

PARENTING TIP OF THE MONTH!

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Tip # 1 - Stop for a moment and ask yourself, “What do I want my child’s and my relationship to be?” If you want to be close to your children there are ways to create a strong bond. Are you spending time each day talking, do you do fun things together, do you pray together? If you do these three things with your child, a solid bond will develop between you, no matter the age of your child.

Tip # 2 - Learn To Listen

Good communication is the essential ingredient in all healthy relationships. If we want to know our children and make them feel important, we need to listen to them attentively. During conversation be sure to look at your child and make eye contact, be aware of the power of your body language and listen with respect to their ideas and opinions. In conversation make the rule ‘dialogue, not lecture’ your motto!

Tip # 3 - Accentuate the Positive

Compliments and encouragement can go a long way towards changing poor behaviours and building self-esteem. Accentuate positive behaviours by praising children of any age when they undertake appropriate actions. By simply letting children know we’ve noticed their good behaviours, we can have a direct effect on the number of times they undertake these actions. “Thank you for...”, or “Good for you for ...”, are great starts in creating a positive environment in your children’s lives.

Tip # 4 - Car Time Can Be Quality Time!

Make use of the time you will spend with your children in the car by becoming a listener instead of a questioner. Refrain from asking questions about whether chores etc. have been done and let your children take the lead in conversations. If they are quiet, give them some time, you may be surprised at what issues or concerns will be raised. You can also ask one leading question and see where it goes, such as: “Have you got any questions about life that are on your mind?” or “Is there something you’d like to share with me if I promise not to yell?” - and then make sure you don’t!

Tip # 5 - Action Plans Work!

As you and your children begin preparing for school with back packs, pens and notebooks, take some time to sit with your child and plan for success. Ask them what their goal for the upcoming school year is, calmly let them know your reasons for wanting their educational year to be a good one and then help them put together an action plan. Be specific, write it down and post it where everyone can see it to ensure success. Include things like: when will homework be done, who will be asked for help, how can they set time lines for projects etc. A collaborative strategy now will result in successful days ahead!

Tip # 6 - Family Meal Time

As the busy fall season begins, sports, activities and school compete with family time. It is important to schedule time for each other. Sharing, communicating and spending time together helps connect members of a family and there is no better way to do this, than to share at least one meal together every day. Make time for it - everyone will benefit!

Tip # 7 - We all make mistakes and as parents we can teach our children that mistakes are opportunities to learn. Teach your child to use the 'Three R's' of recovery after they make a mistake: Recognize their mistake; Reconcile with a willingness to say they are sorry; and Resolve by focussing on solutions instead of laying blame. When we model the 'Three R's' everyone learns!

Tip # 8 - The internet can be a great resource to children, but it can also be fraught with danger. Parents need to be actively involved in monitoring the use of the internet when it is present in their home. Placing your computer in a high traffic area, using programs to control access to unwanted sites and strict rules about entering chat rooms can go a long way in protecting your children from proven dangers on the internet.

Tip # 9 - Christmas is a time of great joy and excitement for children who wait with anticipation to receive presents from Santa and other loved ones. Keeping Christ's birth at the heart of the celebration can be hard, but not impossible. We can help our children focus on the true meaning of Christmas in the following ways: place the nativity scene as a focal point in your home; assist with or contribute to charity drives; read the story of Christ's birth daily; engage in a small advent lighting ceremony each week of advent as a family; on Christmas morning sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus before you open up the gifts under tree. Christmas holds a deeper meaning for all when we stay focussed on its true meaning.

Tip # 10 - The new year is a time for all of us to reflect on the past and see if positive changes are needed in our lives. Are there changes you would like to see in your family - more time spent together, a greater number of meals shared as a family, increased sharing of events in each others lives, or an increase in peaceful family time? Discuss what changes each family member would like to see and then write out an action plan - a how to, so you will accomplish one or two of your goals. Your children will learn how to set goals and action plans, while all of you will benefit from positive changes that will strengthen your relationship as a family.

