

**February
Challenge
Negotiating
Change or
Standing
Firm**



Teaching the Way of Love

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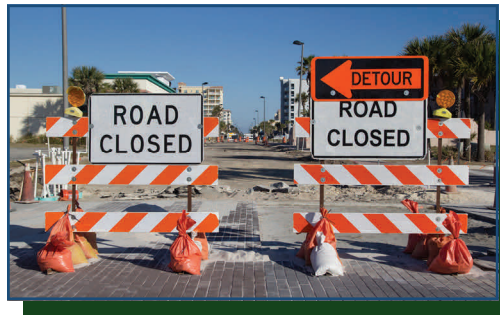
Planning for Life's Detours

**PLEASE PRAY
THAT**

- Parents will be open to the animation of the Holy Spirit as they guide their children towards God's goodness.
- Parents will teach their children the benefits of a Sacramental Marriage.
- The Catholic Church will be a sign of trust and hope in the world.
- Young people may have the courage to forge life-long, faithful commitments.
- The Catholic Church is recognized by all as faithful to God and trustworthy .
- Families will be built upon the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.
- Parents are able to provide for the health and well-being of their family.

In the January challenge we talked about giving our children road signs to pro-actively guide them toward the good we want for their lives. We also talked about giving them guard rails - firm restrictions to keep them away from things that would cause them physical and spiritual danger. With these expectations and restrictions in place, our children will be guided toward goodness.

But of course we're not naive, are we? Life doesn't always go as planned, whether you're talking about a literal road trip or the task of parenting. While we want our expectations to be firm and



as consistent as possible, circumstances always pop up that makes us consider exceptions. These are times when we need a detour.

Now, I know. Detours are often a pain in the rear-end when they pop up on us unexpectedly and interfere with our travel timeline. But think about what a detour really is. Part of the road that has for one reason or another become dangerous or unpassable is blocked off and a

route is offered around the troubled area to get us back on track.

Yes, detours often catch us by surprise even though we know we should expect them. That is why it would be a good idea to try to plan for them whenever we set out for a road trip. The same kind of planning can - and should - take place in our parenting. Planning for the unforeseen twists and turns of parenting includes knowing which of your expectations can be negotiable (can be changed) and which ones are non-negotiable (remain the same).

Here is something to keep in mind. Exceptions like detours are infrequent. They are never meant to replace the rule. If we change our expectations too often and without good reason, we come across to our children as inconsistent. This ruins our children's confidence in us as guides to true goodness. It also teaches our children that there are no solid standards of good and evil, that everything is relative. But if we refuse to ever change our expectations we come across as unreasonable and legalistic. This damages our ability to teach our children the virtue of prudence - the virtue of choosing the best good within their given circumstances. That's why knowing ahead of time which expectations are negotiable (and under what circumstances) and which ones are non-negotiable.

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

Negotiable expectations are expectations that can change based on changing circumstances. For example, usually your curfew would be a firm, consistent expectation. But a special event like a late-night movie or a special dance may call for a change in curfew. Likewise, you may have some firm, consistent driving restrictions (the distance your child can drive, the number of people allowed in the car). But a special trip may call for a temporary lift of these restrictions.

Negotiable expectations may also change based on your child's growth in character. The ultimate purpose of parental expectations is to lead our children to choose the good for themselves. As they show that they are increasingly able to do that, parents can ease off on their own authority and give more freedom. You may ease up on curfew when your child shows that she's taking ownership of her health, homework and other responsibilities. You may ease up on driving restrictions as your child shows that he's a responsible driver.

At the same time, negotiable restrictions may get stricter if greater guidance is needed or if higher expectations would help to strengthen virtue.

Non-negotiable expectations are usually guard rails rather than road signs. These are things that never change no matter the circumstances. Often non-negotiable expectations reflect God's moral law or life-threatening dangers. Examples of non-negotiables would include restrictions on underage drinking, drug use, driving under the influence, and certain dating boundaries.

Here is your February Challenge

Your parenting challenge for February is to plan for the detours in your life by thinking about your negotiable and non-negotiable expectations. The two-step challenge asks you to determine common expectations that parents have for their children and then to think about the circumstances in which negotiable expectations may change and the situations to consider for either easing or strengthening non-negotiable expectations. You can find the challenge worksheet at: <http://goo.gl/8x1J99>.



Are you ready to meet this month's challenge? Give it a try! You'll find that this activity not only improves attitudes toward chores, but also improves the sense of true community within your family. 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.