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## **An introduction to family consecration.**

What does it mean to consecrate our families?

The Hebrew word for holiness is “qadash” which means set apart. God is separate from creation in that he is uncreated or above creation. Created things can be set apart for sacred use, which means that they have only one use. A holy cup can only be used for holy use and not for common use. The Jewish people were set apart by law, by eating practices, and by shared feast days. They could not fully participate fully in their surrounding society. Christians are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” (1 Peter 2:9). Christians are holy because we are set aside for God. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24) The word “consecration” entered English from the Latin “consecratus” which likewise means set apart for a special purpose.

To spiritually consecrate our families means that our homes are holy places, our families are images of the Holy Family and of the Trinity- societies of life-giving love. Individually at baptism, chrismation, and communion we consecrate ourselves. In marriage a family consecrates and dedicates itself to God. In reconciliation we renew ourselves by returning back to God. To consecrate one’s family is to make one’s family a place of life-giving love by building up each other’s faith, practicing forgiveness, and helping each other to become Saints.

### **Strong families and Holy families**

On a natural level, strong families have members with personal virtue and interrelationships marked by forgiveness,

mercy, gratitude, and love. Holy families are strong families that also have faith, hope, and supernatural love because holy families have God in their midst. Strong families can persevere when confronted with external difficulties and persecutions. Holy families can thrive in the same circumstances. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph thrived during scandal, homelessness, persecution and genocide, the death of Joseph, and Jesus' crucifixion. They are called the holy family.

A holy family prays with and for each other and practices good communication and problem solving. A holy family help each other grow in faith and the natural needs for belonging, acceptance, and identity. A holy family discusses hot topics and eternal truth. A holy family enjoys each moment and lives for the sake of eternity

At marriage a couple dedicate themselves to starting a holy family and are consecrated by God as such. Now, because it is the beginning of the church year, and because we are preparing for the consecration of our new home, is the time to rededicate our families- spouses and children to being a holy family. As St. John Paul II often said to families, "Become who you are."

What do we do?

This 40 day tool asks that a family dedicate and allow God to consecrate 15 minutes each day plus one hour every Sunday at Liturgy. The family is invited to pray the Consecration to the Holy Family prayer found on the back of this booklet every day. The family time is to be deliberate, intentional, and with the purpose of growing as a family. Two night a week families are invited to make the fifteen minutes

a time of prayer and one night a week families are invited to discuss a hot topic or pressing issue in their family such as emotions, doubt, grief, or suicide. As family dynamics are different and children are different ages there is no set schedule for the content of these hot topics. Several articles are provided in the back of this booklet to give the parent ideas, insight, and confidence, but any topic can do.

However, I would recommend that helping children share emotions with you and letting them see that you accept them and their emotions as a first step. Prayer prompts following the Sunday Gospels are also provided.

Note: What is found in this booklet is general only and is not a professional diagnosis of you or your family. The author is neither a licensed nor a professional mental health professional or family counselor. This booklet is not intended to replace professional intervention.

## **Example Schedule:**

Sunday- liturgy as a family, a 15 minute family game of hide and seek after lunch. Pray the Consecration prayer together.

Monday- Family meets at school between practices and spends 15 minutes talking about the funniest thing that happened today. Pray the Consecration prayer together.

Tuesday- Family discusses a hot topic for 15 minutes while drinking hot cocoa. This starts a conversation about dating and your child's crush. Pray the Consecration prayer together.

Wednesday- Family spend 15 minutes baking cookies together. Pray the Consecration prayer together.

Thursday- Family spends 15 minutes praying together. Pray the Consecration prayer together.

Friday- Family spends 15 minutes praying together. Pray the Consecration prayer together.

Saturday- Parents tell their kids about great grandparents. Pray the Consecration prayer together.

**Example hot topic discussion for older kids.**

Parent 1: We love you and we want you to be happy and successful. We want to have this talk with you because we love you and because we want you to be happy and successful.

Parent 2: We will not judge you. We want you to be honest and open and we will try to be honest and open with you as well. If there is something you are more comfortable with talking to either of us about later, just tell us. If you are nervous to get started tell us you want, “another 15”

Parent 1: We have read about how kids are pressured to send private pictures to each other.

Parent 2: This is a challenge I did not have to face as a teenager. However, dating, crushes, love, and sex were things I had to navigate. Unfortunately, my parents did speak to me about this, so I felt alone.

Parent 1: What have you heard about this practice of sending private pictures to others?

Child 1: It’s called sexting mom. You are so embarrassing.

Parent 1: I see that it is embarrassing to talk about sexting with your parents. I felt embarrassed when I had to tell my parents that I failed math in 9th grade. Is it like that?

Child 2: You failed math in 9th grade? I didn't know you were bad at math.

Parent 2: We both had our struggles and embarrassments as teenagers. I was embarrassed when I was the only child who couldn't swim. Have you ever felt embarrassed like that Child 2?

Child 2: Yes.

Parent 1: Is this how you feel child 1.

Child 1: Yes. There is a lot of pressure for people to send each other sexts, but I never send them.

Parent 2: I feel happy to hear you say that, and am happy that you can be honest with me. I want to let you both to know that it is never bad to be honest with us and you won't get in trouble for being honest with us.

Child 2: Yeah right. What if I told you that I am pregnant?

Parent 1: We would feel happy that you would be honest with us and that you trusted us to support you. I remember the joy I had when we were pregnant with you, and although the circumstances are different we would treat the new life with joy. Are you telling us that you are pregnant?

Child 2: No. What was pregnancy like?

...

Parent 2: I enjoyed talking with the two of you. I feel happy when we talk together and pray together.

(later) Child 1: Mom can I talk to you?... Can the two of us have "another 15".

As you see the talk can be part educational, part investigative, and part wandering. A major goal can be to get your children to feel safe talking to you. There is time to talk about behaviors you want to change later. A child will likely interpret a punishment as punishing honesty, which will make them stop being honest.



## Example hot topic with younger children

Parent 1: Mommy and Daddy love you and want you to be happy. I feel happy to be sitting here with all three of you. I feel happy like when I have birthday cake.

Parent 2: I feel excited to learn more about you so that we can be closer together. Excited like when its almost my birthday.

Parent 1: Do you ever feel happy or excited.

Kids: Yes... One time I...

Parent 2: Sometimes things happen that make me feel sad or scared. One time I was sad because I was sick on my birthday and couldn't go to my party.

Parent 1: A time I was scared was when the power went out and the wind was blowing really strong because of the tornadoes and we all had to sit in the closet together. Do you remember that? Have you ever felt sad or scared at school?

Kid 1: Yeah one time John took my chips and threw them in the trash and I was sad...

...

Parent 2: I am so happy that you were brave enough to tell us about this. When we are scared or sad it helps us to talk to grown ups about it. When I am sad it helps when I talk to Grandma about it, remember she is my mommy. ...

## Week 1-Sunday of Consecration of the Church

### **Set up:**

Set aside a prayer space or set out holy images, a Bible, and light a candle. Turn off the television and set aside your phones. Gather your family and sit reasonably close together.

### **Pray:**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus,

You loved your family, Mary and Joseph.

Thank you for my family who loves me.

When my family loves me I know more about your love.

Help me to know you more and love you more.

Open my ears and my heart.

Amen.

**Read:** (Read out loud together as a family.)

[Jesus] asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. (Matthew 16: 13-17)

**Explain:** (Take time to help your children understand what they have just read.)

-Disciples are students who want to learn to become like their teacher.

-John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah are holy men who listened to God.

-Prophets are people who speak the truth of God's love to the world.

-Simon Peter is also called Simon son of Jonah, he is a disciple of Jesus.

-Messiah means anointed one, which means one who is made a priest, a prophet, or a king. Jesus is forever the priest, prophet, and king.

-Heaven is being face to face with God forever in happiness.

**Reflect:** (Take 1 minute and answer the following question.)  
Who do I say that Jesus is?

**Lead:** (Tell your answer to your children modeling loving communication.)

For me, Jesus is a...

When I pray to Jesus, I feel...

**Ask:** (Choose age appropriate version of question)

Who is Jesus?

What do you say when you pray by yourself?

**Answer:** (Let each child answer. Then starting with yourself say how you feel about your answers. Then Say what you want to pray for. Example Jesus is always with me and helps me, he never leaves my side. I feel excited to share my faith with you. I pray each of you can know the joy I feel. Or Jesus is some guy from a history book. I feel curious that you know him. I pray that I can understand what it means to know Jesus )

Jesus is...

Sharing about my faith with you and praying together makes me feel...

I pray...

**Pray:**

Jesus,

Thank you for my family who loves me.

Thank you for loving me.

Thank you for...(let each person say what they are thankful for)

Help me to know you more and love you more.

Amen.

## Week 1 Prayer 2

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Share with your children some of your favorite hymns and sing them together. If you don't know any look up some songs and listen to them together.

Talk about which songs were your favorite and what the songs mean.

End with the consecration prayer.

## Week 2 Sunday of the Dedication of the Church

### **Set up:**

Set aside a prayer space or set out holy images, a Bible, and light a candle. Turn off the television and set aside your phones. Gather your family and sit reasonably close together.

### **Pray:**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus,

You loved your family, Mary and Joseph.

Thank you for my family who loves me.

When my family loves me I know more about your love.

Help me to know you more and love you more.

Open my ears and my heart.

Amen.

### **Read:** (Read out loud together as a family.)

“ At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon.

So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.’

Jesus answered, ‘I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.

My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand.

The Father and I are one.' - John 10:22-30

**Explain:** (Take time to help your children understand what they have just read.)

-The festival of the dedication is a Jewish holy time similar to Christmas or Holy Week when 1 days' worth of oil burnt for 8 days after the Jews chased their enemies from the temple.

-Solomon built the Jewish temple which was a large place of prayer which was destroyed and rebuilt bigger than before.

-A portico is like a pavillion or covered patio.

- Jesus, the Son, is God and his Father is God, "The Father and I are one."

**Reflect:** (Take 1 minute and answer the following question.)

Do I hear the voice of God? How does Jesus talk to me?

**Lead:** (Tell your answer to your children modeling loving communication.)

One time I prayed and I heard...

When I was reading the Bible the other day it seemed like God was talking directly to me...

**Ask:** (Choose age appropriate version of question)

How has God talked to you?

**Answer:** (Let each child answer. Then starting with yourself say how you feel about your answers. Then Say what you want to pray for.)

I hear God when...

Sharing about my faith with you and praying together makes me feel...

I want to pray for...

**Pray:**

Jesus,

Thank you for my family who loves me.

Thank you for loving me.

Thank you for...(let each person say what they are thankful for)

Help me to know you more and love you more.

Amen.



## Week 2 - Special prayer

The sign of the cross, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be, the Qadeeshat, Kyrie Eleison, and the creed are common prayers. Pray them together as a family and say which is your favorite and why.

In the name of the Father, And of the Son, And of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the  
glory are yours now and forever  
Amen.

Hail, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee.  
Blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death.  
Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

We confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and we look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Qadeeshat aloho, Qadeeshat hyeltono, Qadeeshat lomoyouto, itraham alein. You are holy, O God. You are holy, o Strong One. You are holy o Immortal One. Have mercy on us. Kyrie Eleison x3 Lord, Have Mercy x3

## Week 3 Sunday of the Annunciation to Zechariah

### **Set up:**

Set aside a prayer space or set out holy images, a Bible, and light a candle. Turn off the television and set aside your phones. Gather your family and sit reasonably close together.

### **Pray:**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus,

You loved your family, Mary and Joseph.

Thank you for my family who loves me.

When my family loves me I know more about your love.

Help me to know you more and love you more.

Open my ears and my heart.

Amen.

**Read:** (Read out loud together as a family.)

“Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him.

But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.

You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,

for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.

He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.

With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.'

Zechariah said to the angel, 'How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.'

The angel replied, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.'

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary.

When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak.

When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said,

'This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.' - Luke 1:11-25

**Explain:** (Take time to help your children understand what they have just read.)

- An angel is a servant and messenger of God without a body.
- Sanctuary is a holy place, often reserved only for priests or people who live a special life of prayer.

**Reflect:** (Take 1 minute and answer the following question.)  
In what ways has God answered my prayers? What am I praying for?

**Lead:** (Tell your answer to your children modeling loving communication.)  
One way God answered my prayers was...

**Ask:** (Choose age appropriate version of question)  
How has God answered your prayers? What are you praying for?

**Answer:** (Let each child answer. Then starting with yourself say how you feel about your answers. Then Say what you want to pray for.)

God answered my prayer when...

Sharing about my faith with you and praying together makes me feel...

I want to pray for...

**Pray:**

Jesus, Thank you for my family who loves me.

Thank you for loving me. Thank you for...(let each person say what they are thankful for)

Help me to know you more and love you more. Amen.

### Week 3- Special Prayer

When we pray we can use our minds as well as our words. It is a common practice for Christians to hold a single idea or phrase and pray and think about it over and over.

Examples:

Jesus, I love you.

God, help me.

Come, Lord Jesus.

My God you see me.

Alleluia or Praise God.

Come, Holy Spirit.

The most popular of these prayers, called the Jesus prayer is-

Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God,  
have mercy on me a sinner.

Often the first line is prayed while breathing in and the second line is prayed breathing out.

Pray some of the above together or silently for a minute or two and afterwards talk about how this could be a helpful form of prayer.

## Week 4- Sunday of the Announcement to Mary

### **Set up:**

Set aside a prayer space or set out holy images, a Bible, and light a candle. Turn off the television and set aside your phones. Gather your family and sit reasonably close together.

### **Pray:**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus,

You loved your family, Mary and Joseph.

Thank you for my family who loves me.

When my family loves me I know more about your love.

Help me to know you more and love you more.

Open my ears and my heart.

Amen.

### **Read:** (Read out loud together as a family.)

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,

to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.

And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.’

But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.

He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'

The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

For nothing will be impossible with God.'

Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her." - Luke 1:26-38

**Explain:** (Take time to help your children understand what they have just read.)

- Gabriel is an angel whose name means God is my strength.
- Galilee and Nazareth are places in the Holy Land.
- Babies and young children are virgins. Parents are not. Mary is special because she was a virgin and a mother.
- The Most High is God because He is greater or higher than everything.
- Elizabeth is pregnant and will have a baby in 3 months.
- Barren refers to someone who cannot have a child.



-Let it be to me according to your word means that Mary said yes.

**Reflect:** (Take 1 minute and answer the following question.)  
Mary, says yes to God and yes to having Jesus in her life. In what ways have I said yes to God? In what ways do I need to say yes to God?

**Lead:** (Tell your answer to your children modeling loving communication.)

One time I said yes to God was...

One way I need to say yes to God is...

**Ask:** (Choose age appropriate version of question)

When have you said yes to God?do you need to say yes to God?

In what way do you need to say yes to God?

**Answer:** (Let each child answer. Then starting with yourself say how you feel about your answers. Then Say what you want to pray for.)

I said yes to God when...

Sharing about my faith with you and praying together makes me feel...

I want to pray for...

**Pray:**

Jesus, Thank you for my family who loves me.

Thank you for loving me. Thank you for...(let each person say what they are thankful for)

Help me to know you more and love you more. Amen.

### Week 4 Special Prayer

Many Christians will pray by reflecting on a passage of scripture. They will begin by reading the passage twice and then reflecting on a word or phrase that stuck out to them. For instance in Luke 1:26-38, you might reflect on the Holy Spirit coming or on Mary saying, "Let it be with me according to your word." Similarly, we might put ourselves into the scene and say, "how am I like Mary hearing the word of God, and having my plans changed" or "am I called to be like the angel telling others about Jesus."

Read the following passage twice and pick a verse. Then read it again and see which character you identify with. (f your child doesn't have questions or comments of her own, offer some comments and prompting questions: What is happening in the picture (or in the story)? Why? What are characters thinking or feeling? How is God (or Jesus) acting in this story? (If God isn't directly mentioned in the story, you may need to suggest some ways that God is quietly present.) Which character would you like to be? What would you do differently if you were that character? How would you feel?)

Thomas (called Didymus) was not with the followers when Jesus came. Thomas was 1 of the 12. The other followers told Thomas, "We saw the Lord."

But Thomas said, "I will not believe it until I see the nail marks in his hands. And I will not believe until I put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side."

A week later the followers were in the house again. Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came in and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand here in my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you see me.

Those who believe without seeing me will be truly happy."

-John 20:24-29

After reading praying reading and praying again talk about your experience praying.

Then end with the sign of the cross.

## Week 5 Sunday of the Visitation to Mary

### **Set up:**

Set aside a prayer space or set out holy images, a Bible, and light a candle. Turn off the television and set aside your phones. Gather your family and sit reasonably close together.

### **Pray:**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus,

You loved your family, Mary and Joseph.

Thank you for my family who loves me.

When my family loves me I know more about your love.

Help me to know you more and love you more.

Open my ears and my heart.

Amen.

