

HOPE IS NURTURED THROUGH INNOCENCE

From Embrace Parenthood



Teaching the Way of Love

Parenting With the Heart of Christ

For all parents,
especially those
with small children.



Against the pessimism and selfishness which cast a shadow over the world, the Church stands for life: in each human life she sees the splendor of that "Yes," that "Amen," who is Christ Himself. To the "No" which assails and afflicts the world, she replies with this living "Yes" thus defending the human person and the world from all who plot against and harm life. The Church is called...to promote human life by every means and to defend it against all attacks, in whatever condition or state of development it is found.
~Familiaris Consortio # 30

Childhood is meant to be a time of joy and simplicity, when life is easy and carefree. It is meant to be a time to gradually discover the wonders of the world and to build trust and confidence in all that is right and good. Childhood is meant to be hopeful.

Hope is a virtue that comes to us from God at the time of our baptism. It can be defined as the *desire of something along with the expectation of obtaining it*. Hope makes it possible for us to trust in God and know that He has the ability to work all things "for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28) Hope gives us confidence that God will remain true to the promises He makes to us through Sacred Scripture and through His Church.

Parents play a critical role in the development of hope. Specifically, they are called to protect their children from situations, media and persons that breach a child's innocence and create doubt and worry. Parents are called to create an environment where their children can experience the simple pleasures of the world in a state of tranquility and serenity. A hopeful environment that maintains innocence teaches children that God is good and that the world He created is also good. Childhood innocence builds a foundation upon which children can fully rely on God and on their parents.

While everyone knows that the time will come when children must grow up and face the sufferings of life, parents must strive to prevent the realities of adult life from becoming known too quickly or too swiftly. As the Bible says, "there is a time for every affair under heaven". (Ecclesiastes 3:1) Therefore the challenge facing all parents is to know when a child is ready for a more adult look at life.

The culture today has changed childhood from a time of hope and innocence into a time of preparing for the ills of the world. Instead of being sheltered from the wrongs of society, children today are exposed to and asked to contemplate adult experiences and dilemmas without the advantage of full character and faith development. Thus they are ill equipped to make sense of what they are seeing and hearing because their brains are still immature and incapable of adult thinking. The assault on childhood innocence can be found in the media, in schools, in peer groups and, unfortunately, in some families.

Consider the passage from *Saving Childhood* by Michael Medved:

Childhood is perhaps the only phase of life when innocence can flourish. But to allow this, parents and others responsible for children's minds need to construct a protective shelter against the painful and frightening facts of life. They need to stand guard at the door, to let the harsher truths of reality gradually unfold for the child, in a way and at a pace that allows the child to maintain a positive outlook. Honoring innocence is incompatible with assuming that the earlier children grasp all of the worst aspects of the world, the better prepared they'll be to handle them. Children are by definition immature: in other words, not ready, not fully developed, unripe...

How can parents help preserve the innocence of childhood, especially in the face of a culture that entices its young into a romanticized and sexualized early adulthood? The good news is that there are many ways in which families can nurture hope in children and preserve innocence. Let's take a look at effective strategies that build a culture of hope and that let your children enjoy their childhood.

From the DVD (WATCH THE CLIP THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THIS SEGMENT.)

Parents can build hope in five ways:

1. _____ your child's God given gifts and help them _____ these gifts.
2. Provide standards based on _____ not cultural standards that change.
3. Ensure that your child _____ they are loved.
4. Cultivate a _____ of _____ in your children.
5. Teach your child to _____.

Parents can protect a child's innocence by doing the following;

1. _____ the media used by your children.
2. Provide for your child's _____.
3. Become _____ in your child's _____.
4. Stay connected with your children's _____ and their _____.

Continue the Discussion

Read and reflect on the following questions and examples.

1. As a child, to what degree was your innocence protected by your family, neighborhood, school and society? Explain.
2. What do you consider to be the greatest threat to your children's innocence? Why?
3. What actions can parents take to provide a sense of security for their children?
4. How can a parent develop a sense of awe and wonder about the world in their children?
5. How can adults today show more hope in the future to the youth they know?

Make a Plan

In order for childhood to be a time of joy and simplicity, parents must find intentional ways to maintain hope and protect the innocence of their children. In the following table you will find seven concrete actions that preserve hope and innocence. There is a space after each action where you may record your personal thoughts and intentions on how to integrate the action into your daily family life. Make sure that you set dates that indicate when you will begin each action. After you have written down what you will do and dated the start of the action, share your intentions with your spouse or your adult mentor.

Connect with each child – giving your undivided attention. I will do this by...

DATE:

Help your child connect with other trusted adults. Name these individuals and plan a time when you can connect your child with each.

DATE:

Catch your child doing what is right more often than catching them doing what is wrong. I will do this by...

DATE:

Identify each child's God-given gifts. Write down each child's name followed by the gifts you believe he or she possesses.

DATE:

Connect with nature. I will do this by...

DATE:

Teach your child to communicate with God through prayer. I will do this by...

DATE:

Resist the temptation to push children into the adult world, especially through their dress, activities, or media usage. I will do this by...

DATE:

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