage?”
- “Why do you think God made marriage to be between a man and a woman?”
- “How did the Christian worldview conquer the pagan’s view and, in doing so, change the world?”
- “What do you see in our culture of these two views?”
- “How can we win back the world with God’s design for marriage and family?”
- “Why do you think St. Valentine was willing to disobey the emperor and perform Christian marriages, knowing he could die for his actions?”

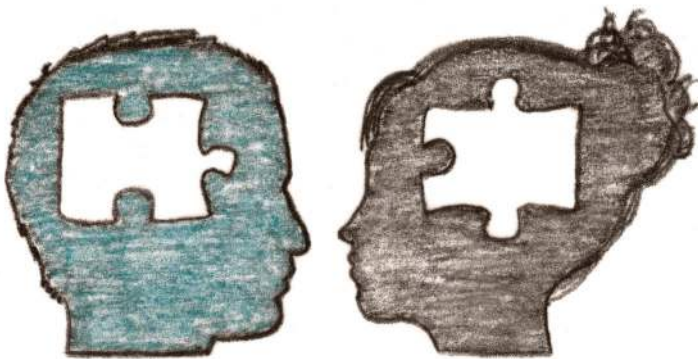
TALK ABOUT MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY

Sex is one component of marriage, and if you haven’t already started, your children are an age where they need to hear from you about sex and sexuality—especially as they move toward puberty and adolescence. Here are some resources to help:

ARTICLES + RESOURCES

- **“The Talk: Healthy Sexuality Education—Basic Goals and Guidance from Focus on the Family,”**⁴ by Jeremy Keeton
- **“Talking About Sex and Puberty,”**⁵ (adapted from *The Complete Guide to Baby & Child Care*; Focus on the Family)
- **“Teaching Children Healthy Sexuality,”**⁶ by Rob Jackson

BOOKS



- ***The Focus on the Family® Guide to Talking with Your Kids about Sex: Honest Answers for Every Age***⁷, by J. Thomas Fitch, MD and David Davis
- ***What's the Big Deal? Why God Cares about Sex***⁸, by Stan and Brenna Jones
- ***Lintball Leo's Not-so-Stupid Questions about Your Body***⁹, by Dr. Walt Larimore with John Riddle (for boys)
- ***Preparing for Adolescence***¹⁰, by Dr. James Dobson

BLESS YOUR CHILDREN

Pray blessings over your children, including a blessing of their masculinity or femininity. Pray for your children's future, whether as a single person devoted in service to God, or as a married person committed to God, a spouse and children.

TEACH CHILDREN IN MIDDLE SCHOOL AND BEYOND

READ, LISTEN AND DISCUSS

Your children are getting closer to the age where they will launch into the world. But they still need and want your attention and input. **Take time to help them think through some of the important aspects of the marriage relationship, such as male-female differences, our longing for connection and intimacy, and God's design for marriage.** Discuss other important aspects of marriage such as commitment, forgiveness, trust, communication, handling disagreements, working together and raising children.

Pick up a pre-marriage book, such as ***Ready to Wed: 12 Ways to Start a Marriage You'll Love***,¹¹ edited by Dr. Greg and Erin Smalley. The book has some great advice for those moving toward

marriage. And while your children might be five, ten or even twenty years away from marriage, it's good to prepare them ahead of time for some of the aspects of marriage where couples run into difficulty. You could read together and discuss some of the chapters with older teens, such as those about money, communication, commitment, male-female differences and healthy conflict.

The Focus on the Family® Daily Broadcast has aired several programs about what to look for in a spouse. Listen to a few of these with your children and then discuss why these particular traits are important for a healthy marriage. Alistair Begg's "[The Search for a Godly Spouse](#)"¹² or Gary Thomas's "[How to Find a Good and Godly Spouse](#)"¹³ would be a good place to start.