### **Read:** (Read out loud together as a family.)

“In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?

For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy.

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”- Luke 1:39-45

**Explain:** (Take time to help your children understand what they have just read.)

-A fruit of the womb is a baby.

-Zechariah and Elizabeth are married and Elizabeth is Mary's relative

-Elizabeth's baby is John the Baptizer. By a miracle Elizabeth and her baby knew that Jesus was the Messiah and Mary was blessed.

**Reflect:** (Take 1 minute and answer the following question.)

How do I ask Mary for help? Are there people that help me grow in faith? Am I ever jump for joy to be with God?

**Lead:** (Tell your answer to your children modeling loving communication.)

My favorite way to pray with Mary is...

So and so helps me to grow in faith by...

A time I was happy to be with God was...

**Ask:** (Choose age appropriate version of question)

Have you ever asked Mary for help?

Who helps you grow in spiritual life?

When has God made you leap for joy?

**Answer:** (Let each child answer. Then starting with yourself say how you feel about your answers. Then Say what you want to pray for.)

One time God made me leap for joy was...

Someone who helps me grow in faith is...

Sharing about my faith with you and praying together makes me feel...

I want to pray for...

**Pray:**

Jesus,

Thank you for my family who loves me.

Thank you for loving me.

Thank you for...(let each person say what they are thankful for)

Help me to know you more and love you more.

Amen.

## Week 5 Special Prayer

One of the most ancient forms of prayer is the Psalms. Jesus prayed the psalms and even prayed a psalm when he was on the cross. Traditionally many Christians would pray all 150 Psalms every week.

Pray aloud the following Psalms one by one and then put yourself in the scene or choose a verse that stands out. Think about how you are praying a prayer that Jesus prayed. Afterwards discuss.

### **Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd.

I have everything I need.

He gives me rest in green pastures.

He leads me to calm water.

He gives me new strength.

For the good of his name,

he leads me on paths that are right.

Even if I walk

through a very dark valley,

I will not be afraid

because you are with me.

Your rod and your shepherd's staff comfort me.

You prepare a meal for me

in front of my enemies.

You pour oil of blessing on my head.[a]

You give me more than I can hold.

Surely your goodness and love will be with me  
all my life.  
And I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

### **Psalm 117**

All you nations, praise the Lord.  
All you people, praise him.  
The Lord loves us very much.  
His truth is everlasting.

### **Psalm 1**

Blessed is the man  
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
but his delight is in the law[b] of the Lord,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree  
planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers.  
The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.



## Week 6 Sunday of the Birth of John the Baptizer

### **Set up:**

Set aside a prayer space or set out holy images, a Bible, and light a candle. Turn off the television and set aside your phones. Gather your family and sit reasonably close together.

### **Pray:**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus,

You loved your family, Mary and Joseph.

Thank you for my family who loves me.

When my family loves me I know more about your love.

Help me to know you more and love you more.

Open my ears and my heart.

Amen.

### **Read:** (Read out loud together as a family.)

“ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.

Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father.

But his mother said, ‘No; he is to be called John.’

They said to her, ‘None of your relatives has this name.’

Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him.

He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.'  
And all of them were amazed.

Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed,  
and he began to speak, praising God.

Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things  
were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea.  
All who heard them pondered them and said, 'What then will  
this child become?' For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was  
with him." -Luke 1:57-66

**Explain:** (Take time to help your children understand what  
they have just read.)

-Circumcision is a Jewish ritual for 8 day old baby boys  
where they get their name.

-In the culture of the story children were usually named after  
relatives as a sign of love, respect, and family.

- When you drive with your hand on the steering wheel, the  
car goes the right way. When your hand is not on the steering  
wheel the car goes off the path. When God's hand is on John  
it means that God is guiding John the Baptizer.

**Reflect:** (Take 1 minute and answer the following question.)  
Where is God leading me? What path is God leading me on?  
What is God's plan for me?

**Lead:** (Tell your answer to your children modeling loving  
communication.)

One way that God has led me is...

God is leading our family to...

**Ask:** (Choose age appropriate version of question)  
How is God leading you? How has God led you?

**Answer:** (Let each child answer. Then starting with yourself say how you feel about your answers. Then Say what you want to pray for.)

One time God led me...

God leads me by...

Sharing about my faith with you and praying together makes me feel...

I want to pray for...

**Pray:**

Jesus,

Thank you for my family who loves me.

Thank you for loving me.

Thank you for...(let each person say what they are thankful for)

Help me to know you more and love you more.

Amen.

## Week 6 Special Prayer

First thank God for these past few weeks of prayer together as a family.

Second discuss how the prayer has changed you.

Third discuss your feelings about the upcoming family consecration blessing.

Fourth talk about how you want to continue your life of family prayer.

## Appendix: Topics for discussion

# Emotions

# Helping kids identify and express feelings

<https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/helping-kids-identify-and-express-feelings>

Learning to identify and express feelings in a positive way helps kids develop the skills they need to manage them effectively. Here are some tips on how to encourage your child to express their feelings.

## Understanding feelings in kids

Kids deal with many of the same feelings adults do.

Kids experience complex feelings just like adults. They get frustrated, excited, nervous, sad, jealous, frightened, worried, angry and embarrassed.

However, young kids usually don't have the vocabulary to talk about how they are feeling. Instead they communicate their feelings in other ways.

Kids can express their feelings through facial expressions, through their body, their behaviour and play. Sometimes they may act out their feelings in physical, inappropriate or problematic ways.

From the moment kids are born, they start learning the emotional skills they need to identify, express and manage their feelings. They learn how to do this through their social interactions and relationships with important people in their lives such as parents, grandparents and carers.

Being a parent means you've got a really important role to play in helping kids understand their feelings and behaviours. Kids need to be shown how to manage their feelings in positive and constructive ways.

When kids learn to manage their emotions in childhood it leads to positive attitudes and behaviours later in life

Kids who learn healthy ways to express and cope with their feelings are more likely to:

Be empathic and supportive of others

Perform better in school and their career  
Have more positive and stable relationships  
Have good mental health and wellbeing  
Display less behavioural problems  
Develop resilience and coping skills  
Feel more competent, capable and confident  
Have a positive sense of self

What you can do to help your child develop their emotional skills

Here are some of the ways you can help your child learn about and express their feelings:

**Tune into cues** - Sometimes feelings can be hard to identify. Tune into your child's feelings by looking at their body language, listening to what they're saying and observing their behaviour. Figuring out what they feel and why means you can help them identify, express and manage those feelings better.

**Behind every behaviour is a feeling** - Try to understand the meaning and feeling behind your child's behaviour. You can help your child find other ways to express that feeling once you know what is driving the behaviour.

**Name the feeling** - Help your child name their feelings by giving them a label. Naming feelings is the first step in helping kids learn to identify them. It allows your child to develop an emotional vocabulary so they can talk about their feelings.

**Identify feelings in others** – Provide lots of opportunities to identify feelings in others. You might ask your child to reflect on what someone else may be feeling. Cartoons or picture books are a great way discuss feelings and helps kids learn how to recognise other people's feelings through facial expressions.

**Be a role model** - Kids learn about feelings and how to express them appropriately by watching others. Show your child how you're feeling about different situations and how you deal with those feelings.

**Encourage with praise** - Praise your child when they talk about their feelings or express them in an appropriate way. Not only does it show that feelings are normal and it's ok to talk about them, it reinforces the behaviour so they are likely to repeat it.



Listen to your child's feelings - Stay present and resist the urge to make your child's bad feelings go away. Support your child to identify and express their feelings so they are heard. When feelings are minimised or dismissed, they will often be expressed in unhealthy ways.

Sometimes kids don't have the words to express how they feel and may act out these feelings in ways that are problematic

Your child might hit or throw toys when angry or frustrated. They might have a hard time settling down after an exciting day. Use this as a learning opportunity to teach your child to express their feeling in a positive way. Teach your child to act on feelings by:

- Taking some deep breaths

- Asking for help or support

- Walking away and taking time out

- Finding a different way to do things

- Taking time to relax before trying again

- Trying to solve the problem with words

- Saying what they feel instead of acting it out

- Talking with a grown-up about what is happening

Spending time with a loved one or asking for a hug or cuddle

- Describing what they are feeling or reactions in their body

You play an important role in your child's emotional development

Helping your child identify their feelings is the first step in helping them manage them.

Kids who are able to identify, understand, express and manage a wide range of feelings experience long term benefits to their mental health and wellbeing.

# Describing your feelings

<https://aweekendforyourmarriage.org/describe.php>

Feelings are hard to get out because we've been trained to think, rather than feel.

It takes patience and gentle questioning on the part of the spouse to help the partner discover feelings. Don't be discouraged. It may take months of daily dialogue before we begin to recognize the difference between thinking and feeling.

Suggestions for describing feelings

- Describe the feeling from experience - the children, a baseball game, etc.
- Recognize the difference in male and female viewpoints.
- Realize that men usually write less, women write more.
- "Why" does not describe a feeling. It explains the circumstance that causes the feeling. "I feel good because..." is not a description, it's an explanation. "I feel as good as the time you brought me flowers" is a description.
- Sometimes you can identify a feeling by relating the sensation to a particular part of the body, i.e.,

gut feelings felt in the stomach (nausea, that butterfly feeling): an ache in the throat with longing; pounding heart with fright.

**I THINK vs. I FEEL RULE-** If you can substitute "I am" for "I feel", you have expressed a feeling. If you can substitute "I think" for "I feel", you have expressed a thought or a judgment.

**Intensity** -Rate the feeling from 1 to 10 "My feeling is a '10' "

**Taste**-Sour, sweet, bitter, etc. "I feel bitter, like a sour lemon"

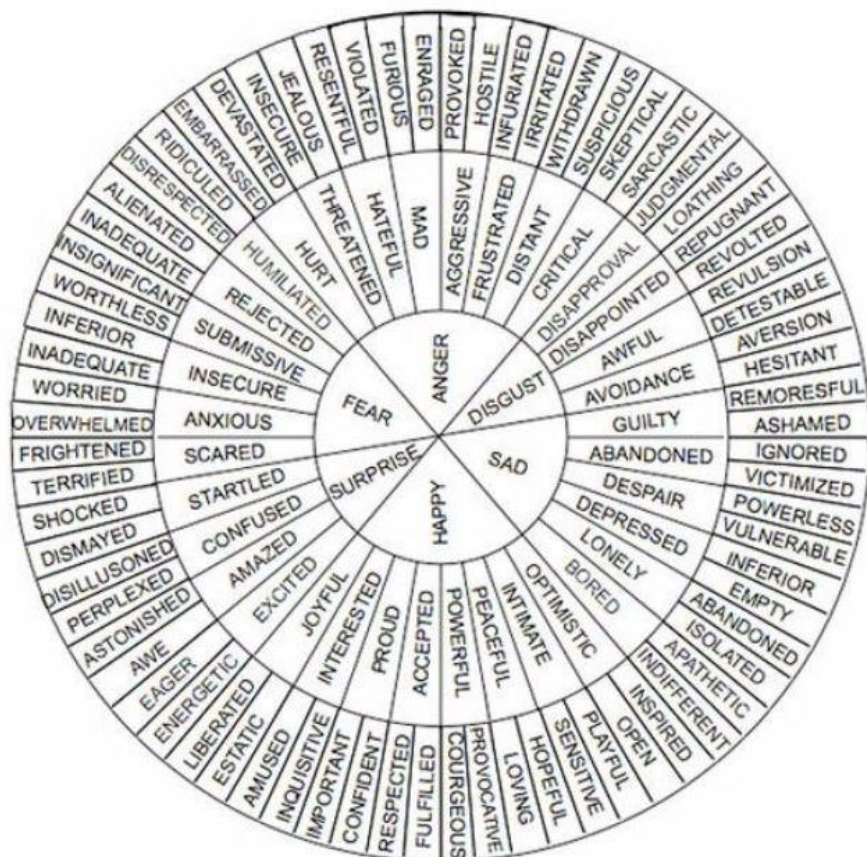
**Touch**-Scratchy, soft, prickly, etc. "It has a softness like silk"

**Color**-Red, blue, etc. "My anger is red hot"

**Sound**-High pitched, screech, crack of thunder. "It was like the singing birds"

**Physical reaction**-Sick, chilled, giggling, etc. "It was like an upset stomach"

**Similar past experience**-Childbirth, riding a bike, "Like when our child took her first steps."



# Good Grief

Kimberly Williams

<https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/good-grief>

“Grieve now or regret it later.”

That was the most common advice people gave me when I was twenty years old and lost my father. I wanted to heed their warnings, but I only had one problem: I didn't know how to grieve. I remember sitting in my room staring at pictures trying to facilitate an emotional moment and thinking, “Am I doing it? Did I grieve?”

Knowing how to grieve well and supporting students in their grief may be one of the most valuable resources a youth worker can have. When a youth worker is unsure about how to respond to grief, their students may feel a subtle pressure to “get over it” or to deal with their loss by themselves. When a youth worker is comfortable with grief, their students are more likely to talk to them about their loss.

Grief can be confusing, and though everyone experiences loss, few of us really know how to grieve our losses well. I suppose I didn't heed the advice given to me, because it was years after my dad died that I really started exploring

grief. Initially it was so I could help others, but in the process I found my own good grief.

## WHEN DO WE NEED TO GRIEVE?

One of the first things I discovered about grief is that it doesn't just have to do with someone dying. In the book *All Our Losses All Our Grievs*, authors Kenneth Mitchell and Herbert Anderson emphasize that any loss someone experiences must be grieved. They even break it down into six major types of losses 1 :

1 Material Loss – “Yes, you can grieve if you lose your cell phone.”

2 Relationship Loss – “Yes, you can grieve if you break up with your boyfriend.”

3 Intrapsychic Loss or loss of a dream – “Yes, you can grieve not getting the job you wanted.”

4 Functional Loss – “Yes, you can grieve breaking your arm.”

5 Role Loss – “Yes, you can grieve being single if you get married.”

6 Systematic Loss – “Yes, you can grieve if your child leaves home and the family dynamics change.”

I had never thought of a person needing to grieve the loss of a dream or the loss of function in their body before. I'm sure I have been grieving or someone around me has and I haven't even acknowledged it.

While I was directing a year-long volunteer program I noticed a trend among the students, especially the ones right out of high school. In the first few months of adjusting they would say things like, "I don't know why I am acting like this" and "I'm not normally like this!" Mitchell and Anderson write, "Growing up and leaving home involves relationship loss, material loss, intrapsychic loss, systematic loss, and role loss: every form of loss but functional. We therefore believe that leaving home is one of the most powerful and critical loss events any human being undergoes." 2 At first I didn't realize it, but those youth were grieving. This is incredibly valuable to know as you prepare the seniors in your youth ministry for graduation. [For more about helping students prepare to leave high school, please see additional posts here.] Similarly, you can assume that every kid who moves to or from your town is grieving.

After I read about all losses needing to be grieved, I started asking the youth in my ministry the question, "Do you think you're grieving?" At times I even gave them permission to grieve: "You know it's ok for you to grieve

that.” I was so surprised at student’s reactions; more often than not they seemed relieved.

## HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE IN THE MIDST OF GRIEF

There are different ways to support others when they are initially experiencing a loss and as they continue to work through the grief process. When a kid or adult first experiences loss, here are some things to keep in mind:

### 1. AVOID PROBING QUESTIONS THAT HURT

There are some things we often say to people who are grieving that bring more pain than comfort. After “I’m sorry,” we often ask questions like:

- “Was she sick for a long time?”
- “Was the accident his fault?”
- “Was he a Christian?”
- “Were you close?”

These questions themselves are not harmful, but sometimes the reason we ask them is not out of concern. We ask because we are attempting to avoid having to experience that type of suffering. In order for our mind to wrap itself around what happened, we ask all sorts of



probing questions that can sometimes jab at a person's loss, especially when they have to describe the situation again and again. It is helpful to invite people to share rather than investigate. This means being observant, taking clues from the person if they are comfortable sharing, and offering to listen if they want to share more. As a general rule, assume that a person has shared as much as they want you to know when they tell you about a loss.

## 2. BE CAREFUL NOT TO COMPARE

We are also prone to compare. Using ourselves as the center, we tend to use a subtle scale from “not as bad” to “worse than” us. In *A Grace Disguised*, Jerry Sittser describes his experience of losing his mother, wife and daughter all in the same accident. He said that before the accident he would try to quantify and compare people's loss by looking at things like, “the numbers killed, the length of time spent in the hospital, the severity of abuse, the degree of family dysfunction, the difficulty and inconvenience of an illness, the complexity of details during a divorce, or the strings of bad luck.”<sup>3</sup> However, after the accident, when he became an “instant celebrity” because his loss could not be imagined or surpassed, he couldn't stand others' tendency to compare. He says that when we compare we are driven to two unhealthy

extremes. The people determined to have a loss “not that bad” feel like their loss is not valid and are “dismissed as unworthy of attention and recognition.”<sup>4</sup> And those who have a loss that is deemed “worse” can convince themselves that they are alone in their suffering and that no one can understand or help. “They are the ultimate victims. So they indulge themselves with their pain and gain a strange kind of pleasure in their misery.”<sup>4</sup> Especially during grief, comparing is never helpful.

