



Baby Step #2

Create a great environment

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Hi! My name is Paul.

- 1 Linkin Park or Doctor's Office?**
- 2 How do I create a great environment?**
- 3 Planning and protecting great environments.**
- 4 How to change your home environment.**
- 5 Two environmental proverbs.**
- 6 You've got this!**



Hi! My name is Paul

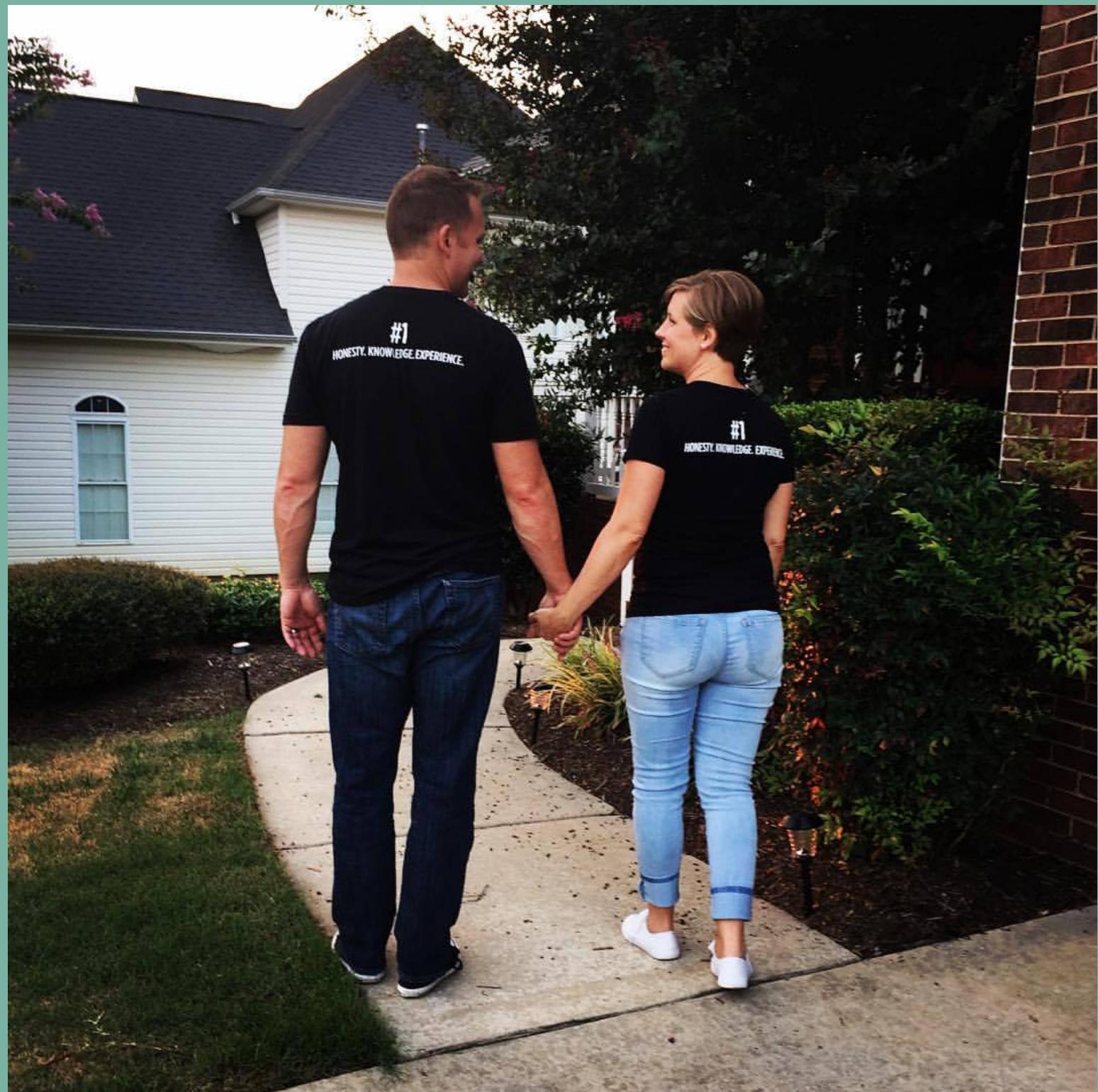
“Hi! My name is Paul. I have six daughters.” Most of the time when people hear this they either think I’m Catholic or, the other extreme, a playboy who sowed his seed with total indiscretion. Neither is true. I am madly in love with the lovely and talented Mrs. Peterson, and together we have brought into this world six amazing ladies!

