



# Formative Parenting

*Cultivating Character in Children*

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

## **Weaving the Fabric of Christian Character, Part 6 A PROCESS FOR MORAL DECISION-MAKING**

Dear Parent,

Previous letters suggested that you are the weaver who creates the fabric of Christian character within your child. The three elements of fabric weaving -- warp, weft, and patterning -- parallel three dimensions of conscience formation: (1) affective-emotional development, (2) critical thinking ability, and (3) decision-making that responds to God's call to personal holiness. Parents are entrusted with the task of teaching these three elements to their children, both through words and example. A person whose decisions are based on clarified convictions that are informed by intelligent reasoning and wisdom sources will develop a soul that is characterized by care, compassion, and a willingness to accept the consequences of his conscience choices. The Christian soul seeks to align with the will of God in the decision making process. She measures good and bad by God-given standards or norms that she discovers in Jesus of the Gospel, the Ten Commandments, the law of Love, and the Beatitudes and she applies these values to her decision-making.

**Wise judgment is the ability to make decisions according to a well-formed conscience and the will to carry out the decisions.** Decision-making is both a process and a learned skill. It needs to be taught to children, exercised regularly in behavior and discussion, and demonstrated by parents on a consistent basis. Many formulas for a decision making process appear in religious education textbooks and in self-help literature. All approaches focus on (1) seeing reality clearly, (2) determining what is good and how best to accomplish it, and (3) knowing your own feelings and motives so as to avoid self-deception. Attentiveness to these components results in a healthy conscience that acts like a true friend, telling us what we need to hear rather than what we may want to hear. Parents who teach these skills enable their children to become active agents in their own formation.

The reverse side of this letter focuses on elements involved in developing a decision-making process for children of elementary school age. Use it and the sample formulas from some publishers of religious education texts to develop your own family formula for decision-making. May the information shared in this letter affirm your parenting style and serve as a guide to determine how best to provide for the Christian character development of your child.

## DEVELOPING A FAMILY FORMULA FOR CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DECISION-MAKING

Some publishers of religious education textbooks suggest mnemonic formulas to teach children a process for moral decision making. For instance,

### CHOICE

(William H. Sadlier Company)

**C**heck out the influences. **H**ave the facts. **O**thers can help; seek advice. **I**n prayer ask God for help. **C**hoose. **E**valuate your choice.

### LISTEN

(Brown-Roa Company)

**L**ook for the facts. **I**magine possibilities. **S**eek insight beyond your own. **T**urn inward. **E**xpect God's help. **N**ame your decision.

### OPTION

(Benziger Company)

Consider your **O**ptions. **P**ray for guidance. **T**est the options against values. Seek **I**nformation. Know your **O**bligations. Look at any **N**ew options. Then make your decision.

**Though the mnemonic formulas differ they each reflect the four core principles that are outlined on this page. Involve your family in defining a process for Christian character decision-making that is based on these four principles:**

#### 1. Explore the situation honestly.

Define the problem. Name the facts. Gather information. List your goal, options/alternatives, pros, cons, consequences and obligations.

#### 2. Seek advice from the sources of wisdom available.

Consult Scripture, especially Jesus' teachings. Reflect on Church tradition. Talk to significant persons, i.e., parent, relative, teacher, coach, priest.

#### 3. Pray to know God's will.

Name your motives. Identify values and priorities. Determine the most and the least harmful thing for all concerned. Ask yourself, "What would Jesus do?" Talk with Jesus about your decision.

#### 4. Test the decision before acting on it.

#### Role Reversal Test

Mentally switch roles. Would you want another to make the same decision you are deciding to make? Would you be willing to allow another person to do what you are about to do?

#### Publicity Test

Could you defend your decision before strangers or the person whom you respect most? Could you give reasons which would persuade them to agree with you? Would you be embarrassed to let others know what you decided? Are you comfortable enough in your decision that if it were widely publicized you could face others without regret?

#### Generalizability Test

What if everyone in your family, class, team, or world were to do what you have decided to do? If any other person was in the same position that you are in, would you want him to act as you have decided to act? If your behavior were to become the norm for others, would society benefit? Would it be a better situation in our families, neighborhoods, schools, nation, and world if most people did as you have decided to do?

#### Use Media as a Family Teaching Tool

Television shows, videos, and contemporary music offer TEACHABLE MOMENTS. When viewing entertainment that reflects Christian character values, help your children to identify the principles of decision making evident in the entertainment. In instances where the media message is disappointing, challenge your children to apply role reversal, publicity, or generalizability to test the Christian character of the behaviors involved. By identifying characteristics and applying the skills involved in the decision making process to observed situations, theory is more likely to become lived reality. Time spent together in these kinds of discussions will bear fruit in your family life and enable your child to become an active agent in her own formation.

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