Tip # 11 - In February we celebrate love with Valentine's Day. Our family consists of those we love most and we need to express this regularly. Say "I love you" to your children each day - as concrete learners they need to hear the words. Don't forget the importance of hugs and a special treat now and then, especially for older children. If you have more than one child, spending time alone with each child is essential in helping them feel important as an individual.

Tip # 12 - Quality or quantity, this has long been the debate about what children need in terms of contact with their parents. The truth of course is that they need both. Quality time is important - this includes any time you are actually focussed for a time on what you are doing with your child. This can include going for a walk, playing games, going to a movie or sharing some other fun activity. Quantity of time spent together is also vital to healthy family relationships. Just being present, or in close proximity, means your

children can talk to you the moment something crosses their mind. Your presence makes them feel secure and important - don't underestimate its power, especially with older children.

Tip # 13 - The art of discipline can be very complicated, but how we view discipline can have a profound impact. Discipline should not be seen as tool to be used only after a problem, but it should be used as a tool to prevent a problem. Children of all ages need to hear clear and exact expectations of their behaviour and the consequence if they do not behave in this manner. The child is then armed with the tools for success. Following through with a consequence is important, but helping prevent the poor behaviour in the first place is even better.

Tip # 14 - Undertaking household chores together gives children of all ages a sense of belonging. Placing a list of specific chores each person is to complete, assigning equal work loads (as much as possible) and having an assigned time when everyone will clean, will help to create a more cohesive cleaning unit. Sharing chores as a family will create a family bond and develop a sense of responsibility in your children.

Tip # 15 – To create a healthy family we must use good communication skills. The three major components of good communication are speaking, listening and negotiating. We have to learn how to communicate efficiently and skilfully. When speaking use “I” statements and description not judgement; when listening repeat back what you heard, reflect on the content & feelings expressed; when negotiating commit to cooperation, find a deal that works for everyone, and look for areas of common agreement.
Communication – a skill for every part of your life.

Tip # 16 – As September begins it is an important time to establish routines that will help our children function to the best of their ability. Talk to your children about the importance of good nutrition (and make lunches that reflect your words), the importance of a **full** nights sleep (8-10 hours for children of all ages) and the importance of physical activity (proven in research to assist children learn). With established routines you can make sure these three important elements become part of your child's lifestyle.

Tip # 17 – Every child born is a unique individual with a genetic code and a personality all their own. All children will go through the same ages and stages as they grow, but no two children will act exactly the same. For this reason a ‘one size fits all’ method of parenting will not work for all children. From a very early age you will witness your child's innate temperament and personality. Use this knowledge to tailor your interactions with your child to meet their needs. Understanding who your child is can help you understand why they respond as they do in certain situations. It will also help you accept them for who they are, while gently teaching them the self-discipline tools they will need to help them manage their natural inclinations.

Tip # 18 - From the moment a child is born they are watching others to learn how to behave. Your children become what they observe. As parents, it is important that we take time to reflect on what our children are observing and hearing from us, because this is the way they will act and speak. Each action and each word spoken sends a message to your children. Are you sending the message you want your child to receive?

Tip # 19 - This is the season of Christmas and a time of great business for most families. As parents we must find a balance between our faith practises at Christmas and the commercial side of Christmas. We spend hours shopping, decorating, baking and preparing to celebrate. Take the time to balance all the hustle and bustle by concentrating on the faith dimension of Christmas. Try having some quiet reflection time each day of Advent, reading the Christmas Story of Christ's birth as a family and by attending mass as a family. Make sure you pass on to your children the real 'reason for the season'!

Tip # 20 - Share your Values!

Television - with its portrayal of explicit sex, drug use and drinking in young adults as acceptable and normal - challenges you as a primary influence on your children every day. Children need to hear your voice and thoughts on these same topics daily. Remember, actions speak louder than words, so know your values, speak about them as they show up in daily life situations and be sure to practice in actions, what you are saying with words.

Tip # 21 - Lent!

For many people, 'giving up' something for Lent is the extent of their Lenten journey. Lent is also a time for self-reflection, prayer and charitable acts. By doing some of these activities as a family, children learn that we can praise God in a variety of ways during Lent. We would never neglect our children's need for physical nourishment, so let's not forget to teach and nourish their spiritual selves as well.