### 3. BE PRESENT AND SILENT

Overwhelmingly, the research and literature on grieving suggest that the most helpful way to support someone may simply be to be present with them silently. Mitchell and Anderson write, “Two warring needs develop: the need to be alone with one’s grief and the need not to be isolated from meaningful communities of support.”<sup>5</sup> They observe a beautiful Jewish custom called “sitting shiva” (pronounced “shee-vah”) where for seven days friends and family are able come and sit with the bereaved person at their home without saying anything except maybe a hello, good-by or shalom.<sup>5</sup> How wonderful if we practiced that today! It would eliminate all the awkward “sorry’s”, the fumbling over words and people feebly trying to answer all of the “why?” questions.

I think when my dad died I would have appreciated a “sitting shiva” session – a time when I did not have to be alone with all of the whirling thoughts in my head, but also a time where I did not have to try to explain to people what I was thinking or comfort them when they did not know how to comfort me.

This is good news for us as we support others who are grieving. Often our best response is to be present, which frees us from feeling like we need to fix the situation. In my own experience, I find it is usually because of my own discomfort that I respond to the grief of others in the way I do. I try to soften the pain I see, I try to minimize or understand it. Mitchell and Anderson note, “It is equally important to demonstrate God’s suffering love by our willingness to listen to suffering and grief, and not give in to the impulse to run from the pain, shut off the complaint, or respond too quickly with pious platitudes.”

6

## HELPING PEOPLE THROUGH THE PROCESS OF GRIEF:

As most of us have experienced, loss begins with an initial sort of rawness. After this rawness subsides, we then enter into the grief process. Much has been written about grief, loss, death and dying. In an attempt to understand and predict what is happening we often

gravitate toward models that give us stages and linear progressions of grief.

For example, from her experience of working with patients with terminal illnesses, Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross writes about five stages the dying go through: Denial and Isolation, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. <sup>7</sup> The problem with these types of models is that grieving is often not a linear process and is very unique to each person. It may be more helpful to have a framework for understanding grief than it is to have an expectation of chronological stages.

Based on my review of research on loss, I believe a successful grieving process involves doing two things at the same time: being able to remember and being able to hope. <sup>8</sup>

## REMEMBERING THE PAST

When grieving a death or a loss, it is important to remember the actual person or situation for who they were or what it was in your life, complete with strengths, weaknesses and quirks. When remembering, people can sometimes focus on remembering all the good or all the bad parts, but both are important. It is valuable to explore ways to celebrate what was and acknowledge how the

griever's life has been affected because of knowing that person or experiencing that situation.

As youth workers, we are able to encourage this type of holistic remembering. For example, if a class of seniors is about to graduate it is not uncommon to have a time of acknowledgement or reflection. During this exciting time, remembering can sometimes be filled with good memories and testimonies of growth. But for the student there may be a darker side as well.

I remember when I was graduating from high school it was scary to think that a chapter of my life was closing so definitively. I knew things would never be the same again and any secret hopes or dreams I had of who I would be or what I would do during that time was impossible once I crossed the stage and shook my principal's hand. Youth pastors can invite those who are grieving to both celebrate and lament as they remember. When a person is able to embrace all of who a person or situation was in their life it is a sign that they are successfully grieving.

## HOPING FOR THE FUTURE

While one aspect of the grief process is being able to look into the past, the other side of the grief process is being able to look into the future, or being able to hope.

To hope, we must be able to look ahead and envision a new life. For some this may look like dreaming about long-range plans, and for some it is waking up and being able to make a plan for the day. When you have always envisioned your life a certain way or with a certain person in it, and then for whatever reason that becomes impossible, it takes some time to hope again. When someone dies, those who were closest to that person have an even more complicated time looking forward to a life without them. Sometimes hoping means envisioning a completely new life.

The youth worker can help foster this “re-dreaming” process. For example, the death of a friend is devastating for kids. Coupled with the loss of the friend is also the loss of any plans made together. It can sometimes feel disloyal to make new plans or continue on without the friend, and the youth worker can walk alongside the student to help brainstorm and encourage them in this process. When a student can hope again, when they can make new connections and have new dreams, it is a sign that they are successfully grieving.

## DOING BOTH AT THE SAME TIME

I have noticed that sometimes people are good at one or the other of these processes. Some people are able to remember, but refuse to hope for a different future.

Others are able to hope and move ahead but are unwilling to look back. If there is not a balance of both hoping and remembering a person can get stuck in their grief.

After developing this concept I realized that I was a bit stuck. I am much better at hoping than I am at remembering. Once I realized this I wanted to find ways to remember my dad well. I put together a scrapbook of pictures and memories of my dad and invited some of my dad's friends to share what they remembered about him. I was surprised at how I was able to continue to get to know things about my dad from what other people remembered.

So “good grief” means grieving all our losses by being able to fully remember what that person or situation meant to us and at the same time being hopeful for our future without that person or situation. Now when someone close to me is working through the grief process I can assess if they are a better “hoper” or “rememberer” and invite them to practice the other side of grief as well. [For another FYI resource on helping kids work through loss, see “In the Aftermath: Processing Trauma Through the Lens of Lament,” ]

WHERE IS GOD IN GRIEF?

In the midst of suffering we often ask hard questions about God's character and will. The questions often have to do with "why?" It is important to be able to engage with these questions with someone who is suffering. While exploring grief I have made a shift in my head from a God who "takes" people to a God who laments death. I am now able to recognize that God suffers to see us suffer.

In his book *Lament for a Son*, Nirene Cholas Wolterstorff writes, "The Christian gospel tells us more of the meaning of sin than of suffering." 9 As much as I search the scriptures for the meaning of suffering I am left unsatisfied. There is a mystery to suffering. Wolterstorff writes, "Perhaps it has been a mistake to think that God reveals himself. He speaks, yes. But as he speaks, he hides. His face he does not show us." 9 God does not explain everything. Wolterstorff concludes, "Instead of explaining our suffering God shares it." 9 This is such a hopeful idea to me. Though God does not always reveal the meaning of our suffering, He shares in our suffering. Isaiah the prophet writes,

"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the



punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” 10

It is amazing that we serve a wounded God, a God who also experiences suffering. I do not often dwell on this. I often think about God as omnipotent and powerful. I think of God as a protector. I do not often recognize that he is also a grieving Father. Or that it is through the suffering and wounds of Jesus that we know who he is. Wolterstorff writes, “‘Put your hands into my wounds,’ said the risen Jesus to Thomas, ‘and you will know who I am.’ The wounds of Christ are his identity. They tell us who he is.” [Nirene Cholas Wolterstorff, *Lament*, 92.] We have a God who suffers as we suffer. Perhaps God does not explain suffering so that we do not have to explain our suffering.

## AN INVITATION TO GRIEVE WELL

As you look around your youth ministry, there are no doubts that kids are experiencing loss. But are they grieving their losses well? Is anyone giving them tools to face loss by both remembering and hoping?

Grieving is good because it means that we are invested and that we care. It is a sign that we love. Supporting others through their grief is a way that we express our

love for them. So we grieve because we love, and perhaps we survive because we are loved.

## ACTION POINTS

- Can you identify some of the losses the kids in your ministry are going through right now?
- If the loss of one student in particular jumps out at you, ask them if they would be willing to check in with you on that. See if you can listen to whether they are better at “hoping” or “remembering.”
- Is there a grief that you’re “stuck in”? Take some time to determine if you tend towards “hoping” or “remembering” and brainstorm ways that you could encourage the other side. Let a friend know that you are doing this and invite them to follow up with you.
- How are the students in your ministry answering the question, “Where is God in suffering?”

## HOW TO STOP SIBLING FIGHTING (A TIP THAT ONLY TAKES 16 SECONDS)

<https://www.noguiltmom.com/how-to-stop-sibling-fighting/>

Without warning, your 3-year-old daughter lashes out and hits her baby brother. Or maybe your four-year-old son yells at his 9-year-old sister and then snaps the head off her Monster High doll. You wish this was a one-off occurrence. But, no... Something like this happens EVERY. SINGLE. DAY. *“Be nice to your sister,”* you plead. *“OH MY GOD!! Don’t hurt the baby!”* When will it end? Nothing is helping. In fact, the nicer you ask them to be to each other, the more belligerent they become. Don’t you wish you knew how to get your kids to stop fighting?

### HOW DID YOU DEAL WITH SIBLING RIVALRY?

First, let’s think back. Do you have a sibling? My little sister is 7 years younger than I am. One day, we were playing in the backyard and I said something that made her mad. To get back at me, she planted her toddler jaws into the fleshy part of my tricep. When I tried to lift my arm up and away, she held tight like a little piranha, her feet dangled six inches from the ground. We got into constant fights.

From my experience, she was the young and cute one – always in pigtails and looking so pretty. I, on the other hand, was just entering puberty. Clothes suddenly pinched my waist, I never knew what to say to my peers and I hated that my sister took all my parents attention. So, I excluded her. Told her to get out of my room. Refused to play with her and...tattled on every little bad thing she did. I hit her too when I got mad. I did exactly what I don’t want my kids to do.

But what's the alternative? Ask them to be nice all the time? Actually, that might exacerbate the situation more.

## HOW TO STOP SIBLING FIGHTING

According to the book, [Siblings Without Rivalry](#), the bad feelings need to come out before the good feelings can come in. This means that we as parents need to acknowledge the hateful, vengeful feelings between our kids before there can be any chance of harmony. What?!? Do you mean that my kids yelling at each other is not only completely normal, but ideal? Yep. Well, to a certain extent.

## NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE BAD FEELINGS

Just like adults, when kids hold all of their emotions inside, they're likely to explode in some other way. For instance, when I'm having a completely sucky day – those days when no one is visiting my blog, the dog used the dining room floor as her personal commode, the kitchen drain is clogged – and I try to maintain a happy exterior. One of three things will happen, I'll: drink my weight in wine, eat my entire kitchen, or yell at my kids if they even look at me the wrong way. All those negative feelings – that I have every right to feel – come out in horrible, awful, no-good, very bad ways. We need positive ways to let our feelings out just like our kids need ways to express how they feel about their sister or brother.

## HOW TO STOP SIBLING FIGHTING WITH WORDS

From a very early age, we as women are told to be nice. That doesn't exactly work when it comes to mental health. Women tend to ruminate more than men. Whereas men turn their problems into anger and substance abuse, [women tend to hold it all inside and blame themselves – thus causing depression](#). Now, I'm not saying that either way is good.

Both sexes could use guidance on how to better deal with emotions. Why not teach our kids this skill at a young age? We benefit in two ways: it helps our kids stop fighting, and they'll have a process they can use the rest of their life.

Here's how to do it.

Last week, my son screamed at his sister while unloading the dishwasher: *"STOP IT, SISSY!! YOU ARE SO RUDE!! I DON'T LIKE YOU!"* And I responded, *"Stop yelling at your sister! Can't you two just along?"* Ummm... ya, that didn't help the situation one bit. My son was furious and that's completely OK. And, we need to show our kids how to release their feelings without attacking the other person. Instead, I could have said, *"WOW! You sound furious at your sister. And you used your words to tell her how mad you were."*

That's it.

Now, say instead of yelling at her, he hit her or he called her a name like "stupid" or a "jerk". Then, we can step in, stop the behavior and say something like: *"Whoa, no hitting and name calling in our house! You sound mad! Tell her in a way without hitting or name calling."*

## HOW TO HANDLE SIBLING FIGHTING WITH WISHES

When we can't give our kids what they want in reality, we can always find a way to give it in fantasy. For example, I was busy typing in our office upstairs, when my daughter came in: *"MOM! Erik threw my doll across the room!"* My first inclination as a parent: *"Ignore him. He's just trying to get your attention."* How many times were we told this as kids? And did "ignoring him" make the situation any better? No

way! Our siblings still took our dolls and threw them across the room. Instead, I could answer – *“That is frustrating. You sound mad. You wish he would stop throwing your dolls and apologize.”* Notice that this doesn’t require any compliance from my son – something I probably wouldn’t get immediately anyway. But giving my daughter’s feelings a name and saying aloud what she wishes would happen shows that I understand what she’s feeling – even if her brother does not.

### DEAL WITH SIBLING RIVALRY THROUGH A CREATIVE OR SYMBOLIC ACT

When kids are mad, they need an outlet. Creativity is one of the best emotional outlets there is. Some ideas for how your son or daughter can handle their emotions towards their siblings:

- Draw on a piece of paper
- Write exactly how they feel
- Use a pillow to show what they want to do to their sibling (Warning: This may shock you, but remember them hitting a pillow is in place of what they would do to their brother or sister)

At first, your kids might resist doing something like this. Since kids tend to copy their parent’s behavior, show them how you use creativity to release your own negative emotions. Laundry repairman charging you for a job that he didn’t finish? Draw an ugly picture of him with dollar signs for eyes. Mad at your 10-year-old for always leaving clothes on the floor? Write her a note. Chances are, the next time your children are mad, they will use the form of expression that

you modeled to deal with it. Pretty cool how much influence we can have on our kids...

The next time your kids start to argue, stop sibling fighting by allowing each child to express their negative emotions. Show them how they can use their words, give them their wishes in fantasy and model how to creatively express their emotions. You'll be surprised how the simple act of releasing bad feelings is one of the best sibling fighting solutions there is.

# The World



# Talking With Children About Disaster

## Tips for talking to kids about scary news

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Sometimes the news is just heartbreaking: senseless violence, deliberate cruelty, lives lost, families devastated...

For families directly affected by a tragedy, finding ways to move forward takes enormous strength and courage. But even those not directly affected can have their sense of safety and their faith in a just world deeply shaken by tragic news events.

A plane crash, a terrorist attack, an accident, an epidemic, or a natural disaster... Events that cause widespread suffering leave us with the aching question, "How could such a thing happen?!", and they make us want to hold our children tighter.

When we adults feel baffled, frightened, and gutchurningly sad about tragic news events, how can we make sense of them for our children?

How children understand death at different ages

Our explanations need to match our children's developmental level. Children understand death in different ways at different ages. Three- and four-year olds see death as temporary and not personally relevant. Young grade school children understand that death is permanent but don't

believe they will die. They may find symbols of death frightening. Around age nine, children grasp that they too will die someday. Some respond by being extra cautious, while others become daredevils. Teens are capable of abstract reasoning and may enjoy philosophical discussions about life and death, good and evil, but if tragedy strikes too close to home, they may revert to more concrete ways of thinking.

### Talking with children about disaster

Here are some things you may want to keep in mind when talking to your child about tragic news events:

- Start wherever your child is. Children may misunderstand adult conversations or get inaccurate information from peers. Hearing about a disaster repeatedly may make young children think it's happening again and again. Ask your child, "What have you heard?" This may give you the opportunity to clarify or reassure. For instance, you may need to explain that the tragedy happened far away or that it's a very rare event.

With young children, especially, keep your explanations short and factual. Emphasize that they are safe. Don't be surprised if you see drawings or imaginative play about the tragedy. That's children's way of controlling and making sense of their experiences. These activities can present opportunities to talk with your child. On the other hand, you may see nothing if your child doesn't view the event as personally relevant.

Follow your child's lead about how much to talk about the disaster. If your child doesn't want to talk about it, that's fine. You don't have to push it.

- Be careful what you let your child see. Whenever there's a disaster, there's always nonstop media coverage as facts about the event unfold. It's probably impossible to prevent all but the youngest of children from hearing the news, but use your judgment about how much and what kind of information your child can handle.

Consider both content and immediacy. Immediacy means how "in your face" information is. Hearing a trusted adult calmly say that a disaster happened is less immediate than reading a detailed description of the tragedy, which is less immediate than seeing photos of the adults or children who died, which is less immediate than seeing video footage of a grieving mother sobbing as she talks about her dead child. Most children could tolerate hearing about the disaster, even though it's frightening, but few could tolerate the video footage, nor is there any benefit in exposing them to such vivid information.

- Take care of yourself. Children are magnets for emotion, so they're likely to pick up on adults' fear, sadness, horror, and anger about this event, even if they don't fully understand what's going on. In order to be able to take care of your child, you need to take care of yourself. Reach out to a friend, family member, or spouse for comfort. Watch your own level of media exposure. Get enough exercise, rest, and healthy food. And if you find yourself acting irritable or tense, reassure your children that they're not the cause.

- Keep things stable and predictable at home. Routines are comforting to children. While it might be tempting to keep your children constantly by your side in the aftermath of a tragedy, it sends them an important message about your confidence in their safety if you allow them to continue their

normal routine about school or daycare, meals, baths, and bedtime. Of course, some extra hugs won't hurt.

