

## **Guide for First Reconciliation Parents**

Vatican Council II said that parents are “the first and foremost educators of their children.” How a child turns out as an adult Catholic depends more on his or her parents than on the school attended.

What a real difference it makes when parents are aware of the decisive role they play in the faith life of their child. Even when children are attending special classes and a teacher is presenting all the information they will need to be ready to make their First Reconciliation, parents are more important than the teacher.

Children need to know what their parents’ values are. They should be able to identify them and recognize what they believe in and is important to them. They need to see parents acting upon their values with consistency and regularity. This is why parents’ example is most important. Ask yourself, “What kind of values am I instilling in my child? What kind of choices does my child see me make?” Honesty, fairness, kindness, generosity, and integrity are lessons *taught* during the school time but are *caught* at home through Christian family living.

The first and many subsequent confessions of your child will be confessions of devotion, not of necessity, hence there is no need to make distinctions between mortal and venial sin, no need to enumerate sins. Rather than emphasizing sins, it is better that we devote our energies to cultivate loving attitudes and ways of behaving. The child learns what sorrow for sin means and what forgiveness means from his own experiences at home and at school. Our child offends us: he is made aware of his offense; he makes a gesture of regret, receives pardon and is restored to our friendship. In each case that he offends anyone, he connects his offense, his regret, and the pardon with someone he loves. All along he has been learning about God – he has begun to know and love God. His sin will be in exact proportion to his knowledge of God, to his awareness of God. Thus he can be brought to see his little lapses not as isolated acts but as acts connected with God, a turning away from God, a saying no to God. A child should not be left to imagine that no one but himself needs to say “I am sorry” to God. An adult can give a powerful lesson by saying “I should not have done that. It wasn’t right. I have to say I’m sorry. I will tell God I am sorry”. Receiving forgiveness from parents and seeing parents forgiving one another are vital religious experiences for children.

### **Some visible signs of a young child’s awakening of conscience:**

Even without adults telling them. Children begin to see *why* a lie is wrong, *why* cruel words can hurt others.

Children accept their parents’ standards as their own – they will act out of the parental role in games.

Children will begin to resist temptation to do wrong even when they are not being watched by a potential punisher.

Children want to see things more clearly. They want objective information about good and evil. They will ask questions about personal problems, “Mom, is this ‘good’ or is this bad”?”

Children are more capable of self-analysis. “Yesterday I was mean; I ignored my friend. I’ll try to be good to her today.” They begin to sense that choices have to be made in all their actions.

In a developing conscience children act differently after they do something wrong. Troubled by self-blame and fear of punishment, they will often admit to their wrongdoing.

**Bible Stories** Sit down with your child and read or tell stories about reconciliation:

Zacchaeus is forgiven (Luke 19:1-10)

The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7)

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

How Many times do I forgive? (Matthew 18:21-22)

The Good Shepherd (John 10:1-6)

Importance of forgiveness before offering gifts (Matthew 5:23-24)

Jesus blesses the children (Matthew 19:13-15)

### **Examination of Conscience**

Together with your child you may begin his/her conscience formation at night. Include yourself in the view of the day: *I am going to look back over today. Did I please God today? Did I say NO to Him, turn away from Him, displease Him? If I did, God knows about it. So do I. I am sorry that I did this because God is so good and loves me so much. I will tell God that I am sorry and I will try to be better.* (Later on, you may add certain things that displease God: lies, disobedience, unkindness, sulking, etc.)

### **Thoughts to ponder**

What do you remember about your First Reconciliation (Confession)?

Was the day exciting? Were you afraid? Did you understand what was happening?

What past experience do you have with disagreements? How were disagreements settled in your family when you were a child?

Today, how does your child see disagreements settled?

There is a human need to say "I'm sorry" and to be forgiven. Was this familiar to you as you grew up? Today, is your child familiar with the action?

What do you want for your child who is preparing for First Reconciliation?

### **Helpful Hints**

Tour the Reconciliation Room, the Confessional with your child. Open the doors, turn on the lights, show them where this Sacrament takes place.

Teach your child how to confess – to tell the priest (who takes Jesus' place) in their own words exactly what he/she did when they said no to God.

Teach your child to be sorry for offending God – connect the Act of Contrition to this sorrow.

Give your child some examples of a penance he/she may receive and how to fulfill it.

*\*This handout was provided by the Diocese of Buffalo and has some helpful hints for parents!*