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# **PARENTHOOD**



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# PARENTHOOD

by

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## FROM THE ENCYCLICAL ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

“We wish to call attention in a special manner to the present-day lamentable decline in family education. The offices and professions of a transitory and earthly life, which are certainly of far less importance, are prepared for by long and careful study; whereas for the fundamental duty and obligation of educating their children, many parents have little or no preparation, immersed as they are in temporal cares . . .

“For the love of Our Saviour Jesus Christ, therefore, We implore pastors of souls, by every means in their power, by instructions and catechisms, by word of mouth and written articles widely distributed, to warn Christian parents of their grave obligations. And this should be done not in a merely theoretical and general way, but with practical and specific application to the various responsibilities of parents touching the religious, moral and civil training of their children, and with indication of the methods best adapted to make their training effective, supposing always the influence of their own exemplary lives.”

# Parenthood

**P**ARENTHOOD is an exalted profession. St. Chrysostom, for instance, contrasts it with that of the artist—the painter or sculptor—and finds it incomparably greater. Artists work with paint and marble, parents with living flesh and blood. The former produce masterpieces of canvas and stone. The latter's products are living human beings—spiritual beings destined one day to enjoy the Beatific Vision of God in Heaven. It must be both consoling and inspiring for Catholic parents to realize that by faithful and prudent guidance they can mold souls, beautiful with sanctifying grace, fit even to appear in the very presence of the Godhead.

But parenthood is also a difficult profession. It was always so in the past. It is even more so today, and the parent who has at heart the best interests of his child is well aware of these difficulties. He is deeply conscious, too, of the tremendous influence that he exerts, for weal or for woe, over the developing personality of his child. Moreover, he feels keenly his obligation toward society for the proper upbringing of his child, and even more so, his accountability before God for his spiritual well-being. Hence he is eager to make the most of both the supernatural graces granted him through the sacrament of matrimony and of the helps that advances in present-day child study can give him. Such a parent does not rest satisfied with leaving matters of child guidance to the whim of the moment, to the promptings

of his emotions, or to parental impulse alone. He brings to his tasks in this important field much forethought and prudent insight, much painstaking study and sincere prayer. Furthermore, he looks to others for whatever help and guidance they may be able to give him.

It must be admitted that there are very real limitations to the help that can be offered parents in their tasks of child training. The art of child guidance cannot be reduced to rule-of-thumb methods. Hard and fast rules that provide un failing solutions for all possible cases of discipline that may arise are quite beyond the realm of possibility. The variations in the types of both children and parents are too great. The same is true of the circumstances in which they find themselves. Furthermore there is the difficult matter of the child's varying educational needs at different age periods. Yet, withal, something can be done. Some guiding principles can be laid down. Indeed, not a few helpful hints can be given parents.

### **The Purpose of Child Discipline**

Perhaps one of the main things that parents must keep in mind in their dealings with their children is the true purpose of all disciplinary measures. In its best sense, discipline is not to be taken as being identical with the notion of punishment. Rather is it identical with the notion of guiding, teaching, training the child. It is in reality a system of external control that must have for its ultimate purpose the establishment of a reasoning inner or self-control on the part of the little one. In other words, it is identical with the

true purpose of child training, namely, "the progressive development of self-control on the part of the individual child, the securing of inner conformity to proper standards of conduct, the growth of inner attitudes that socialize the individual and eventually become an integral part of his character."

It is so easy for parents to overlook this prime purpose of discipline and to substitute for it secondary aims—for example, their own comfort and convenience rather than the proper development of the child's character, immediate response to their arbitrary commands rather than a wholesome spirit of cooperation on the part of the little one. Unfortunately, such practices may prove utterly futile as a preparation for a socially well-adjusted and normally independent and self-controlled child. What is more, they may prove distinctly harmful because of the emotional attitudes to which they give rise or because of the habits which they fix in the little one's life.

### **The Happy Medium**

If the true purpose of parental guidance is to be attained, certain features must characterize it. Perhaps more than all else must the parents' attitudes and actions be characterized by normalcy. Parents have much need indeed for the cardinal virtue of prudence. They must prudently follow a middle of the way course and not incline toward extremes, either toward undue leniency on the one hand or toward excessive severity on the other. Furthermore, they must be consistent, or to put it negatively, they must not be inconsistent, changeable, vacillating. It may

be assumed as a general rule, that extremes are not right in child training. Nor is it any less true that inconsistency is hardly in place in any dealings with rational human beings. A consistent happy medium should be the aim of parents. A middle of the road course, regularly followed, will lead them more directly and certainly than will any other toward the true goal of child training.