- Find child-size ways to take action. Most of us feel better when we can do something about a problem. If your child seems preoccupied with the disaster, you might want to help your child come up with some way to take action. This could involve saying a prayer together, sending a card or letter, signing a petition, raising money for an appropriate charity, or even just spending extra time with loved ones.

- Talk about values. When tragedy strikes, it can derail us, but it's also a call to be our best selves. It's an opportunity to demonstrate and talk about our deepest values with our children, especially courage and compassion.

# I Doubt It Making Space for Hard Questions

<https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/i-doubt-it>

Kara Powell, Brad M. Griffin

I (Brad) remember as a child in the '80s seeing vivid televised images of starving African kids. Grottesque, overwhelming images.

I can actually recall sitting in my brother's bedroom watching Ethiopian famine vaulted to a little television screen in central Kentucky, and feeling completely helpless to do anything about it. I also remember wondering why God didn't just fix it. Why God didn't pour out rain over Africa or make some kind of manna appear to end the famine. Why God couldn't figure out how to make suffering stop.

## ***Why, God?***

Those two words have punctuated the beginning of a faith crisis for more than a few believers through the ages. Especially when marked with big questions about the world or about personal circumstances for which easy answers simply don't come.

Unfortunately, many of us have experienced periods of questioning that were met with silence, trite fix-it Bible quotations, or a well-meaning "Just have faith" from those around us. In short, **our questions and doubts were pushed underground** and either blocked out or left to grow like cancer until they overtook our faith.

Whether students in your ministry or kids in your home are disturbed by today's wars and famines, or wondering about God's goodness in the midst of fifth-period algebra, their questions and doubts are begging to be known.

The question before us is: **Will we *let them be known*?**

## Doubt in the Research

Some of us may come from traditions or training that suggest that doubt is troubling or even sinful. But our Sticky Faith research findings show that doubt can help form our faith in stronger and perhaps more lasting ways. 1

### 1. Doubts happen

Seventy percent of the students in our study of youth group graduates reported that they had doubts in high school about what they believed about God and the Christian faith, and just as many felt like they wanted to talk with their youth leaders about their doubts. Yet *less than half* of those students actually talked with leaders. Likewise, less than half talked with their youth group peers about their doubts.

So if you do the math here (and at FYI we can't resist), that means that seven of every ten students is struggling with doubts—but only one or two of those ten is likely to have had conversations about those doubts with anyone. **In other words, a lot of kids are wrestling with tough questions *alone* and in *silence*.**

When we asked our students in college to reflect back on the doubts they remembered having during high school, their responses tended to cluster around four central questions:

1. Does God exist?
2. Does God love me?
3. Am I living the life God wants?
4. Is Christianity true/the only way to God?

As we've shared these questions with leaders and parents across the country, one of the resounding responses has been that these are

questions adults have, too. Perhaps when we're silent about our own faith questions, our kids don't know they can ask them out loud.

## 2. Safety matters

Safety to express doubt seems to be connected with stronger faith. **High school seniors who feel most free to express doubt and discuss their personal problems with adults show greater faith maturity in college.** Further, among those who had doubts and did talk with leaders or peers about them, about half found these conversations helped them. This helpfulness was also linked to stronger faith.

It might be that simply creating safe spaces for young people to explore hard questions can deepen faith.

## 3. Students' view of God makes a difference

When young people feel safe to share doubts and struggles with peers and adults, they also feel more supported by *God*. Our study explored correlations between a scale measuring this concept of "God support"—the extent to which someone feels that God cares about their lives, feels close to God, and feels valued by God 2—and a number of other factors. Safe environments for expressing doubts were positively correlated with God support in those analyses. Talking with adults about doubts is also linked to feeling supported by God. And feeling more supported by God is linked to stronger faith maturity as measured in other scales. So it seems as though there's a connection between students' perception of God, their perceived safety to express doubt, and their actual faith maturity.

#### 4. Doubts aren't necessarily the end of faith

Lest we be misunderstood, simply *having* doubts doesn't transfer into more mature faith.

For many students, struggling with faith can in fact lead to weakened faith, at least in the short term. One of the scales we incorporated in our third-year survey was the "Spiritual Struggles Scale." 3 Students were asked to indicate the extent to which each item on a list of religious struggles (e.g., "Felt distant from God," "Questioned my religious/spiritual beliefs,") had described them in college. We found that the more frequent students' experiences of struggling with belief, the less likely they were to show Sticky Faith. This left us to wonder whether these students received the support they needed in the midst of their struggle.

On the other side of struggle, we asked students about various events and the extent to which they strengthened or weakened faith. 4 Interestingly, **experiences of loneliness, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed seem to push students toward God**. These feelings were reported as strengthening faith, and when we analyzed them alongside measures of faith, we found strong correlations.

The same was true of **dialogue with other students**. In fact, the stretching experiences most connected to Sticky Faith were interactions with other students; particularly with people of other faiths, and with students of other cultures/ethnicities. We often fear that the increased diversity of lifestyle and belief that many students encounter in college will weaken their faith; in our research, the opposite seems to be true.

Other research has found similar connections between college students' faith and experiences. In fact, some studies have shown



that faith can grow as we encounter the following sorts of significant struggles as well as engage with new people 5:

1. Exposure to diverse ways of thinking, whether through other students, classes, or some other source.
2. Multicultural exposure, through mission trips, living in another culture, befriending someone from another culture, or even reading about people from other cultures.
3. Relationship, health, or emotional challenges like significant illness, conflict with parents, or other negative experiences.

In her classic study on crisis and faith, Margaret Hall discovered that those who showed the most spiritual depth after experiencing crises were **those who had consciously reoriented their faith in order to overcome the crisis**. In other words, they were attentive to the ways their faith must change so they could climb out of the pit of despair. 6

One student in our study described a similar experience:

Entering my sophomore year of college, I became very, I guess, disappointed with life. I had all these ideas about college and it wasn't necessarily going how I wanted. I was feeling very far away from God and very dry spiritually, struggling to find a church and a church family where I could fit in at school. And as I went through that long struggle, basically spiritual darkness ... when I came out of it I found God kind of waiting for me on the other side, and realized that he'd been with me through that struggle, through that time of question and doubt and searching.

### Making Space for Doubt

Thankfully, **we don't need to leave young people doubting alone** in our ministries or our homes. Below are some ideas for creating space in our relationships and programs with adolescents where their questions can be both heard and unpacked.

## 1. Creating Safe Zones

The perception that “good Christians don’t doubt” can easily (and sometimes unintentionally) be fostered in youth ministry. This understanding can be intensified by the letdowns that may follow retreat and camp highs and hype, haunting students who wake up the next week and don’t “feel God” as viscerally as before.

Our responsibility to the kids in our care includes creating safe places for questions that emerge along the faith journey. In the family, small group settings, mentoring relationships, and in the context of the broader youth ministry, how are doubts and struggles being voiced, and how are they being received?

One ministry we know is working to create space for struggles and doubts to be safely heard. They now close each session of their fifth-and-sixth-grade group with 56 seconds of silence where kids can write down any question on a note card. The hope is to make asking questions a normal part of faith development starting in early adolescence, even if those questions don’t all get answered right away.

Another church from one of our Sticky Faith Cohorts is working hard to create space for doubt in the midst of its Confirmation program. At the conclusion of the six-month process, most students write a statement of faith. Last year one student felt safe enough to write a “Statement of Doubt” instead. This allowed her to share openly with the community that her own journey of faith wasn’t yet at the place of trusting Christ. Several months later, she came to the point where she had wrestled through her doubts and decided to be baptized as an expression of her newfound trust. Alongside her were several adults who had supported her, prayed for her, and walked with her through her valley of doubt to the other side of faith.

## 2. Learning to Lament

While scripture doesn't always give us answers to all our questions, the Bible does have a surprising place where doubts and struggles are freely expressed: the book of Psalms. While we tend to think of the psalms as a book of praises, the writers of the Hebrew songs and prayers that became their worship book were not afraid to ask God to show up in the midst of ugly situations. Out of the 150 psalms, over one-third are considered laments. <sup>7</sup>

A lament can be defined simply as a cry out to God. It's both an act of grief and of asking for help. In fact, lament is usually something we do in the dark places—often the darkest points of our life journeys. For example, Psalm 88 ends with the phrase, “darkness is my closest friend” (v. 18).

One of the most frequently-asked questions in scripture is “How long, oh Lord?” It's an important question because it calls God to do something to end our pain or the pain of others. Laments like this don't answer all of our questions, but lamenting can be a helpful part of strengthening our faith by reminding us that *answers aren't everything*. As the psalmists proclaim over and over, the unfailing love of God isn't wiped out by anything: not our crises, not our doubts, and not even our sins.

By weaving lament into our corporate worship and prayer life, we open up the possibility that kids might feel freer to share their own hard questions, and maybe even write or sing their own psalms of lament.

## 3. Preparing Seniors for Doubt and Dialogue

During our research, one youth pastor from Tennessee shared with us: “Every year in the fall I get phone calls—usually in the middle of

the night—from students after they get a campus ministry visit where they're asked if they ever doubt. If they say yes, they're told they don't have enough faith. They call me back confused, asking, 'Is it okay to doubt or not?'"

Some students will leave our ministries or homes and face new questions and doubts in college that they haven't wondered about before. Giving them a healthy heads-up about this before they leave home can help doubt become a building block for new, deeper faith.

Alongside new doubts in college is often new dialogue. Students need to understand the basics of Christian faith in order to discuss their faith with others, and training in core beliefs (sometimes called apologetics) can be helpful. However, learning to *argue* about faith may not be the most helpful approach. Reflecting on her teenage years, author Alisa Harris writes about her own experience of being trained to give these kinds of responses: "I was taught that faith was so simple and easily grasped that I could argue someone into it, which ended up shaking my faith when I found that belief wasn't simple, and argumentation and evidence could only take me so far." 8 As we prepare seniors for talking about faith after high school, we will do well to avoid oversimplifying belief into neat tenets that resolve every question with a proof-text answer. 9

In response to youth workers' requests and in partnership with youth pastor Jim Candy, we've recently released a curriculum for high school students called *Can I Ask That?* The small group discussion format is designed as a tool to help you engage dialogue around some of these tough questions while students are still with you in high school ministry (or it could be used by parents as well). **Learn more.**

### Falling in the Light

One of the things we do in my (Brad's) church is regularly remind ourselves to live out our core values. In affirming authenticity as one of those values, we state that as we struggle and stumble through our

faith journeys, “...we encourage one another to ‘fall in the light’—to readily admit our mistakes, not to hide or try to cover them up.”

Falling in the light. I like that image not only for thinking about mistakes, but also about our fall into questions and doubt. When students around us fall into seasons of uncertainty, **let’s help them fall in the light of Christ and Christ’s people**, ready to catch and hold them through doubt and back into faith.

### Action Points

- How do you tend to respond when a student asks a hard question about God? What do you think your first response does to open up space for more questioning or shut that space down?
- Share this article with others in your ministry or with other parents. Then get together and share ideas for how you can collectively make it safe for kids to express their doubts and struggles.
- Gather a group of students and ask them for their perception of whether it’s okay to share faith struggles in your ministry (or do this with your kids at home). Ask for their input on ways you can create a more supportive environment as well as actively seek answers to the questions that arise.

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# Tips for Parents Whose Kids Want to Skip Church

By David R. Smith

<https://thesource4parents.com/parenting-help/i-dont-wanna-go/>

"Harrison, just doesn't want to attend church with us," said a friend about his teenage son. With a grimace on his face he asked, "What should we do?"

That's a great question...but first let's talk about what we shouldn't do.

## **Making a Difference or Making Matters Worse**

Why wouldn't "Harrison" want to go to church? I wondered. The pastor at his church happens to be a dynamic, godly, theologically profound, talented, and handsome guy. OK, OK. I'm the pastor at this particular church...but rather than taking offense, I assured my good friend that his family wasn't the only one in America facing this issue. I even told him how much I despised church when I was a teenager...before becoming a disciple of Jesus and then a pastor, myself.

It's true; for several intriguing and/or difficult reasons, thousands upon thousands of families have a similar conversation amongst themselves each weekend. Unfortunately, many of the parents caught in this back-and-forth choose to adopt one of two possible strategies that are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Some turn to bulldozing ("As long as you're under my roof...") while others turn to bribery ("If you'll go to church with us then you can...").

These parents want to help their kids make the right choice, but their approach may be unintentionally undermining their efforts. As parents, we all want our kids to develop a life-changing relationship with Jesus, model a God-honoring faith, and lead lives that positively impact those around them.

So, how do we go about that...especially when that same desire seems like a low priority for our kids? Here are a few simple ideas.

### **Take biblical disobedience off the table.**

Over and over again, the Bible calls for our faithful participation in the Body of Christ – for our benefit and the benefit of others! Therefore, we need to do our very best to remove the option of anything less than the standard prescribed by God. No, this isn't "spiritual semantics" for bullying our kids into church attendance. If our kids said they didn't want to take showers anymore, you wouldn't let that be an option. If your spouse said they didn't want to pay taxes anymore, you wouldn't let that be an option, either. As the leader of your home, it's up to you to set the spiritual pace for your family. If we remember that God is going to hold us accountable, then we quickly realize not going to church as a family is not an option for our family. Now that we know what we're not going to do (bulldoze or bribe), we can start working on constructive plans to help our kids see the tremendous benefits of an active and obedient faith.

### **Talk about the importance of belonging to a spiritual family.**

So much has been written about the positive effects church attendance has on teenagers. When young people faithfully attend church and heed the spiritual instruction it provides, they have so many deep needs met by the fellowship it offers. Lovingly remind them of the importance of belonging

to your biological family, and then point out the (many) benefits of belonging to a spiritual family. Ask them where they hope to have their spiritual needs met if not at church. Ask them how they can be a blessing to others if they're not at church. As you discuss your family's spiritual discipline of church attendance, be prepared to share a story or two of your own growth and development that sprung from being faithful. If church doesn't mean much to you, you shouldn't expect it to mean much to your kids.

### **Do everything in your power to make church better.**

It may well be that your kid is regularly having a terrible experience at church for some reason. Maybe there's really poor leadership in the youth ministry department. Maybe there is a church bully waiting for him. Maybe she suffered an embarrassment a few weeks back and the awkwardness is still too raw. Do your best to uncover the obstacles keeping your kid from wanting to attend church. When you discover the hurdle(s), you're better prepared to help your kids overcome them. Maybe you can help make the youth ministry stronger by volunteering in some capacity. Maybe you can help repair a relationship that suffered a setback. At the very least, you can always pray for your kid to supernaturally experience God at the church in which He's placed your family. Be proactive...and be willing to step up your own level of obedience to help your teenager get where God wants him/her.

As parents, we're called to raise our kids in Christ...not just in church. But we can't fully forge our kids' identity in Christ apart from His Body, either. Model true Christlikeness before your children and that will help them want Jesus and His people even more.



# How to talk to children about shootings: An age-by-age guide

When a horrific event happens, again and again, what do we tell our children?

<https://www.today.com/parents/how-talk-children-about-shootings-age-age-guide-t59626>

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By Meghan Holohan

The sinking feeling is all too familiar: When mass shootings occur, parents have to figure out how to talk to their children about violence.

There's no one way to address tragedies with children, and how parents approach it depends both on the child's age and temperament. The American Psychiatric Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend avoiding the topic with children until they reach a certain age – around 8, but again, it depends on the child.

"If it doesn't directly affect your family, kids under 8 do not need to hear about this," says Dr. Deborah Gilboa, a parenting expert. Before this age, children struggle to process it.

But parents should talk to their younger children about mass shootings if they are at risk of hearing it from others, she says.

While advice varies by age, Gilboa provides a general recommendation for all parents faced with telling their children about the latest mass shooting.

"First, you have to process your own emotional response. What you do will affect them more than what you say," she says. "Have your first reaction away from your child."

She also provides the following recommendations for sharing bad news with children of all ages.

How to talk to your kids about shootings and terror

### Preschool-kindergarten: One-sentence story

“You have to figure out before you talk to them what story you want them to tell themselves,” she says.

With young children, Gilboa recommends that parents keep their stories simple. These stories should reinforce parents’ beliefs. Perhaps, parents want their children to know that a bad man hurt people. Maybe parents want their children to know that someone with a serious illness felt angry and hurt people.

“You are going to give a one-sentence story to anyone under 6,” she says.

This might be a chance to change the conversation, too. Try to focus on the positives, such as the heroes of the story.

### Elementary school children: Shield them

Again, parents need to decide on the takeaway message. Children in this age group will ask many more interrogative questions and parents need to decide how much they want to share.

Gilboa stresses that parents should prevent their children from seeing pictures or the news because the images will stick with children longer than words. If children do see pictures, she recommends that parents show their children positive photos to counteract the negative.

“Let’s see if we can replace those memories and balance it out by showing the positives and the amazing people who rushed to help,” she says.

