

The Life Cycle: The Years of Innocence



The Years of Innocence

The[♂]ology
of the BO[♀]dy for families
& single people
plus Family Chastity Formation in Virtue & Purity of Heart

Universal Truths about Human Sexuality for People of All Ages

With extensive references to the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church

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The Years of Innocence

What the Church Says

576 The years of innocence are from approximately age five until the onset of puberty, which on average is about age 12, but can vary by a few years with each individual child. The years of innocence are a period of tranquility and serenity. A child must be protected from and never disturbed by direct information about sex that is unnecessary, upsetting or causes fear. Family chastity formation is accomplished indirectly through the loving presence of parents who, by example, teach a child how to receive and express appropriate displays of affection and love (Cf. TMHS, 78).

577 In this time period, the child enters the age of reason (about seven years old) and has the ability to be morally responsible and distinguish right from wrong. Parents' formation and catechesis should be directed toward preparing for and then receiving frequently the sacraments of Reconciliation (Penance) and Eucharist. Children at this age accept the need for purity and modesty in dress and behavior. Being pure, good, and dressing up with respect—in order to receive Jesus in the Sacraments—is a very important learning stage in chastity (Cf. TMHS, 79). The pure love of an innocent child for Jesus is so powerful that it often draws parents to a deeper love of God and conversion of heart.

Learning What it Means to Be a Man or a Woman

578 Real and natural differences between men and women and their complementary roles

in family life cannot be ignored or minimized since boys naturally want to grow up to be just like dad and girls just like mom. In teaching what it means to be a man or a woman, parents should also take care not to discourage expressions of tenderness and sensitivity in boys, nor exclude girls from vigorous physical activities (Cf. TMHS, 80).

About Girls

579 By nature, girls generally have a maternal interest in babies, motherhood, and homemaking and a receptivity to being helpful or nurturing in relationships. By looking to the model of femininity and motherhood in the Blessed Virgin Mary, mothers and daughters together can grow in feminine grace and holiness (Cf. TMHS, 81).

About Boys

580 Boys look to their father as a model of what it means to be a man, and the Church encourages fathers and sons together to look to the ideal of masculinity in Jesus and in St. Joseph. These examples will help to discourage boys from being overly aggressive or concerned about physical prowess as proof of masculine virility. Masculinity is a gift and call from God to take on roles of responsibility, sacrifice, protection and service; particularly concerning women as mothers and sisters. This tranquil period is the easiest time for fathers and sons to establish a closer relationship with one another (Cf. TMHS, 82).

Discipline

581 At the age of reason, children desire to be morally responsible and want to know clearly what is right and wrong. Parents should present objective standards within the moral framework of Church teachings and expect children to be accountable to them by authoritative parenting and frequent use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The practice of examining one's conscience, verbally admitting faults, asking for and receiving forgiveness, accepting consequences and making reparation should be employed throughout the day as offenses are committed, not just when preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

582 Discipline and personal accountability will provide a solid foundation for chaste living. On the other hand, "An undisciplined or spoilt child is inclined toward a certain immaturity and moral weakness in future years because chastity is difficult to maintain if a person develops selfish or disordered habits and cannot behave with proper concern and respect for others" (Cf. TMHS, 86).

Caution about Premature Sexual Information Presented to Children

583 A planned and determined imposition of premature sexual information on children during the age of innocence is being carried out worldwide under many guises, such as promoting sexual health and safety, tolerating sexual diversity; and educating and socializing children to accept all expressions of sexuality and family life, especially so-called gay marriages and unconventional parenting styles.

584 All of these are grave violations of the right of a child to his or her innocence and contribute to the sexualization of children who

are not yet able to understand, integrate or control sexual imagery or information. These violations shatter a child's emotional stability—and spiritual and moral development—and thus undermine the loving relationships developing within the family. Parents must act to prevent the violation of their child's innocence in these circumstances (Cf. TMHS, 83).

