

Parent or Pal?

A Lenten Reflection for Parents

By Jerry Topczewski

Some decisions for parents are easy. "Wear your boots!" "Put on your mittens." "Where's your hat?"

Others become more difficult as your child grows up and seeks more independence.

Would you let your 2-year-old cross the street by himself? Of course not. What about a 10-year-old? Probably, depends what street and how busy it is. What about a 15-year-old? Imagine the look you'd get if you told your teenager she needed to wait for you to hold her hand before she crossed.

The time spent talking about your decisions with your child also varies. "Because I said so," is a short discussion with short-lived effectiveness. When your child moves into middle school and then high school, "Because I said so," falls on deaf ears. Instead, children want information. They want to understand. They want to be treated as adults.

"But Mom, I'm 14-years-old." "Quit treating me like a kid."

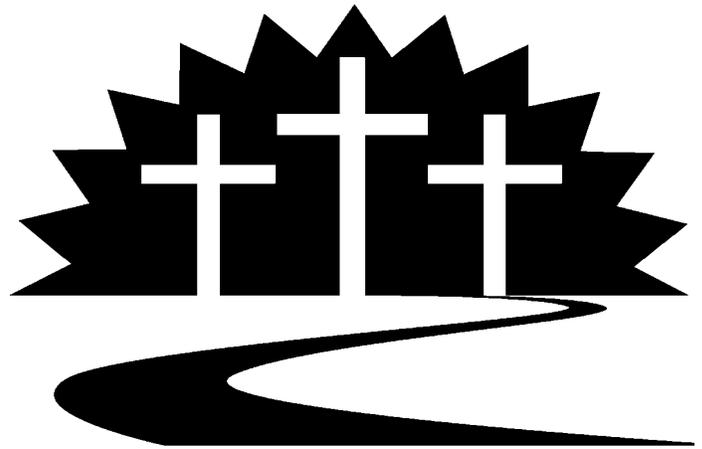
Still, they are kids. They are testing boundaries and their independence. They need a role model they can trust and rely upon for consistent messages.

Kids today are bombarded with conflicting messages from TV, the internet, friends, teachers, sports heroes, pop stars, movies, video games and more. As children search for answers and deal with conflicting values, parents need to help guide them on a course that's steady, sensible and consistent, and not let intruding messages displace the values instilled at home.

As parents, we need to make sure our actions and speech model the character, integrity and faith we want our children to have. We provide a spiritual foundation for our children by modeling Christ to them. We provide them the opportunities to make decisions and understand consequences. We minimize risks by providing a safe place for them, where they know they are always loved and supported.

Parents are called to make tough choices and mature decisions. Parents are also subject to peer pressure. "But Mom, all the other kids' parents are letting them go," doesn't mean you have to say yes, too. Stand by your convictions. Be fair, but firm. Explain your decisions and provide alternative options.

How much parental control is too much or too little? How much independence do you encourage?



Here are some suggestions to think about, pray about, reflect upon or do:

- Be involved and engaged in your child's life at home and at school.
- Talk to your child about acceptable behavior at social events such as athletic banquets, proms, dances and graduation.
- Know your children's friends and their parents.
- Know where your children are going and who they will be with.
- Listen to your children and let them know you support them.
- Be a role model for your child, in word and action.
- Keep discipline healthy and consistent.
- Set and enforce curfews.
- Set boundaries, state expectations and explain consequences.
- Talk with your children about social issues such as drugs, alcohol, sex and violence.
- Monitor the content of materials your children read, see, watch on TV or listen to in music selections.
- Discuss feelings of self-esteem and belonging.
- Share your opinions and belief in Catholic teaching as a moral guide.
- Explore and talk about the Church's teachings – together. Listen to questions and seek answers as a family.
- Take time to eat together.
- Take time to pray together.

On this pilgrim journey of Lent, let's reflect on our role as parents. Pray about the decisions facing us as parents and think about how our actions and words influence our children and their future.

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