In everyday life it is very easy for people to run to extremes. And it is perhaps for this reason that we find so many parents who lose sight of the happy medium and become either unduly strict and rigid in their dealings with their little ones or unduly lax and indulgent.

There are not a few homes in which excessive punishment and ceaseless bickering, endless restrictions and continuous commands make the child's world anything but an inviting place to live in. And the results of such excessive use of parental authority readily run counter to the real purpose of child training. Indeed, instead of leading to the true goal of discipline, they may warp and disfigure the little one's personality for life. In one case, for instance, a too rigid discipline leads to the cultivation of a disputatious or rebellious spirit. In another, it results in a sullen and silent antagonism. Again, such unfortunate discipline leads to double-dealing and deceit. It may lead even to downright rebellion against parental and other authority. Needless to say, these things are not the goal of child discipline. Nor does that goal consist in the thrill, or the feeling of pleasant satisfaction that parents get out of the unquestioned and instantaneous



obedience of their children or out of the latter's immediate conformity to their manifold and peremptory commands. The true goal is the proper training of the child, the development of a wholesome degree of moral independence and self-control on his part that will enable him, on leaving the parental nest, to stand on his own feet in the world. That the parent must unfailingly keep in mind.

Even more common today than parents who are too rigid in their dealings with their children are fathers and mothers who are too lax, too weak and easy-going with their little ones. The causes of their undue laxity or indulgence are many and varied. Some over-indulgent parents, for instance, are simply of an easy-going temperament. Others apparently bring themselves to believe that they can train their children by yielding to them, and consequently give in to all their childish whims and fancies as the easiest if not the only way of maintaining peace and order within the home. There are even some parents who are morally so enfeebled and obtuse that they do not care about the proper upbringing of their little ones. But perhaps environmental circumstances and the spirit of the times, more than any other cause, account for our present parental leniency or laxity. Our flippant American "this is a free country, I'll do as I please," has proven decidedly contagious, particularly so with the young. The spirit that this expresses has not a little appeal to human nature. So too have our exaggerated notions concerning the need for self-expression on the part of children, or concerning the importance of the little one's learning to make independent decisions,

played some part here. It is such ideas that lead parents to adopt a policy of excessive freedom toward their children and eventually leave the latter to think and act as if they were under no obligation to heed any dictates other than those of their own impulses. Apparently such fathers and mothers are unaware of the fact that unlimited self-expression not only does not free a child, but that it actually makes him the slave of his whims; that instead of progressively teaching him self-control and moral independence, it robs him of all control.

Particularly harmful is the situation in which the parent allows his child an extreme liberty and then protects him against the natural results of his misdirected efforts—results that might otherwise bring him to an eventual realization of the error of his ways. Such a procedure deprives the child of excellent opportunities to learn the absolute necessity of a natural restraint within a reasonable measure of freedom. After all, in every day life the individual must, regardless of whim or wish, face the inevitable consequences of unsocial behavior. Failure to play fair, he finds, means exclusion from the world of sport and good fellowship. Violation of the customary rules of friendship implies forfeiture of the pleasure and happiness, of the friendly companionship with others. That is the way it works out in practice and it is well for the little one to realize the fact even from his earliest years. To give a child an uncontrolled freedom that will lead him to violate these laws and then to step in and deliberately protect him against the natural consequences of his acts, is for the parent to

leave him in an utterly false position. It is to leave him without ultimate self-direction or self-discipline. It is to miss the purpose of child training and to prepare the child for failure in life rather than for success.

Any parent who has seriously given thought to matters of child training must realize that a policy of excessive laxity or over-indulgence, a policy of approving the easiest way for their children, will simply leave them unprepared for the battle of life. The world into which these children must eventually go is not a garden of pleasure but an arena of hard knocks, and young people whose rule of life has always been to avoid whatever is difficult and to go through with only those projects which appeal to their fancies or to their sense of ease and comfort, will not be prepared for such a world. They are almost certain to meet with inevitable failure. Parents, therefore, will refuse to approve of an easy-going rule of life. They will take a definite stand against the creed of softness that characterizes our modern world. Guided by true Christian prudence they will cultivate in their little ones the cardinal virtue of fortitude. Such responsible parents will appreciate the fact, and act on it, that to permit a child to range entirely at will is to prepare him not only for failure in every worthy conflict of life but in all probability also for a useless if not even a disgraceful life.

