

*Learning to
Relate: one
meal at a
time.*

Connectedness



Teaching
the Way of Love
Because humanity passes by way of the family...

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**PLEASE PRAY
THAT**

- Parents will role model civility and humility in the home.
- Families will make family meals a priority.
- Parents will help their children learn the skills and virtues necessary to form healthy and loving relationships.
- All children will know the security of true love from their parents.
- Families will create homes filled with conversation, prayer and joy.
- Parents will witness a visible love for God for their children to see.
- Charity will flourish within every family.
- No child (or parent) will ever feel they are beyond God's love and mercy.

My Child isn't Friendly—HELP!

2017 is off to an interesting start. Many parents have contacted our office seeking advice. One Dad had noticed that her 8-year-old daughter was not integrating into the games and activities that her peers played at school. A mom had a concern that her teenage son was more content to spend time alone rather than be with friends. Another parent wanted to know what to do when her child shouted and yelled like the people on TV do when she didn't get her way.

Shortly after these calls, a group of parents stopped me at a parish to share their concern that people are losing their ability to relate civilly to others. When asked where their unease comes from, they quickly blamed politicians and media outlets. They worried that their kids were seeing daily examples of adults behaving badly on the news, in YouTube videos and in the local square.



What do these parents share? All of them want to help their offspring become socially mature. They understand that "it is not good for anyone to be alone" and that we must "love our neighbor" even when we don't see eye to eye.

Can you relate to their concerns? I certainly can. It doesn't take much to recall what it was like watching my children struggle as they learned how to relate well to others. They shed plenty of tears and harbored feelings of resentment as they learned how to relate to others. As a parent, my heart crumbled each time one of their friendships went south.

Why do we get upset when our kids don't relate well to others? As Catholic parents, we recall that Jesus calls our children - as He calls every one of His followers - to love as He loves. This means pouring themselves out completely in selfless love for others. We think to ourselves, "If that's the goal I'm striving for as a Catholic parent, I'm in real trouble if my kids can't even get along with others." Intuitively, we also know that our example - and those of other adults - may have contributed to our children's social struggles. The old adage that behaviors are caught more than they are taught rings true. When we are rude or mean or (add any social ill here), we know that our kids are watching and likely to repeat the same behavior.

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It is also likely that our kids observed poor socialization from the media. Even though we try to place limits and boundaries around their screen time, we can all recall moments when we just gave into their whining and bent the rules.

Here's the bottom line; parents more than anyone else influence a child's ability to relate well to others. What we do does get passed down. Whether we like it or not, we are the strongest teachers for our children. Perhaps it is time for us to check our own actions and standards when our children struggle with kindness, respect and selflessness. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves, "What type of example are we setting?"

The relationship between a parent and child sets the trajectory of social maturity. Parents are the first educators for their kids and the home is the first school of humanity. The family is the best place for kids to practice social skills. All of the virtues associated with the common good and peace on earth and that lead to true charity begin within the family. As the tag line on this newsletter says, "humanity passes by way of the family".

Learning how to make and keep friends is no different than learning how to read or write or ride a bike. It is a skill that should be introduced, developed and mastered. Thankfully, most parents have access to a place and time in their family to teach these skills; at the table at mealtime. Sharing a meal provides a perfect opportunity to teach kids how to ask questions; how to listen without interruption; how to reserve judgment; how to be humble; how to be mannered and civil...

Meal Time is the Perfect Time for Socialization

There is no time like the present to begin sharing one meal a day together as a family. Your first step is to consult your family's schedule and block out the days and times to gather at your table.

Here are a few guidelines and tips that will help you make a daily meal a reality.

1. Be open to sharing a meal at different times of the day. Some days you might share a breakfast together. Other days you might choose a dinner time meal. On weekends, a brunch might be chosen ... the time of day doesn't matter—but getting together does.
2. Bring people without their technology to the table. Cell phones, tablets, TVs, radio ... are not allowed during your meal. Removing technology allows you to connect with each other.
3. Open your meal with a prayer that everyone can say. This sets the stage for togetherness and invites God into the mix.
4. As the parent, have a question ready to ask your family. It can be as simple as, "tell me about your day," or more thought provoking like, "what do you think about (add a topic here)." Then, ask each person at the table to respond. As conversation flows, guide your kids to ask questions, listen without interruption, reserve judgment, share opinions respectfully ... it is your job to moderate the exchange and form your children's social skills.
5. Thank your family at the end of the meal for gathering with you and spending time together. Help them see how important and valuable it is for you to relate well with each other.

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.