

Necessary Conversations

How to Deal with Struggles

PLEASE PRAY THAT:

- All families find ways to face and solve life's struggles without falling into despair.
- Parents will know when to step in or step aside when their kids fail.
- Parents will share the truth about God's love clearly and with charity.
- Parents will correct their children's behavior without hardening their hearts.
- Parents will love their children in the same way that God does; selflessly, consistently, unconditionally.
- Parents will make time to pray daily with and for their children.
- No child (or parent) will ever find themselves beyond God's love and mercy.
- Families will desire to do God's will.



VOLUME 9, ISSUE 5

Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family...

MARCH, 2020

Should I allow my child to struggle?

It's difficult to be a good parent and raise children who love life and are faithful to God's plan. It's hard to know when to let them struggle and when to bail them out. It's tough to discern when letting them struggle might break their spirit and when protecting them might make them weak.

When my kids were growing up, I could easily identify the social pitfalls, emotional traps and academic snares waiting to take my children down. Knowing that my kids would have to face these issues day in and day out often made me anxious. I would lose sleep trying to decide if I should let them face these struggles and possibly fail or rescue them.

It was tough, but my husband and I decided to let our children face the world and its sufferings, just as Christ did. We insisted that the kids wear their bike helmets for their own safety even though no one else did. We made our son go to school and take a test for which he was unprepared because it was the morally right thing to do. And, we told our recent college graduate daughter that she couldn't come home if she quit her job just because she thought it was too hard. She needed to know that you don't quit when it gets tough.



Our kids were bullied for wearing bike helmets. Our son almost blew his perfect GPA. And our daughter did wrestle with her career choice. But, guess what? Letting our children work through these struggles was good for them. It was a key ingredient in the development of their social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual competence. It brought them closer to Christ and his suffering.

It may seem counterintuitive that crash and burn situations can be good for someone. It appears to run against the grain of what we are taught as parents; that

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we have a primary responsibility to keep children away from harmful situations. Several studies confirm that kids benefit when they tussle with real life situations. Search Institute, a renowned research organization in the Twin Cities, confirms that children become more responsible, are more motivated to learn and become more successful adults when their parents allow them to struggle and fail.

Researchers at Boys Town in Omaha found that children who are sheltered from life's skirmishes remain dependent, find it near impossible to handle life's ups and down and strain to make critical decisions. They found that facing difficulties and working through them increases confidence, builds self-worth and leads to health and happiness as an adult.

Both of these groups also found that parents must be present to their children as they struggle. They should not walk away, letting the child work through the situation alone. Rather, parents should guide their offspring to the best solution, support them as they correct the circumstances and help them determine how to prevent the struggle in the future.

One more important point; parents should also remember to pray with and for their children when struggles occur. Nothing is more important than remembering to ask God to fortify you and your children when life becomes hard. Always turn to Him for guidance, wisdom and mercy.

Preparing for a Necessary Conversation about Handling Struggles

Parenting is a balancing act. How do you decide that it is best to step in and shelter? And how do you know when you should step aside and watch? Here are some guidelines that might help you out.

- Determine if the struggle will cause life-threatening or permanent damage to your child. If the harm will be irreparable, step in. If it won't, step aside.
- Will the struggle teach a character-building lesson or give them an opportunity to develop their virtue? Will it give them a chance to fall but pick themselves up and try again? Step aside and guide.
- Does the struggle and potential failure provide an opportunity to share decision making and personal control with your child? If it does, step aside.
- Does the struggle worry you or enflame *your* emotions? Are you stepping in to help because you want to soothe yourself or because you can help your child fix the situation yourself? If this is about you and your need to be in control, step aside.

Remember, your parental role is to be there as a guide on your child's side. Be there for them and help them work through the struggle and find the best outcome, especially by praying for them and asking God to keep you and them safe from impending injury and harm.

For more great ideas and guidance on how to talk with your kids about the struggles of life, view all of the Necessary Conversation webinars available at the Teaching the Way of Love website. Register at: twl4parents.com/necessary-conversations-webinar/.

This challenge is 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.