



Parents are busy people! Most days, the best you can do is focus on the next thing: work, home, dinner, supervising homework, bedtime routine, bed. It is so easy to get tunnel vision as you go through your daily lives. Being too busy means not having time to reflect and to plan your response to situations. To avoid tunnel vision, you need to develop the virtues that help you stop, take the time to think, and to plan your actions.

If you want to take your parenting to the next level, you need to take the time to **see** your children. You need to see your children's unique strengths and challenges. You need to see how your children communicate and receive love. You need to see how your children change as they mature. But to do all of this, you will need to change your habitual tendency of tunnel vision. Two virtues, foresight and circumspection, can help you do that. Both of them are part of the circle of virtue begun by Prudence, the habit of knowing what is good and making a plan to get it.

Foresight and Circumspection are habits of clear vision, both now and for the future. Foresight is the ability to look ahead and see what effects your decisions might have in the future and then make the choices that lead to the right end. Circumspection is the ability to look around you in the present and see the circumstances you need to consider to make the best decision.

You might assume that you already possess these virtues. After all, any mature adult should be able to consider their circumstances and foresee future consequences. However, like a muscle, virtues get stronger with exercise. If you want foresight and circumspection to become a powerful positive force for your parenting, practice them as you interact with your children. Here are some basic ways to exercise each of these virtues as a parent.



Exercising the Virtue of Circumspection

Identify the circumstances that lead to anger.

Circumspection deescalates anger within the home in two ways. It helps you understand what your children do that triggers your negative feelings. It also makes you aware of how you frustrate your children and create friction. If you can identify the behaviors that you or your children have that inflame tense situations, you can take steps to evade them.

Approach each child as a unique individual.

It's a mistake to apply a parenting strategy to every child in the same way. It is most constructive to approach each child individually. When you practice circumspection, you recognize that each child's strengths and limitations require growth in different virtues. Children may be in various stages of development. It's perfectly OK to negotiate different approaches to your house rules for each child in these cases. You may also need to respond to each child in a way tailored to his or her personality.

See what your children are going through.

Your children's behavior and attitude are often affected by what they're going through at the moment. Stress, fear, friendship dynamics, preoccupation with a school project, or any other event in a child's life can affect mood

and attitude, even about entirely unrelated things. Check-in with your child daily, so you know what is happening in their lives. Seek out the circumstances behind their attitudes or behavior, especially when it's out of character.

Exercising the Virtue of Foresight

What kind of adult do you want your child to become?

Tunnel-vision keeps you reacting to your children's immediate behavior. Psychologists call that "reactive parenting." Here is a simple question to ask yourself that broadens your vision and reduces reactive parenting. What kind of adult do you want your child to become? Reflecting on this question reminds you that what you do today impacts your child's future. This question helps you act rather than react, getting rid of tunnel vision.

Plan your responses ahead of time.

Foresight helps you plan your responses in productive ways that avoid conflict. When you plan out consequences and discipline ahead of time, you are more likely to correct the behavior rather than attacking the child. You may even be able to offer an opportunity to improve your relationship with your children through the consequences or discipline you give. For example, with foresight, you might turn what would ordinarily be an argument into a cooperative problem-solving session.

Help your children create a plan to reach their goals.

Sometimes the things your children focus on are very different from the things you **think** should be their focus. For example, teenaged boys often have the aim of playing video games as often as possible. They may not be so interested in succeeding at school. However, with a bit of foresight, even a goal like having the freedom to play video games can become a learning experience. You might tell your son that his time on the computer is directly proportionate to the responsibility he shows to the family. If he participates in the family and does his chores, he can have more freedom with the computer. What goals do your children have? How could they lead to the development of your child's character, skills, or knowledge? A little foresight might show you the way.

Growing in Virtue

As daughters of Prudence, the virtues circumspection and fortitude require reflection and reasoned thought. Take the time to think about your children and the circumstances in which they live. Listen to your children. Watch their behavior. Then think ahead about how you will respond to them.

If you'd like to learn more specifically about developing and strengthening circumspection and foresight, we invite you to join us in our *Teaching the Way of Love* membership. Each month, you will receive a video lesson to supplement this article. The video lesson will teach you specific strategies for developing and strengthening each of the virtues we cover in the article. This month we'll share a step-by-step process for building these two virtues, and we'll share personal examples of how we exercise these virtues in our own families. Visit www.twl4parents.com/basic-membership to learn more.

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.