



www.risemagazine.org

## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**Bonded for Life** by Robin Wiley

My son and I developed a bond years after he came home.

---

### DISCUSSION FOCUS:

Repairing your relationship with your child.

---

### ACTIVITY GOAL:

Participants will understand the impact of their parenting style on their children and think about new ways to relate.

---

### STORY SUMMARY

*Robin's son Caiseem goes into foster care as soon as he is born, and they are never able to establish a bond. After he comes home, she still feels that they are disconnected, and doesn't know what to do about his behavior problems. Finally, she decides they should go to family counseling together.*

*In counseling, they learn to listen to each other and get a better understanding of why the other person acts the way they do. They practice new ways of relating to one another, and begin to develop real closeness.*

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### GROUP INTRODUCTION: 10 minutes

Today we are going to talk about how we relate to our children. Often we're puzzled or frustrated by the way our children respond to us, and we don't realize how our own behaviors affect them. If you can step back and listen to your child, you can better understand how you and your children relate to each other and use that understanding to reduce frustration and strengthen your bond. Family counseling or feedback from friends or family members can help you step back.

- How do you feel about this topic?
- Do you have experiences related to this topic that you'd like to share before we get started?

## READ AND DISCUSS STORY: 15 + 30 minutes

Read the story out loud as a group. Help participants recognize the writer's emotions and coping mechanisms and their own. Go back over important moments in the story and ask the participants about how they've handled similar experiences:

STORY MOMENT	DISCUSSION QUESTION
Robin is unable to bond with Caiseem as a baby.	When your children were babies, what things helped you feel close to them, or prevented you from feeling close?
Robin learns that counseling is "mostly about listening to yourself" and getting a new perspective.	When you're struggling with something, what helps you get a new perspective on it?
Robin chooses family counseling over sending her son to individual counseling.	Have you or your child been to individual counseling? What makes family counseling different? Do you think family counseling could be helpful for your family?
Robin and Caiseem are both embarrassed when the other points out their bad behavior in therapy	What concerns would you have about talking through problems with your children or hearing their feedback about your parenting?
The therapist gives Robin and her son strategies to cut down on her yelling and his lying.	How does having (or not having) a close and trusting relationship affect children's behavior?

## JOURNAL TIME: 15-30 minutes

By writing in their journals, participants can more deeply reflect on their experiences and the steps they can take to strengthen themselves and their families. Hand out the "Journal Reflections" worksheet and give participants 15-30 minutes to write. They can share their responses with the group or in pairs, or after the workshop with a counselor, therapist, or peer.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

**JOURNAL REFLECTIONS: Bonded for Life** by Robin Wiley

Through talking and role playing in family counseling, Robin learns how her behaviors affect her son and starts to understand his behavior. They both learn and practice strategies for cutting down on upsetting behavior and being more open with each other.

Write in your journal (or below) about how you and your children relate to each other, and what you could do to strengthen your connection.

1. If your child was pretending to be you, what would he or she do?

---

---

---

---

2. What would you like your children to understand about how you act toward them?

---

---

---

---

3. If you were pretending to be your child, how would you act?

---

---

---

---

OVER 

4. What would you like to understand about the ways your children act toward you?

---

---

---

---

### **ACTION STEPS**

Family counseling is helpful to Robin because it shows her ways to connect to her son. Write down 2-3 things you could do with your children to create better communication and closeness.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

2. \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

3. \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

### **A SUPPORTIVE CONNECTION**

I plan to get support and encouragement by talking about my reflections and action steps with:

---