



SEVEN SERIOUS SINS OF SOMEWHAT SAINTLY CHILDREN AND HOW HEALTHY FAMILIES DEAL WITH THEM.

*Parents have dealt with quarreling kids since
Cain and Abel. The trick is to keep the peace
while kids raise cain.*

The following article was written by Dolores Curran who has written several books on family life. This article was written in the 1980's. You who are parents and grandparents can check to see if the serious sins of the 80's are still around today.

Also, have new sins invaded family life in the past twenty years—e.g., sins connected with the world of computers. Curran states that in her research for her book *Stress and the Healthy Family*, parents named children as one of the top stresses in family life. Because parents mentioned certain stresses over and over, Dolores Curran decided to identify them as the *Seven Capital Sins of Children Today*. Curran writes:

Parents who would like a saner household should first identify these seven sins and then learn how healthy families deal with them and with children in general.

Pay your respect

1. *Disrespect* is the most often mentioned sin. Disrespect for their own selves, for property, and for things religious seems to be a part of childhood today. It shows up in nasty retorts, fighting between siblings, behavior toward adults, disregard for property, and drug and alcohol abuse.

"I get so tired of arguing with my children," a young mother said. "What do I do when they answer back or refuse to do as I ask?"

Here is a common complaint of parents, as is another: "Why do our children fight so much? It drives us crazy."

While there is friction and conflict in all families, **disrespect is not permitted in healthy families.** Those who deal with it effectively show certain similarities.

First, parents model respect themselves. They speak to each other and their children with respect. They say please, thank you, and I'm sorry more than other families. They treat each other as friends.

These families set limits and consequences. When children refuse to carry out parents' wishes, there is a consequence. This is tied in with the parent's self-esteem. If a child treats a parent with refusal and disrespect, these parents let the child know they respect themselves enough to withdraw a privilege or refuse a service, such as driving

them somewhere or otherwise making life unpleasant for them.

"When you treat me with respect, I will treat you with respect," these parents imply. "Until then, we really don't enjoy serving you."

To hit, taunt, and humiliate simply isn't allowed in these households. If such behaviors occur, there is a consequence that parents hold to. "Whenever our children hit, bite or pull hair, we say, "The violence of television is rubbing off on you, so we don't want you to watch for a week," said one mother. "And they know we mean it."

Families also have a list of remarks which are not allowed in the family like, "Shut up," "You're stupid," and "get the hell out of here." Some families even post this list.

Nor is disrespect of others' goods permitted. "This goes for the environment, too," said a father who deplores the common practice of trashing the landscape. "We try to teach our children a sense of responsibility toward the earth. We don't permit them to tread on others' lawns, to toss McDonald's trash out the window, or to use other's things without asking. It's an endless battle; but if we don't teach it, who will?"

A basic respect of the body can be seen within these families as well. "Junk foods, cigarettes, and dirty jokes all show disrespect for our bodies," a mother said. "Children need to be taught self-discipline in this area. Whenever we see TV using sex to sell a product, we comment on it. We're trying to show our children that their bodies deserve respect and that misuse of any substance will harm them."

Finally, a genuine respect for God and church shows up in these families. Swearing is prohibited as are derogatory references to priest, the Mass and prayer. Often these families discuss religion critically, but it has to be done respectfully as well.

Gimme-gimme generation

2. *Hedonism* is the second of children's capital sins. They expect and want too much, say parents. Again, television feeds into this materialism. "Our children demand tapes, designer clothing, pizza money, everything," a mother said. "If they don't get them, they can make life miserable."

Not so in healthy families. They teach that happiness does not lie in the accumulation of goods and gratification, but in relationship and work satisfaction. Again, parents are the chief models. If they imply by their attitudes and behavior that simplicity is of high value, so will their children. These parents allow a certain amount of spending, but they hold firm on limits.

Responsible parents also require that children save money and contribute to charities. They might encourage church

support, for instance, or suggest that a portion of their child's allowance be saved for future use. They teach children how to regard and use money, not just how to earn it. Most important, these parents do not live out the impression that happiness is found in the good life; rather, they show that it is found in being good persons.

Call me irresponsible

3. *Irresponsibility* is a third sin of today's children. Many of them object to responsibility for simple household chores, for the family's mood, for peacekeeping, or for even their own schedules. They think it's Mom's job to see that they are on time and have the baseball pants or dance shoes needed for that day.

I worked with a mother whose 8-year old son dawdled in the morning to the point where everyone was angry and late by the time he left for school. She had to realize that promptness was his responsibility, not hers.

If the boy was tardy, he had to suffer the consequences; and yet the mother was afraid the teacher would blame her. I suggested she let the teacher know the problem and then apply the consequences. The mother happily reported that after he had to stay inside for three recesses in exchange for tardiness, her son miraculously speeded up at home.

Some parents feed into children's irresponsibility when they nag and take on Scout projects, homework, and other responsibilities that belong to children. Before long, the children turn these responsibilities over to their parents.

Parents who deal well with responsibility have clear, but flexible, expectations and do not rescue their children except in unusual circumstances. They don't re-fight daily issues—such as, who will dry the dishes, or why homework wasn't done—which is one of the most frustrating of family stresses.

Lazy days, sleepless nights

4. *Sloth* is another capital sin of children. "I'll do it later," "I'll get it done," and "Don't sweat it, Mom," are familiar comments reported by parents. Some children just want to watch television; others don't like physical exertion.

