

Giving your children feedback; having hard conversations

Objective:

As a parent, we observe our young children in sports, school, and extracurricular activities. For parents of older children, you may be observing your child in college, working in their profession, or raising a family. When you see their performance, you will no doubt observe things that they do wrong; competitions that they lose or do not come in first, times where you think they could have done better. Perhaps other times you observe things that they do well; things that they are improving in, and sometimes things that they just enjoy. As parents we have the task to help our children grow and succeed. When you talk to your child after an activity or regarding a facet of their life, what do you focus on first?

- Coaching to improve the things that they did wrong, how they need to stop their current track and change, how they're not doing something the way that you think they should?
- Acknowledgement of their efforts, how they are improving, what success they have had, what do they enjoy?

Strive to put yourself in their place. How do you best receive criticism and coaching in your job or from your own parents – should you be using the same methods to communicate with your children? Does your faith in God, help you to communicate with your children? To ask them to do the hard things and the easy ones? Find ways to be more effective in parenting and coaching your children in whatever they do. How can you encourage them to succeed, to meet and exceed their goals, but not overwhelm them or lose them in the process?

Song Suggestion: Prayer of St. Francis (Blue 368, Red 721)

Bible and Catechism Readings:

Deuteronomy 31:5-8

The LORD will deliver them to you, and you must do to them all that I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.” Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, “Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

Jeremiah 29:11-13

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” which is the first commandment with a promise “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Catechism 2222 Parents must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God's law.

Catechism 2223 Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones." Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them.

Saint: Saint Rita of Cascia is the patron saint of parenthood.

<https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-rita-of-cascia>

Vignette: Jim's youngest daughter Jill is a sixth grader. At the end of her basketball season, Jill told Jim that she wants to play basketball in high school, and Jim is excited to see Jill express interest in improving her skills. Jill is rather passive at times and struggles in intense situations, but she wants to succeed and grow, so they get Jill on a travel team that plays a more difficult schedule. Jim enjoys watching Jill grow, but finds himself getting frustrated at times when Jill just doesn't seem to get it like the other kids. She might be a step slower, afraid to take the shot and chooses to pass it off, or not the one to dribble into pressure and becomes desperate to pass it off. Over time, after a practice or game, Jim spends 5 or 10 minutes talking to Jill right after a practice or game, while they are in the car. They review missed opportunities, or things Jill struggled at, in the hopes that she would do better. Jim wants her to look like the other players on the team who get more playing time. Over time, Jim witnesses Jill becoming less interested in playing and not having as much fun.

One Friday morning, at a men's team meeting, Jim listened to a man who gave witness of a similar situation that Jim had with Jill. The man's son wanted to play his sport, it was his son's idea initially, but his son wasn't having much fun anymore. The man was desperate to figure out how what was wrong, why his son was becoming less and less interested in playing. The man said that things changed for the better when the man changed his communications with his son and recognized what the boy did well after the game, or just talked about what the boy liked about the game. When the man focused on why the boy liked playing and celebrated improvement or even just having his head in the game, they both enjoyed the son playing more, and that his son did improve. He still coached his son on what he needed to do to improve; but he did so a day or two later, while practicing in the yard or talking in the car – there was plenty of time to discuss what to improve on and how.

Jim listened to the man's witness and put himself in that man's very shoes and saw how Jill had experienced the very same thing. Jim learned from the man and changed how he and Jill acknowledged her success and planned how to improve.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

When you see your children struggling with being an adult, or a parent, do you talk to them? Do you try to reenforce what they do well, along with coaching them on how to change or improve?

When you discuss challenging topics, or coach your child on how to improve a situation, do you bring your faith into the conversation? Have they prayed for strength or guidance? Have you prayed for them and told them so?

When your child is playing a sport, do you relive your youth through them? Sometimes too much? Are you frustrated for the child when they don't do as well as you would like, or embarrassed for yourself?

Can you recall a recent time where you had to coach or push your child to try harder or improve on their efforts? Would you have done something different if you had the chance to walk it back?

Encouraging a child to grow or improve is an important part of parenting. What do you think are the most important aspects of doing this?

Action Plan:

- 1) Examine your interaction with your children, young or old, and ask yourself if you are doing everything on "their behalf" or might it be for your own interest at times?
- 2) How can you bring your faith to bear on your child's behalf? Say a prayer with them in the car before practice or a game?
- 3) Wanting your child to improve and succeed isn't a bad thing. How can you improve your coaching and mentoring of them?

References:

12 Tips for Coaching Kids: Learn How to Coach Children for Life
<https://positivepsychology.com/coaching-kids/#hero-single>

Author: Bob Considine (updated from Dan Lape)