### Tweens: Listen to their feelings

Start the conversation by asking tweens if they heard about the latest shooting.

“If you are going to talk [about] a fraught or laden topic ... you start with a pretest. You are going to ask how they feel about it,” Gilboa says.

If they have heard of it, listen to their feelings. If they haven’t heard of it, parents have an opportunity to share their beliefs while gaining better insight into their tweens.

“[This becomes] a great conversation of their values and your values that do not focus on the particular gore [but] more on the person you are raising,” she says.

Teens: Look for solutions

Again, Gilboa says parents should ask their teens if they have heard of the latest tragedy and allow them to share their feelings. But teenagers will expect more.

“Teenagers are looking for hypocrisy and solutions and this generation believes in collaboration and social justice. And they are going to ask ‘What are you doing,’” she says. “You can answer and then ask ‘what are you doing? What would you like to do? What can we do together?’”

Teaching teenagers to work toward change will help them be resilient, she says. She stresses that parents still need to listen to their teens’ feelings and display empathy.

“I think for anyone action makes us feel effective,” Gilboa says. “What we want our kids to do when [they] see something wrong is to try to fix it.”

# The Big Problem of Teen Suicide

By David R. Smith

<https://thesource4parents.com/youth-culture-window/the-big-problem-of-teen-suicide/>

Based on a recent study of 6,500 teenagers (and their parents), researchers found that almost 1-in-25 American teens have attempted suicide, though an even more massive 1-in-8 have considered it. The findings have researchers in agreement; the greatest season of suicide risk is adolescence. *But can the remedy for such a terrible problem be found at home?*

I've written about the heartache of teenage suicide in previous articles and it's even the subject of our most recent Campus Ministry Corner article. It's never easy to discuss an event that takes a young person's life, but sadly, that's the reality too many youth ministries and families face these days.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) puts it grimly; suicide is the third-leading cause of death for young people ages 10-24. Almost 4,600 young people take their lives every year with one of three preferred methods: firearms (45%), suffocation (40%), or poison (8%). Boys are more "successful" at suicide than girls, largely because of the more severe means they use to take their lives; a whopping 81% of all teen suicides are by guys. But, girls are more likely to *attempt* suicide (and report it) than guys.

Making the matter worse is the fact that a full 55% of young people who had attempted or planned suicide had also received some sort of help *beforehand!* Dr. Brian Daly of Drexel University says, "We're seeing some of these [suicidal] thoughts coming *after* the initiation of treatment

which is most concerning.” This reality has led many professionals, including those at PBS, to ask tough questions about the current effectiveness of programs and clinical treatment available to those suffering with suicidal tendencies. *But questions lead to answers...regardless if we like them or not.*

## **Fostering Failure**

Nobody doubts the connection between poor mental health and suicide, especially in light of the findings that claim “almost all teens who thought about or attempted suicide had a mental disorder, including depression, bipolar disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or problems with drug or alcohol abuse.”

But can the catch all of “mental disorder” adequately explain the current trends in teen suicide?

The list of possible suspects responsible for the rate of teen suicide is not a short one. In fact, here are just a few headlines taken from the past two weeks to give us an idea of the world in which kids are now living:

Almost one-third of junior high and senior high kids who are in a dating relationship report some kind of abuse. Furthermore, the study by the University of Georgia reports that “90% of those kids in violent relationships are both victims *and* perpetrators.”

Young girls continue to be obsessed with their image, and are tempted to take drastic actions to uphold an unrealistic expectation of appearance. When young ladies can’t meet those wholly unattainable goals, they turn to various methods of coping, like...

Binge drinking is now a common practice for 1-in-5 high school girls according to the CDC. (*For a female, binge drinking is defined as consuming 4 or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion, usually 2-3 hours in length.*)

Let’s toss in one more “possible” factor behind the high rates

of teen suicide: *parental suicide*. This study from overseas claims that young people are at a greater risk to attempt suicide if a parent – especially if that parent is the mother – has already committed suicide. Researchers in Europe also discovered an increase in kids’ willingness to attempt suicide after a parent had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Regardless of the continent, when teenagers grow up in a world clouded by violence, abuse, alcohol, deeply depressed adults, and more, it’s little wonder why we see so many suicides and suicide attempts. *It’s almost as if their failure is being fostered.*

## **Simple Solutions?**

So, what are some possible solutions to this – *dare I say* – epidemic of teen suicide? Of course, there are the mainstays like education, screening, counseling, and medication, but what if there are additional ways to tackle the problem of teen suicide?

Though it’s only tied to suicide through mental health in general, a study by the Association of Psychological Science reports that “exercise has positive effects that go far beyond physical changes in teens.” The report discovered that young people who participated in team sports had higher self-esteem and a more positive self-image than those who didn’t. Furthermore, active students were less likely to engage in negative behaviors, including social withdrawal and anxiety, mischief, and aggression.

Beyond exercise, a gripping article in the *New York Times* makes the suggestion that teenage suicide might be curtailed by giving kids more responsibility. The idea follows that if young people know they are needed by those around them – *for instance, taking care of a sibling or a grandparent* – they may be less likely to try ending their lives.

As simple as it sounds, it’s also an idea that’s

supported by the CDC which claims, "Connectedness is a common thread that weaves together many of the influences of suicidal behavior and has direct relevance for prevention." There have been studies – like this limited one – that reinforce the idea that family involvement lowers these kinds of serious risks.

Now, in NO way am I suggesting that we toss out our teens' supply of Zoloft, Prozac, or Abilify; I don't have that good a lawyer! But what if committed adults can tackle the big problem of teen suicide before it runs its awful course? Here are a few simple ideas based on the research we've just covered:

1. Have ongoing conversations about the topic of teen suicide. Like so many other life-changing issues, suicide is not one of those topics you can address once and be done with. Suicide may not ever cross the mind of a teenager who's dating a cheerleader in June, but happens when they break up in July? You won't know unless you're talking to them about it. There's no need to pressure teens or make them feel uncomfortable; just ask a few simple, diagnostic questions on a regular basis.

*How are you feeling?*

*What is your greatest source of joy, and why?*

*What is one challenge you're facing right now?*

*If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be?*

You don't have to ask "Are you thinking about jumping off a bridge?" to know if your teenager is at risk; just toss a few non-threatening questions their way to get them talking about their life.

2. Share some responsibilities. This goes back to the theory mentioned above...and one that I saw play out in years of youth ministry. If you give a teenager a significant role to play, they usually do it well. So, dole out a few

“whine-inducing, independence-producing” chores around the house and see what happens. Granted, you might not want to trust your absent-minded 15-year-old with the task of counting out Grandma’s pain meds, but why not make him/her responsible for dinner one night each week? What if they had to spend one hour each week with their younger sibling helping them out in some way? What might happen if they were asked to help you with some work you brought home from the office? I’m not suggesting dishwashing duty – though that’s not a bad place to start; make sure these responsibilities come with real meaning attached to them. Your teen will definitely find some self-worth in fulfilling these obligations and serving others.

3. Use God’s Word to teach the importance of life and hope. This is a good place to begin *and* end. The Bible is filled with passages that inspire us to press on through difficult circumstances and trust that God still loves us and cares for us. With all that your teens face in their lives, make sure they get a hefty dose of these kinds of verses. If you need a little help, you might want to check out this great MOVIE CLIP DISCUSSION about finding hope in the midst of discouragement. And here is another great resource, taken from The Death of DJ AM, about our need for total transformation. Use the Bible to saturate your teenagers with the truth that our God is the Creator and Sustainer of life.

Without a doubt, teen suicide is a complex issue, but perhaps the solution for it is simpler than we think. Make every investment of time, energy, and love that you can so they know they are valued. That will usually head off the big problem of teenage suicide...plus a lot of smaller problems, too.



# Technology

(Fr. Alex note- blocking software helps, but it does not work. Banning apps helps, if you have a strong relationship with your child. Communication and discussion are important.)

## **A Complete Guide to Potentially Dangerous Apps All Parents Should Be Aware Of**

<https://www.familyeducation.com/mobile-apps/a-complete-guide-to-potentially-dangerous-apps-all-parents-should-be-aware-of>

Charise Rohm Nulsen

Updated: October 22, 2019

We've compiled the ultimate list of the sites and apps tweens and teens are flocking to in 2019. Plus, we have useful tips for protecting your child from cyberbullying and other online safety hazards.

Pop quiz: What is Voxer? If you're scratching your head, it's time to read up on the trendy new social media apps kids are using. Friending your child on Facebook is now just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to online safety. Click through to see some of the sites and apps tweens and teens are flocking to these days, and get useful tips for protecting your child from cyberbullying and other online safety hazards. Have you heard about a new app causing safety concerns? Please share in the comments! Also, check out these 10 apps that can help you monitor your child online.

### **TikTok**

Purpose: TikTok is an app for creating and sharing short videos. Users can create short music videos of 3 to 15 seconds and short looping videos of 3 to 60 seconds. It encourages users

to express themselves creatively through video. Special effects can be added to the videos.

**Why Parents Should Be Worried:** Thirteen is the minimum age, but there isn't a real way to validate age so anyone can download the app. Also, parents express concern that there is a lot of inappropriate language in the videos so it's not appropriate for young children. Lastly, by default, all accounts are set to public so strangers can contact your children.

## **YouTube**

**Purpose:** YouTube is a place to house and share your videos. You can control privacy settings. It's also a great resource for educational videos and entertainment.

**Why Parents Should Worry:** Inappropriate content has been sliced into both all-ages content and children's content. Also, comments on videos can be extremely inappropriate and hurtful. YouTube also has a known pedophile problem which is major cause for concern.

## **Tellonym**

**Purpose:** This is an anonymous messenger app. It calls itself "the most honest place on the internet." This app is extremely popular in middle schools and high schools and it allows kids to ask and answer questions anonymously.

**Why Parents Should Worry:** It is a regular occurrence to see cyber bullying, violent threats, and sexual content. It also offers unmonitored access to the internet. The age restrictions are inconsistent ranging from 12 to 16, but this app is inappropriate for anyone younger than being in their late teens.

## **Bigo Live**

**Purpose:** Bigo is a live streaming app. It is rated for teens 17 and up. Users can vlog about their lives, live stream video game play, and host their own shows.

**Why Parents Should Worry:** There is no age verification and users have to provide personal info like their age and location. This is a place where bullying, nudity, violence, and profanity is common.

## **IMVU**

**Purpose:** This is a virtual world game like SIMS. Users interact with each other as avatars. IMVU stands for Instant Messaging Virtual Universe.

**What Parents Should Worry:** There is nudity and sexual encounters in areas that are for 18+, but there is sexual talk and behaviors in the regular area of IMVU as well. There is a Chat Now feature that randomly pairs users with other users and can lead to inappropriate pairings and interactions. All profiles are public, and there can be bullying and predators trying to get other users to share their phone numbers and to send pictures.

## **Houseparty**

**Purpose:** Houseparty is a video chatting app that's pretty open. Friends can communicate with each other through live video and texts in chat groups.

**Why Parents Should Be Worried:** There's no screening and the video is live, so there's nothing to keep kids from inappropriate content. Users can send links via chat and even take screenshots. There's also nothing keeping friends of friends joining groups where they may only know one person.

## **Tinder**

**Purpose:** Tinder's developers describe the app as "the fun way to connect with new and interesting people around you." But it's mainly used as a dating tool or an anonymous hook-up (read: one-night stand) locator by 20-somethings, college students, and even younger teens and tweens. (Yikes!)

**Why Parents Should Worry:** The app is rated ages 17+ but Tinder's privacy policy allows teens as young as 13 to register (the

app connects with Facebook — which is also technically for ages 13+ — to pull in photos for users' Tinder profiles). Tinder helps people find others in their geographic location and allows users to view each others' photos and start instant messaging once both people have "liked" one another. The geo-location features and anonymous nature of the app put kids at risk for catfishing, sexual harassment, stalking, and worse. Learn more scary facts about the Tinder app.

### **Ask.fm**

**Purpose:** This app allows users to interact in a question-and-answer format — with friends, peers, and anonymous users alike.

**Why Parents Should Worry:** The app is rated ages 13+ and is most popular in Europe but is catching on in the U.S. Some kids have used the app for hurtful cyberbullying that has been linked to suicides, including the death of 12-year-old Rebecca Sedwick of Florida. British schools have sent home letters calling for students to stop using ask.fm because of its use in several cyberbullying incidents there, and its loose regulation and lack of monitoring. In response to the uproar in the U.K., the site added a button where users can report abuse, but some parents feel it's too little, too late. Check out Webwise's Ask.fm Guide for Parents and Teachers.

### **Kik Messenger**

**Purpose:** Kik is a mobile app that people can use to text with friends at high speed and with more of a "face-to-face feel" than regular texting (users' profile pictures appear in a little bubble next to their text, and they can quickly text photos, sketches, or even pre-designed greeting cards to individuals or groups).

**Why Parents Should Worry:** The app is rated ages 17+, but there is no age verification so anyone can download it. Like some other instant messenger apps, Kik allows your teen to connect with others using just a username (rather than texting from her

phone number). But it begs the question: Should teens be texting with people beyond their phone contacts? Reviews in the App Store and Google Play store reveal that many people use Kik to meet strangers for sexting. The app also been connected with cyberbullying. Rebecca Sedwick, the Florida bullying victim who killed herself, reportedly used Kik and Voxer in addition to ask.fm — receiving messages like "Go kill yourself" and "Why aren't you dead?" — without her mother even knowing about the apps. It's no surprise Kik has landed on some parents' "worst apps" lists. Check out [bewebsmart.com](http://bewebsmart.com)'s advice on Kik.

## **Voxer**

**Purpose:** This walkie-talkie PTT (push-to-talk) app allows users to quickly exchange short voice messages. They can have chats going on with multiple people at a time and just have to tap the play button to hear any messages they receive. Although it largely has an adult following, including some people who use it for their job, it's becoming popular among teens who enjoy its hybrid style of texting and talking.

**Why Parents Should Worry:** Hurtful messages from cyberbullies can be even more biting when they're spoken and can be played repeatedly. Surprisingly, the app is rated ages 4+ in the App Store.

## **Snapchat**

**Purpose:** Snapchat is an app that allows users to send photos and videos that disappear after they're received. It's rated ages 12+. The filters and special effects allow users to alter pictures.

**Why Parents Should Worry:** Some kids are using the app to send racy pics because they believe the images can't be saved and circulated. But it turns out that Snapchat pics don't completely disappear from a device, and users can take a screenshot before an image vanishes in the app. And while recent studies revealed that "sexting" (sending sexual messages and images, usually via

text message) is not as popular as parents had feared, "disappearing photo" apps like Snapchat might embolden kids to send more explicit photos and texts than they would have before through traditional texting. Check out connectsafely.org's "A Parents' Guide to Snapchat."

## **Vsco**

**Purpose:** Vsco is a photo creation app that gives users the tools to shoot, edit and post images to a profile, kind of like Instagram.

**Why Parents Should Worry:** You should know that you have to manually turn on privacy settings and limit location sharing. There are also in-app purchases for more serious photo editing tools that could cost you some serious money if your kid decides to download them.

## **Whisper**

**Purpose:** This 17+ app's motto is: "Share Secrets, Express Yourself, Meet New People." It has a similar feel to the now-defunct PostSecret app, which was discontinued shortly after its release because it filled up with abusive content.

**Why Parents Should Worry:** Whisper lets users set up anonymous accounts to make their messages or confessions overlap an image or graphic (similar to e-postcards), which other users can then "like," share, or comment on. While it allows for creative expression, it can also take overly personal content viral. The app also shows a user's location. Although the app is geared toward older teens and adults, younger children are finding their way to it. A 12-year-old girl in Washington was reportedly raped by a 21-year-old man who met her on Whisper.

## **Tumblr**

**Purpose:** Many children and young teens are also active on this 17+ photo-sharing app. It can also be used for sharing videos and chatting.

**Why Parents Should Worry:** Common Sense Media says Tumblr is "too raunchy for tykes" because users can easily access pornographic, violent, and inappropriate content. Common Sense also notes that users need to jump through hoops to set up privacy settings — and until then, all of a user's photo and content is public for all to see. Mental health experts say that Tumblr can be damaging to adolescents' mental health because it tends to glorify self-harm and eating disorders.

## **Instagram**

**Purpose:** This hugely popular photo-sharing site is owned by Facebook, so you may be more familiar with it than with other photo-sharing apps. Users can add cool filters or create collages of their photos and share them across Facebook and other social media platforms.

**Why Parents Should Worry:** The app is rated 13+ and may be slightly tamer than Tumblr, but users can still find mature or inappropriate content and comments throughout the app (there is a way to flag inappropriate content for review). "Trolls" — or people making vicious, usually anonymous comments — are common. A user can change the settings to block their location or certain followers, but many users are casual about their settings, connecting with people they don't know well or at all. Check out [connectsafely.org](https://connectsafely.org)'s "A Parents' Guide to Instagram."

