

*God's Plan
for Us*

*Respect for
Others*



Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

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Please Pray That

- Families will be true schools of love, where all family members become more Christlike.
- Parents will help their children foster respect for all people.
- Families will be safe places to learn how to handle conflict and challenges to relationships.
- Parents will have the strength to teach their children selfless generosity in a culture of selfishness.
- Families will joyfully work to put God at the center of all they do.
- Our culture will reclaim the lost art of true friendship and civil respect.
- Victims of bullying will find healing and strength in the love of God.

Having Necessary Conversations About Right Relationships

As a child, I was the constant victim of bullying. I don't know why, but my sisters and I were consistently targets for bullies in our neighborhood, on our school bus, at school, and even in extracurricular activities. While I got through it in the end, bullying gave me very low self-esteem that I still struggle with today.

So as a father, I have been very vigilant to protect my children against bullying. At the slightest rumor that they were being bullied on the bus, I decided to drive them to and from school every day.

Imagine my surprise when I received a phone call from the principal of our children's school and heard that my own son was being accused of bullying. There is nothing more embarrassing to a Catholic parent than realizing that **your** child is a bully. But in my case it was even worse. I had already sacrificed daily to make sure that my children weren't bullied. I had talked to my children why bullying was bad and why I was so willing to help them avoid it. I had talked to them about the importance of standing up for themselves when they needed to, but avoiding people who just couldn't be reasoned with. So to admit that my son was bullying someone else was a grand ironic reversal.

It was time for another "Necessary Conversation."

I started the conversation by asking questions and listening. Starting with listening is especially important with my son because he gets defensive easily and shuts down. But it's really the best starting point for any parent in a similar situation. So I asked my son, "Tell me about this girls in school you seem to be having trouble with." He immediately responded, "Dad! She is so annoying! I can't stand her!" I asked him what he found so annoying about her and let him vent for a while. Then I asked him, "So how do you respond to her when she annoys you?" He wasn't very forthcoming with self-incriminating statements, so at this point in the conversation I brought up the complaints made about him. I asked him to examine his behaviors with me (refusing to listen to his objections that these things never happened). Did his behavior toward this girl make her any less annoying? No. Did his behavior toward this girl bring any good other than the feeling of revenge? No. In the end, whose behavior was worse - the girl's annoying behavior or the boy's mean behavior? Mine, I guess. Do you think anyone at school finds you annoying? Not really. What about the girls' friends who told the teacher on you? I guess. Would you think it was fair if they treated you the way you're treating this girl just because they found you annoying? I guess not.



Unfortunately but predictably, this initial conversation did not immediately fix the problem. We had a number of other conversations including talking about human dignity and the importance of respect, how his behavior was shaping his character, what effects his behaviors were having on this girl (she was afraid to even come to school), and what consequences he would face if this behavior continued (including being removed from the school). We discussed 1Thessalonians 5:11, “Encourage one another and build each other up,” and he earned the opportunity to memorize this verse by writing it over and over again.

Eventually my son got the message that his behavior was unacceptable and that my wife and I were not going to let up on it. He stopped bullying the girl and they actually grew friendly toward each other the next year. So the good news is that these conversations do work. That bad news is that they take a lot of work and perseverance. But that shouldn't surprise any of us as Catholic parents, should it?

Now, you may be thinking, “Hopefully I will never need this conversation because my child will never be a bully.” Of course, I thought the same thing until I was proven wrong. The truth is, our children suffer from the effects of Original Sin. While they are created for love, love does not come naturally to them any more than it comes naturally to us. We all need to learn how to cooperate with the grace of Holy Charity, to learn how to love. So don't put off this “Necessary Conversation” until there is a problem. Teach your children early and often how to love others, how to be a good friend, and how to respect everyone.

How Do We Teach Our Children to Love Others?

- Recognize that secular terms like “bullying” are often ambiguous and hardly ever cover the main goal of Catholic parenting. Make your goal to teach the fulness of charity - selfless love.
- Begin with a conversation about human dignity and why everyone - stranger or friend - deserves our respect because they are created in the Image and Likeness of God.
- Talk with your child about how she responds to people she doesn't like. Develop strategies together for how to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43).
- Have frequent and regular conversations about your child's relationships at school. Who is he playing with? Who doesn't he like? Who doesn't like him? How is he handling conflicts? How is he trying to be a blessing to others?



- Recognize that girls and boys are equally likely to “bully” but they do it in very different ways. Girls often bully under the radar, by passing notes, starting smear campaigns, or committing social media assassinations. Boys punch each other.

- Teach your child that true friendship is actually love (*philia*). In other words, friendship is not just about enjoying someone's company or having fun together. It's really part of Jesus' plan for us to learn to love as He loves. Strategize with your child about how she can be a true friend.

- Pray with and for your child that he will grow in charity and form good, true friendships that will help him become their best selves and nurture true, Christlike love in them.

- Learn more about how to address bullying, right relationships, and friendship with young people, attend the upcoming Necessary Conversations webinar on Bullying and Right Relationships scheduled for Monday, Feb. 10th at 8PM. Register at: twl4parents.com/necessary-conversations-webinar/ .

This article tells about 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.