My experience with parenting goes like this... MOST of the time I like being “dad.” MOST of the time I love coming home. MOST of the time I enjoy those decades old jokes (you know, they’re the same ones you told your parents and now your kids are telling you and you have to act like you’ve never heard it AND that it is funny). MOST of the time I like hearing about their day. MOST of the time I like going out in public with all of these ladies. But there are days... you’ve had them too! Those days when you would prefer to act like those screaming kids belong to someone else so that you can make snide remarks and shoot condescending looks at those irresponsible and awful parents. Or better yet, those days when you can binge on Netflix and Doritoes and act like you’re single with no responsibility. There are days when you simply cannot endure one more child initiated drama, and you swear to God that if you hear your nickname (DAD! MOM!) again you will simply change your name and move to another country. (Come on, you know you’ve felt this way too.)

Seriously, I love being a parent, but there are days when I just want to run away! There are days when I just want to quietly slip in the front door and right upstairs into my Mandom (aka Man Cave) ... a land where there is no tattling, arguing, or drama; a land where my rulings are unquestioned and my belongings left untouched. Do you know what I’m talking about? Some days we feel too tired, inadequate, distracted or frustrated to do what parenting requires of us! Welcome to parenting in the “First Half.”

I have learned some things that will help you enjoy the first half of parenting, which I define as starting at birth and ending around 10 years of age. This article will help you get started with the most important lesson about parenting young children! Enjoy, and always remember this, **“You’ve got this!”**

Me with the lovely and ever talented Mrs. Peterson!



Our six ladies!





Linkin Park or Doctor's Office?

Environment. We hear a LOT about that topic these days, and most of the conversation is centered on how we care for and protect our natural environment. I don't know what you think about environmental issues, but I do know this... **your home has an environment and you are the creator, manager, and protector of that environment.**

When I say, your home has an environment, I am not talking about water, soil, nuclear factories, or oil drilling. I am talking about how it feels... sounds... looks in your home. Dictionary.com defines "environment" as, "the aggregate of surrounding things, conditions, or influences; surroundings, milieu." If we apply that definition to your home, we can conclude that ***the environment of your home is the sum total of everything and everyone in your home.*** Let me illustrate. The things you see, hear, smell, and feel in your doctor's office are completely different than what you see, hear, smell, and feel at a Linkin Park or Taylor Swift concert.

The way you behave at a concert would be completely unacceptable in a doctor's office! No yelling! No holding up cell phones and swaying back and forth. Singing out loud is frowned upon, and eating fried foods while waiting is forbidden, but these actions are normal fare at a concert. You see, it is all about the environment.



Your home has an environment, and it is probably different from the environment in the ten homes closest to you. Some homes are filled with the sounds of Mozart, smell like cinnamon, and have many books. Other homes sound like Sponge Bob, smell like backpacks, and have dirty shoes laying in multiple places around the house! Some homes are filled with laughter while other homes are filled with angry tension. Some homes work first and play later while other homes play now and get to the work “whenever.” Some homes have TVs in every room and some homes only have one TV... in the den.

You get the point, right? Every home environment is different, but every home environment is the net result of a bunch of things added together.

Your responsibility as a parent is to determine what you want your home environment to be. **So, what words would you use to describe the environment of your home?**

Take a minute and look at the words in the chart below. Which ones would you want to be descriptive of your home environment?

Loud	Quiet	Laughter	Thoughtful	Relaxed
Focused	Critical	Peaceful	Disrespectful	Safe
Encouraging	Angry	Generous	Fearful	Messy
Fun	Organized	Playful	Helpful	Controlling
Fear	Honest	Harsh	Perfect	Gentle

I have good news for you! Just like you picked the words from the chart, you can pick the words that will describe the environment of your home! **YOU are the creator, manager, and protector of your home environment!**

How do I create an environment?

If you are not thoughtful, you will create a home environment that feels a lot like the one in which you grew up! Are you good with that?

You are probably asking, "How do I create an environment?"

You just started doing it when you picked the words from the chart that you want to describe your home! **The awesome thing about being a parent is that you get to decide the way your home will sound, look, and feel!** The thing that makes it difficult is that you must sit down, think about it, and write it out or you will not know what you are trying to build, manage, and protect! Chances are that **if you are not thoughtful in this process, you will end up unintentionally creating the home environment that you are most familiar with... the home in which you grew up.**

Think about this, the parenting style with which we are most familiar is the parenting style of our parents, or the adults who raised us as children. For years, we watched them create an environment. From them we learned how to deal with conflict, handle responsibility, think about those less fortunate than ourselves, prepare for challenges, navigate uncertainty, etc. We learned about God, money, sex, love, work, time management, etc. from our parents because they were the adults we saw the most as children. Because of that, unless we are intentional about creating something else, we will reproduce what we have seen the most... because that is what we are most familiar with. You might be okay with that, but I would be willing to bet that the majority of us, even though we love our parents, want to change some things in the home environment for which we are responsible.