## **Look**

**Purpose:** Look is a free video messaging app. Users can send video (of course), text, emojis and gifs. They can also draw on and use filters on their videos.

**Why Parents Should Worry:** With Look, strangers can message kids pretty easily, and because there are no content filters, kids can come across inappropriate content. Users have reported cyberbullying activity and have found it difficult to delete their accounts.



## **Jailbreak Programs and Icon-Hiding Apps**

Purpose: These aren't social media apps — and they're confusing — but you should still know about them (especially if you have a tech-savvy teen or have had to take away your child's mobile phone privileges because of abuse).

Why Parents Should Worry: "Jailbreaking" an iPhone or "rooting" an Android phone basically means hacking your own device to lift restrictions on allowable applications — meaning, the user can then download third-party apps not sold in the App Store or Google Play store (read: sometimes sketchy apps). It's hard to say how many teens have jailbroken their mobile device, but instructions on how to do it are readily available on the Internet. Cydia is a popular application for jailbroken phones, and it's a gateway to other apps called Poof and SBSettings — which are icon-hiding apps. These apps are supposedly intended to help users clear the clutter from their screens, but some young people are using them to hide questionable apps and violent games from their parents. Be aware of what the Cydia app icons look like so you know if you're getting a complete picture of your teen's app use.

## **What About Facebook and Twitter?**

Do all these new social media apps mean that Facebook and Twitter are in decline? A 2013 survey by Pew Internet found that U.S. teens have "waning enthusiasm" for Facebook — in part because their parents and other adults have taken over the domain and because their peers engage in too much "drama" on the site. But Facebook still remains the top social media site among U.S. teens, who say that their peers continue to stay on the site so they don't miss anything happening there. Your child may keep a profile on Facebook but be much more active on newer platforms.

Meanwhile, Twitter use is rising among teens. The 2013 Pew survey found that 24 percent of online teens are on Twitter,

up from 16 percent in 2011. Twitter is more popular among African American teens than Hispanic and white teens.

### **Next Steps for Parents**

Sit down with your child and find out which apps she's using, how they work, and whether she has experienced any issues on them, such as cyberbullying or contact from strangers. Look into apps that help you monitor your child online. And keep these tips in mind:

You can set up age limits on your child's device. The 2013 Pew Research Center survey found that nearly 40 percent of teens say that they have lied about their age to gain access to a site or create an account, so restricting kids' access to apps by age rating is a wise move.

You can't join every site or app and monitor your child's every move online; teens will always find a new platform that their parents don't know about yet. Rather than hovering or completely barring your child from downloading every social media app, sit down and go over some general rules to keep him smart and safe online.

Tell your child to let you know if someone is hurting her or making her feel uncomfortable online, even if the person is acting anonymously. Use the Cyberbullying Research Center's "Questions Parents Should Ask Their Children About Technology" to guide your discussion. Our printable anti-bullying pledge and parent/child online agreement are also useful tools.

Make a rule that your child must ask for permission before downloading any apps — even free ones — just so you're aware of them. When your child wants to join a new social media platform, go through the security settings together to choose the ones you're most comfortable with. Advise your child not to share passwords with anyone, including best friends, boyfriends, or girlfriends.

# Questions Parents Should Ask Their Children About Technology

<https://cyberbullying.org/questions-parents-should-ask-their-children-about-technology>

By Cyberbullying Research Center  
By Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin

It is important to talk with youth about what they are doing and seeing online. Most of the time, they are using technology safely and responsibly, but sometimes they run into trouble. As a parent, you want to establish an open line of communication so that they are comfortable turning to you in times of crisis, whether perceived or actual, and whether online or off.

Below we list several questions that you can use to get the proverbial ball rolling. Be strategic in how you approach your children with these queries: don't badger them with questions first thing in the morning or when they are stressed out about something at school. Find a time when they are open to your interest in these topics. Maybe it is during a longer car ride to an activity that they are really looking forward to. Or bring them up while you are eating ice cream on a hot summer afternoon. If you catch them at the right time, they will prove to be a treasure trove of information that can help you better understand what they are doing online.

## GENERAL TECH USE

What is your favorite app? What do you do on it?  
What apps or websites are your friends into these days?  
Are you ever contacted by someone online that you don't know? If yes, what did they want? What did you do? How did you respond?

Have you ever received a text message from someone that made you upset? How did you respond?

How do you keep yourself safe online?

Do you get concerned that people will read what others have written about you online that is not true but think it's true?

Do you ever talk to anyone online that isn't in your school?

## CYBERBULLYING

Do you ever argue or post hurtful updates on your Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, or another social media site? Why?

Have you ever had to delete a post or comment on your page that was written by someone else?

Does cyberbullying happen a lot? Would you feel comfortable telling me if you were being cyberbullied?

Do you think your school takes cyberbullying seriously?

Have you ever had to contact a teacher or someone else at school because of a cyber-threat? If so, did they do something about it and did it help?

Does your school have a way to anonymously report bullying and cyberbullying?

Do you feel like your friends would be supportive of you if you told them you were being cyberbullied?

Do you ever get verbally attacked during online games?

Have you ever had to leave an online game because someone was bothering you online?

Have rumors ever started about you in school, based on something said online?

Did you find out who started the rumor? What did you do when you found out?

Have you ever blocked somebody online because you felt harassed? If so, did that make it stop?

## SEXTING

Have you ever had anyone do or say anything sexually inappropriate to you online? How did you deal with it?

Has anyone ever asked any of your friends for an inappropriate photo or video? Has anyone ever asked you?

Do you know about the consequences that can result if you send inappropriate pictures (child pornography laws)?

How might sexting affect the reputation of those involved?

Is there a way to participate in sexting while still making sure that pictures or video sent in trust are never shared outside that relationship?

Has any adult at school ever talked with you about sexting?

What might participation in sexting say about your level of maturity, and your readiness to be in a healthy, mature romantic relationship?

Have you heard stories of other kids from your school (even those who may have graduated) or your community who have dealt with major fallout from sexting?

## SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA USE

What social media apps do you use most frequently? How many friends or followers do you currently have on each? Are your accounts set to Public or Private?

What kind of people have you met on social media, outside of people you know at school? Do you feel like you can trust them?

Do you ever worry that they might use your posts or content against you in \*any\* way?

Do you get a lot of friend or follow requests from strangers? If so, how are you handling that?

Do you use Twitter? What do you like or dislike about it? Who do you follow and who follows you?

Do you use Snapchat? Can you explain to me how it works? Do you think your sent and received snaps are really completely gone?

Do you know how to use the privacy settings on Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, and Twitter? What about on the games and gaming networks you use?

Do you have them set so that only those you accept as friends can see what you post? Are you sure about this?

What kind of personal information are you posting or sharing online? Have you ever posted your full name? Age? School? Phone number? Current location?

Have you ever been tagged in a photo or video in a way that made you upset?

Do you know how to edit your privacy settings so that if somebody wants to tag you in a post or photo, you have to approve it?

Do you know how to untag yourself in pictures?

Do you feel like social media apps should be used to vent your frustrations? Do your friends vent on social media? Do people comment? What do they say?

What kind of videos are you watching on YouTube? Do you have your own channel? How often are you posting and what kind of reception are you getting from those who see your videos?

Have you ever reported inappropriate videos that you have seen on YouTube? Or any other site or app?

Does anyone else know your password or passcode for any site or social media app? What about for your laptop, or cell phone?

How do you feel about your level of FOMO (fear of missing out) right now? Do you feel like you can control it based on how much you use social media?

Do you ever feel like you're addicted to social media? Has that "addiction" ever messed with your emotions or brought you down or negatively affected other areas of your life?

What do you think you can do to maintain a healthy balance when it comes to social media use?

Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J.W. (2018). Cyberbullying Prevention: Questions Parents Should Ask Their Children About Technology. Cyberbullying Research Center. Retrieved [insert date], from <https://cyberbullying.org/Questions-Parents-Should-Ask.pdf>

# Getting Kids Off Screens

July 10, 2019 by Derek Hales

<https://moderncastle.com/home-resources/getting-kids-off-screens/>

The relationship with children and technology may sometimes be a tumultuous one as parents try to juggle being relational with being realistic. For many, technology serves as a way to entertain children in public places, like restaurants or at appointments. In the home, screen time has a similar role, which allows parents the freedom to do laundry, cook dinner, dishes, and other household chores.

The modern kid, ages 8-18, spends 7.5 hours (on average) on a device or screen every single day, according to the CDC. All that time adds up to 114 days glued to a screen every single year. That's over 30% of their time, spent under the soft glow of the blue light.

## How Does Screen Time Affect You?

The effects of too much screen time are lasting and touch nearly every part of the body from your bones and arteries to the teeny-tiny nerve fibers of your optic nerve. Here are a few sources for specific ways that screen time effects each part of your body:

### Body

Too much screen time can mean that your body is taking the hit. Increased screen time has a direct correlation to decreased physical activity, which can in turn, decrease your metabolism and cause an unexpected weight gain or other adverse effects.

## **Brain**

To the young developing brain, screens provide a bit of handicap. In this example from Psychology Today, the comparison is drawn between a smartphone-told story and a book read by a baby's mother.

With the smartphone, the child must process the story, images, words all at one. With a parent reading, the child can focus on the words, then visualize pictures that help to form a complete story line. When the smartphone tells the story, the child doesn't have to think, they simply follow along, and their cognitive muscles can remain weak because of it.

## **Eyes**

Screen time, especially in excess, can mean various levels of eye problems. Eye irritation, dryness, fatigue or blurred vision, or eye strain are all common problems of too much screen time.

Some studies even showed increased rates of the childhood myopia, from rates 50 years ago. Myopia is basically nearsightedness, but many doctors point to too much screen time as the culprit and cause.

Excessive exposure to screens that let off blue light, which is most, can be even more damaging. But what is blue light? Blue light is technically everywhere. Blue light is the light that travels from the sun through the atmosphere. That is natural blue light. Many man-made electronics emit artificial blue light, which can be damaging to your eyes.

Blue light waves are extremely short, one of the shortest in the entire color spectrum, and they pack a punch, by having one of the highest energy wavelengths. This kind of light can



be hard to absorb and may cause excessive eye strain or headaches.

## **Development**

As children grow, there are several childhood developmental milestones that help parents know if their child is on track with similar-aged children. Too much screen time, early on, may delay some of these milestones and cause issues later down the road.

## **Screen Time & Self Control**

One of the biggest problems with too much screen time is the child's inability to control it. In a recent experiment, one family decided what their children would do, given 48 hours without screen time limits for their four children.

Not to spoil the ending, but the children struggled with placing limits on themselves. Time on the screens ranged from 16 – 46 hours and tantrums ensued when the devices were taken away at the end of the experiment.

This study helps to prove that children are not yet mature enough to decide what amount of screen time is appropriate.

## **How To Get Kids Off of Screens**

So we've reviewed the dangers of too much screen time and how it affects so many facets of life. But what do you do if your kiddos are already hooked? There are a few great techniques and strategies you can try to reduce the harmful effects of too much screen time.

Be an example, put the phone, tablet, and PC away from time to time to show kids balance

## **Be an Example**

First and foremost, be an example. Are you, yourself, hooked on screens? Children often emulate the behavior of their parents. Try taking some time each night to unplug from technology and spend intentional time bonding with your kids.

## **Monitor & Control**

Some kids may need firmer and more clear guidelines to help manage their screen time. There are a number of parent control apps and software that allow parents to put limits and controls on kids devices.

These parental control software suites can help to manage both time and content, creating a safer and healthier way for kids to learn to effectively use, and balance technology within their lives.

ScreenTime.com is great for phones and tablets (both iOS and Android) and ScreenLimit.net is good for cross platform.

## **Tech-Free Meals**

When it's time to eat, consider putting away all devices. Meal time can be time to ask questions, hear about everyone's day, and even learn a little bit from your kids. Be involved, be present. Anything that's happening on a device can wait 30 minutes for dinner to be done.

## **Provide an Alternative Activity**

It can be hard for children to cope with losing their devices or screens if there is no alternate activity. Instead of just taking the screen away, try providing an exciting alternative activity. For example, load up the family and head to the lake, or hit

up your local roller rink. Getting out of the house may help to keep your kids' minds off Minecraft.

### **Practice Screen Free Week**

Try taking one for the whole family to unplug. 'Screen free week' can be an effective way to limit screen time since it's something that affects the whole family. Together you can find new activities to do that don't require screens. Here's a list of activities to do that don't require a screen!

### **Create a Sense of Awareness**

Depending on the age of your child, consider creating a sense of awareness around levels of screen time. This could look different for all families. In some cases, maybe it's a physical timer that counts down the amount of screen time they have left. In other cases, it may be a physical reminder or tap on the shoulder to let them know how much time they have left.

# Protecting Kids from Pornography

By Tim Hogan, PsyD, LP, CIRT

[https://www.rclbenziger.com/sites/default/files/pdf/TH-Protecting-Kids-from-Porn-\\_2016.pdf](https://www.rclbenziger.com/sites/default/files/pdf/TH-Protecting-Kids-from-Porn-_2016.pdf)

Allowing children easy access to pornography may constitute as one of the most frequent forms of child sexual abuse of children in our day. The United States Department of Justice recently reported that children have never before been this vulnerable to obscene sexual material. Over half of today's teens have visited sexually explicit websites and suffer predictable consequences, including increased uncertainties about their own sexuality, and increased feelings of loneliness and depression.

Children and teens must be protected from pornography. Parents are in the perfect position to provide this protection by following a few key steps: 1. Actively supervise your child's Internet activity 2. Use monitoring software to ensure that computers are used appropriately 3. Educate children about how pornography degrades the dignity of people and contradicts the goodness of the human body

**Step #1: Supervise all Internet activity** Parents should make sure children only use computers, tablets, etc. that are out in the open where other family members can monitor and observe their activity. Children should not be allowed to search the Internet unless a parent is present. Parents should not allow children or teens to have a computer in their bedroom.

**Step #2: Install monitoring software** Tell children clearly and often that their activity on a computer, table, smartphone, etc. will be monitored. Remember, digital devices can take a child anywhere in the world, so they need good supervision. Parents should clarify that children and teens should not expect to have fully confidential communication while online. Parents should also establish a rule that the usage history of all computers, tablets, and phones will be

reviewed and tracked. A child should never delete a device's history. Similarly, cell phones should be left on the counter at the end of the day so parents can quickly check Internet activity. Parents should only use this to briefly scan for inappropriate material, not as a method of reading messages with friends.

**Step 3: Educate about the dangers of pornography** Children need the tools to fight this threat when parents are not around to protect them. Therefore, as children approach adolescence, parents must help them to confront the three most common lies that lead to widespread problems with pornography:

**Lie #1:** Looking at pornography is harmless fun; it doesn't hurt anybody.

**Truth:** Viewing pornography "burns highly charged" images into the brain. These images become difficult, if not impossible, to remove. This often distorts a young person's view of human sexuality and perception of relationships. Pornography makes the viewer far more likely to engage in damaging and confusing sexual exploration, resulting in depression and anxiety disorders.

**Lie #2:** Looking at pornography is a normal and healthy way to enjoy God's creation.

**Truth:** Jesus taught that lusting (i.e. looking at pornography) is spiritually deadly. It is akin to committing adultery with your heart. Young people already know this in their hearts. Parents can ask teens how they would feel about other people viewing pornographic images of their parents, siblings, or best friends. Our hearts know that pornography violates the dignity of the human person. We are meant to enjoy the goodness and beauty of people, but in appropriate ways that honor God's plan for life and love.

**Lie #3:** People can play around with pornography without getting addicted.

Truth: People can become immediately addicted to Internet porn after one exposure. In this way, it follows the addictive path of crack cocaine, and often requires years of intensive treatment to get back under control. Pornography poses a serious threat to the sexual and emotional development of children. However, parents stand in the perfect place to protect their children.

# Themselves

# What to Do with Oppositional and Defiant Behavior

By Tim Hogan, PsyD, LP, CIRT

[https://www.rclbenziger.com/sites/default/files/pdf/TH-Defiant-Behavior\\_2016.pdf](https://www.rclbenziger.com/sites/default/files/pdf/TH-Defiant-Behavior_2016.pdf)

Few things steal the joy of parenting like defiant, entitled, and impulsive children. Watching your child challenge rules, lose their temper, and demand privileges can poison the emotional health of your family. This might even drive you to the brink of despair! However, by moving in a new direction you can get back in the driver's seat, and return your family to the loving community for which God created and planned.