The happy medium between a practice of extreme strictness and rigidity and an excessive ease and laxity must be sought out and followed. Only then can the true purposes of discipline be realized. A policy of interminable repression, on the one hand, stunts

and kills. Or again, it incites to rebellion and must be followed by a host of laws and regulations, all unwelcome because imposed from without. Hence, a proper degree of independence, initiative, and freedom must be recognized and encouraged if the true goal of child training is to be attained. Without these there can be no development, no virtue, no self-control. However, this does not mean that parents are to surrender their rightful position as superiors over their children. Condemning rigidity or the excessive use of authority is not to condemn the principle of authority in the home. On the other hand, condemning laxity and decrying the absence of authority in the home is not to deny that obedience in the home is compatible with a wholesome spirit of democracy therein. It is the extremes in either case that are to be condemned. Neither excessive rigor nor extreme laxity can be approved. If the true goals of discipline, eventual self-direction and self-control, are to be achieved, a happy medium must be sought and followed, a controlled freedom must be aimed at and attained.

### **Changeable Parents**

Certainly no less harmful to children than extreme parental attitudes of rigidity and laxity is an unwholesome combination of the two or an imprudent union of license and severity within the family circle. It is the changeable, inconsistent parent who offends by this type of discipline. He is spasmodic or vacillating in his dealings with his children. One time he pets, another he punishes. One minute he coaxes, the next he scolds.

Today he severely condemns a thing, tomorrow he passes it up unnoticed. There is no forethought, no rule or reason, no real attempt at systematic discipline. The only guide that he follows is his own whim or the convenience of the moment.

It seems needless to add that such a system of discipline, or rather such an utter lack of all discipline, will not lead to the true goal of child training. Indeed, it is quite obvious that it will prove harmful rather than beneficial to the little one. Without a discipline that demands that a fault be corrected, not only once or twice, but every time, there can be no wholesome growth of self-guidance and self-discipline. Without a firm consistency no parent can expect loyalty or respect on the part of his child. A vacillating and capricious parent may be able to force a child outwardly to obey the letter of the law, but he will not win his respect and inward conformity. Children are very shrewd, and seeing their elders led by caprice rather than by principle, by impulse rather than reason, they will gradually lose both respect for them and confidence in them.

### **Contact Essential**

A reasonable measure of contact between parents and children is essential if the former are really to exert the influence over the latter that they are rightfully expected to exert. There can be no child training at a distance.

It would perhaps be difficult to exaggerate the importance of an influential relationship between parents and children. And more than the matter of discipline is involved here. The child's growth, and particularly

his emotional development is involved. No one except the parents themselves can supply those intangible sentiments which so intensely influence children and which provide the spirit which makes the home a home. Children reared in institutions show a lack of parental contact. Their emotional life usually becomes abnormal in a variety of ways. Even their physical well-being may be affected by the absence of parental contacts. Convalescent children, it has been shown, often do better in an ordinary home where they can be mothered than in the best institution with all its modern equipment and routine care.

The ideal situation is, of course, contact with both parents. The responses of the child are conditioned somewhat differently to the father and the mother. Hence, lack of contact with either is likely to bring about a one-sided development of his emotional reactions. The child, whether boy or girl, who comes under the guidance of but one parent is in much the same position as that of a half-orphan and will only too likely suffer a one-sided development. To be sure, in the earliest years of the child's life, the mother rather than the father is in closest contact with him and is the great central source of influence over him. But the father's relationship with the child is also a vital factor in his life. Perhaps this is more true of the later years. Yet, the first years are of importance too since the father who fails to share an interest in his children in their early years, thereby developing a spirit of companionship with them, can hardly expect to win their full confidence in later years or



exert over them the influence that he should. Most unfortunate will be the lack of contact between the father and his young boys, who because of his neglect, are left entirely dependent upon the mother or are left without any parental influence or guidance whatever. It must be recognized, of course, that it is not an easy task for fathers today to spend much time with their little ones. Indeed, many of them must definitely plan for it. They must make the most of the time they do have with their children. In other words, they must learn to take an active interest in their hobbies and in their sports. After all, a half hour of active companionship with a child may be more far-reaching in effect than full hours of merely passive association with him.

