



# Formative Parenting

*Cultivating Character in Children*

*A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania*

## SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION

Real love goes far beyond words. Love requires action and sincerity (I John 3:18). Children need parents to teach them how to transfer this abstract word “love” into practical, observable examples. In other words: What does love look like? How do children learn love and how do parents teach love?

This newsletter, one of a six-part series, presents **SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION** as a formula for love. Other newsletters spotlight as expressions of love the Ten Commandments, the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy, and the Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

Pope John Paul II issued an Apostolic Letter to mark the beginning of the new millennium (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*). In it he urged us to promote a *spirituality of communion* as the guiding principle of education and family life. Consider the following twelve practices as guideposts for crafting love in your home.

- **Find Christ in one another.**

People who hurt are caught up in a cycle of anger, defensiveness, and distrust. Finding Jesus is hard in negative behavior. If you cannot see Christ, bring Christ! Imitate Jesus by initiating conversation, being respectful, inviting people to join in an activity, forgiving, and sharing.

- **Think of others as extensions of myself.**

Give others the benefit of the doubt. Provide second chances. Grow in sensitivity. Others have sensitive feelings, fear and worries too. They want to belong, to be acknowledged, to have their opinions respected.

- **Do for others what I would want for myself.**

Do you value privacy, respectful use of property, inclusion, forgiveness? Provide those same benefits to others.

- **Honor the joys and sorrows of another.**

Be aware of both the accomplishments and the disappointments of others. Use encouraging words to acknowledge their efforts. Express prayerful support at times of sorrow. Offer to help.

- **Be sensitive to the “core” needs of others.**

Develop a sensitivity to “read” the emotional needs of others. Are they in need of attention? personal power? respect? or know-how? Pay attention to body-language. Give attention, invite them to join, ask advice or seek their opinion. Work side-by-side on a task. Give space and sit in silence when needed. Provide companionship.

- **Relate in genuine friendship.**

Express interest in topics of importance to the other person. Care more about giving than receiving, listening rather than talking, understanding rather than being understood. Keep confidences and promises. Be loyal.

- **See the positive in others. Welcome it and cherish it as a gift from God.**

Look for positive attributes like easy temperament, quick wit, creative thinking, organizational skills, readiness to forgive, willingness to contribute ideas, etc. Comment on positive, attractive traits. Complete the following kinds of thoughts about others in the family: “I respect ..., I enjoy ... , I admire . . . , I am amazed by ...”

- **Affirm the efforts and potential of others.**

Though we cannot always guarantee results we can guarantee our effort. That attitude contributes to positive self-esteem. Potential evolves with encouragement from significant others. Express interest and admiration for the efforts of another person.

- **View others as gifts.**

If we think of a person as an inconvenience, burden or responsibility we convey a sense of duty or a cold, detached “charity.” This attitude hurts. Think instead of the positive quality that the person stirs within you like patience or generosity. Think of other people as messengers of God for you.

- **Make room for others; be inclusive and inviting.**

Be conscious of others. Invite them to sit with you at lunch. Add a chair to your group, make space, and introduce them to your friends.

- **Practice tolerance and mutual respect.**

Be gentle with people who are unlike you. Give to people who are different or even oppositional the same greeting and attitude that you give to your friends.

- **Resist the selfish temptations that provoke competition, distrust, and jealousy.**

The “Me, myself, and I” attitude seems to come naturally. Don’t let it block the spirit of community and relationship-building.

## **PARENT PRACTICES THAT MENTOR A SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION**

Twelve goals. Twelve months in a year. Why not lead the family to focus on one goal a month? Advertise the monthly goal via a sign on the table, refrigerator, bathroom mirror, or on top of a TV or computer monitor. Be creative in ways to spotlight the practice.

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