One of the duties of parents is to rear fit and responsible children. If parents turn their children over to television and refuse to give them opportunities to prove their abilities, parents neglect an important area of child development. "It's easier to do it myself," is the kind of remark I hear from parents who surrender to their children's sloth.

Parents in healthy families fight laziness when they control both the quality and quantity of television. They realize it is not normal for a 5-year-old to sit for three solid hours watching cartoons. They build play and physical activity into their children's lives when they are very young.

In many homes, television is not turned on until chores and homework are completed. These parents give even the youngest children chores like emptying the silverware from the dishwasher and sorting socks, and they increase

the complexity of the chore as the child matures. By the time these children are ten, they are able to prepare their own sack lunches. By the time they are teens, they are able to cook themselves a decent meal. And they are proud of these accomplishments.

Our own sons were making themselves good breakfasts by seventh grade, probably because my husband and I let them know very early a maxim that he and I were prepared to carry out: any boy who can't operate a stove, washer, and dryer has no business operating an automobile. It is a much more complicated piece of machinery.

Sloth is a habit, not a favor, to children. If allowed to continue, it hampers development and stymies the pride people need as they learn to care for themselves.

C'mon trust me

5. *Distrust* is another of the capital sins identified by parents. This takes form in lying, cheating, and general deception. "Mom says it's okay, if you say so," says a child to his father. Later the parents discover he hadn't asked Mom.

"Everyone else is going," and "My homework is done" are too familiar to parents who, upon receipt of report cards, find out about incomplete homework assignments. Children can get adept at deception. "I have to go to the library" may mean cruising the mall while passing the library on the way.

How do parents deal with these deceptions? Successful ones emphasize early the importance of trust. They also focus on the trust aspect of the lie rather than the incident which brought about the lie.

They say, "I want to trust you. Trust is something valuable between us. If I can't believe you now, I will be forced to distrust you in everything. Do you want that?"

Usually they inflict a consequence on early lies and deceptions but give their children a second chance. Just as in our relationship with God, broken trust is not forever. Sometimes families with an accomplished deceiver will add a prayer to daily grace: "Please God, help us to learn to trust one another in all that we do and say." This emphasizes for children that trust is an important value in family life.

Red with envy

6. *Jealousy* is another sin which can cause great stress in the family. Children try to get siblings into trouble. They often wail, "How come he gets to do it when I couldn't at his age?" and "It's not fair."

Parents sometimes foster this behavior unwittingly by saying, "Why can't you be like your brother?" Or, they praise the achievement instead of encouraging the effort.

Family educators have taken a new look at praise today. Some children get hooked on praise and feel resentful if they aren't praised for the tiniest achievement. Praise also states our expectations. When parents praise a child for a good game, what do they say when he has a bad one?

Effective parents tend to encourage the effort rather than the achievement. Not, “Wonderful. You got an A,” but “You really worked hard on that. You must feel good about yourself.”

These parents also prize uniqueness over conformity in children, which minimizes jealousy. If children feel valued for who they are rather than what they achieve, they don’t feel as much envy toward siblings who are more gifted in one area than they are because they know they have special qualities, too.

These parents’ value and model cooperation and negotiation over competition. They realize that relationships between siblings are more important than temporary successes. Competition among siblings for highest grades, most parental attention, and sports glory only breeds jealousy. Successful parents don’t buy into this method of parenting. They verbally applaud attempts at cooperation and minimize praise when one child achieves over another.

Ain’t it awful?

7. The seventh sin of children is *negativism*. This includes skepticism, cynicism, lassitude, and hopelessness. “What difference does it make? And “Who cares? Are popular manifestations of this attitude.

Because this sin seems to run in families, parental attitudes are fundamental. Adults often get in a habit of playing the “Ain’t-it-awful?” game in daily conversation. The general conversation goes like this: “Isn’t it awful that there’s some much crime, pollution, inflation, unemployment, corruption, violence, etc.?”

Before long, children pick up the message that life isn’t worth living. Parents tell them the world is a mess and then expect them to embrace the world and their part in it enthusiastically.

Healthy families foster an attitude of optimism and hope that spills over to their children. These parents aren’t cynical and pessimistic. They acknowledge problems, but they evidence a trust that God will see them through.

The depression and suicide rate of young people in our nation is alarming. Recent statistics show that one in ten adolescents seriously consider suicide. The hopelessness that underpins suicide doesn’t begin with adolescence but with childhood. And it runs in families.

To offset negativism, healthy families nurture optimism, faith, idealism and hope. An optimistic attitude bonds the family into a support system that tells the children they have family and God to help them face daily fears and pressures—always, not just today and not just in this situation. Families do well to highlight the small favors people do for them from time to time. Such recognition leads to a more optimistic view of life.

These seven capital sins are found in all families to some extent but they are controllable. Adults are still rearing good children, in spite of dire news stories to the contrary. With parental attention and a little help from God, they’ll continue to do so.

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Reflection Questions

1. What struck you most about this article?
2. What are the top deadly sins of your children? Did the article offer any help with how to deal with these sins?
3. Do you think your kids see the author’s list as sins?
4. How do you feel about giving kids an opportunity to discuss the deadly sins of you, their parents?

Have a blessed week,