### **Giving Commands**

Among the various disciplinary devices made use of in the training of children, that of giving commands is perhaps most commonly in use. To recognize the authority of his parents and to obey their commands is one of the first and most essential lessons that a child must learn. Until that particular lesson is learned, the little one is not satisfactorily equipped for life, for every individual's life involves obedience to commands, the fulfillment of orders and injunctions, submission to authority.

It is first of all the parent's duty to teach the child this essential lesson, and it is far from a simple task. Here again much prudence is required. The following suggestions should be of some assistance.

1. Bring the child to attention before giv-

ing him a command. A command shouted haphazardly at a little one who is all taken up with some play activity will likely be but dimly recognized and perhaps not at all heeded by him. For ready compliance and genuine cooperation it is necessary that the child hear and understand the parent who commands and that he actually give the latter his attention. It is expecting a good bit of a child to look for ready compliance on his part if he is called hastily and without preparation from whatever may be occupying his mind or engaging his attention at the time.

2. Commands should not be unduly multiplied. This is simply in harmony with what has already been said regarding an excessive or too rigid discipline generally. Children as well as adults tend to resent excessive domination and over-correction. Hence, the parent should avoid it. He might well bear in mind that a show of authority through an excessive number of commands is a sign of weakness rather than of strength. Whenever commands are multiplied it is only too likely that many of them are quite arbitrarily given and the average child will not be slow in recognizing that fact. Many children, for instance, very early acquire a negative adaptation to the sound of their parent's voice because of the endless number of commands that are constantly being showered upon them. The prudent parent will guard against being too much a parent. He will avoid arbitrary commands, limiting the exercise of his authority to occasions that really call for it. That will bring him closer to the true



goal of child discipline than will the use of an interminable number of commands.

3. Closely allied to the foregoing is the matter of consistency, of which mention has also been made before. In the matter of commands, as in all matters of child discipline, this quality is highly essential. Inconsistency leads to confusion on the part of the child. The responsible parent will see to it, therefore, that his commands will be based on order and right and not on a foundation of the humor of the moment.

4. When commands are consistent and few in number, they can also readily be made firm and their observance insisted upon. This, too, is highly essential. Firmness is very beneficial to a child. If he is simply and naturally told what to do, he will settle down to it. He will accept the role of authority and his character be benefited by it. Children will come to trust, honor, and obey those who rule them with a reasonable firmness, who make known firmly and pleasantly that obedience to their commands is the expected thing. On the other hand, they will lose respect for those who weakly yield to them.

5. Commands should be reasonable. The child should not be asked to do things which are beyond his capacity because to do so is simply to court resistance and disobedience. It should hardly be necessary to add that to be reasonable, a command must be just and right. Parents should never abuse their position of authority by giving and enforcing unjust commands. At best, such action would lessen the child's respect for and confidence in his parents.

## Punishing the Child

Punishment is another disciplinary device. While punishment represents the more unpleasant and disagreeable side of child discipline, it is, nevertheless, essential. Hence, no matter how much parents may wish to avoid it, no matter how painful it may be at times to inflict it upon a child, there are occasions when the little one's rash behavior must be made to serve him against future offenses. At the same time, this disciplinary device must be used with reasonable caution. It can easily become harmful to a child. Used indiscriminately, it will result in psychic scars that may last for a lifetime. And unfortunately, it is often so used. It is a handy tool that parents are inclined to grasp at on the spur of the moment and without forethought as to its suitability or unsuitability, because it gets things done or because it serves as an outlet for their annoyance. The prudent parent will avoid such indiscretion.

As the writer has stated elsewhere: "In making use of punishment in the disciplining of his child, he will be guided both by the present interests of the little one and by the distant goal of his future successful adjustment to adult life. He will not act rashly, under the influence of emotional excitement, but prudently and with cautious forethought."

In order to achieve its true purpose, punishment must be characterized by certain features. Among the more important ones are the following:

1. Punishment should be infrequent. The

reasons for this are much the same as those for not unduly multiplying commands. Infrequent use of punishment emphasizes its purpose. Its frequent use robs it of its effectiveness and may prove positively hurtful to a child. It is a reasonably safe statement to make that the fewer the occasions for punishment in a home, the better the parent.

2. Punishment must be just. That is, it should be in reasonable proportion to the offense committed, and also to the nature of the offending child. Unjust punishments readily lead to such harmful results as deceit, evasions, and double-dealing, not to say resentment against authority and loss of respect for and confidence in parents.

