

Raise Them  
Well

Emotional  
Maturity



# Teaching the Way of Love

*because humanity passes by way of the family . . .*

Please Pray That

- Families will joyfully live with God at the center of all that they do.
- Parents will show their children the joys of self-control.
- Moms and dads would take the time to just be with their children and enjoy them.
- Parents will learn to build an open, nurturing relationship with their children.
- Parents will ask the Holy Spirit to help their family be respectful in word and deed.
- Family time will be cherished.
- Families will regain the art of building households and communities of persons.
- Our culture will learn the true nature of emotions and value thoughtful response rather than rash reaction.

Volume 6, Issue 4

December, 2018

## Emotional Maturity - The Importance of Relationship

There's another hole in our house. We have a hole in a bedroom, a couple in the basement, and now there's a new one in the bathroom door. When I asked the kids why, my daughter said, "Oh, that. I got mad." It was time for another talk about the proper expression of emotions.

Part of being the adult God wants us to be is the proper control and expression of our emotions. Human beings are called to respond to their emotions thoughtfully, not to blindly react to them. Just in case you're wondering - kicking a hole in the bathroom door would **not** be a proper response to emotion. As parents, we want to help our children to attain emotional maturity - not just to save ourselves from property damage - but to help our children respond to their world in positive, productive and holy ways.



### What Are Emotions?

Considering how misunderstood emotions are in our culture, a great place for parents to start is to know how Catholic thought and teaching understands emotions. Emotions are part of the system that we share with animals called the sense appetite. I know that sounds complicated, but here's a simple run-down of how this system works.

Our brain uses our senses to detect things that it identifies as good (things to get) or evil (things to avoid). It then sends a signal to the rest of our body to move us either toward the good or away from the evil. We feel that signal as an emotion. Again, the purpose of the **emotion** is to **motivate** us to take action - either to get something we've identified as good or to avoid something we've identified as evil.

Because human beings are an integration of body and spirit, human emotions are more complex than the emotions of animals. But we always need to remember three things.

1. Emotions originate in the body, and are therefore primarily physical responses to physical stimuli.
2. Emotions are fallen like the rest of us. They are therefore not always accurate or appropriate.

3. Emotions are especially strong during puberty due to brain development and increased hormones.

## The Importance of Your Relationship With Your Children

In the last edition of the newsletter, we talked about skills and virtues that can help your children **stop, think,** and then **respond** to their emotions. Another important part of helping children achieve emotional maturity is to build a relationship with your children that is affirming, supportive and formative.

The relationship between parents and their children is important for emotional development throughout a child's life. In the young years, children need to feel their parents' love through physical contact. As children grow, that sense of love and support needs to increasingly come through verbal connection. They need to **hear** that they are loved, and just as importantly they need their statements of love to be accepted by their parents.

Children who are growing toward adulthood also need their parents to affirm their emotional experiences. Controlling our emotions and responding to them is not the same as denying emotions or repressing them. If your child is angry, affirm the anger and then encourage them to thoughtfully respond to that anger. Parents shouldn't tell their children that their emotions are ridiculous or that they have no right to feel what they are feeling. Affirm the emotion, then lead your children through the process to respond to them in a reasonable and holy way.

While teaching your children the skills involved in the virtues of emotional self-control, children also need to learn about their emotions through their relationship with you. Model emotional self-control and thoughtful response for your children as much as possible. This may require some virtue development on your part. I tend to have a hot temper. But some of the most fruitful instruction I have given my children has been after I lost my temper. My children heard me apologize. They heard me tell them how I should have responded to my anger. They heard me promise to do better, and to make a plan to respond more reasonably next time. In fact, I even invited them to be part of my solution. That way we could help each other grow in virtue.

Children also benefit by being guided through the thought process of responding to their emotions. When your children express strong emotions, first encourage them to stop and think. This doesn't come naturally to them. They need to be reminded and supported. Next, ask them questions to help them decide if their emotions are accurate and in proportion to the truth of the situation. If your daughter is angry at her brother, ask her if she is sure that her brother did the offense, and how she knows. Encourage her to look at the evidence. Finally, help your children think through what a reasonable response would be.

## Strengthening Your Relationship

Your relationship with your children is so important to their emotional development. How can we strengthen that relationship?

- Spend time together! All relationships are built over time, and your relationship with your children is no exception. Eat meals together. Waste time together. Play, talk and laugh together.
- Have meaningful conversations. Conversation builds trust and intimacy, and is one of the main methods through which your children will learn from you.
- Join forces in your quest for virtue. Let your children offer you loving correction when you need it. Work on strategies as a family that will help every family member become a better person.
- Pray together. Father Patrick Peyton coined the phrase "the family that prays together stays together." The family that prays together also loves, lives and grows together.

This article tells about just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit [www.twl4parents.com](http://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