

*Note: As it stands right now, this is the draft I wrote before my resignation. I have received additional feedback from my family on this document (which needs to be incorporated), and I also realize now that part of achieving understanding between affected parties is understanding what generates a rift **for some family members and not others** in the first place. [The three-fold nature of the LDS Church: corporate, totalistic, and individual-growth](#) and [To peek behind the curtain: weighing the decision to investigate LDS truth-claims](#) begin to get at the underlying issues. In some ways, then, this document is a very superficial (and naive?) treatment of this topic.*

Key principles to building bridges of understanding

In order to build strong relationships in a mixed faith family, the following principles are paramount:

I. Agency

Self determination

Although we have stewardships and relationships that *matter*, each individual is ultimately responsible for what they believe and how they act.

Accept people where they are at

While we all believe the matter of whether or not to stay in the church is a weighty matter, all of us agree that individual family members are *more* important than religious affiliation. This was a central message of Jesus Christ's ministry, illustrated most profoundly in the story of the Good Samaritan.

II. Attitude

Generosity

Each family member feels strongly that they are acting with the best intentions. We are all trying to be our best selves. It's easy when we disagree to feel like other parties are acting maliciously or with shallowness, or deliberately ignoring ideas or evidence that are in plain site for us. We should do our best to attribute the best intentions to others.

“Most mistakes with family members are not the result of bad intent. It's just that we really don't understand. We don't see clearly into one another's hearts.” (From the 5th habit of highly effective families [here](#))

Building on common ground

Each of us can try to put ourselves in another's shoes and to respect their point of view, even if we disagree with it. There is *something* good or noteworthy in somebody else's opinion (else why would they think it?). Let's focus on that.

Differences are a strength

“The fact that we see things differently is a strength—not a weakness—in our relationship. (From the 6th habit of highly effective families. [here](#))

All on the same side

We are all on the same side—we should do our best to avoid thinking in terms of *us* vs. *them*. Our circle is an inclusive *we*. Religious affiliation is merely one of many ways in which we are somewhat different and somewhat alike.

III. Communication

Strong relationships are built on open communication. If we are following/acknowledging the principles of self-determination, generosity, acceptance, and building on common ground, then communication of our deep thoughts and ideas should serve to enrich our relationships rather than alienate us from one another.

“There's no way to have rich, rewarding family relationships without real understanding.” (From the 5th habit of highly effective families [here](#))

Free exchange of feelings

Healthy family relationships include the sharing of deep and tender feelings with one another.

In an atmosphere of respect and consideration, we should each be willing to share our feelings and listen to others share their feelings. This is one of the defining characteristics of good family relationships.

Free exchange of ideas and information

“The technique of empathic listening is just the tip of the iceberg. The great mass of the iceberg is a deep and sincere desire to truly understand.” (From the 5th habit of highly effective families [here](#))

We should be willing to share our ideas and information. Facts are not to be feared—there are no *evil* facts. Rather, knowledge should be sought after and embraced. We are all seekers of truth and love to share ideas and what we’re learning about. In an environment of love and respect, we ultimately have nothing to fear from the truth, whatever its source (in the internet age, most facts can be sourced and weighed as to their reliability with relatively little effort). The Church, in some regards, is shifting to this kind of approach, as evidenced by the comprehensive and careful release of [all the documents related to Joseph Smith’s life](#) in the [Joseph Smith Papers Project](#). This attitude is manifest among leaders of the Church (here are just a few expressions):

“I think a full, free talk is frequently of great use; we want nothing secret nor underhanded, and I for one want no association with things that cannot be talked about and will not bear investigation.” - President John Taylor, [Journal of Discourses](#), v. 20, p. 264

“I admire men and women who have developed the questing spirit, who are unafraid of new ideas as stepping stones to progress. We should, of course, respect the opinions of others, but we should also be unafraid to dissent—if we are informed. Thoughts and expressions compete in the marketplace of thought, and in that competition truth emerges triumphant. Only error fears freedom of expression.” —Elder Hugh B. Brown, “A Final Testimony,” from *An Abundant Life*, 1999 (taken from [here](#))