Tip # 22 - Breaking Bread

There has been an enormous amount of research indicating the essential connections that occur when a family shares a meal together. Take advantage of this knowledge by ensuring your family gathers at least once a day to bond while eating. Don't gather in front of the TV or computer, but in front of each other; sharing thoughts, stories and time. The benefits to everyone will be powerful.

Tip # 23 - Strengthening Family Bonds

Summer is a great time to spend fun, relaxing time together as a family. Take this time to play games, share an ice cream cone, take a long walk, enjoy the beauty of nature. Time spent relaxing and sharing thoughts is a great way to strengthen those all important family ties.

Tip # 24 - As summer ends, many of you will be sending your children back to a school setting of some kind. This is a good time for parents to do some self-evaluating of their own role as teachers of their children. Have you taught your children how to be respectful, to use their manners, to be courteous and to understand certain etiquettes that are important in their lives. Parents need to teach their children, of any age, the importance of these life skills, but also demand that their children put them into practise.

Tip # 25 - Parents have two important roles in healthy families. One as a leader, which requires setting rules, enforcing the rules, sticking together when enforcing the rules and staying in charge at all times. The second role is that of being a model, which can only be accomplished if you spend time with your children, listen to your children, encourage

your children and talk to your children. Healthy families have parents that are leaders and models, which is why their families are healthy!

Tip # 26 – Soon the busy days of Christmas will be on us and many of our children will be thinking about what they want for Christmas. This is a wonderful time to talk to them, no matter how young or old, about what we are really celebrating with the Birth of Christ. It is a perfect time to reflect on others less fortunate, and ways that we as a family can give to those in need this Christmas, instead of focussing on what we want ourselves.

Tip # 27 – Christmas can become a time of great stress for families, where trying to find money for gifts and being too busy can take the real joy out of the season. Teach your children that Christmas is not about stuff, but about family, as we celebrate the beginning of the Holy Family with the birth of Christ. Take a time out of the rush to play some games together, take a walk together, and/or make some homemade gifts together. Remind your children that giving should be joyful, not painful. Be sure you model what you want them to live out in their own lives because what you model now will be their experience for years to come.

Tip #28 - Parents have the primary influence on their children's values. Your kids are watching you, they look to you to guide them in how they think and act. They especially watch what you do, more than what you say. They learn from how you use pills and medications, how you use or don't use alcohol, and from how you treat others. They also watch and observe your spiritual self by observing what you say and do. Are you living the life you want your children to live?

Tip #29 - February is the month when we celebrate love. Love is shown to our children when we take time to be with them, talk with them and look after their needs, but never underestimate their need to hear the words "I love you spoken" by their parents. If you tell your children you love them each day, you are doing a great deal to make them feel good about themselves. If you don't tell them you love them daily, try it - you might be surprised at how positive the experience can be for both of you!

Tip #30 - Easter is a time of great joy in the Church, one that should last far beyond Easter Sunday. Christ died for our sins, giving us eternal life with God. His death and resurrection though, holds a wonderful lesson for all who believe. As Pope John Paul II said, Easter helps us to understand that, "We are an Halleluiah People." In other words, we always have hope and faith as our pillars of strength, no matter the difficulties in our lives. An understanding of this is the best gift we could give to our children this Easter, so talk about it and celebrate the gift of this great season with your family!

Tip #31 - Teaching our children the value of work will help them to be successful at all stages of their lives. As school begins, steer the focus away from new clothes and school supplies and instead focus on the value of doing their best, even if their best isn't perfect. Help them to plan to do their best work by creating a plan for doing homework, staying on top of assignments and even celebrating a job well done!

Tip #32 - Sharing a meal as a family is one of the easiest ways for family members to form close bonds. It is also a great way for you to keep informed about your children's lives! At meals encourage conversation, but don't lecture; make the table a neutral zone by dealing with disciplinary issues away from the table; use the time together to teach

manners and offer prayers of thanksgiving as a family. Shared meals are a great time to build relationship, knowledge and memories.