585 If a child is exposed to the mass media, even for a few minutes, he will almost certainly have his innocence violated by some form of premature sexual information or imagery. Even if parents have safely prevented their child from direct exposure, other children and young people have been exposed and will likely try to talk about or act upon the information in the presence of your child. If this occurs, parents will need to correct immoral and erroneous information and bad language (Cf. TMHS, 84).

Sexual Abuse

586 Parents are on the front line of protecting their children from sexual abuse and violence by first teaching them modesty and reserve with regard to strangers, along with relatives, neighbors and friends. Good general training should be such that details which might upset or frighten them are avoided (Cf. TMHS, 85).

Wisdom of Parents

587 Parents need to continue to both develop their own parenting skills and remain the primary educators of their children as they were during the first five years. The principles learned throughout that period do not end during the years of innocence but rather continue to grow in importance. In particular, cultivating a personal and intimate relationship with each child during the years of innocence will provide

a foundation for building mutual love, trust and respect. Also, this special connection will assist the child with preparation for puberty and adolescence when he will need your loving support, parental guidance and sound wisdom. If Catholic-based formation in chastity has not been firmly established during the first years of life, it may be too late—or at least very difficult—to begin when the child reaches puberty.

588 Parents must continue to cultivate their own spiritual life, and model chastity and sacrificial love to their children (who sincerely desire to emulate their father and mother at this age). Family chastity formation for children—as they enter the age of reason—continues in the formation of conscience by accepting accountability for right and wrong decisions, and by offering and receiving forgiveness for sins committed throughout the day. Overall, most children want to be obedient at this age by exhibiting interest in clear rules of right and wrong.

589 The first signs of a vocation begin to show up during this time frame. Children at this age are easily drawn toward heavenly things, so the vision and goal of eternal life, holiness, and a loving prayerful relationship with Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the angels, and saints should be cultivated. Children at this age can also be very generous in helping others, so practicing charity towards the less fortunate should be encouraged, as well as praying for others, especially the souls in purgatory who have no one to help them. Blessed Jacinta and Francisco of Fatima, who died at ages 10 and 11, are excellent role models for children of this age. They prayed the rosary, practiced many small acts of sacrificial love—in obedience to Jesus and Mary—made reparation

for sins committed, and interceded for the poor souls in purgatory and for those who were in danger of going to hell.

590 Children at this age generally participate in the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist for the first time. As parents prepare their children for these events, they can emphasize the central importance of being pure in mind, heart, body and soul; thus, by avoiding sin, their children will learn how to remain in a state of grace, be close to the heart of Jesus, and be ready to go to heaven.

Putting this Knowledge to Work

591 Recommendations from parents who are seasoned veterans

Continue to help your children develop their prayer life and grow in their faith. In addition to daily family prayer, grace before meals, and bedtime prayers, encourage them to:

- Develop their vocal and musical skills (which can be used to better glorify God during times of prayer).
- Become involved as an altar server.
- Join the church choir.
- Attend religious education classes provided by the parish.
- Get involved in parish youth groups and other activities.
- Participate in diocesan or parish-sponsored youth events.
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592 Education in the Faith

- This would be a good time to begin educating your children in the faith. Textbooks faithful to the new Catechism of the Catholic Church would be an excellent place to start, along with stories about the lives of the saints.
- Regularly schedule time as a family to visit and pray before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament during Eucharistic Adoration or before the tabernacle. By so doing, children will learn reverence and respect, and gain familiarity with Jesus in their personal prayer life.
- Begin to prepare your children for first Confession (Reconciliation) and first Communion by teaching them how important these Sacraments are for growing in virtue, holiness, and love of God and neighbor.
- Teach your children about the importance of tithing to the Church—in thanksgiving to God—when they receive money from gifts or earnings. This would also be a good time to help them establish a systematic approach to saving part of their earnings and teaching them about financial responsibility.
- The years of innocence can be used to teach children about having compassion for the needy, ailing friends and relatives, and visiting elderly people who live in nursing homes as well as making donations from their tithe money to provide charitable assistance to the poor.

