



# Teaching the Way of Love

Parenting With the Heart of Christ

For parents whose  
children are  
approaching puberty.



*...having given and welcomed life in an atmosphere of love, parents are rich in an educative potential which no one else possesses. In a unique way they know their own children; they know them in their unrepeatable identity and by experience they possess the secrets and the resources of true love.*

*Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality #7*

Children who are becoming adults undergo amazing changes in every part of their being. Some of those changes are

easily seen and understood (like the need for new pants because the old ones are too short). But, some changes are not easily detected because they are invisible (like what and how children think as they mature). These internal changes provide the focus for this segment.

The internal life of children going through puberty is complicated. They think differently than they used to. Their likes and dislikes vary. How they respond (or don't respond) changes. It's almost as if they flip flop between the child they once were and the adult they are becoming. This constant flux often results in the children asking themselves, "Am I still loved in the midst of all this craziness?"

Up until puberty, most children have a hard time hiding how they feel. When they are angry or sad or hurt their outside actions match what is happening inside. However, this sync between one's actions and one's feelings quickly disappears with puberty. The child becomes introspective, frequently spending lots of time in their inner world.

Many parents misunderstand that this change in behavior means that the child just wants to be left alone. This is not true. During puberty, children begin to discover a new perspective on life. They are entering a time of self-discovery where they are trying to figure out who they really are and what they are meant to do. As they spend more time in thought, they have a growing desire to bounce their ideas off someone who will really listen to what they have to say. In reality, they want to connect with their family more now than ever.

And, this is where listening comes in. Listening is the means by which parents enter the invisible world of their child. When parents listen to their son or daughter, they begin to grasp what is happening *inside* the youth. Children in the throes of puberty long to share their personal thoughts and have someone say, "I still love you and care about who you are and what you are saying." Listening validates the worth and importance of the child during the transition to adulthood.

The teachings of the Catholic Church remind us that every person has value and should be treated with the utmost respect, care and dignity. This is why parents need to learn how to listen. When parents take the time to ask questions, read the body language and focus on the personal story without interruptions they honor the child and forge a connection that bonds them together. The union that flourishes from listening allows parents to continuously guide the youth towards what is best in this world.

The act of listening creates an atmosphere of true conversation. True conversation means communicating relationship rather than just information. It includes connecting verbally and non-verbally with your entire being and creating an exchange where everything is shared and received. True conversations craft a balance between the individuals so that no one person dominates the exchange.

Children who are becoming adults need to be heard. They are filled with questions and ideas that need to be expressed. Caring parents recognize their obligation to probe into the invisible reality of their child's world by listening. Let's look at concrete ways to develop active listening that will strengthen the bond between parents and children.

**F**rom the DVD (WATCH THE CLIP THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THIS SEGMENT.)

Children really need to have someone \_\_\_\_\_ to them.

Real listening includes:

A \_\_\_\_\_ to listen. \_\_\_\_\_ distractions.

\_\_\_\_\_ the person you are listening by using \_\_\_\_\_ contact and \_\_\_\_\_ what you heard.

\_\_\_\_\_ on the issue.

\_\_\_\_\_ as needed.

## **C**ontinue the Discussion

**Read and reflect on the following questions and examples.**

1. Who is a person in your life that you consider to be a very good listener? Why did you pick this person?
2. Think of a time in your childhood when you had a real problem. Were you able to talk with your parents about the problem? Why or why not?
3. Children will find someone to talk with about their problems. What can parents do to establish themselves as the “go to” person for their children?
4. How does the communication technology available today help you listen more effectively to your children? How does it hinder listening and true conversation?
5. If you had to pick one part of listening to improve (deciding, showing, focusing, commenting) what would you pick?

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## ake a Plan

Learning to listen involves four elements: deciding, showing, focusing and commenting. The table that follows will help you sharpen each of these skills. Begin each section by reflecting on the Think About It question in each section. Once you have done so, record your response below the question. Finish each section by completing the suggested task.

### Deciding

**Think About It:** How comfortable are you with silence?

**Task:** Find a comfortable place to sit upright in silence (no media, no sounds, no distractions). See how long you can sit without being distracted or moving. Record how long you sat before you become uncomfortable with the silence or felt like you had to move. Repeat this exercise over the course of a month, trying to increase the length of time you can sit without fidgeting or becoming distracted. Record the time you sat at the end of the month.

Beginning Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Ending Time: \_\_\_\_\_

### Show

**Think About It:** When someone talks to you, what does that person see *you* do?

**Task:** When your child talks to you, look at his or her eyes without staring. And, when you talk with your child, ask him or her to look at you.

## Focus

**Think About It:** How can you tell that your child wants to talk with you?

**Task:** When your child talks with you, see how long you can keep him or her talking. Respond with one of the following statements or questions.

- That sounds interesting. Tell me more.
- Help me understand that better.
- You seem (add emotion) about that. Tell me more.
- What do you think that means?

## Comment

**Think About It:** When your child shares a problem with you, do you give them the solution or do you ask questions to help them come up with a good solution?

**Task:** Each time your child talks with you about a dilemma in their life, respond with one of the following questions or statements.

- How do you think this can be fixed?
- What do you think should be done?
- I understand that this is difficult but I don't agree with your solution. What else can you do?
- What did you learn from this situation?
- I know you can find a respectful way to handle this. Let me know how I can help you find the solution.

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