3. Another essential feature of punishment is promptness. This characteristic is particularly necessary in the case of the young child, for if too long delayed, he will fail to see the relation between the punishment and his misconduct, and consequently it will prove ineffective. It is to be observed, however, that prompt punishment is not to be taken to mean hasty punishment or impulsive action, serving as an outlet for annoyance or pent-up feelings on the part of the parent.

4. In this connection, too, the need for consistency must be emphasized. If punishment will merely be made to depend on the humor of the moment or the state of mind of the parent at a given time, this feature will be lacking and the results of such discipline will necessarily prove unsatisfactory.

## Kinds of Punishment

Various kinds of punishment can be distinguished—natural and artificial penalties, deprivations and disapprovals, corporal punishments and such as are of a more spiritual or mental nature.

Natural punishments are such as flow directly from some particular act. Touching a hot instrument, for instance, results in pain. Misbehavior toward playmates implies the incurring of their dislike or even the loss of their companionship. The advantage of punishment of this kind is that it focuses the attention of the child upon the consequences of his own acts rather than upon some external agent, for instance, the anger or resentment of a parent. It goes without saying, of course, that the very young child must be protected against the harmful consequences that may flow from his actions, no matter how natural they may be. But, regarding other acts, he should be shielded less and less as he grows older. He should be given ample opportunity to experience the effects of his own indiscreet actions in order that, by such natural punishment, he may come to learn to recognize the error of his ways.

A common type of artificial punishment is corporal punishment. It is a disciplinary device of long standing and is particularly suitable for the younger child, that is, for the one who has not yet reached the "age of reason." It is open, however, to certain drawbacks that must be diligently avoided if its advantages are to counterbalance its disadvantages. For example, there is the tendency for parents to rely upon it more and

more. Corporal punishment gets results—at any rate, in the sense of outward conformity. But it can hardly be repeated too often that mere external compliance is not the ultimate goal of discipline. Its true purpose is inward conformity to right rules of conduct. And this demands just the reverse of a policy of multiplying corporal punishments. It demands that, as the child advances in years, physical punishment give way increasingly to other forms of punishment and to appeals to reason, to higher motives, to ideals, and the like. These disciplinary devices and appeals may not immediately bring such rapid outward compliance but they give reasonable promise of ultimately leading to the true purposes of child training. They will be permanently and constructively effective.

Another serious drawback in the case of corporal punishment is the fact that the emotional element so easily enters in and plays entirely too important a part. It is difficult to administer physical punishment unemotionally. So, too, is it difficult to receive it unemotionally. And it is this emotionalism on the part of the punishing parent rather than the flaw in his own conduct that gets the attention, particularly of the older child, and causes him to react at times with sullenness, resentment, and even open rebellion. The younger child easily forgets. But the older one is inclined to harbor his grudges and to nurse his hurt feelings. And, after all, corporal punishment is at best a negative form of punishment. It is not a positive inducement to the child to direct his activities along social lines, to shape his life in proper rela-

tion to those with whom he has to live. It is an appeal to fear of bodily pain rather than to the dignity of developing one's finer qualities and making the most of one's higher faculties.

Another type of punishment that usually brings results consists of deprivations. The parent knows what particularly appeals to the child and will also know therefore what particular deprivations will be effective. In the case of the average child perhaps one of the most effective deprivations is that of the companionship of others. At the same time this is often a most valuable form of punishment, insofar as it leads him to make a pronounced effort toward behavior that is socially acceptable. Enforced isolation from the group may readily bring the little one to an effective realization of the advantages of cooperation with others. It might well be added that even a brief ignoring of a child or depriving him of attention is a very effective means of control. The average child is exceedingly desirous of attention. He loves to be the center of attraction. He is more than likely to enjoy people's emotional reactions to his misdemeanors. Fewer things, therefore, are more effective in calming him down than ignoring him or refusing to give him the attention that he craves.

Disapproval is still another form of punishment. Some measure of disapprobation is essential to a comprehensive program of child discipline. Its effectiveness will largely depend upon the number of times it is used. It can easily be overdone. Repeated recriminations on the part of the parent will wear out the child's affection and beget in him a



want of respect for and confidence in his elders. The little one may eventually develop the attitude that parents only exist to thwart his will, to misunderstand and reprove. The ultimate result may be a child that is deprived of all initiative or one that is callous and unyielding.

Another common disciplinary instrument is the threat of punishment. All in all, it does not have much to commend it. The habitual use of threats—and they so easily become habitual—results either in a hampering fear and timidity on the part of the victim or in a realization that the commands of the parent are futile and that their observance or non-observance is a matter of little consequence. There is hardly any better way of making discipline ineffective.

