Planning for Maturity

*Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.* Proverbs 22:6

Spiritual maturity happens in the midst of physical and psychological maturity. In traditional Catholic theology terms, we say that grace builds upon nature. If we attend well to the natural processes in life, we can easily find gateways to God within daily life. Help parents pass on faith at home by teaching them how to lovingly plan for their children’s maturity.

The chart on the next page lists some of the things kids want to attain as they grow up (motivators). These motivators provide parents with opportunities to have meaningful conversations about life skills needed to navigate privileges with maturity. Meaningful conversations, offered in a loving context, are a key to successful home faith formation.

Parents, in a spirit of marital teamwork (if married) and love for their child, should introduce each new motivator with the following in mind… (Single parents should be consulting a trusted friend or advisor when developing and using maturity plans for children.)

* What character traits in my child show me that he/she is ready for this privilege?
* Have I communicated my expectations in clear and simple terms about how my child will incorporate this privilege into his/her life?
* Has my child communicated feedback to me that indicates he/she understands how to use this privilege in a mature manner?
* What are the consequences if my child abuses this privilege?
* How will I affirm my child’s successful use of this privilege?
* How am I currently modeling mature behavior as I use this privilege?
* Have I prayed for my child’s success, and have I communicated that God is the source of my child’s successful growth and development.

There are many benefits to planning for a child’s maturity. Here are a few:

1. Planning promotes thoughtful responses rather than knee-jerk reactions.
2. Planning for maturity moves the maturation process along at an appropriate pace. Children are not rushed into behaviors that are beyond them developmentally, and they are not restrained from growing up.
3. When teens have friends who are getting privileges earlier than they are, parents can assure them that they will get the privilege when it is time. This provides the teen with hope and the parent with a rationale for restraint. Parents can remind their teens that they want them to have privileges, but they also want them to be successful with them.
4. Teens leave the home for college or work with confidence that they can succeed in the world.

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| Motivator  (The motivator is like a milestone that a child earns after demonstrating the growth necessary to responsibly use it. Trust is built in the child/parent relationship as the child demonstrates increasing responsibility.) | Skills/virtues Needed to Attain the Motivator  (Children should show signs of these before they are given the privilege in the left column. These would be the signs of spiritual development we would want to see in a child/teen.) | Suggestions for Meaningful Conversation  (Motivators provide the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations, which are a key to home faith formation. Children and teens engage in conversations related to the motivators they are seeking. Parents need to track the upcoming motivator in a child’s life and develop ways to talk about spiritual growth as it relates to the incorporation of the motivator into the child’s life. Some examples of talking points are provided, but this handout will need to be adapted by families for each child.) |
| Eating sweets | Restraint, moderation | Sweets need to be introduced into a child’s diet slowly and should be a special treat to signify a celebration. |
| Watching television | Critique, discernment | The TV is an educational tool, not a babysitter. It teaches incessantly. Parents permit shows that are consistent with the family’s values. As children age, TV shows can be a launching point for important discussions about cultural trends such as peace and violence, respectful and rude conversation, committed and casual sex, joyful and inappropriate humor, etc. |
| Playing video games |  |  |
| Listening to music |  |  |
| Planning a play date |  |  |
| Walking across the street |  |  |
| Making a store or online purchase |  |  |
| Hosting a sleepover |  |  |
| Sleeping at a friend’s/relative’s house | Respect, courage, honesty, self-control | Showing respect in another’s house is a way to “honor your father and mother.” Developing boundaries is also important. Children need to know what to do if someone touches them inappropriately during a sleepover and should be coached by parents on taking precautions to minimize this possibility. |
| Social networking, e.g. Facebook |  |  |
| Going out with friends without a parent |  |  |
| Attending co-ed parties |  |  |
| Attending school dances |  |  |
| Getting a job | Responsibility, community awareness, generosity | Parents will want to engage teens in discussion about the values and skills needed to sustain employment. Managing finances responsibly and with a spirit of generosity is a form of stewardship. Now is the time to teach this. |
| Opening a checking acct. |  |  |
| Getting a cell phone |  |  |
| Driving |  |  |
| Establishing a curfew |  |  |
| Extending the curfew |  |  |
| Going on a date |  |  |
| Driving |  |  |
| Getting a credit card |  |  |
| Drinking responsibly | Moderation | Parents should always model responsible consumption of alcohol. Consuming alcohol responsibly is a learned behavior and should be taught by parents. Children who are formed in a home where drinking responsibly is a value that is modeled and discussed are less likely to abuse alcohol in high school and college. |
| Going to college |  |  |