Values and Phrases

So, how do you create that home environment?

You must thoughtfully identify the characteristics you want in your home. In our home, Sherri and I spent a good amount of time identifying nine words we want to define the environment of our home. Then we created a memorable phrase for each one.

- **Courageous:** Fear will not keep me here, because I have courage.
- **Encouraging:** I will help you with what I say, and what I do.
- **Good stewards:** Earn it, give it, save it, and spend it.
- **Loving:** Love values others and makes me valuable.
- **Responsible:** I am in charge of me. My life is what I make it.
- **Optimistic:** I can. I will. I did.
- **Perseverant:** I will not quit until the job is done.
- **Honest:** Find the truth. Tell the truth.
- **Generous:** I am at my best when I am giving.

After we identified and wrote these values down, we begin using these phrases regularly. These phrases are a regular part of the conversation in our home.

We celebrate and affirm these values when they are displayed. Every month, we highlight a different value by talking about it at mealtimes and looking for examples of it in our daily lives. Because we place a high value on Scripture, we have identified a verse that teaches each individual value and our family memorizes it along with the memorable phrase for that value.



Ben Franklin's list

This list of values is printed and hanging on our refrigerator for everyone to see every day. Every month we focus our attention on a different value. I got this idea from Benjamin Franklin. When he was a young man, he identified thirteen characteristics he wanted in his life. He wrote them down along with a short, descriptive phrase. He realized that it would be impossible to work on thirteen things at the same time, so he would focus on one characteristic per week. Over the course of thirteen weeks, he could focus on each characteristic and develop those traits thoroughly in his life. Ben Franklin lived three hundred years ago, and we are still talking about him and feeling the result of the personal environment he created. I would say that what he did worked!

The first step in creating your home environment is to think about what you want your home to sound, look, and feel like. What will you celebrate and affirm? What will you not tolerate? If you are having a hard time coming up with a set of values, you can use the words in the box that you circled. You can use my list to get you started thinking, or you could use Ben Franklin's amazing list:

- **Temperance.** Eat not to Dullness. Drink not to Elevation.
- **Silence.** Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself. Avoid trifling Conversation.
- **Order.** Let all your Things have their Places. Let each Part of your Business have its Time.
- **Resolution.** Resolve to perform what you ought. Perform without fail what you resolve.
- **Frugality.** Make no expense, but to do good to others or yourself: i.e. Waste nothing.
- **Industry.** Lose no Time. Be always employed in something useful. Cut off all unnecessary Actions.
- **Sincerity.** Use no hurtful Deceit. Think innocently and justly; and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
- **Justice.** Wrong none, by doing Injuries or omitting the Benefits that are your Duty.
- **Moderation.** Avoid Extremes. Forbear resenting Injuries so much as you think they deserve.
- **Cleanliness.** Tolerate no Uncleanness in Body, Clothes or Habitation. (*incredibly important for parents of pre-teen boys... haha!*)
- **Tranquility.** Be not disturbed at Trifles, or at Accidents common or unavoidable.
- **Chastity.** Rarely use Venery but for Health or Offspring; Never to Dullness, Weakness, or the Injury of your own or another's Peace or Reputation.
- **Humility.** Imitate Jesus and Socrates.



STOP!

Take a minute to stretch before you read the next line.

if you do not know what you want, you will create what you know... the environment you grew up in as a child. If you are not intentional about creating a happy, healthy environment, you will create an environment that highlights your weaknesses and fears and tilts towards unhealthy extremes. You will parent like your parents OR you will make a huge effort to NOT parent like them! In other words, you will do what they did or you will do what they did not do. In either case, “they” is the common denominator. ***Wouldn’t it be better to thoughtfully and prayerfully design the kind of home environment you want for your children?*** Certainly, you can look to your parents as examples but do not stop there! Look at other homes, read good books, dream about the kind of place you want to come home to and the kind of people you want to spend your evenings and weekends with! Write down those characteristics and now you have begun creating an environment!

Planning & Protecting Great Environments

“If I keep doing what I’m doing, am I going to like what I create?”

