

*Raise Them
Well*

*Emotional
Maturity*



**Teaching
the Way of Love**

because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

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Help Them Think *Before* Acting on their Emotions

PLEASE PRAY
THAT

- Families will joyfully work to put God at the center of all they do.
- Parents will show their children the joy of self-control.
- Moms and Dads will make time to just be with their children and enjoy them.
- Parents will ask the Holy Spirit to help their family be respectful in word and deed.
- Families will cultivate deep friendships within their extended family.
- Parents will learn how to correct their children in charity rather than anger.
- No child (or parent) will ever find themselves beyond God's love and mercy.
- Family time will be cherished.

Some memories are hard to forget. Like the time our 13-year-old son, a normally compliant and joyful child, walked into the living room and bellowed like a bull. When I asked him why he did that, he just looked at me and said, "I'm not sure why I did that." And the time when our 12-year-old daughter found a dead bunny in our yard and cried inconsolably until she went to bed. When I asked her why she was so sad, she couldn't explain her grief. And the day that our youngest and most playful son vehemently argued with me because I wouldn't let him join his friends who were going to vandalize a teacher's property to celebrate homecoming. His rationale, "We're not going to do anything wrong!"

These true stories point out the obvious: emotions are often magnified and reasoning seems to disappear as children pass through puberty. Young adults tend to become more impulsive and have less self-control during the teen years. Why? Because the brain undergoes its most dramatic growth spurts during puberty. Almost every connection that exists is first disabled, then



rewired and finally reactivated. In the end, they do have improved thinking skills and decision making abilities. But, until the project is completed, the brain fritzes and sputters resulting in intense emotional outbursts and a temporary loss of logic.

It can be tempting run away or throw your hands up when this erratic behavior begins. Parents who want the best for their kids will acknowledge the emotions as well as engage and lean into the situation. They will stand firm when the emotional life of the child becomes trying. (Let's face it, what was right before the outburst is still right during and after the outburst.) They know that rules should not change just because a child feels they should. Parents will also remain consistent in their

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demonstration of respect by loving their son or daughter even during emotional highs and lows. Further, parents who truly care, confront the conflict or behavior in question, even if this means more emotional outbursts.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that emotions are what incline us to act or not to act in regard to something perceived or imagined to be either good or evil. They are the connection between what we sense and how we reason. Emotions themselves are neither good nor bad, nor are they decisive and precise. In other words, emotions that feel good do not always lead to what is good and emotions that feel bad do not always lead to what is bad. Emotions are meant to get us to think before we act.

Following the lead of the Catechism, parents should teach and show their emerging adult how to stop, think and then act. When a person stops, the draw of the emotion also stops. Stopping can be accomplished through a number of ways; a time out in one's room without distraction, taking a deep breath, counting to 10, saying a quick prayer. When the emotions have subsided, clearer thinking can happen. The young adult is now ready to determine if the emotions are leading towards something that is good or something that is wrong. It may take some time and conversation with you to determine the right course of action. Eventually, the teen is equipped to act in a way that will lead to the goodness that God intends.

Raise Them to be Emotionally Mature

What virtue helps a person stop, think and act? (Reminder—a virtue is a firm habit to do what is right and good.) The answer is temperance. Temperance is self-mastery or self-restraint. It helps us moderate our actions, thoughts, or feelings so that we are free to do what is best for us.

Here are a number of ways that parents can encourage emotional maturity through the virtue of self-control in their offspring.

1. **Give them something godly to imitate.** In a nutshell—show them how to live in moderation. At meals, take less than you normally do. When you shop, buy less. Cut your media exposure by a third. Show them what it looks like to have emotional self-control by denying excess and living more simply.
2. **Say “no” with good humor.** Each time you deny yourself something, maintain a cheerful heart. Forego the grumbling and mumbling and replace it with some lighthearted sentiment.
3. **Admit that self-restraint takes effort and time.** It isn't helpful to sugar coat the reality that it doesn't always feel good to say no to yourself—especially at first. Share the truth that it does get easier. AND, let them know that when temperance is practiced, we often find that we actually enjoy things more and not less. Temperance will lead us to a new gratitude and satisfaction that we could never find in excessive self-indulgence.
4. **Guide—and let them decide.** The best teacher is experience which means you have to let your children experience what happens when they don't exercise temperance. If they make a decision to be excessive, let the consequences play out.

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.