

Difficult conversations with your kids

Headline: Part of the vocation of being a parent involves communicating with your child about difficult topics, during stressful times, and/or when the child is confused, angry, or distraught. We will discuss strategies for maintaining compassion, integrity, and humility during these conversations.

Objective: As a father, having a serious conversation with your child is rarely easy. Usually, at least one side is suffering from stress, confusion, fear, or doubt. Even if that is not the case, one side, the other, or both, is suffering from a lack of understanding or ignorance. How do we approach these conversations in a Christ-like manner, with courage, wisdom, understanding, and patience?

Song Suggestion: Prayer of St. Francis

Bible and Catechism Readings:

Deuteronomy 6: 6-7

“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

Matthew 18: 10-14

See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

Catechism 1784

The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults. The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart.

Catechism 2222-2223

Parents must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God’s law. Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones." Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them.

Saint: St. Francis Ch'oe Kyong-hwan was a farmer and lay catechist in Korea during the 19th century. Catholicism was in direct opposition to the religion of that time in Korea and the church there was outlawed and in hiding. Francis established a secret Catholic school that, during the evenings, would secretly educate his children and other members of the community in the faith. The witness of his faith was not unnoticed, and Francis and his wife were tortured and martyred. Francis's son Thomas became the second Korean-born Catholic priest and followed his father's catechical example by walking hundreds of miles a year to remote villages in Korea to teach and minister.

Vignette: – Ron has two teenage daughters. His older daughter has a serious boyfriend. Ron and his wife are worried that their daughter is sexually active. Ron's younger daughter has some friends who have come out as gay. She is questioning the church's beliefs on homosexuality and does not want to go to Mass until the Church changes its stance on gay marriage and homosexuality in general. Ron knows that he needs to have serious conversations with both, but he is not confident in his ability to speak to them. With his older daughter, he is worried that anger is going to prevent him from speaking clearly as he feels there is no ambiguity or question to what he has tried to teach his girls about premarital sex. With his younger daughter, he is worried that he is too ignorant to speak clearly about same-sex attraction. He feels out of control and out of his depth. He begins to pray.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

When you discuss challenging topics with your children, do you bring your faith into the conversation? Even before you start these conversations, do you approach it with prayer?

How important is it to you to “win” in an argument or conversation? Conversely, how important is it to you to maintain peace? How do you know when to lean in one direction or another?

Where do you go when you are given questions about your faith or morality that you find hard to answer?

Action Plan:

1. Think and pray about an area of parenting that you are not confident in. Pray for grace. If you can, ask someone you trust and find to be wise about how to navigate with this area of parenting.
2. Find a Catholic book, podcast, or other media program that can help you better understand an area of your faith that you are either ignorant about or feel less confident in discussing. Actively read or listen (with your wife if you are able).

Author: John Murphy (with thanks for inspiration from Bob Considine, Dan Lape, and Reid Rooney)