Tip #33 - One role of parents is to teach their children the skills they will need to be successful. An important social skill that all children need to be taught is the art of good manners. Manners help children focus in on their behaviour, giving them some concrete guides as to how to respond in specific situations. Learning manners begins at home on two fronts: one when manners are modelled by parents; second when they are expected of children. Social skills are one of the predictors of success in the world, so be sure to insist that your children develop good manners.

Tip #34 - As we begin a new year we are often compelled to start ‘anew’ by changing areas of our lives which do not fully satisfy us. This is an excellent time to assess your role as parent. Parents are called to be **leaders** (by making rules, sticking together to enforce rules, and by staying in charge) and **models** (by planning time with your children, listening to your children, encouraging your children and talking with your children) in their families. When parents are **leaders and models** children thrive. Now is a good time to develop strategies to be both for your children!

Tip #35 -The early days of Lent are a perfect time to talk to our children about the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness, fasting and praying to God. Explain to them that Lent is a time when we strive to grow closer to God through fasting, prayer and good works. Don’t let your children ‘give something up’ without talking to them about the deeper meaning of Lent as a time to grow in holiness and to show care for our neighbours. Help your children learn about Jesus by reading the Bible together; help them self-reflect with discussions and prayer on how we can be more Christ-like in our world; most importantly, remind them of the great hope that comes to us after Lent when we celebrate Easter!

Tip #36 - Easter is the perfect time to explain to our children about the deep love God had for all of us when he sent Jesus to fulfill His promise that we would have eternal life in heaven. Help your children to think about why Jesus came to earth; so that he could die for all of us. Be sure they understand what the resurrection three days after Jesus death meant to each of us for all eternity. With Christ’s death and resurrection we are given great hope. The Easter season (which *begins* with Easter Sunday) is a great time to continue to discuss God’s great love for all people.

Tip #37 - Families offer a wonderful opportunity for sharing experiences with those we love. Some of the most joyful experiences are the times we spend celebrating key moments in our lives, such as Christmas, Easter and birthdays. As a family of faith, how about considering a yearly celebration of the day your child was baptized? The date can be remembered by marking the occasion in some special way; a simple prayer, by lighting the baptismal candle during one of your family meals, or by inviting God-parents for dinner. Celebrations send a message to our children about the importance of the occasion. Baptism is a “new birth” which fills us with the grace of God and opens the door to eternal life. It is a great day to celebrate and remind our children of the everlasting goodness of their faith.

Tip #38 - Christmas is a perfect time to help your children remember what the ‘reason for the season’ actually is – the birth of Jesus Christ. Read the story of the Nativity together, let your children help set up the Manger in your home, take part in your parish Christmas pageant where possible and before opening gifts Christmas morning, sing ‘Happy Birthday’ to Jesus. The real story of Christmas is the birth of our Saviour: do your children know and understand that?

Tip #39 - Quality and Quantity Both Count: Being there for the big events is, of course important, but never forget it counts to be there in the small moments too. These are times of teaching, modeling, sharing traditions, and helping our children learn about who they are as people. Take time, you will never regret it!

Tip #40 – Our children get all kinds of images in the media of what love means. In this month of love, let us guide our children to a clear understanding that real love is always a reflection of God’s love. It accepts us for who we are, puts the other first, and wants what is best for each of us. Real love is seen through the truths of our faith, not the eyes of the media.

Tip #41 – Vacations or ‘Stay-cations’ are a wonderful time to step away from the busyness of everyday family living and reconnect with each other. As you laugh and play, don’t forget to stay connected to our faith. Be the family that plays and prays together.

Tip #42– Our temperament, or style of behaviour, is mainly a biological phenomenon. Every temperament has the potential to influence a child’s behaviour in positive or negative ways. Help your children develop strategies that will allow them to manage their own inborn tendencies so that they may find the most positive responses to life’s events.

Tip #43– Faith passed through the generations is strong and vibrant and necessary. Grandparents can be role models in the faith to both their children and their grandchildren. A faith passed on, lives on.

Tip #44 – June is a good time to reflect with your children on the successes and challenges of the past school year. Remind your children that, through baptism, we are all called to use our God-given gifts. In Confirmation, these gifts will be strengthened so that we may share them with the whole Church. Help your children to see how important it is for them to use God’s gifts.

