

KidNews Today

The Catholic School Edition

Holy Family Catholic School

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Encouraging Moral Development in Children

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We want our kids to grow up to be good, kind, and moral people—people who make the right choices for the right reason, not just to avoid punishment or to be rewarded. What kinds of actions on the part of parents and other caregivers set children up to successfully develop the skills and attitudes that can combine into sound moral development?

Moral development comprises a combination of basic elements. A few are: caring about others, or what social psychologists call “social interest;” self-control; and the ability to comply with external standards.

We encourage social interest, or caring about others, from the earliest days of life. The quality of relationship a child has with the primary caregivers, and the degree of tenderness and care provided, are critical to the child developing the ability to have secure emotional attachment to others. Infants who are neglected, abused, or even have caring parents who are misinformed about infant development can have difficulty experiencing warm, close attachment to others. Example: you can’t “spoil” an infant by going into the nursery to comfort her when she is crying at five months old. Rather, you run the risk of “spoiling” her in the sense that she is learning she cannot trust the world to protect her and provide even the most basic level of comfort. Likewise, parents who are very depressed will be slow to respond and not emotionally expressive with their infants, and this, too, can be a problem if it persists.

Self-control is something that really begins to be expressed when we begin looking at potty-training. However, parents can lay the groundwork by providing a nurturing environment. Infants are easily over-stimulated and cannot say when they’ve had enough, and do not have the skills to calm themselves when the environment has been too stimulating. Lots of enthusiastic relatives wanting to play and hold the baby, and disrupting the routine, is a normal example of a situation where the alert parent will notice when the infant has almost had too much stimulation and remove the baby

to a quieter, peaceful corner and provide that nurturing, calming presence and care. As the child grows, the parents and caregivers can continue to lay the groundwork for self-control not just by modeling good self-control, but by providing a safe environment for the child to learn and explore, by helping with distraction when delayed gratification is necessary, e.g., engaging the child in play when it is not quite mealtime.

Finally, as children enter preschool, they must learn to follow the rules of the outside world. They must learn that church is not a place for loud play or eating - despite the regrettable number of parents who do not bring preschoolers to a 60-minute service without a bag of dry cereal. Children learn to share and take turns at preschool and wait their turn to swing the bat at T-Ball. When parents and caregivers encourage compliance with such standards, and express the expectation that teachers, coaches, etc., can indeed set rules and consequences, they are helping the child develop the awareness that his personal wants and preferences are not the central code of the universe. There are other, higher standards that involve others’ rights and responsibilities.

For all of these, the parents’ and caregivers’ role as the modelers of moral behavior: making the right choices for the right reason and explaining those choices, when appropriate, in kid-friendly language, is central. But before our kids understand words, we can provide the nurturing relationship and environment necessary for healthy moral development.—Dr. Lori Puterbaugh, LMHC, LMFT

Faith-Friendly News
You Can Use

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OCTOBER HOLIDAYS

Feast of St. Francis of
Assisi 10/4

Yom Kippur
10/8

Columbus Day
10/10

Halloween
10/31

October resources for parents & professionals

What's good for kids? Healthy marriages! Here are some great sources to strengthen already-healthy marriages, and some serious help for marriages that need healing.

Marriage Encounter: a world-wide movement, this is a weekend retreat. No—it's not at all like that old Simpsons' episode where Marge complains for hours and the therapist tells Homer it's all his fault! The weekend comprises presentations and then quiet time alone, and with your spouse, to write, reflect, and talk with one another on structured topics. It's aimed at improving communication, not solving major problems. Find the website at www.wwme.org/. If your marriage is really hurting, please investigate **Retrouvaille**, a healing-focused variation of Marriage Encounter. Again—no group "sharing" required! Find Retrouvaille online at <http://www.retrouvaille.org/>.

Silly-sounding but helpful: paperback books "**Making Marriage Work for Dummies**" and "**The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Perfect Marriage**" really do have helpful hints.

If you like to take the self-help quizzes you can find in magazines and online, a deeper, research-based self help tool can be found at <http://www.foccusinc.com/refocus-inventory.aspx>. Refocus is a version of the questionnaire many churches use in premarital counseling, aimed at helping married couples identify areas for growth and deepen their communication. It is also available for groups, with a leader's guide.

HEALTH NEWS: *Marijuana—it's not harmless.*

One of the seemingly undying myths of our culture is the relative harmlessness of marijuana. "It's natural," a user assures me, as if something coming from the earth makes it automatically good for you. "People have been smoking it for decades," is another justification—or attempt to justify—what is, ultimately, a very dangerous and illegal habit. Let's look at some of these myths, and the facts, about marijuana use and abuse.

"It's natural," with the next line, whether spoken or not, being that something "natural" is therefore "good." This is almost too silly to be answered sensibly, but just consider opium, arsenic, mercury or lead poisoning—all those are "natural" substances and the health risks are obvious.

"It's not addictive." There are different types of addiction. While the body may not become dependent on the marijuana (and this is still subject to debate) the psyche becomes dependent. If the person were not psychologically dependent on the "high" or the "escape" or "relaxation," why not pick some other, less dangerous form of relaxation?

"It's safer than cigarettes." This is a foolish argument, too, and not accurate. The chemicals in tobacco can sicken and kill people, and so can the chemicals in the smoke of marijuana. End of story.

"It's not a dangerous drug." This is false. Modern varieties of the marijuana plant have a much higher density of THC, the psychoactive chemical that causes the disturbances in perception and thought that users call a "high." THC is linked to psychosis and, in the past few years, is implicated as the causative factor in what appear to be treatment-resistant forms of anxiety and panic disorder in adolescents. In non-psychology talk, that means that more and more teens and young adults who smoke marijuana are developing anxiety and panic attack symptoms that won't go away with normal treatment. This sounds "dangerous" to me!