## Understand the Problem

In order to turn things around, begin to keep a behavioral journal. Purchase a notebook and begin observing and recording what happens between you and your child before, during, and after these frustrating encounters. Then imagine how these events unfolded through the eyes of your child. Notice their emotional responses, especially whether or not they seem rejected or misunderstood. Children with oppositional behavior often struggle with emotional processing. Because of this, they frequently feel confused and frustrated inside, and believe others are misunderstanding or being mean to them. As a result, oppositional behavior becomes their only safe, familiar, and habitual way to express their frustration. In a similar way, record what was going on for you during the frustrating event, including what you were thinking, feeling, saying, and doing. Notice how you might have contributed to the problem. Remember that children with oppositional behavior



can bring out the worst in adults. Adults often respond uncharacteristically by yelling, ignoring, criticizing, interrupting, threatening, and/or becoming verbally or physically aggressive. Such adult reactivity reinforces oppositional behavior in a child.

## **Changes that Will Work Wonders**

The following seven tips can help you move in a new direction so your family can be the loving community that God and you desire:

1. Be gentle with yourself. You will not find more compassion for your child until you first find it for yourself. Practice grounding and regulating your emotions through exercise, prayer, and general good self-care. Consider using a breath prayer regularly: Say to yourself while breathing in, “I can do all things,” then say while breathing out, “through Christ who strengthens me,” (based on Philippians 4:13). You can also imagine breathing in God’s peace and exhaling your frustration, picturing yourself inhaling pure, clear air and exhaling dark smoke. Staying grounded and calm will be the foundation for changing the way you interact with your child.
2. Be gentle with your child. Remember that your child may often feel frustrated and confused about his or her emotions. Your compassion and empathy will help your child to heal and grow.
3. Relentlessly work to see your child in a positive way. Catch them behaving cooperatively and compassionately, and celebrate it. Challenge yourself to prayerfully discover your child’s personality strengths hidden during their annoying behavior. For example, stubbornness might be hidden perseverance.

4. Pursue a positive connection with your child. Create a regular space and time to connect with your child that is fun and positive, that is separate from the oppositional interactions.
5. Commit to compassionate, calm, firm, logical, and creative responses to their most defiant behaviors. Avoid verbal and physical violence. Remember, if you need to remind someone you are in control, you aren't! Focus less on showing your child that you are in control; focus more on reflecting and empathizing with your child before clarifying boundaries. For example, you might say, "I can see that you are very hurt and angry with me because I'm keeping you from your friends right now. Once you cool down and get your homework done, I'd be happy to help you connect with them later."
6. Avoid power struggles by anticipating common conflicts, and addressing them creatively. For example, if homework is a frequent battle, create a positive environment for your child by preparing a special snack, telling them that you understand homework is challenging, and offering to help them with tough assignments.
7. If your child has a pattern of physical aggression toward people or animals, destroys property, or has had problems breaking the law, then it is time to seek a trained mental health professional. Oppositional behavior can take us to our limits. It can also create an opportunity to transform our families and renew them as the community of love that God intended them to be.

# What has the Church said about “Gender Theory”?

BY JASON EVERT

<https://chastity.com/2015/06/church-said-gender-theory/>

Although Pope Francis’ comments on climate change have dominated the headlines in recent days, many are unaware that his new encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, also addressed another controversial topic: Gender Theory.

Here’s what he wrote:

“Human ecology also implies another profound reality: the relationship between human life and the moral law, which is inscribed in our nature and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment. Pope Benedict XVI spoke of an “ecology of man,” based on the fact that “man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will.” It is enough to recognize that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek “to cancel out

sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.”

This isn't the first time that the Pope has addressed the issue of "Gender Theory."

During an in-flight press conference from The Philippines to Rome on 19 January 2015, the following question was posed to Pope Francis:

"You have spoken of "ideological colonization." Would you expand on the concept?"

He answered:

"Ideological colonization. I'll give just one example that I saw myself. Twenty years ago, in 1995, a minister of education asked for a large loan to build schools for the poor. They gave it to her on the condition that in the schools there would be a book for the children of a certain grade level. It was a school book, a well-thought-out book, didactically speaking, in which gender theory was taught. This woman needed the money but that was the condition. Clever woman, she said yes and made another book as well and gave both of them. And that's how it happened. This is ideological colonization. They introduce an idea to the people that has nothing to do with the people. With groups of people yes, but not with the people. And they colonize the people with an idea which changes, or means to change, a mentality or a structure. During the Synod, the African bishops complained about this. It was the same story, certain loans in exchange for certain conditions — I only speak of this case that I have seen. Why do I say "ideological colonization"? Because they take, they actually take the need of a people to seize an opportunity to enter and grow strong — through the children. But this is nothing new. The same was done by the

dictatorships of the last century. They entered with their own doctrine. Think of the Balilla, think of the Hitler Youth.... They colonized the people, they wanted to do it. So much suffering — peoples must not lose their freedom. Each people has its own culture, its own history. Every people has its own culture. But when conditions are imposed by colonizing empires, they seek to make these peoples lose their own identity and create uniformity.”

Pope Francis again challenged the idea of “so-called gender theory,” during a pair of Wednesday Audiences and while speaking to young people in Naples. He wondered, “I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution.” He proclaimed “Gender theory is an error of the human mind that leads to so much confusion.” In order to remedy the matter, he called for a “rediscovery” of the “alliance between man and woman.” This is essential, because “Not only man as such, not only woman as such, but rather man and woman, as a couple, are the image of God.”

More recently, in his apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, he added:

“...The young need to be helped to accept their own body as it was created, for ‘thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation....An appreciation of our body as male or female is also necessary for our own self-awareness in an encounter with others different from ourselves. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts

of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment.” (285)

“Sex-education should help young people to accept their own bodies and to avoid the pretension to cancel out sexual difference because one no longer knows how to deal with it.” (285)

“It is true that we cannot separate the masculine and the feminine from God’s work of creation...But it is also true that masculinity and femininity are not rigid categories...A rigid approach turns into an over accentuation of the masculine or feminine, and does not help children and young people to appreciate the genuine reciprocity incarnate in the real conditions of matrimony. Such rigidity, in turn, can hinder the development of an individual’s abilities, to the point of leading him or her to think, for example, that it is not really masculine to cultivate art or dance, or not very feminine to exercise leadership.” (286)

In saying these things, Pope Francis is not preaching hate or intolerance, but is reminding the world that when we devalue or deny that God made us male and female, we are not endowing one another with dignity, but are erasing the complementarity that images the very love of God.

# from -Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/homosexuality/always-our-children.cfm>

## Accepting God's Plan and the Church's Ministry

For the Christian believer, an acceptance of self and of one's homosexual child must take place within the larger context of accepting divinely revealed truth about the dignity and destiny of human persons. It is the Church's responsibility to believe and teach this truth, presenting it as a comprehensive moral vision and applying this vision in particular situations through its pastoral ministries. We present the main points of that moral teaching here.

Every person has an inherent dignity because he or she is created in God's image. A deep respect for the total person leads the Church to hold and teach that sexuality is a gift from God. Being created a male or female person is an essential part of the divine plan, for it is their sexuality—a mysterious blend of spirit and body—that allows human beings to share in God's own creative love and life.

Like all gifts from God, the power and freedom of sexuality can be channeled toward good or evil. Everyone—the homosexual and the heterosexual person—is called to personal maturity and responsibility. With the help of God's grace, everyone is called to practice the virtue of chastity in relationships. Chastity means integrating one's thoughts, feelings, and actions, in the area of human sexuality, in a way that values and respects one's own dignity and that of others. It is "the spiritual power which frees love from selfishness and aggression" (Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, 1996, no. 16).

Christ summons all his followers—whether they are married or living a single celibate life—to a higher standard of loving. This includes not only fidelity, forgiveness, hope, perseverance, and sacrifice, but also chastity, which is expressed in modesty and self-control. The chaste life is possible, though not always easy, for it involves a continual effort to turn toward God and away from

sin, especially with the strength of the sacraments of penance and eucharist. Indeed God expects everyone to strive for the perfection of love, but to achieve it gradually through stages of moral growth (cf. John Paul II, *On the Family*, 1981, no. 34). To keep our feet on the path of conversion, God's grace is available to and sufficient for everyone open to receiving it.

Furthermore, as homosexual persons "dedicate their lives to understanding the nature of God's personal call to them, they will be able to celebrate the sacrament of penance more faithfully and receive the Lord's grace so freely offered there in order to convert their lives more fully to his way" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 1986, no. 12).

To live and love chastely is to understand that "only within marriage does sexual intercourse fully symbolize the Creator's dual design, as an act of covenant love, with the potential of co-creating new human life" (United States Catholic Conference, *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, 1991, p. 55). This is a fundamental teaching of our Church about sexuality, rooted in the biblical account of man and woman created in the image of God and made for union with one another (Gn 2–3).

Two conclusions follow. First, it is God's plan that sexual intercourse occur only within marriage between a man and a woman. Second, every act of intercourse must be open to the possible creation of human life. Homosexual intercourse cannot fulfill these two conditions. Therefore, the Church teaches that homogenital behavior is objectively immoral, while making the important distinction between this behavior and a homosexual orientation, which is not immoral in itself. It is also important to recognize that neither a homosexual orientation, nor a heterosexual one, leads inevitably to sexual activity. One's total personhood is not reducible to sexual orientation or behavior.

Respect for the God-given dignity of all persons means the recognition of human rights and responsibilities. The teachings of the Church make it clear that the fundamental human rights of homosexual persons must be defended and that all of us must strive to eliminate any forms of injustice, oppression, or violence against them (cf. *The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 1986, no. 10).

It is not sufficient only to avoid unjust discrimination. Homosexual persons "must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2358). They, as is true of every human being, need to be nourished at many different levels simultaneously. This includes friendship,



which is a way of loving and is essential to healthy human development. It is one of the richest possible human experiences. Friendship can and does thrive outside of genital sexual involvement.

The Christian community should offer its homosexual sisters and brothers understanding and pastoral care. More than twenty years ago we bishops stated that "Homosexuals . . . should have an active role in the Christian community" (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *To Live in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Reflection on the Moral Life*, 1976, p. 19). What does this mean in practice? It means that all homosexual persons have a right to be welcomed into the community, to hear the word of God, and to receive pastoral care. Homosexual persons living chaste lives should have opportunities to lead and serve the community. However, the Church has the right to deny public roles of service and leadership to persons, whether homosexual or heterosexual, whose public behavior openly violates its teachings.

The Church also recognizes the importance and urgency of ministering to persons with HIV/AIDS. Though HIV/AIDS is an epidemic affecting the whole human race, not just homosexual persons, it has had a devastating effect upon them and has brought great sorrow to many parents, families, and friends.

Without condoning self-destructive behavior or denying personal responsibility, we reject the idea that HIV/AIDS is a direct punishment from God. Furthermore

Persons with AIDS are not distant, unfamiliar people, the objects of our mingled pity and aversion. We must keep them present to our consciousness as individuals and a community, and embrace them with unconditional love. . . . Compassion—love—toward persons infected with HIV is the only authentic Gospel response. (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Called to Compassion and Responsibility: A Response to the HIV/AIDS Crisis*, 1989)

Nothing in the Bible or in Catholic teaching can be used to justify prejudicial or discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.<sup>2</sup> We reiterate here what we said in an earlier statement:

We call on all Christians and citizens of good will to confront their own fears about homosexuality and to curb the humor and discrimination that offend homosexual persons. We understand that having a homosexual orientation brings with it enough anxiety, pain and issues related to self-acceptance without society bringing additional prejudicial treatment. (*Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, 1991, p. 55)

## Pastoral Recommendations

With a view toward overcoming the isolation that you or your son or daughter may be experiencing, we offer these recommendations to you as well as to priests and pastoral ministers.

To Parents:

1. Accept and love yourselves as parents in order to accept and love your son or daughter. Do not blame yourselves for a homosexual orientation in your child.
2. Do everything possible to continue demonstrating love for your child. However, accepting his or her homosexual orientation does not have to include approving of all related attitudes and behavioral choices. In fact, you may need to challenge certain aspects of a lifestyle that you find objectionable.
3. Urge your son or daughter to stay joined to the Catholic faith community. If they have left the Church, urge them to return and be reconciled to the community, especially through the sacrament of penance.
4. Recommend that your son or daughter find a spiritual director/mentor to offer guidance in prayer and in leading a chaste and virtuous life.
5. Seek help for yourself, perhaps in the form of counseling or spiritual direction, as you strive for understanding, acceptance, and inner peace. Also, consider joining a parents' support group or participating in a retreat designed for Catholic parents of homosexual children. Other people have traveled the same road as you but may have journeyed even further. They can share effective ways of handling delicate family situations such as how to tell family members and friends about your child, how to explain homosexuality to younger children, and how to relate to your son or daughter's friends in a Christian way.
6. Reach out in love and service to other parents struggling with a son or daughter's homosexuality. Contact your parish about organizing a parents' support group. Your diocesan family ministry office, Catholic Charities, or a special diocesan ministry to gay and lesbian persons may be able to offer assistance.
7. As you take advantage of opportunities for education and support, remember that you can only change yourself; you can only be

responsible for your own beliefs and actions, not those of your adult children.

8. Put your faith completely in God, who is more powerful, more compassionate, and more forgiving than we are or ever could be.

To Church Ministers:

1. Be available to parents and families who ask for your pastoral help, spiritual guidance, and prayer.
2. Welcome homosexual persons into the faith community, and seek out those on the margins. Avoid stereotyping and condemning. Strive first to listen. Do not presume that all homosexual persons are sexually active.
3. Learn more about homosexuality and church teaching so your preaching, teaching, and counseling will be informed and effective.
4. When speaking publicly, use the words "homosexual," "gay," and "lesbian" in honest and accurate ways.
5. Maintain a list of agencies, community groups, and counselors or other experts to whom you can refer homosexual persons or their parents and family members when they ask you for specialized assistance. Recommend agencies that operate in a manner consistent with Catholic teaching.
6. Help to establish or promote support groups for parents and family members.
7. Learn about HIV/AIDS so you will be more informed and compassionate in your ministry. Include prayers in the liturgy for those living with HIV/AIDS, their caregivers, those who have died, and their families, companions, and friends. A special Mass for healing and anointing of the sick might be connected with World AIDS Awareness Day (December 1) or with a local AIDS awareness program.

## Conclusion

For St. Paul love is the greatest of spiritual gifts. St. John considers love to be the most certain sign of God's presence. Jesus proposes it as the basis of his two great commandments, which fulfill all the law and the prophets.

Love, too, is the continuing story of every family's life. Love can be shared, nurtured, rejected, and sometimes lost. To follow Christ's way of love is the challenge before every family today. Your family now has an added opportunity to share love and to accept love. Our church communities are

likewise called to an exemplary standard of love and justice. Our homosexual sisters and brothers—indeed, all people—are summoned into responsible ways of loving.

To our homosexual brothers and sisters we offer a concluding word. This message has been an outstretched hand to your parents and families inviting them to accept God's grace present in their lives now and to trust in the unfailing mercy of Jesus our Lord. Now we stretch out our hands and invite you to do the same. We are called to become one body, one spirit in Christ. We need one another if we are to ". . . grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love" (Eph 4:15-16).

Though at times you may feel discouraged, hurt, or angry, do not walk away from your families, from the Christian community, from all those who love you. In you God's love is revealed. You are always our children.

# HOW THE CHURCH CAN UNDERSTAND HOMOSEXUALITY

by Dr. Greg

<https://catholicpsych.com/homosexuality/>

Following the Synod on the Family, I'm really disappointed by how quickly the Catholic media went the way of the secular media and amplified the polarization between the two – a polarization that only feeds page clicks for advertising revenue-driven blog sites and not much more. My blog does not exist for page-clicks, and so even if no one reads this, I'd like to contribute (in my opinion) something positive and helpful to the conversation on homosexuality and the Catholic Church.

Instead of talking about what went wrong with the Synod in Rome, I'd like to propose some of the things that our world actually needs from the Church concerning people who experience SSA. No, one of them is not more finger pointing about how gravely wrong homosexual actions are.

Here's what people with Same Sex Attraction (SSA) really need from the Church.

## **1. Truth about human identity.**

For far too long, there has been widespread confusion on what it is to be human. Without a solid foundation in what true humanity really is, people are left to flounder on this question. With 2000 years of philosophy and theology under its belt, the Catholic Church is certainly in a position to shed some light on the subject. One need not go deep into the bible to find the most basic answer. In the first pages of the first book of the Bible, we read that God created humanity, and he did so "in his

image.” The human person is created by God, in the image of God. Just a few pages further into we read “man and woman he created them.” There you go. When it comes to sexual identity, there is only one distinction. You can either be a male human or a female human. Even when sexual disorders of the body are present, there is never a human being that is not either male or female. **Every human person is either a male or a female. This sums up the entirety of sexual identity.**

As males and females, human beings have sexual inclinations towards other human beings. These attractions, however, are not what constitute the identity of the males or females who feel them. They are feelings. Deep as they may be, they do not constitute the identity of a person any more than any other feeling can.