Blaming a child is also a punishment. It is a negative device which, if used incessantly, may beget in the little one an incapacitating sense of failure. Constant blame tends to drag him down and to make him despondent and discouraged. While it has its legitimate place in child training, the extreme use of it must be avoided.

### **Rewards**

Still another device that parents make use of in the training of their little ones is the sanction of rewards. No program of child guidance is complete without the inclusion of rewards. The ultimate purpose of rewards and punishments is the same, the development of a self-controlled, socialized individual. The more immediate purposes are in part the same and in part quite the contrary of each other. Both, for instance, may

aim at quick results. But, while a reward seeks to help the child realize that he is on the right track and to encourage him to go ahead, punishment aims to show him that he is on the wrong track and, consequently, seeks to check him. In their chief characteristic the two are at opposite poles; that is, a reward aims to give pleasure or satisfaction while the essential characteristic of punishment is to displease or to cause dissatisfaction.

In the case of rewards as in that of punishment we find much variety. Dainties, toys, pets, money for his own use, even necessities of life such as articles of clothing, may be given the child by way of rewards. Then there are also rewards of a less material nature—special privileges, expressions of affection, praise, approval—all of which serve as evidence to the little one that good behavior, or conformity with rules and regulations, brings with it worthwhile satisfaction. To the very young child approbation on the part of his parents is a particularly welcome and effective reward. A few years later, companionship with others, particularly with children of his own age, becomes an especially fascinating and stimulating type of reward.

What has already been said regarding extremes and inconsistencies in the use of disciplinary measures generally also holds good here in connection with the matter of rewards. But there are besides several considerations pertaining more specifically to rewards that are deserving of attention. For instance, in the matter of material rewards, postponing them for a sufficiently long period of time to induce the child to make a



genuine effort to obtain them, should be advisable. Herein, precisely, lies one of the peculiar values of rewards, namely, the foregoing of momentary pleasure for the present in the hope of obtaining something of greater value later. In the case of non-material rewards, such as praise or approbation, they should normally be related in some way to increased opportunity. When this is the case, the child will be stimulated to greater effort. On the other hand, if the little one is too readily rewarded, if, for instance, generous praise is accorded him for but ordinary effort, he will tend to become complacent and to rest on his laurels rather than to push on to higher goals and to better things.

### Bribing the Child

Outstanding among the dangers that must be avoided in the use of rewards is that of bribing or baiting the child. This danger is especially present in the case of extrinsic rewards, that is, rewards that depend on the whims or wishes of the parent. It is not so likely to be present in intrinsic ones or those that flow naturally from a particular situation. A contemporary writer illustrates the distinction between these two types of reward by the following example, based on the practice of telling the child a bedtime story. "First," she says, "we need to recognize the difference between telling the child a story *as a part* of the going to bed process on nights when he managed his share of the program with dispatch, offering it to him *if he will* so manage, and threatening him with no story *if he does not do so.*" Com-

menting on this, she adds: "If we regard the bedtime story as bait to get the child to undress quickly, the bright youngster senses the element of bargain and either refuses to comply or plays for larger stakes—two stories or a longer one than we had planned. Whereas if in our mind the bedtime story follows dispatch in undressing, not as a reward in the usual sense but as a natural consequence since there is time for stories when one does not waste it in dawdling, the same child will usually undress speedily in anticipation of it. The story and not the bargain is on his mind."

When these objective features of rewards become gradually clearer and clearer to a child through many specific applications, he will come to appreciate the inherent satisfactions that naturally flow from good behavior. These will become basic factors in his daily conduct. He will be able to plan his behavior on the basis of results that he can foresee. He will no longer be subject to changing whims and moods and fancies. Baiting and bribing such a child with rewards that have no logical part in the picture will then be unnecessary.

While this is all ideal in theory, there is little question that in practice many parents not infrequently use rewards as bribes. "The reason for this is," as the writer has indicated elsewhere, "that they are interested in getting immediate results, in getting things done, and bribes are a handy device for that purpose. Unfortunately, rewards that smack of bribery set up a totally wrong philosophy of life which ultimately outweighs any momentary advantages. The final and true pur-

pose of discipline, the little one's self-direction and self-control, is lost sight of. Rewards become for him a gambling device, a means of extorting greater and greater returns. If given a penny for good behavior today, he will want another, or two of them tomorrow. Eventually the limits of such a system must be reached and then there will no longer be any assurance that even immediate results will be obtained. The child will have formed a habit of doing what he is told to do for what he gets in return. He will have learned to look for pay for good behavior that should be accepted in the very nature of things and should be found satisfying in itself. When the rewards are no longer forthcoming, appropriate conduct will also be withheld." Once the little tot's sporting urge has somehow been stimulated through extrinsic rewards it will take not a little patience and effort to manage him without them.