READ ABOUT MALE AND FEMALE DIFFERENCES

Men and women are different, despite the misguided belief of some in the media and in academia who view gender differences as arbitrarily assigned by society. Do some research with your kids and discuss [male/female differences](#)¹⁴. Carol Ann Rinzler, for example, has a whole dictionary of differences in her book, *Why Eve Doesn't Have an Adam's Apple*.¹⁵

The Bible teaches that God divided humanity into two sexes, deliberately designing men

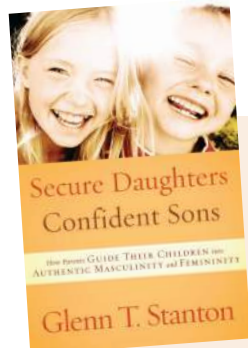


and women to reflect different aspects of His character and nature. Both are valuable, necessary, and complement each other. While men and women are similar in many ways, we also want to celebrate and enjoy the differences. Here are just a few examples, and researchers are finding more all the time:

- In *Why Gender Matters*,¹⁶ author Leonard Sax notes that boys and girls often see the world differently, because their eyes are made

differently. Typically, boys are drawn to motion and colors such as blue, black, silver and gray. Girls are more drawn to faces and to brighter colors like red, orange and green.

- Sax also says boys tend to be more ready to take risks than girls—partly because boys tend to overestimate their abilities, but also because they want to impress other boys.
- Girls and women tend to be more socially adept and relational than boys. Glenn Stanton, in *Secure Daughters, Confident Sons*¹⁷, writes about their strong desire for intimacy and connection.



ORDER NOW

There are many more examples; but of course, there are also exceptions. Some boys are very relational, while some girls are risk-takers. Parents should resist defining masculinity so narrowly that a sensitive boy, for example, feels excluded from the world of men. We can still encourage that boy in his masculinity, pointing out and blessing masculine qualities. And we don't want to describe

femininity so rigidly that a more aggressive, rough-and-tumble girl feels as though she isn't feminine. Such girls can be encouraged and blessed for their feminine qualities, too.

The goal is to help all girls embrace healthy femininity and have confidence that they will grow

into godly women. And we want all boys to know they can and will become godly men, believing they have what it takes to enter the world of men.

WATCH AND DISCUSS MOVIES TOGETHER

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY'S
plugged in®

It's interesting to note how many movies feature orphans or children with one parent. The Focus on

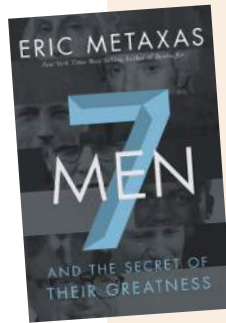
the Family Plugged In® entertainment guide has an interesting interview with Don Hahn, a movie producer from Disney® films, where he discusses this phenomenon.

Read the article¹⁸ and talk to your kids about how children need a mom and a dad. When one or both are gone, we recognize the loss in a child's life. When you see this in a film, ask your children:

- *"How is life different when children grow up without a dad or mom? What do they miss out on?"*
- *"How does the character in this movie overcome the loss of a mother and/or father?"*
- *"What do kids get from moms that they don't get from dads? How do moms help children thrive?"*

- “What does a dad offer that a mom doesn’t?
How do good fathers help children thrive?”

LEARN MORE ABOUT JACKIE ROBINSON



Eric Metaxas’ book, *7 Men—And the Secret of Their Greatness*,²⁰ gives more details about Robinson’s story.

DIG DEEPER

For older teens, you might watch a film like *42*, which depicts Jackie Robinson’s battle—along with the Dodgers and owner Branch Rickey—against racism and segregation. ([Check out the review](#)¹⁹ at [PluggedIn.com](#) before you decide to watch—there is some language, sexual content and violence in this PG-13 film.)

Discuss the importance of faith and family in Robinson’s life, giving him the strength to stay strong and persevere. Robinson

tells his wife he carries her in his heart, and there’s a poignant scene in the movie where he talks to his newborn son:

“My daddy left us flat in Cairo, Georgia. I was only six months older than you are now. I don’t remember him. Nothing good. Nothing bad. Nothing. You will remember me. I’m gonna be with you until the day I die.”

LEARN FROM COUPLES WITH MARRIAGE LONGEVITY

Whether you are married or a single parent, you can invite couples with long-lasting, healthy marriages over to your house for conversation. These could be family members or friends from church; you might have dinner together or coffee and dessert. Ahead of time, let the couple know that you want your children to learn from them about their marriage. Work with your children to develop questions for the couple, such as:

