



Teaching the Way of Love

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

April, 2014

Prayer of the Month

Jesus Christ,
Open our hearts and
minds to accept God's
wonderful plan for hu-
man love. Teach us to
respect human dignity
through the virtue of
chastity. May we love
as you love.

Amen.



Parenting Tip of the Month

Guiding our children in love & romance is much easier when we understand the language of love.

Visit: <http://goo.gl/p4AmcP>

to learn about the four types of love and how to guide your children to love like Jesus.



Spring—Is Romance in the Air at your House?

What is it about spring? The re-awakening of life around us, the chance to enjoy the great outdoors, the fresh and fertile smell in the air? Whatever it is, spring gives people the urge to reach out and connect with each other. Being the season of the “birds and the bees,” spring can also awaken the “nesting instinct” in us as well. Perhaps this is why spring is often referred to as the season of love.

This makes us a bit nervous as parents, doesn't it? Especially parents whose children have entered - or gone through - puberty. There is a good chance that your child will be bitten by the “love bug” in the very emotional sense of the word. This may take the form of a “crush” or of an actual relationship of “puppy love.” Or it might just take the form of a great desire for a romantic relationship, and maybe a sense of loneliness or of inadequacy as they see other young people “coupling up” and find themselves alone. Spring can set up an emotional mine field in our children's lives.

When parents exercise true parental authority, they can use this season of love to shape the hearts of their children in very positive ways. Catholics understand authority as a reflection of God's power which is the inexhaustible ability to generate goodness and to love selflessly. Human authority is therefore the power to lead other people to a true good that they would not or could not otherwise choose for themselves. As parents, we exercise authority over our children in order to lead them to authentic goodness. How can we use parental authority to turn the season of “hormonal love” into a positive force in our children's lives?

Know the Goal of Romance - God placed the desire for romance in our hearts for a purpose: to move us towards mutual self-giving. In other words, romance is supposed to transform our selfish desire to “get what I can” out of a relationship towards “what I can give” to the other in the relationship. Romance should point one's heart to the fullness of self-sacrificing love. So our goal as parents is to connect romance to the practice of putting the needs and wants of the other before our own desires.

Uphold God's Plan for Sexual Expression – All parents should consistently uphold and teach their children that sexual expression is only right, good, true and beautiful between spouses in marriage. But it is especially important to step up our education when we perceive that our children's desire and romantic fire have been stirred up. How do we do this? We need to pay attention to our children's increased desires and talk with them about their feelings. This is the time to be more present to them.

Parenting with the Heart of Christ

It is not the time to give them their space. It is your opportunity to engage your child in regular conversations where they can share their thoughts and you can respond by reminding them that God has a plan for sexual expression that you want them to follow. (FYI - God's plan for the sexual act is that it be used within marriage to increase the bond of love between spouses and to bring new life into a family that is firmly founded on marriage). It is also your chance to warn them that the power of sexual union can be damaging to body and soul when it is abused outside of marriage.

Become the go-to person for your child's "ups" and "downs" - Do you remember the board game "Chutes & Ladders"? The goal of the game is to get from the bottom of the game board to the top. If a player lands on a ladder, the game piece can travel up the ladder, skipping rows on the game board and accelerating the journey toward the goal. However, if the player lands on a "chute" they slide back down toward the bottom of the game board, making it necessary to climb multiple rows all over again.

Sometimes our children hit a ladder on their relationship journey. Our children will come off the ladder feeling really good - having a sense of success and personal growth. During these times of victory, some parents may be tempted to sit back and congratulate themselves for a job well done. They may be tempted to relax their vigilance and to "lay off" of the lessons on relationship and sexuality. But if we give in to this temptation, we lose a great opportunity to help our children internalize the lessons of their success. Our job as the parental authority during these times of victory is to become the cheerleaders in our children's lives - to help them celebrate the victory and to remind them that the goodness they are experiencing comes from God. One very important point for us to remember here is that we do much better to celebrate the virtues that are growing in our children that got them to this high point, rather than to celebrate the good (often temporary) results or individual actions that our children performed.

Other times our children will hit a chute - it's unavoidable in the "game" of life. The chute may be a break-up of a relationship or it might even be falling into temptation or sin. Our children may display selfishness, self-pity, or lust. Or they may fall into emotional depression, loneliness or feelings of inadequacy. Whatever form the chute takes, it can be very disheartening for our children and for us as parents.

There are two important responses for parents toward the "chutes" that life throws in our children's path. The first is to prepare our children for life's downturns, and to help them avoid sin. We do this when we set and enforce standards of behavior. We do this by knowing what is happening in our children's lives and being actively engaged in helping them make wise choices. The second response is to be there for our children during tough times. We have to realize that our job is not to fix or cover up problems for them - or to make the problem go away, as much as we'd like to. Our job is to guide and support them as they fix the problems themselves. We want to make sure that a sinful choice does not become a vice (a bad moral habit). Of course, through all of this we offer forgiveness and we pray for them.

We can blame it on the spring - the season of the birds and bees - but the truth is that our children will struggle with romantic desires and the rigors of relationships and chastity throughout the year. Parenting with the heart of Christ means that we stand ready to guide our children to God's loving plan for love and life as they navigate the struggles and joys that relationships bring.

Following these recommendations can help you prepare your children to really learn and develop during their time in school. But this is just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies for helping your children become the best they can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the Teaching the Way of Love program, which can be found at the same website.

This article series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, authors of the Teaching the Way of Love home study series for parents. Find out more at www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love.