### **Discipline and the Child's Age**

Several statements in the foregoing referred to different age periods in children and the need for adopting the rewards made use of to particular periods. This but indicates a general principle that holds true with regard to all disciplinary devices, with regard to the entire field of child training. While it is true that the ultimate goal of child training is self-control, it must nevertheless be borne in mind that this goal can be attained only gradually and over a considerable period of time. This is as much as to say, for instance, that the child needs more external control in his first years of

life than he does in his later ones. Just as he must with the advance of years gradually become self-supporting, so too, is he expected, as he grows older, to become progressively more self-controlled in his behavior. Consequently he should be given due opportunity to grow in moral independence. The parent must learn to restrict his authority to the time when the child is unable to judge for himself or when there is genuine need for its use. He will make it a point to use the particular tools of discipline that are most suitable to the age of the child with whom he is dealing.

Naturally, the very young child can appreciate only those satisfactions which are immediate. He has not yet learned to look ahead. Hence, if rewards for instance, are to influence him, they must come at once. In general, during his preschool years, his reasoning faculty will play but little part in the training process. At this time, therefore, the methods used in his training must depend very largely upon the fact that the child tends to repeat acts that have pleasant consequences and to avoid those which have unpleasant ones. The unpleasant consequences may result from the undesirable action itself or they may be artificially induced by the parent through such media as a scolding, physical punishment or other acts of disapprobation. In other words, the training during these first years will have to depend very considerably on blind obedience. The child will have to do what his parent tells him and not what his undeveloped reason may suggest.

The story becomes a different one in his

early school years when the child rapidly becomes more and more capable of appreciating the reasons for things. He should then gradually be taught those reasons. Ideals and principles should at this time be made to play an ever-increasing part in his training. More remote aims and objects, including the reward of a future life, should be brought to bear more and more upon his conduct. Even before school age the child can have some realization of the fact that it is proper for him to obey, not merely to avoid the unpleasantness of punishment but because disobedience is wrong, because it is a violation of God's law and therefore offensive to Him. If in this way ideals and standards of right conduct are gradually integrated into the child's personality in his earlier years, they will eventually operate without external guidance or authority. On the other hand, if the child learns no other reason for being good, other than blind obedience to his parents, his good habits will have no permanent force. They will last little longer than the sound of his parents' voice. Hence, while blind obedience may be excellent in the case of the young child, it must not be emphasized in his later years. If the true purposes of child training are to be realized, the reasoning faculty of the child must be gradually brought more and more into play. The highest motives that he is capable of grasping at the various stages of his development must be appealed to.

### **Variation in Types of Children**

Another general guide that parents do well to bear in mind is this: Children vary some

in type, and the discipline that the parents make use of must vary with the type if it is to prove effective and constructive. Punitive measures, for instance, that might be altogether in place in dealing with a brusque, forward type of child might prove prejudicial to the retiring, sensitive type. Excessive or harsh punishment may very readily harm a quiet or shut-in type of child. He may become so docile that he remains entirely dependent upon the judgment of others, hesitating at all times to speak out or to express his own mind. Again, he may react by sullenness rather than by docility; that is, while yielding a surface obedience, he remains inwardly resentful, he pouts and sulks—perhaps even becomes deceitful and hypocritical. Or again, he may withdraw himself more and more from actual life and take refuge in an illusory dream world. It need scarcely be argued that none of these reactions are in harmony with the true purposes of child training. Consequently, severe reprimands or anything in the nature of harsh treatment should seldom, if ever, be meted out to children of this type. Fortunately, they are quite unnecessary in their case. Such children can usually be checked in their waywardness by a mere look or tone, by a word of friendly counsel, or even by a timely joke.

Harsher measures of discipline are more in place with a forward, extrovert type of child. While this type may not sulk or pout at excessively repressive measures, as does the sensitive child, he may, because of them, gradually develop a spirit of antagonism toward his parents and even toward all social authority. He may even be driven to open



rebellion. Even in his case undue extremes must be guarded against.