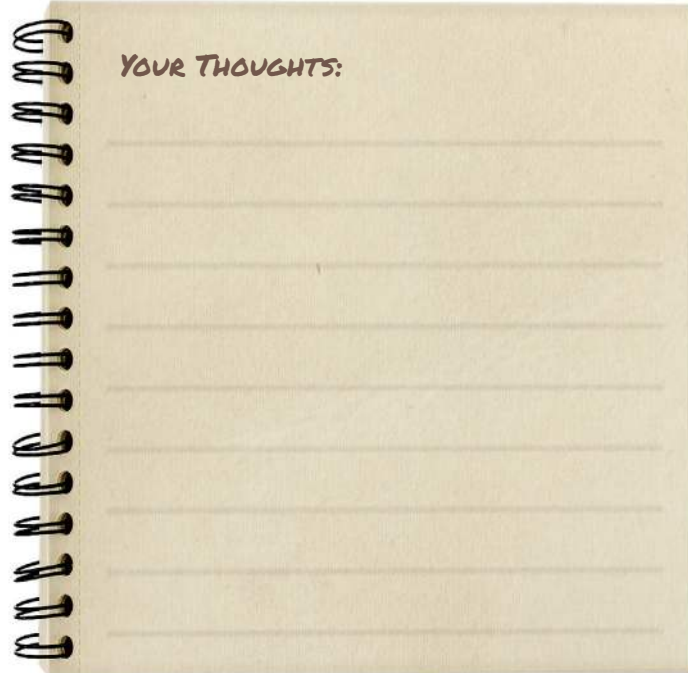
- “How did you meet?”
- “What attracted you to each other?”
- “What are some of the difficulties you’ve overcome?”
- “What have been some of the blessings or surprises about your marriage?”
- “What has helped your marriage last and thrive?”
- “What are you thankful for about your spouse?”

BLESS YOUR TEENS

Knowing about male-female differences will help you as you affirm your children. Many of the resources we’ve mentioned have great ideas for

blessing and encouraging your children as they grow into young men and women. In addition, the list of articles, FAQs and broadcasts on [page 14](#) offers many useful ideas for blessing your teenager.

A FINAL NOTE TO PARENTS



BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

Our world has gone through a sea change in its views and practices with regard to sexuality and marriage. Some Christians and churches have fallen away from Scripture's teaching on these subjects. And some Christians have gone through [trials](#)²¹ for taking a biblical stand on marriage.

It will take courage to believe—and act—according to a biblical view. We encourage you to be bold and have courage, as you instill a scriptural world view in your children. You and your children might be inspired to read and listen to stories about the experiences of believers in history who held to God's truth and made an impact on the world:

- *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion*²², by Rodney Stark
- "Learning from History's Great Men and Women"²³ with Eric Metaxas
- *Seven Women: And the Secret of Their Greatness*²⁴ and *Seven Men: And the Secret of Their Greatness*²⁰ by Eric Metaxas

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

—JESUS, JOHN 16:33 (ESV)

MORE TRUSTED FOCUS ON THE FAMILY RESOURCES

For more ideas on what children need to hear and experience as they grow into young men and women, Focus offers helpful articles, books and broadcasts:

ARTICLES

- “Rites of Passage for Your Daughter”²⁵
- “Rites of Passage for Your Son”²⁶
- “What Sons Need”²⁷

FAQS

- “Dads and the Influence They Have on Their Daughters”²⁸
- “Fathers and the Influence They Have on Their Sons”²⁹
- “Helping a Teen Boy Become a Man”³⁰
- “Helping a Teen Girl Become a Woman”³¹
- “Key Differences Between Male and Female”³²

BROADCASTS

- “Being a Good Role Model for Your Daughter and Nourishing Yourself in the Midst of a Busy Life”³³
- “Being the Intentional Parent Your Child Needs”³⁴
- “Being Your Daughter’s Hero”³⁵
- “Praying for Your Sons”³⁶
- “Recognizing Your Son’s Need for Respect”³⁷
- “Understanding Biblical Manhood”³⁸

ENDNOTES

1. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage1>
2. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage27>
3. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage30>
4. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage2>
5. <http://bit.ly/1bdRDad>
6. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage28>
7. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage3>
8. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage34>
9. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage32>
10. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage31>
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13. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage5>
14. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage6>
15. Carol Ann Rintzler, *Why Eve Doesn't Have an Adam's Apple: A Dictionary of Sex Differences*, (New York: Facts on File, 1996).
16. Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D., *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know About the Emerging Science of Sex Differences*, (New York: Doubleday, 2005).
17. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage7>
18. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage29>
19. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage8>
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38. <http://bit.ly/teachmarriage26>

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