



# Formative Parenting

*Cultivating Character in Children*

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

## **Developing Moral Maturity – Part 4 HABITS OF ACTION**

Moral maturity builds upon skills of heart, mind, and action. In addition, Christian maturity (or conscience) integrates Christian principles and prayerful discernment into the decision-making process. Parents and teachers help children to develop a moral mentality by fostering these five habits. This newsletter focuses **on Habits of Action**.

Decision-making skills are necessary to move the heart and head into appropriate action. Wise decisions represent objective thinking, not emotional desires or subjective whims. Moral maturity does not happen overnight. Making wise decisions is a skilled process that must be learned just like heart skills and reasoning skills. Parents and teachers help the process by providing children with regular opportunities to (1) exercise thinking skills, (2) analyze behavior from real life, literature, TV, video, or cartoons for elements of decision making, (3) participate in discussion and problem solving and (4) see their adult mentors demonstrating decision-making skills on a consistent basis.

Many formulas for decision-making exist. Regardless of the source, all approaches focus on seeing reality clearly, determining what is good, considering how best to accomplish it, and recognizing personal feelings and motives. Religious sources also include prayer in the decision-making process. This newsletter highlights four core principles for making wise decisions.

### **PRINCIPLE 1: Explore the situation honestly.**

Avoid hasty conclusions. Things aren't always as they first appear and emotions cloud judgment. Over-reaction or emotional reaction suggests that a deeper issue is involved. Imitate a detective. Search the clues. Work through aspects of the situation with objectivity.

- Define the problem.
- Name the facts.
- Gather information.
- List goal(s).
- Identify options or alternatives.
- Consider predictable consequences.
- Weigh risks and benefits.
- Recognize obligations.

### **PRINCIPLE 2: Seek advice from the sources of wisdom available.**

Our nature is relational. It is unwise to struggle alone through difficult decisions. Though we are personally responsible for our choices, wise folk know when to ask for advice and who would be capable of providing helpful perspective.

Complex situations need objectivity and balance that requires considering sources outside of ourselves. Catholic Christians benefit from the wealth of wisdom that resides in their faith tradition. Teach children to consult the wisdom sources available when making a moral decision.

- Consult Scripture, especially Jesus' teachings, attitudes, and example.
- Examine the tradition and wisdom of the Church.

- Listen to the voices of the Community.
- Be informed by personal experience.
- Talk to mature mentors.
- Research the issue with experts.

**PRINCIPLE 3: Pray to know the will of God.**

True freedom— the ability to be who God created you to be—is the fruit of obedience. Obedience means “to listen”—to hear the voice of God, to understand what God means, and to freely apply God’s will to the situations in your life. True freedom requires learning how to discern God’s voice apart from the voices of self-interest, peer pressure, and the competing opinions of society. Prayer is both the vehicle and context for hearing God’s voice. Teach children how to:

- Name motives.
- Identify values.
- Prioritize between conflicting principles.
- Ask, “What would Jesus do?” and “What would Jesus want me to do?”
- Talk with God about the decision.

**PRINCIPLE 4: Test the decision before acting on it.**

Probably all folks can tell whether a decision was right or wrong after the decision has been acted upon. Monday morning quarterbacking demonstrates 20-20 vision in hindsight! Growth in moral maturity prompts a person to seek to know before the fact whether the decision will be life-giving or life-blocking. In simple ways, involve children in “testing” decisions.

- Role Reversal Test—Put yourself in the shoes of the other person.
- Publicity Test—Imagine reading your decision on the front page of the newspaper.
- The Day-After Test—Observe your feelings and the reactions of other people.
- Generalizability Test—If others make the same decision, would it be a blessing to the common good?
- E-mail Test—Declare your decision. Are you at peace, or do you wish that you could “Un-send” the message?

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