Tip #45 – Celebrating Family: In July we celebrate Canada, its history, values, cultures and traditions. It’s a good time to remind ourselves to celebrate our own families. Teach your children what is important about your family’s traditions, history, values and faith. Encourage them to honour and love who they are as family.

Tip #46– Families spending time with families creates bonds of friendship and cements communities. Tell your children they also belong to a family of faith. Spend time with extended family, family friends and your parish family; you’ll benefit from all of them!

Tip #47 – Brothers and Sisters: Living under the same roof can bring times of tension and disagreements. It also brings times of great joy, support, and caring. In the moments of laughter, a common history is created; bonds that last a lifetime. Help your children discover the joy of their siblings.

Tip #48 – Created to Be Someone: Who are they going to be when they grow up? Helping our children uncover their strengths happens when we provide a wide range of experience. Talk with them. Find out what they like. Encourage them to try new things. Pray with them. Our children are depending on us to help them discover their gifts and talents.

Tip #49 – It is important to help our children see that our lives are shaped by the many seasons that come our way. Teach your children to be thankful during the seasons of plenty and hopeful during the seasons of drought.

Tip #50 – Family Matters: Families provide a strong foundation on which future generations are built. Their strength today is the backbone of both present and future generations. God loves families and our Church stands behind us as we love, learn and live in families.

Tip #51 – Every interaction with our children is a moment of modeling for them. When the relationship between your child and yourself is tense, expressing the need for a time out from the situation serves as a great lesson on how to handle stress. When everyone is calmer, be sure to come back and discuss the situation, since this is an important part of the lesson being learned!

Tip #52 – Talking to your children on a regular basis and discussing important issues in their lives, is a vital part of our role as parents. Through your words (and actions) you teach – never stop talking to your children!

Tip #53 – Lent is a perfect time to journey toward Easter as a family. Spend time together each day in prayer and reflection and decide together how to best use your family resources to give to others. Your children's spiritual journey will be enhanced by your presence and guidance.

Tip #54 – Nutrition, physical exercise, intellectual stimulation – parents are rightfully intent on doing their best for their children in these areas. Research is quite clear though, that the spiritual wellbeing of our children holds the key to both physical health and happiness for them. In this month of May, let us heed the words of Pope Benedict when he said, "Make the praying of the rosary in the family a moment of spiritual growth under the gaze of the Virgin Mary." Our spiritual and physical selves cannot be separated; nurture both!

Tip #55 - With the start of school in September we reflect on how to help our children prepare for their future. Successful students (and adults) know how to organize themselves in many areas of their lives and learn how to prioritize what needs to be done. Help your children organize and prioritize and you will be giving them tools for life. Teach them that family and faith (including attending Mass) should be highest on their list so they stay healthy and happy.

Tip #56 – Building a relationship with our children provides life time benefits for everyone. One element involved with this is teaching our children our family values; this means being specific about what is and what is not acceptable behavior. In fact, a survey of 5,500 teenagers done by National Young Drivers Association showed that risky driving behavior, including not wearing a seat belt, drinking and driving and cell phone use while driving was strongly associated with the way teens and parents communicate and approach rules about safety. Being supportive of our children, setting clear rules and paying attention to where our children are going has measurable positive results in their behavior.

Tip #57 – Our children are healthier and happier when their emotional, physical, intellectual and social needs are looked after. Add to this list one more essential need that requires care - a child's spiritual well-being. A relationship with God is as essential to their welfare as water. Pray together, attend Mass as a family, share readings from the Bible, talk about the awe of God's creation and remind them that God is always present. His love will guide them and be a source of comfort as they grow.

Tip #58 – “When You Thought I Wasn't Looking” is written by an unknown author, but one with a wise message. The poem reminds us that our children are always watching and listening; they learn from what we model. Ask yourself if your actions and words are ones you would praise or rebuke in your child. Your child will be what you speak and do.

