

Challenge #1 Meal Time as Real Time



Teaching the Way of Love

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PLEASE PRAY FOR

- The safety and well-being of all children going to school.
- Children going to school, that they will develop their God-given gifts.
- All parents, that they will find meaningful ways to connect with their children each and every day.
- School teachers, that they will respect parents as the primary educators for their students.
- Families, that they may find time to come together and enjoy each other.
- School personnel, that they may support the truth that comes from God.

Remain *Primary* During the School Year

The countdown is over. Another summer vacation is done. The frenzy of back to school preparation has passed and your children are back in school dressed in their new clothes with all their shiny school supplies.



Some parents shed a tear when school begins. Others can hardly wait for their kids to leave. It really doesn't matter which end of the spectrum you are on as long as you realize that you are still your child's parent when she is in school. You are still the person with the most authority.

What does that mean? The Catholic Church teaches that parents are the primary educators for their children at all times. Teachers, coaches, and administrators are there to help you in your duties but they are not meant to replace you. As Saint Pope John Paul II said, "*(your role as a parent) is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for your failure in it.*" Familiaris Consortio

Current research from the Search Institute agrees that the role of the parent during the school year is very profound in three ways. Parents' example is more **important** than any other example. What children do is based largely on what they "caught" at home from their parents' example instead of what the parents "taught." A parent's words are most **powerful**. Consider this: researchers tell us that children who avoid risk behaviors do so because these kids don't want to disappoint their parents. In other words, when children know that their parents reject risky behaviors, they are very likely to reject the same. Finally the parents' relationship with a child is the most **influential**. Parents who hold their kids accountable with true love have the most fulfilled and successful children.

Clearly, the start of a school year does not mark the end of your parenting. Rather, the beginning of another academic session calls you to find different and more intentional ways to stay engaged as a family. This can be a big challenge. Let's face it, once school starts, you have less time to be together. Mornings during the school year have a tendency to be more hectic; more rushed. After school hours often take on a "quick step" tempo. And the evening to bedtime hours can prove taxing as you try to finish the tasks of the day and prepare for the next.

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

Here is some good news. The busyness of a school year can be managed and family togetherness can be maintained with some pre-planning and a strong resolve to stay connected. Let's take a look at three great ideas on how to stay connected now that the school bell has tolled.

Start the Day Right. A great way to maintain a parental bond with your kids is to find a loving way to roust them out of bed each school day. Greet your kids with a gesture of tenderness rather than a startling wake up call. A soft kiss on their cheek with a whispered, "good morning," a calm embrace, or a sincere smile when they first look at you can create a positive tone for the day.

End the Day Right. Night time routines (repetitive actions that remain the same) reduce family drama and increase togetherness. One very effective routine is to establish a place for everyone's school stuff (perhaps a series of hooks by the door for backpacks, coats, etc.) Another great idea is to lay out clothing for the next day before retiring. It may also be helpful to pack lunches and set up for breakfast before going to bed. Here a great idea: set a rule that all media devices are turned off and docked outside of the bedroom one hour before bedtime (this one ensures a good night's sleep). Finally, set bedtimes that are preceded by night prayers.

Make Meal Time, Real Time. A lot can happen to your family each day. Some events will be good, some not so good and others confusing. The family meal is the time when emotional decks are cleared and support can be given. It is the time when family values are instilled and interdependence is strengthened. Sharing time over a meal can create an environment of tenderness, forgiveness, respect, faithfulness and service above self. It is a sacred space in the day when the world can become peaceful and secure. Our **September Challenge** will help you make meal time a real time for your family. (See below)

Here is your September Challenge

Each TWL Newsletter for the 2014/15 school year will provide parents with a fun and easy challenge that will increase their ability to be a primary educator. This month's challenge is focused on making meal time a real time for family bonding and connection.

As you read, regularly sharing a family meal is good for everyone's spirit. It helps us think more clearly, feel more secure and reconnect. It is a time for conversation that makes us laugh, listen and learn with those we love.

This month's challenge is to engage in meaningful conversation every day during meal time. We have created a month's worth of questions that parents can ask during meal time to stimulate the conversation. The questions are designed to provide everyone at the table the chance to talk as well as listen. To access the questions go to <http://goo.gl/6Zd43p> and download the list. If you like, you can cut the questions into cards and draw one at each meal.



Are you ready to meet the challenge? Give it a try! It can help you prepare your children to really learn and develop during their time in school. This challenge is just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you 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.