593 Boys and Fathers

- Boys need to spend time with their fathers participating in men's activities like hunting, fishing, camping, working on

projects, building, or fixing things. Fathers should also use this time to teach their sons about duty, discipline, honesty, integrity, self-control, responsibility, work ethic, trust, respecting the dignity of all people, treating girls with respect, personal hygiene, the need for and types of modesty, etc. Your role as a father is crucial in helping your son understand his own identity, his masculinity, and how to develop friendships; helping to build your son's sense of self-worth during these years is extremely important.

594 Fathers and Daughters

- Fathers need to spend time with their daughters so their daughters can learn what it means to be loved and respected by a man; how to trust, feel safe and secure, and what it means to receive appropriate displays of affection and love from a person of the opposite sex. It is also good for daughters to experience the masculinity of their fathers and to realize that they have the complementary gift of femininity and gentleness.

595 Daughters and Mothers

- Daughters need to spend time with their mothers in women's activities such as cooking, baking, cleaning the house, sewing, and other generally feminine activities. Mothers should also use this time to teach their daughters about caring for others, especially younger brothers or sisters, personal hygiene, the need for and types of modesty, discipline, honesty, integrity, self-control, trust, respecting the dignity of all people, treating boys with respect, etc. Your role as a mother is crucial

in helping your daughter understand her own identity, her femininity, and how to develop loving and meaningful friendships; helping to build your daughter's self-esteem during these years is extremely important.

596 Mothers and Sons

- Mothers, out of daily duty, will likely spend more time with their sons than their husbands do, at least at first. This is character-building time which includes teaching your sons to be responsible and accountable for their actions, how to respect rules and boundaries, how to redirect their frustration and anger in constructive ways, how to treat others with respect and so forth. Likewise, you must also respect your son's masculinity by recognizing that boys are hard-wired to be boys and can be expected to engage in activities that are often physical in nature.

597 Family Time

- Participate in physical activities with your children, such as team sports, walking, running, hiking, bicycling, swimming, camping, working around the house or yard and so on.
- Schedule family time together such as vacations, holidays, or short trips; this is a great time for bonding, forming healthy relationships, and learning discipline and teamwork.
- Affirm your children in love through simple expressions of affection, such as hugging them, telling them that you love them, taking time to listen to and talk with them, etc.
- During the years of innocence, clear objective standards of right and wrong must

be presented and followed by parents and children alike, since children will imitate adult behaviors and assume the morals of their parents.

- Part of these objective standards for morality would be to establish guidelines for modesty in dress, behavior and speech; again, you must lead by example.

598 Access to Mass Media

- Restrict access to mass media. Reinforce to your children that watching television is a privilege, not a right. As a parent, you must determine what is acceptable programming and what is not. The least amount of TV time is best. The same holds true for movies, video games, listening to CDs, the radio, and spending time on the Internet. As parents, you must protect your child's innocence from sexual imagery, bad language and other immoral influences. **Most mass media programming is not safe for children.**
- Steer your children away from TV by encouraging them to develop other interests such as reading, improving their musical talents, participating in team sports, taking up various hobbies and playing outside with their brothers, sisters and friends. Other opportunities could include getting involved with church groups, scouting, school programs and so on.

599 Work Ethic

- You should begin teaching your children about work ethic and being responsible; for example, taking care of pets or other animals, doing chores around the house (without pay) such as keeping their rooms neat and orderly, helping with dishes,

completing their school assignments on time and so forth.

600 Discipline

- Discipline must be firm but fair; make sure that your child understands the reason why they are being punished for their wrongdoing. When you take privileges away from them for a certain period of time, stick to your time frame. For example, if you tell them they cannot do a favorite

pastime for one week, make sure you do not relax the penalty before the seven days are up. This will teach them that they are accountable for their actions and that there are real consequences for violating the rules; it will help them to become responsible adults.

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