Tip #59 - Lent is a perfect time to help children develop good spiritual practices in their lives. Engage your children in various components of spiritual well-being: read the bible daily; say the Rosary as a family; attend Stations of the Cross at your parish; connect fasting to almsgiving; read age appropriate stories about the life of Jesus Christ. Lent is about more than “giving something up” - help your children prepare their hearts for the joyous Easter season in a balanced spiritual way.

Tip #60 – Easter is a perfect time to help our children recognize that God loves, understands and cares for every person – it was true at the time of creation and it is true today. Help them to comprehend that Jesus loved us so much that he died for every person to save us from sin, so that we could be with him always. Remind them that after the Cross comes the Resurrection, where joy replaces sorrow. Everlasting joy is the promise of our faith and we are called to live in such a way that others will see the joy we have as sons and daughters of God.

Tip #61 – Spring is a wonderful time to point out the gifts of nature, given by God, to our children. Help them see the beauty of new growth and life; remind them that what seemed lifeless, was really preparing for new growth; prompt them to recognize that with a little support, we can help nature reach its full potential. Our children too have unused potential given by God and with nurturing from loving parents, they will blossom and grow.

Tip #62 – Our children are constantly learning about life and how to live in the world by all they hear and experience. Stories are great ways to teach our children, but we don't always have to reach for a book to tell a story. Family stories about an event that taught you a lesson, demonstrated love, connected you to your faith, and describes family traditions are great teaching tools. Setting aside a weekly family storytelling session is a great way to bond, pass on traditions and teach the lessons that have value to you and your family.

Tip #63 – Children grow and learn in a family. As parents it is our task to help our children understand who we are and what we believe as a family. We accomplish this when we interact with each other, both at work and play. Talk openly about your morals and values, explaining why they are important, and teach your children that faith provides a solid foundation for every aspect of their lives. Knowing who they are provides guidance throughout their lives.

Tip #64 – Spending time conversing with our children is a perfect way to pass on knowledge and values and a great way to learn about who they are as a person. The fall season offers parents a perfect time to head outdoors as a family for a hike, where you can take some time to chat about the beauty of God's creation, the value of nature and our need to be stewards of God's world. Taking time to connect with our children allows us to influence them and simply enjoy each other's company!

Tip #65 – November is a month for remembering those that have died: all the saints and martyrs, our loved ones on All Souls Day and finally those who have died for our freedom in war. This is a month to embrace prayer with our children - for all those that have died and for ourselves too. Help them understand that prayer helps soften their hearts, which can become hardened when they don't live as Jesus has taught us. When we pray every day, God helps to keep our hearts soft.

Tip #66 – In the Christmas carol, 'Do You Hear What I Hear?' the words, "He will bring us goodness and light" are repeated twice at the end of the song. It is an important message to help our children understand – Jesus brings us goodness and light for our everyday living. He shows us how to live through the Gospels, he nourishes us through the Eucharist, and he listens and responds to our prayers. For Catholics, Christmas is about so much more than gifts - it is the promise, through Jesus, of goodness and light in our lives. Parents who help their children know and understand this give their children a gift to last a lifetime.

Tip #67 – Manners are accepted means of behaviour that show care, respect and consideration for others. Good manners make a person more socially acceptable and successful. Parents who take the time to both **teach** and **model** manners to their children help them to have positive life experiences. Teach by example - they are watching us more than they are listening to us!

Tip #68 – The great joy of Easter is the promise of eternal life, but the prominence of the Easter Bunny often draws children away from this understanding. Help your children appreciate the true meaning of the season by attending Mass as a family and discussing, in simple language, the readings heard that day. Explain that, like the disciples, we are called through our baptism to be friends and followers of Jesus. Help them understand that through prayer, works of charity and caring for all, even the youngest child can bring hope to the hearts of others.

Tip #69 – Parents are the first and foremost teachers of their children. We model for them how and who to be in the world. If you want your children to be respectful, then you must be respectful; if you want them to be happy, then you must be happy; if you want them to have a relationship with God, then you must have a relationship with God. They are watching us and we are powerful influencers of who they become.

