

Raise  
Them Well  
Intellectual  
Maturity



# Teaching the Way of Love

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

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## Please Pray That

- Parents will live according to the Ten Commandments, especially within the home.
- Families will work together to embrace what is true, good and beautiful.
- Parents will spend the time to dialogue with their children.
- Parents will have the strength to selfless generosity in a culture of selfishness.
- 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 gifts of life and family.
- Parents will learn how to correct their children in charity rather than anger.
- Families will embrace the need to develop virtue.
- Parents will lead their children in seeking the help of the Holy Spirit to strive for excellence and holiness.
- Families will desire to have holy homes.

## Intellectual Maturity: Knowing and Choosing the Good

*“And be not conformed to this world; but be reformed in the newness of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God” Romans 12:2.*

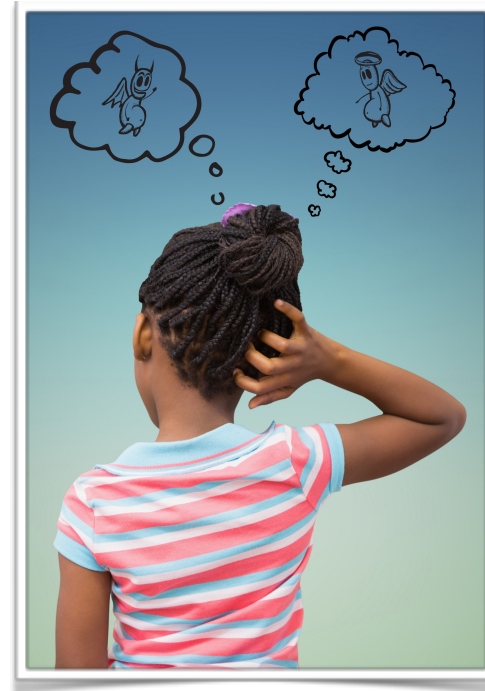
One of the biggest surprises to me as a parent is how difficult it can be to teach my children right from wrong. Even though I “knew better,” I found that I had made a couple of common assumptions that tripped me up.

1. I assumed that conscience development happened more-or-less naturally, without much parental guidance. Conscience is just a built-in “voice” of goodness, isn’t it? Even though I knew from previous learning that conscience needed to be formed, I assumed it was something my children would catch onto naturally by learning from life.
2. I assumed that conscience development mainly dealt with the large, obvious sins. Do I really need to teach my children that murder is evil? Nah. They get that. But I do need to teach them about gossip and harsh words, and the importance of honesty even when nobody’s watching.

I had to realize that acquiring a sense of right and wrong requires formation. Right thinking is the part of intellectual maturity that we call conscience formation.

The conscience isn’t a little “Jiminy Cricket” voice in our heads. It’s not an angel sitting on our shoulders whispering in our ears. Our conscience is the God-given ability to **think** about God’s loving plan for us, and to **apply** the (his) moral law to everyday circumstances with the help of the Holy Spirit.

**Step #1:** The first step in knowing right from wrong is to identify what are in fact the real goods in life. This involves surrounding children with the objects and behaviors that help them become the person that God intends them to be. It also means that you limit exposure to that which draws them away from God’s plan.



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

**Step #2:** The second step involves asking the right question when making a decision. Too often children ask themselves the question, “Is this possible?” In other words, they’re asking, “Could I get away with it?” They seem to think that something is wrong only if they get caught. Parents should want children to instead ask the question, “Is this choice right and good?” We want them to think about what is right and good even when they think they won’t get caught.

**Step #3:** The final step is to make a plan on how to achieve the good that God desires. It’s really good for children to know the good and to ask themselves what is right rather than what is possible. But what matters most is that they choose to live according to God’s plan. Nurturing virtue – especially the virtue of prudence – in our children is the most effective way we can encourage them to live what they know.

In our household, we have regular discussions about what virtues each of us (yes, parents included) need to grow in. We each choose two or three virtues to be working on. These virtues are often the topic of dinner conversations. Part of our bedtime prayer is for each of us to share either how we grew in one of our virtues that day, or what we could do tomorrow to grow in one of our virtues.

The idea is to challenge our children, and ourselves, to not only know how God wants us to live, but also to put it into practice. Parental participation in this exercise is crucial. It’s good for our children to know that conversion is an ongoing process. It’s not just an exercise that parents expect children to go through. We are all going through it together.

## Encourage Intellectual Development with the Virtue of Prudence

The key to helping our children form their conscience is to help them **think** about how they can live as God expects them to in the midst of everyday experience. It’s one thing to know that Jesus teaches us to love our enemies. It’s another thing to know **how to love** the classmate that picks on your children or the kid on the bus that annoys them. Here are some ways to nurture the virtue of prudence in your children.

1. Look for “teachable moments” where you can ask your children questions about the difference between what is **possible** and what is **right and good**.
2. Helping your children to know what is right and good begins with teaching them the Ten Commandments. Asking children to memorize the Ten Commandments is a great start. Make it a game or a family challenge.
3. As your children grow, you can expand your children’s conscience by showing them how Jesus’ teachings perfect the Commandments. Saint Pope John Paul II called the 10 Commandments the first steps of love. Following Jesus means more than avoiding the great evils. It means learning to love as completely and selflessly as we can. Talk about one Commandment at a time and discuss how you would follow the Commandment as a follower of Jesus who is trying to love as Jesus loves.
4. Have a couple of times planned for each day when you can talk about what happened during the day. Family dinner and bedtime prayers are two great opportunities. Listen for opportunities to discuss how the Commandments and the teachings of Jesus could be exercised in particular situations.
5. Ask your children what virtues **you** need to work on. You might be surprised what they tell you! Then decide together what virtues they should work on. Make a plan to talk regularly about the progress each family member is making in the virtues. Teach your children that conscience formation is an ongoing process.

This article teaches 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 series for parents. Find out more at [www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love](http://www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love).