Great home environments begin with intentional planning! However, there is more than just planning! Great home environments require management and protection too. In other words, planning must be followed by action! I regularly ask myself, “Are my actions aligned with my values?” In other words, “If I keep doing what I’m doing am I going to like what I create?” I am learning this; *when you do what you want you will get what you want*. If you want a home that is filled with encouragement, you must encourage! If you want a home filled with laughter, you must laugh. If you want a home that is organized, you must organize. If you want forgiveness to be valued in your home, you must forgive. You must do what you want to get what you want!

What does the environment of your home feel like? What words would you use to describe your home on a normal day? Are you happy with the environment of your home? Depending on how you answered those questions, I have some good or bad news. The environment in your home is what you have created by the actions you have taken. What you have is the result of what you have done... the choices you have made. If you like the environment of your home, congratulations. You have done well. Keep it up! If, however, you are not happy with the environment in your home, I have good news... you can change it!

You can change the environment in your home!

How to change your home environment

- 1) Decide what is important in your home environment.**

- 2) Do those things.**



YOU are the key to environmental change!

If you determine that encouragement is something that you want in your environment then teach, affirm, and reward encouragement. Stick with it! Do not stop trying, because in time you will create an environment of encouragement! Keep in mind that the older your children are the longer this environmental makeover will take, but it is worth it whatever age, and YOU are the key to change. Your home environment is the net result of all of your choices and actions. Because you are an adult with free will, you can choose and do different things, and when you do those different things, you will create a different environment!

Two Environmental Proverbs

I mentioned early on that the book of Proverbs has been helpful for me in my parenting journey. Two proverbs in particular that are helpful in this conversation about environments are:

- Better a bread crust shared *in love* than a slab of prime rib served *in hate*.
(Proverbs 15:17 MSG)
- A meal of bread and water *in contented peace* is better than a banquet spiced *with quarrels*. (Proverbs 17:1 MSG)

You can see the kinds of environments created here: love, hate, contented peace, quarrels. As you read those proverbs, did it remind you of your home? Is there peace or quarreling in your home? Love or hate? Little or lots?

Both of these proverbs highlight the value of what is felt over the value of what is held. I have seen many home environments that valued things you can hold rather than things you can feel. I have eaten top shelf foods off expensive plates in homes that felt terrible. I have seen children with the nicest and newest toys and tech who live in home environments filled with the sounds of “quarrels” and the feel of hatred. It is sad, but many parents believe that what their children hold in their hand will make them great. It is not true... and there are many examples to go around! We call children who have full hands and empty hearts... spoiled. They are to be pitied. Dad and mom, full hands can never replace a full heart. I hope you are creating an environment that places priority on full hearts!

***If you must choose...
choose what is felt over what is held.***

I have also had the opportunity to sit in homes that had very little to hold but lots to feel! I am old enough now to see which is the best way and I will tell you that if you have to choose, choose feel over hold! Children whose hands are not completely full but whose hearts are overflowing are healthier, happier adults. If you have to choose... choose to fill their hearts! Fill their hearts with love, encouragement, wisdom, courage, grace, etc. An environment that fills and nurtures the heart is always better and generally produces finer adults. You can do this! This is not your first time to create an environment! You have done it before! You created the environment you currently live in by the choices you made! Now you are going to change the environment in which you live again! You are going to do it the same way you did it the first time! Make some decisions followed by consistent actions. Keep doing it and you will change your environment!



You've got this!

Dad and mom, it is important to make sure you have a healthy, happy home environment because your children are learning to be adults, and the environment in which they learn these lessons is one of the most important factors in determining their success. Finances, work ethic, conflict resolution, responsibility, spirituality, etc. all of these lessons are best learned in a happy, healthy environment. Speaking of learning, you and I have to know this... *we are our children's first and most influential teachers!* We have discussed how to create an environment that is ripe for learning, in our next e-book will discuss your next responsibility as a parent... teaching.

Until then... **You can do this! You've got this!**



F I R S T

half parenting

You can find out more about Paul on his social media:



[Instagram.com/theaulpeterson](https://www.instagram.com/theaulpeterson)



[Facebook.com/theaulpeterson](https://www.facebook.com/theaulpeterson)

“

“The better you are, the better your kids will be!”

Paul Peterson

www.firsthalfparenting.com



[Twitter.com/firsthalfparent](https://twitter.com/firsthalfparent)



[Facebook.com/firsthalfparenting](https://facebook.com/firsthalfparenting)



[Instagram.com/firsthalfparenting](https://instagram.com/firsthalfparenting)