

*Raise Them
Well*

*Emotional
Maturity*



Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

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Loving Children Requires Self-Control

PLEASE PRAY
THAT

- Parents will love their children—especially when it hurts to do so.
- Parents will show their children the joy that is found when you help another person become the best they can be.
- Moms and Dads will make time to just be with their children and love them.
- Parents will ask the Holy Spirit to help their family live sacrificial love.
- 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.
- Families will desire to have holy homes.

The world today often portrays love as just another emotion. It should come to no one's surprise that many people—even many parents—think that love is nothing more than following your heart or indulging in what makes you feel good.

While it is true that a part of love includes feelings, the better portion of love—the really satisfying part of love—is found when you focus on the needs of the other rather than yourself.

Most of us can understand this concept of love when we picture affection exchanged between a man and a woman. But, can we comprehend it when we think about the love between a parent and a child? That might be a bit more difficult because loving kids is tough business.

Think about how hard it is to love a toddler screaming NO or a 2nd grader refusing to do his homework or a pre-teen texting inappropriate selfies. Consider the challenge of joyfully playing Candyland over and over again with a 5 year old. Or sitting through a day long dance competition during which your daughter performs one short routine. Or listening attentively as your 13 year old berates your parenting skills because you haven't given him a smartphone.



What makes the love between a parent and a child so demanding? It has to be unconditional,. That's right, no conditions. And you know what that means? Loving kids often does not *feel* good.

Unconditional love will test you to your very core. It is limitless, consistent, enduring, comforting, patient, understanding. It is time consuming and often unappreciated. Are you getting the picture? Unconditional love is tough to pull off.

It's been a while since my kids lived under my roof and required 24/7 unconditional love. Yet, I can quickly recall many times when I either loved well or failed miserably. Here's what I learned from my experience: when I focused on what I wanted, I botched it and when I paid attention to what my kids needed, I nailed

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it. The difference between loving well or poorly rested upon my ability to restrain my personal urges and desires in favor of what was truly needed by my children.

Most parents want to love their kids unconditionally every day. But how can a Mom or Dad make that happen? What can be done to set your personal default switch to first focus on the interests and good of the other? The answer lies in one's ability to demonstrate emotional maturity through self-control.

Self-control is the ability to moderate one's own desires for the sake of the other. It flows from the virtue of temperance, which develops our will power to control our wants and find balance. Self-control gives parents the edge they need to move beyond love as just a feeling in order to express love without conditions. It equips parents to love like God does; perfectly and completely. Let's end with this reminder of how God intends us to love. May this quote from the Holy Father inspire you to love unconditionally through emotional maturity.

The first step that God takes toward us is that of a love that anticipates and is unconditional... God does not love because there is something in us that engenders love. God loves us because he himself is love, and, by its very nature, love tends to spread and give itself.

Pope Francis, General Audience June 14, 2017

Be an Emotionally Mature Parent

In a previous newsletter, we addressed ways to help children become emotionally mature. In this newsletter, we offer parallel suggestions to parents. What virtue helps a parent to love their children unconditionally? (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 develop their emotional maturity.

1. **Live with less.** Learn to live in moderation. At meals, take less than you normally do. When you shop, buy less. Cut your media exposure by a third. Increase your emotional self-control by denying excess and living more simply. Consider fasting one day each week. Try abstaining from meat each Friday.
2. **Find joy in living more simply.** As you learn to live with less, maintain a cheerful demeanor. Forego the grumbling and mumbling and replace it with a 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. Be patient with yourself because it will become easier over time. Be assured that as temperance is practiced, you will find yourself enjoying your children and your life more rather than less. Temperance leads you to a new gratitude and satisfaction that is never found in excessive self-indulgence.
4. **When you botch it, get back up and try again.** Sometimes, the best teacher is experience. If you lose your edge and become self-centered, admit your failure and try again. Receive the extra mercy and grace you need with a good Confession and refocus your efforts to love unconditionally.
5. **Sustain your efforts by receiving the Eucharist.** There is no better source of strength than the Eucharist. Christ is ready to help you master your desires. Receive Him at least once a week.

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.