## **2. Affirmation of their dignity.**

Every. Single. Human. Person. Has. Infinite. Dignity. This reality is so far from being understood that it is making our culture sick. **Deep in the heart of every person is a sense or innate knowledge that he or she has dignity and is meant to be respected as having dignity.** Yet, so much of the world finds reasons to withhold that respect and NOT treat every single person as if he or she has infinite dignity. INFINITE DIGNITY! Can you pause for a moment and just reflect on those two words? The Church and all of her representatives (myself included) need to make this clear both in word and in action.

## **3. Understanding of their cross.**

If a person experiences only SSA, this means that he or she does not have inclinations towards someone of the opposite sex. This should be obvious but it's not. At least, when I hear or

read Catholics talking about the issue it doesn't seem like it's obvious. **If Catholics believe that the fulfillment of human sexual love only occurs between a man and a woman (who have vowed to be together for life), it would seem that they might have a little more compassion on those who don't have those natural inclinations.** What's the bigger problem here? The people who act on homosexual tendencies who don't even pretend to have a Catholic worldview, or the Catholics who claim to have the full scoop on love but "speak not with love"?

Psychology can lend a helping hand here. Religion calls a thing what it is, but psychology helps understand the human experience of that thing. According to the research, there is not one unified or universally accepted explanation of how homosexuality develops, and there's not one type of homosexuality. While there are cases of people that have changed their "orientation", this change is not the norm. It is not just, nor compassionate, to expect this is possible for every person with SSA.

So the situation is this: There exists a segment of the population that is not oriented in their feelings towards experiencing the fulfillment of human love. It is not just or reasonable to expect this to change for them. **Therefore we need to have the greatest compassion towards them no matter what needs to be said about the morality of particular behaviors.**

**4. Encouragement and support of their vocation to the celibate state of life.**

As a logical consequence of this disposition, we need to also have an overabundance of support for the way of life we are actually saying they are supposed to live. As Catholics, we are saying that those who experience SSA are called – practically speaking – to live a celibate life. Think about the way we react to people who are simply thinking about living a celibate vocation. We gush with support and joy for people that are merely considering the possibility – people who have the freedom to take it or leave it. **Now consider how we treat those who are forced to live this vocation** as a result of their sexual inclinations. We should give even more of ourselves to those people. Depending on where they are at, they might not want our gushing joy, but as a church we can certainly use a bit of reorienting ourselves towards this segment of people.

## **5. Allocation of resources to support their vocation.**

The Church can lead the way in this reorientation by allocating resources to develop programs for people with SSA who are choosing to live according to the Church's teachings. **If we are going to proclaim that celibacy is the right way for people with SSA to live, doesn't it make sense to have a safety net of real resources and support ready to catch anyone who decides to take that leap?** We have programs for NFP, Pre-Cana, marital difficulties, raising children, etc. We need to go bigger for SSA celibates.

While we're on this topic, how much time is spent in the parish praying for these issues? I have never once heard a prayer for people struggling with SSA during the prayer of the faithful. I've



never seen a holy hour, or even as much as a novena. We are dropping the ball.

## **6. Protection from all other attacks against their dignity.**

No member or representative of the Church should stand for any offense against the dignity of any person. We are right to proclaim the Gospel truth of God's plan for sexuality, but we also must proclaim the truth of the dignity of the person. The culture says that to proclaim this truth is "homophobic", which is of course an illogical prejudice against the Catholic faith.

However, we need to speak out strongly against anyone – even within the church – that speaks or acts in a way that takes away from the dignity of any person, gay or straight. **An**

**under-appreciation of the cross that the Gospel is telling people with SSA to carry is not in accordance with the dignity that we owe them.** While this under-appreciation is far from homophobia, it certainly can be described as the kind of egotism typically displayed by those who fail to understand another person's suffering.

## **7. Masculine Dignity.**

St. John Paul the Great was a pioneer for women's dignity and coined the phrase "the Feminine Genius". 20 years later, it is now far past the time to understand the "Masculine Genius". Our culture depends on it.

The connection might not seem so obvious, but the Church needs to continue its work in reorienting the culture to the truth of femininity and masculinity. **Women's dignity does not come from being more like men (as secular femininity**

**would like us to think), and man's dignity cannot possibly come from being more like women (as some of the secular trends would also have us believe).** A couple of basic truths: Men are not women, and women are not men. Women are owed a profound respect for being women. Men are owed a profound respect for being men. It seems to be a mark of our culture's insanity that these truths are disputed. Regardless, the Church can proclaim these truths and more importantly, unpack them.

I am working on this myself, and I know I am not the only one. Just as St. JP II's work for women started with the model of Mary, a better understanding of masculinity will start with St. Joseph. The fact that St. Joseph is so little studied, focused on, or understood is illuminative of where our culture is as a whole. Hopefully there is a sense about how this might have something to do with the issue of SSA. More on this in a future post.

If we wish to proclaim God's plan for sexuality, we must proclaim what it is to be male and what it is to be female. Only then will there be the proper context for understanding the full depth of every single facet of the Church's teaching on sexuality, including teachings on same sex attraction.

# I Hate You, Food: My Struggle with Anorexia

by [MAURA PRESZLER](#)

<https://lifeteen.com/blog/i-hate-you-food-my-struggle-with-anorexia/>

Two months before graduating from 8th grade, while warming up before field hockey practice, I overheard two high school girls gossiping about a girl in my class who had a heavier build than I. *Why are they speaking about her like that? That's so cruel!* My mind raced, *I wonder if they talk about me like that? What if they laugh about me and think I'm fat too?*

I glanced down at my scuffed up oxford shoes and noticed my skirt, which was supposedly two inches too short for the school. Every morning one of the teachers reminded me, "Maura, your skirt is too short. Please tell your mom to fix it or you will need to get a new one."

Then I panicked. *Great, now people are going to talk about me because I'm fat and my skirt is too short.* I was an exceedingly anxious child and when corrected or talked to harshly, I shattered.

Upon arriving home from school later that day, I told my mother that I wasn't going to be eating desserts again. My mother, an exceptional chef, looked perplexed. After all, what normal child says such things? Well I'm going to show them that I'm not kidding. I'm going to start running and swimming more and eating less. I'll prove it.

I was one of the thinnest girls in my class and have been a runner since I was five years old, so naturally, my weight was never something I needed to even remotely worry about.

But that night I stared intently in the mirror and decided that if I was going to be considered beautiful I needed to lose weight. All I could hear was the mirror shouting at me, "**Beautiful girls are thin and you're ugly.**"

## **Food, the enemy**

My mom insisted I eat breakfast before school, so I started purposely getting up later so I wouldn't have time. I promised her I would eat my waffles as I walked to the bus stop.

But I lied.

Every morning I tossed the waffles down the sewer as I approached the bus stop. *I have to do this because no one believes that I need to lose weight. What are they thinking? Why don't they see how fat I am?*

As the weeks passed, the lies started darting out of my mouth daily and the person I was becoming frightened me.

*Oh, I already ate breakfast mom.*

Yes, lunch was delicious, thanks mom.

I had a snack on the bus. I'm not hungry.

*I only ran five miles (when I had actually run 8).*

*See mom I ate lunch and there's my dish in the sink to prove it. (I had really just taken a clean dish from the cabinet and placed it in the sink.)*

I weighed myself 20 times a day. I allowed myself 100 or 200 calories a day. If I survived the day on 100 calories, I considered it to be a good day. If I had overeaten, which meant 300 calories, I made sure to punish myself the next day by running more miles and eating more meager portions. I went to bed starving and most nights I couldn't sleep because my hunger pains kept me awake. My body ached.

I shunned every reflection of myself, whether that be through a mirror, window, pane of glass, or the pool. When I saw myself I shuttered. *Ah, I'm so ugly. I can't even stand the sight of myself. How do people even look at me?*

I had a pair of khaki J.Crew pants that I would try on multiple times throughout the day. Those pants defined me. They were literally my life.

If I felt like I had eaten too much or gained weight, I would immediately try those pants on. *Ah, they are too tight!! Okay, I need to lose weight and run more. Or, Phew, they are still loose. Okay, I can relax for an hour or two.* I was a slave to those pants for years.

**When the doctor told me that I would still be considered thin if I gained thirty pounds I nearly passed out.**

*Thirty pounds?? Are you crazy?? I would explode if I gained ten pounds! I wouldn't be able to fit through the door or sit in a normal seat on an airplane, let alone look at myself if I gained thirty. Gross, I'm already ugly enough. Why does she want me to be a whale? Maybe*

*because she is overweight herself? Yes, that's got to be it, she doesn't want anyone to be thin because she's fat. This doctor is crazy!*

Past trauma in my life plagued me and my eating disorder was all I could control. **I didn't think I was worth three meals a day.**

I was terrified that if I started eating again I wouldn't have the self-control to stop. I convinced myself that it was better not to eat breakfast because, what if I couldn't stop and just kept eating and blew up to three hundred pounds overnight? I was afraid that if I stopped running 50 plus miles a week I would let myself go.

On the Brink of Death

Several weeks later as I was lying in bed I could literally hear my heart struggling to beat. I was petrified. I took my pulse and it was in the high twenties. I fought back the tears because I was afraid my heart wouldn't be capable of handling the energy my tears would produce.

My bones were protruding. I was freezing. My hair was falling out in clumps. My fingernails were purple and I had fine hair growing all over my body. I knew that I had to make a change in my lifestyle or I could die. I promised myself that if I was alive the next morning I would get better and one day be an advocate for women in their recovery.

After that night, I realized that I was missing out on life. I wasn't allowed to go to dance class anymore, compete on the swim team, run, or go to summer camp. Yes, I was breathing, but I wasn't living. I was simply surviving, hoping that tomorrow I would still fit into my J.Crew pants.

I wanted to be healthy.

I yearned to enjoy my life minus counting calories. I day-dreamed about what it would feel like to eat a bowl of ice cream without worrying about the caloric intake. I wanted to put half and half in my coffee like a normal human being. I wanted to lick the bowl after making brownies and not obsess over the fat content in the chocolate and butter.

I wanted to drink orange juice again.

I wanted to live.

Learning to Love Myself

As I recovered, I removed the towels I had put over my bathroom mirror. Over time, I was gradually able to glance in the mirror

without cringing. For the first time in years, I didn't see an ugly human being anymore.

I learned that seeing my ideal number on a scale would *never* fulfill me. It's exceedingly empty and tiring. And trust me, I tried everything. **At my lowest weight, I was thirty-five pounds lighter than I am today and it's a miracle I'm alive.**

Instead of dwelling on what I disliked about my body, I tried to focus on what I liked. I wrote a list in my therapy journal and here is what it said.

I love my hair. I love my big blue eyes. I love that I have long legs. I love my cheekbones.

I love that I'm athletic and like to run. I love that I can create things with my hands. I love that I can swim in the ocean and know how to ride the waves.

It's interesting, I have one dimple on the right side of my face. I wonder why I don't have them on both sides? Anyway, I use to hate that dimple, but then a boy told me it was cute. It's growing on me. I don't love it yet, but I'm getting there. I love my resilient attitude.

I contemplated how much physical exertion it took to exercise without any fuel in my body. Or how many hours I spent planning my 'meals,' which were more like small snacks. Along with the days I wasted obsessing over counting calories, keeping my eating disorder a secret, and the relationships my eating disorder strained.

I used to think, *What would happen if I put all of the energy that I use to keep my eating disorder alive towards recovery? Actually, scratch that, what would happen if I just used a fraction of that energy towards my healing? I would be a changed person, I'm sure of it. I know it would hurt. But on the flip side, I can't live like this forever. Let's be real, I'm miserable. I'm destroying relationships and slowly killing myself. Alright, let's do the darn thing. Let's recover! I want to live again!*

I tried to remember that just because I had a moment of struggle, defeat or a bad day in my journey of recovery it didn't mean that I hadn't made progress towards freedom.

I actively worked on being patient with myself and taking it one step at a time. I sought to embrace the change and when I fell, which I did, I didn't stay down. Instead, I dusted off the dirt and tried to

embrace each opportunity in my life to seek beauty. And I started anew the next day and no matter how many times I messed up I never gave up.

**I learned that recovering from my eating disorder isn't about being perfect.** But it was about making smart daily choices, even if I didn't feel like it. Those daily choices eventually helped me to form new habits, which cultivated a lifestyle change.

Healing my relationship with food

In the beginning of my recovery, it was an intense challenge for me to put a spoon or fork in my mouth. I felt like I was shoving food down my throat. So in the beginning I had to eat with my fingers, forcing myself to stay at the table until I had eaten a serving of food.

Eventually I started using utensils again.

Today I can eat a bowl of ice cream at one o'clock in the morning and not give it a second thought.

I drink orange juice now, just like I *desperately* yearned to be able to do. I can go out to dinner at a restaurant or to my favorite coffee shop in Nashville and get a mocha and not obsess over the caloric content. I work out in moderation and I never run over five miles.

It's been over 10 years since 8th grade and reflecting on my journey **I have learned that my validation of beauty and sense of acceptance isn't the width of my waist or my BMI.**

I can never quench my yearning to be loved through the number that flashes back at me on the scale. My worth comes from my intrinsic dignity as a human being. Today I can look in the mirror and say, *I am beautiful. I am valuable. I am enough.*

Ask Yourself:

Do you ask God daily to show you your beauty as His child?

Do you seek to remain positive in your struggle, embracing each opportunity to see beauty in your cross?

What are you holding on to that you need to let go of?

Do you see eating as a way to nourish and care for your body?

Do you know that your body is unique and no one could complete the mission God created you to do?

Do you surround yourself with positive friends who uplift you and help you to see yourself as God sees you?

# When to Say No: Learning You Can't do it All

by KATE SEDDON

<https://lifeteen.com/blog/say-no-learning-cant/>

For me, it took a while until I actually made a change in my over-committed schedule. I was a competitive swimmer for a little over twelve years and as the years went on, the more committed I got. Before I knew it, I was waking up at 4 in the morning to swim for 2.5 hours, showering at the local LA Fitness. Then rushing to school for the next seven hours of my day. Right when school ended, I went straight to the pool again for another 3-hour practice and then off to my weight trainer for another 2 hours of trying to get swole. My life revolved around swim and because of this, I had to make room for school. Due to this chaotic schedule and the fact that my only goal was to make it to junior nationals, my mental health was nowhere near my number one priority. For almost 5 years straight, this was my schedule year round and it only got worse in summer. Not only did swim consume my life, but I joined clubs at school, did high school swim, and stayed very active at my church. Trying to keep grades high enough to be in NHS, still participating in clubs, going to Life Teen events at church, and working out for 7.5 hours a day, my mental health evaporated. Finally realizing the toll all of this was taking on my mental and physical health, I knew something needed to change.

Starting school again or going into college, there are a multitude of different activities being thrown at you with a very tempting nature. Clubs, intramural sports, talks, social events that usually include free food, and so many more begin to fill your daily schedule to its brim. Learning when to say no, and still have



free time for yourself is beyond imperative. In order to spread the Gospel with your whole self, we have to be healthy, happy, and whole. With no room in your schedule to ensure time to take care of yourself mentally and physically, things can become overwhelming fast. Even though all these commitments seem like the best idea at the time, you will soon begin to realize the dwindling nature of your mental health.

As someone who used to be drowning in over-commitment, I've learned some helpful ways to overcome the temptation to say "yes" to everything. Here are a few of the steps I've used to examine each decision I make:

### **1. Identify what's most important to you.**

Committing yourself to something that will take over a lot of your time has to have meaning and be important enough to you to change your whole schedule. Not only do we have to examine the pros and cons of the decision itself, but also how it will impact your routine. Making sure that committing to this opportunity will still allow you to have time for yourself. That it will be fun, exciting, and something to look forward to throughout your week.

### **2. See how much time you have available for this new commitment.**

Still having time for your academic commitments, job commitments, and even extracurricular commitments, is there room for this new responsibility? Will you be able to have time for yourself if you add this to your schedule? Does this new commitment prevent you from being an authentic disciple of Christ, by infringing upon prayer time, Mass time, or time with your faith community? Making sure that any obligation, new or old, does not consume your whole day is crucial. We have to keep

in mind that, even though a potential new commitment may seem enticing, if it doesn't keep us healthy, happy, and whole, then is it worth it?

### **3. What will you Have to change in order to fit this in your schedule.**

Usually when you add an event to your agenda, it affects other things and there are changes that need to be made. Try to only change what isn't as important to you. For example, when I began to take on a larger responsibility at swim, school and church were also my top priorities. I would make changes to adjust to youth group events, or tutoring after school because to me, those were more important than swim. Listing the importance of everything you do can also be a helpful reminder of where your priorities are at.

### **4. Is this still something you desire?**

At the end of all of this reflection and planning, make sure you still want to be a part of whatever new obligation you're considering. If you try it out for a little while and decide it is too much or not your style, there is no shame in trying something new or making more time for yourself. Take frequent check ups to reflect on how you're doing with your routine and if you notice you've started to overcommit, take a step back and begin to make changes.