

*Raise them
Well*

*Personal
Maturity*



Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

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Preparing Your Child for School

PLEASE PRAY THAT

- Parents will live according to the Ten Commandments, especially within the home.
- Families will challenge themselves to value personal dignity over accomplishments.
- Parents will ask the Holy Spirit to help their family be honest in word and deed.
- Families will joyfully work to put God at the center of all they do.
- Families will cultivate a sense of awe and wonder for the truth of God.
- Parents will take the time to be with their children and enjoy family connections.
- No child (or parent) will ever find themselves beyond God's love and mercy.

Sending a child back to school a decade or two ago was much easier than it is today. Back then, parents worried about buying the right supplies and getting the kids into the right classroom. Today, parents' worries are more complex: Will there be bullies in school? Is the school safe? Do I agree with what is being taught? Will the teacher see my child's potential or let him fall through the cracks?

You are not the only one worrying about the coming school year. Your child is likely doing the same thing. His concerns may include your list plus others. Will I fit in? Will I make friends? What am I good at? Where might I fail?

You and I both know that it isn't good to start a year with anxiety. It's far better to begin with a sense security and comfort. Experts tell us focusing on a child's self-worth rather than self-esteem leads to the best outcomes. What's the difference? Self-esteem is what a person thinks and feels and believes about himself. Self-worth is recognizing "my value is greater than all of those things". Kids who are convinced that their parents love them no matter what and value them (especially when struggles and failure occur) will do their best.



Let's explore three ways to create the groundwork for self-worth as the academic year opens.

Focus on the being before the doing. Learn how to emphasize who your child is before what he does. Remember that he is a unique, unrepeatable person created by God. He is not a thing or a machine or a robot that spits out facts and accomplishments. His value is based on more than grades or sporting excellence or participation in lots of activities. Help him realize that he has deep-rooted value, deserves to be loved, and is needed in this world by treating him as a human being not a human doing. Cherish him more than his accomplishments.

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

Identify both strengths *and* weaknesses. Every child starts a school year with a set of natural talents (things she is good at) and limitations (things she will need help with). This means that she will both excel and fail. She will experience exhilaration and frustration. As the parent, expect the year to have both ups *and* downs and acknowledge that there is value to working through rough times. Teach your child to own her failures, ask for help and to trust the power of hard work. Let her know that you don't expect her to be the first at everything; but you do want her to be the last person still trying.

Strengthen both body and soul. We know each child is more than a just a body. We know they have an invisible soul that animates everything they do. (That is why they are persons and not things!) What we often forget is that parents have an obligation to take care of both their physical well-being as well as their spiritual well-being; that there is a daily need to strengthen both.

Chances are that you have a set routine for physical care; times set aside for eating, hygiene, exercise and rest. Now is the time to set up a routine for spiritual care. This will include family togetherness and prayer, individual prayer (both you and your child), diving into the Scriptures and weekly participation in the Sacraments. Spiritual care is just as important to your child's ability to succeed at school as is his physical care.

Raise Them to be Personally Mature

This is a perfect time of year to review your family's routines and ask yourself, "Do we focus more on what our children do or on who they are?" As you reflect on this question, consider the following.

Look at what you display in your home. Take a look at your refrigerator. What do you see? If the first things you see are ribbons and stars and certificates, you might be valuing what your kids do more than who they are. If you see pictures of your children at play or rest; laughing or pensive, you are likely valuing who they are more.

Think about *what* you ask in conversation. Which question are you more likely to ask your kids each day: "what did you *do* today?" or "what is one thing you did today that was fun (or surprising or [fill in the blank])?" The first focuses on doing while the second focuses more on them as a person. Learn to ask questions that engage them.

Survey your family's downtime. Check your weekly calendar. Is there time set aside for your family to be together and just chill? Think about it. You schedule other important events. What is more important than spending time with those you love? Get intentional about protecting your family time.

Assess your ability to pray as a family. When does your family pray together at home? What prayers do you all know that you can recite together? Do your family members pray for each other? Where is your family's bible and when was the last time you read it together? While this may be the hardest step in your review, it is likely the one step that will bear the greatest fruit in helping your children mature personally over this school year.

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.