### **Positive versus Negative Devices**

Another thought that parents might well bear in mind is that child training should be positive rather than negative. This means, for instance, that they should not only condemn the bad actions of children but should also approve their good acts. It means that not only punishments but also rewards should have a place in a program of child discipline. It means that not only failures but also successes should be noted, that praise as well as blame should be used. It means that child training should not consist entirely in "don't" but also in "do." To be sure, as already pointed out, approval of good acts on the part of a child can easily be overdone. Too much commendation readily leads to complacency. The little one becomes self-satisfied and lowers his standards, or, at any rate, makes no effort to raise them. But none the less faulty, on the other hand, is the attitude of the parent who constantly appears in the role of taskmaster or policeman in his dealings with his little ones. He will hardly make a mistake by placing reliance upon positive achievement, upon cooperation in common purposes, the building of wholesome interests, the sharing of activities, rather than upon a policy that only seeks to condemn and that tends to restrict and hamper the child at every turn. While the pointing out of mistakes and their proper correction is not to be neglected, due emphasis should also be placed upon right learning, right action, right conduct. Only too

frequently is the practice of parents anything but in accord with this.

### Parental Affection

Of the utmost importance in the child's training and life is the rôle of parental affection. No other natural factor can do so much toward the enrichment of his personality. Its absence leaves a void in his life which nothing else can fill. Its presence assures him a feeling of security and confidence, and a sense of fellowship and mutual sympathy, that is altogether essential to his normal development.

The important consideration here again is that extremes be avoided, that moderation be the rule. Although in itself a wholly normal reaction on the part of parents toward their little ones, there can be too much and too little of affection. And, in either case, the purposes for which it is intended will be defeated.

Children react in various unwholesome ways when their parents' love for them is of a faulty type. The results may show themselves, for instance, in emotional instability, in excessive shyness or extreme boldness, in feelings of inferiority or manifestations of superiority, in jealousy, in a negativistic attitude, or in immoderate demands for attention. The particular reaction will depend upon the type of child in question. Needless to add, all harmful reactions should, insofar as possible, be avoided.

Excessive affection too, it must be observed, has its hazards. There is danger, for instance, of encouraging the little one's inborn selfishness by giving in to his whims in order



to win his affection or to keep him quiet. Again, there is the danger of encouraging in him a hampering sense of dependency by too sympathetic an attitude on the part of the parents or by too great a solicitude for him. In all these cases perhaps the danger is greater for the retiring type than it is for the forward child. But in either case it is likely to prove unfortunate. It is highly essential that the little one be gradually weaned away from his dependency upon his parents and develop a spirit of self-help and self-reliance. Without this he will remain unfitted for the realities of life. Hence, although it is quite natural for parents to get a certain pleasure or satisfaction out of their natural affection for their children and out of the latter's dependence upon them, they must keep a proper perspective. They must control their emotions for the sake of their little ones. They must not permit them to impose unduly upon their sympathy. In parental love, as in so many things that enter into child training, moderation must be the rule.

### **The Supernatural Necessary**

It should hardly be necessary to add in closing, that, helpful as various natural means may be, the Catholic parent will not depend on these alone in the all-important task of training his little ones. He will also have recourse to supernatural means, to prayer and the sacraments. He will seek divine guidance and will be motivated in all his efforts by the highest of spiritual motives. Only then can he feel assured that his duty will really be well done. Only then can he feel that the true goal of child training will be attained by him.

## Study Outline

1. Why is parenthood an exalted profession?

2. Why is parenthood a difficult profession?

3. What are the main purposes of child training?

4. Describe the over-indulgent parent.

5. Describe the excessively rigid parent.

6. Describe the inconsistent parent.

7. Describe the happy medium between extreme indulgence and rigidity.

8. How is contact between parents and children to be achieved today?

9. Why is contact with one parent insufficient?

10. Mention and explain five rules that should guide parents in giving commands.

11. What features should characterize the punishment of the small child?

12. Mention and explain the various types of punishment commonly made use of in child training.

13. Show what part rewards should play in child training.

14. Explain the harm in bribing a child.

15. Discuss the question of discipline in relation to the child's age.

16. Discuss the question of discipline in relation to various types of children.

17. What can be said of positive in contradistinction to negative disciplinary devices?

18. Show the rôle of the affections in the training of the little one.


19. Are natural means alone sufficient for the proper fulfillment of the duties of parenthood?

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