You can find something on the internet to support any position—true or false. Teenagers, and, worse yet, plenty of adults who are old enough to know better, persist in justifying what is illegal and dangerous behavior with these and other lies. You can refuse to buy into the myths and learn more about the science of the truth.—Dr. Lori Puterbaugh, LMHC, LMFT

Relationship Corner: Is Anxiety Affecting Your Relationships?

Your anxiety can affect—or infect—your relationships. Here are some warning signs of anxiety getting the way: Everyone thinks you're cranky or angry all the time. Your anxiety and stress may be coming out as irritability, impatience or anger.

You really, really want a break—to the point of saying so to the people you love. Your stress level may mean you do need a break, but when you lash out at your spouse, the kids, your siblings or the family pet, your anxious stress is getting the best of you.

You find yourself avoiding real conversa-

tions because it seems like taking on others' problems and concerns will be "too much," and that means that you are dropping your end of the relationship deal. When your stress and anxiety keep you from even trying to be there for loved ones, it's really getting in the way.

You forget important events or even small, meaningful things, because you are too preoccupied. Your anxious brain is never in the same place as your body—you might look like you're at the family dinner table, but you're really performing some amazing science-fiction worthy stunt of

appearing to be in one place while really elsewhere. Your hologram shows up for dinner but the thinking part is far away! So, you miss the little details that make life beautiful.

You're chronically late because you have to do just "one more thing" before you can do or be anywhere else.

Your family and friends are annoyed because you're never organized—because you are trying to do too much.

If anxiety is a stealth problem in your relationships, it may be time to take control.- Dr. Lori Puterbaugh, LMHC, LMFT



Your anxious brain is never in the same place as your body

Something to Talk About: Test Anxiety

Do you feel nervous before a test? Maybe a little sweaty, or some butterflies in your stomach? Don't worry—it's normal. When your mind is worried about something, your body reacts in ways that would make sense if you had to get ready to run away from danger. That fluttery tummy and racing heart would help you if you were anxious about a dangerous situation instead of a quiz. So, we have to find ways to "trick"

your body and mind into relaxing. Here are some starters:

1. Be well-prepared. If you really have studied and practiced—what scientists call the "over-learning" necessary to really learn something—you will be able to remind yourself that you are ready to do well on the test.
2. Before it's test time, practice taking slow, deep breaths and clenching and relaxing your hands. The combination of breathing and muscle move-



ment can help your brain release chemicals that tell the rest of you it's safe to relax. Rehearse this skill for a few minutes 3 times daily so your brain really knows it well.

3. Talk to a trusted adult about strategies to reduce test-anxiety. —It's something to talk about! - Dr. Lori Puterbaugh

Coaching Your Child in Study Skills



Kids who do well in school from a very young age are at special risk of avoiding developing the study skills they will need in secondary school and beyond.

Working with children from preschool through high school, and with adults in undergraduate and graduate school, I have learned a lot about what kids do, and don't, know about study skills. I also know how hard parents and teachers work to teach study skills—and how enthusiastically many children resist absorbing those lessons. Not sure if your child has good study skills? Here are some clues that your child "gets" what it takes to succeed:

1. Some time is set aside during homework time to rehearse basic skills: spelling words, or how to form new letters in script (cursive), or, for older kids, dates and facts.
 2. Any assignment or project that takes more than 2 days to complete (such as a book report, research paper or science project) should appear in the daily planner as regularly planned steps in the overall process. For example, if your 4th grader has to read a 10-chapter book and write a report, each chapter should be a separate entry in the daily planner so she can keep track of the task and complete it successfully.
 3. The daily planner should include a list of what's necessary for homework. If your son's math homework is "page 137, problems 1 through 14," it should be clear if he needs his workbook, a study guide, or the textbook.
 4. Model good "study skills" yourself, in planning activities and tasks.
- Dr. Lori Puterbaugh, LMHC, LMFT

Grownup Tip of the Month: Reducing Anxiety



Anxiety is a normal human emotion that, at times, can become troublesome or persistent. It is easy to medicate this problem into temporary abeyance—but in the long run, and not really so long! - research indicates that using drugs for anxiety (even legal, prescribed ones) can lead to a more chronic, difficult-to-treat type of anxiety. After about 4 weeks, the usefulness of anxiety drugs seems to lessen and it would be preferable to learn the kinds of coping skills that can help you through all sorts of life challenges. However, withdrawing from long-term use of benzodiazapenes (drugs like Xanax) can be dangerous without medical supervision, so consult your prescribing physician and ask for guidance about pursuing options like cognitive-behavioral therapy and supportive techniques to become a master at handling anxiety when it arises, as it will, when life throws you surprises and disappointments. - Dr. Lori Puterbaugh, LMHC, LMFT

Hey, Kids: Aren't You Glad You're You? Grownups will guess that I'm thinking of that old song as sung by Bing Crosby in some wonderful movie—aren't you glad you're you? Our culture spends so much time encouraging us to be disappointed we're not someone else—someone richer, or stronger, or better-looking, or more powerful. What if you are exactly who you're supposed to be, if only you were being the best you possible? What if you were made exactly as you are—on purpose? Would that change something about how you treat your particular talents and gifts? If someone picked them out especially for you to enjoy and do great things, would you appreciate them more? Be more curious about them? Well—Someone did make you on purpose, and those gifts are yours—and only yours—for a reason. Yay for you, and yay for each of us!