

5 WAY TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR FIRST RECONCILIATION/TALKING ABOUT FORGIVENESS

It's the time of year when many young children are preparing to soon receive their first Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is a beautiful Sacrament, instituted by Christ as a way to offer us His Mercy and Grace. It is a very special time for our children and as parents, it's our primary responsibility to help prepare them for this soul-redeeming Sacrament. Here are five simple ways you can help your child prepare for their first reconciliation.

1. Talk about the Sacrament of Reconciliation Together

Before your child receives the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it's important they understand what it is and why we do it. Spend time talking with your child about this great healing Sacrament. Read together with your child about when Jesus instituted the Sacrament and gave his apostles the authority to forgive sins in His Name in the Gospel of John 20: 19 – 23. The *Healing of a Paralytic* in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 2: 1 – 12, is also a good example of Jesus's authority to forgive sins and an example of faith and trust in His healing power.

Explain to your children that going to Confession is not about getting into trouble; it's about asking God for forgiveness and receiving God's Grace to do better. Listen to your child's questions and encourage them to learn more by asking more questions.

2. Examination of Conscience

Teach your child how to pray an Examination of Conscience each night before bed, or as often as time allows. Some families do this together as a family before bed, silently reflecting on their days while mom or dad read the Examination out loud.

There are many great examinations around. Try and find one that your child will understand. This Examination of Conscience for Children Using the Lord's Prayer is very simple yet prods children to think more about their actions. There is also a good one based on the Ten Commandments and one for the Beatitudes.

3. Practice

Practice, practice, practice! Like with any sport, musical instrument, or other skill – continuous practice is essential. The same is true for preparation for all the Sacraments. The National Catholic Register has a nice and easy Confession Guide for Children that goes through a simple Examination of Conscience followed by the steps involved in a confession.

As your child's first reconciliation approaches, take time to role play with them what they will do in their real confessions. Except, you can tell them they don't have to really tell you their sins – unless of course they really want to. Maybe you'll finally find out who really took that item you've been searching everywhere for.

4. Go to Confession as a Family

Aside from practicing how to go to confession with your child, practice actually *going* to confession as a family. As parents, we are the first educators for our children when it comes to our Faith. However, the best way to really teach our children about the Faith is to *practice* it by

living it out in our everyday life. Showing your child that you can take the time to go to confession makes a deeper and longer-lasting impression than all the hours you might spend talking or reading about it with them.

Maybe even make it a family tradition, say on the first Saturday of each month or another day that works for your family. If you cannot make it during the time of regularly scheduled confessions in your parish, try a different parish nearby or ask your pastor if you can schedule a regular family confession time. Add a little fun *incentive* and go out for ice cream or grab some pizza afterwards and make it a family date night.

5. Pray Together

Aside from all the talking, reading, and practicing, the most essential step in preparing your child – and yourself – for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is *prayer*. Through prayer, we join in an intimate conversation with God. We ask Him to open our hearts to Him, show Him our weaknesses, and ask for His infinitely merciful forgiveness. Pray with *and* for your child, asking God to prepare him or her for this great Sacrament.

Together, you can pray the Act of Contrition with your child and also the Prayer to Your Guardian Angel to help them make good choices and be ready to receive God's mercy.

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2020