Tip #70 – Summer brings much needed time to relax and enjoy being together as a family; it restores balance in our lives. Fun activities and extra treats are part of the season as we relish family and friends in our lives. It is a great time for families to savour their faith as well. The Year of Faith is about rediscovering the joy it brings – we recommend you slow down, enjoy and ponder your faith this summer. Find ways to do this on our Diocesan web site (www.hamiltondiocese.com) by clicking on the Year of Faith logo. Enjoy creating memories for all to treasure!

Tip #71 – September brings with it a change of pace from the slower days of summer. School, extracurricular activities and involvements create hectic days for busy families. The research is clear on the importance of family time for the well-being of children. As the schedule becomes more frenzied, be sure to remember that a meal together each day, daily prayers and weekly Mass shared as a family will bring long term benefits to all members of your family.

Tip #72 – October is a perfect month to take the time to sit with your children and talk about the many people and areas in their lives for which they can be thankful. Help them to acknowledge and give thanks to God, family members, priests, teachers, coaches, neighbours, and the many other people that touch their lives with goodness. Recognizing the bounty in their lives will help accentuate the positive and remind them of the abundance of God’s creation!

Tip #73 – November is the month where we remember soldiers who have died for our country and provided us with our freedom. This is a great time to talk to our children about the true meaning of freedom and how it allows us to participate in our faith - both within the parish and at school. Authentic freedom means knowing how to live in a world that offers so many choices, many not good for us. The Catholic faith can provide a rich road map for our life journey; help your children to navigate life using their faith as a GPS, knowing it holds a promise for salvation.

Tip #74 – The Christmas season is a beautiful time to focus our children on the gifts God gave to us the day his son was born. When we focus on the gifts of that first Christmas, we find a template on how to live our lives: the gift of forgiveness for all sin; the gift of and fulfillment of the promise of eternal life; the gift of a role model to show us how to live God’s way; the gift of faith, since Jesus birth is also the birth of Christianity. Forgiveness, a role model, faith and eternity – help your children see that nothing under the tree will be as wonderful as the gifts given that first Christmas.

Tip #75 – Every child is a diamond in the rough, with value and dignity; a child of God. As parents we need to be generous in providing loving affirmation to our children, so they will grow to recognize their inner rich and vital gifts. A parent’s love teaches a child to know God’s love and to learn of their significance in the world. With love they will discover a mine full of gems within themselves.

Tip #76 – The month of February, when love is all around us, is a perfect time to talk to our children about love, its power in every life and our need to treat it with care. A child is never too young to begin to learn that love means being selfless, compassionate, caring and life-giving; we have to be respectful of its power and influence over our hearts and minds. A child learns to love first through the example of their parents. We have to teach them that true love is more than what they see at the movies. Love takes work and commitment, but the payoff is well worth it!

Tip #77 – For many of our children Lent is a time to give something up; it becomes simply a time of self-denial. Parents need to help their children understand that Lent is really a time to connect with their baptism and the teachings of our faith - it is a time to prepare ourselves for Easter. Explain to your children that we give something up as an act of self-denial, but also to unite ourselves with the world’s poor; we fast, not just from food, but from poor behaviours and actions that do not make us Christ like; we pray, not just for ourselves, but for all those in need. Reading and talking about Jesus’ passion, praying as a family, engaging together in works of charity – these are all ways that families can journey through Lent together. This Lent help your children engage in activities and take the time to become closer to God – it will make their Easter so much more meaningful.

Tip #78 – Easter is a wonderful time to help our children understand the power of love and forgiveness, shown to us by the death and Resurrection of Christ. As children of God they too are called to love others, especially their family members, and to offer forgiveness when someone hurts or offends them. Remind them that Easter teaches us to remember that when difficulties come into our lives, as they will, we must have faith that life will get better. The message of Easter, through the Resurrection, is that with faith and prayer, life’s crosses can be overcome. A wonderful message for every child to understand!

Tip #79 – Please, thank you, excuse me, these are all simple ways of being polite and using manners. Good manners benefit our children in several ways by: increasing self-esteem as mutual respect is established; generating positive attention and respect for and from people; developing an attitude of courtesy towards others; increasing friendships with peers. Children develop good manners through modelling, education and your expectations. Teaching manners helps them to become both confident and successful.

Tip #80 – “When you Thought I Wasn’t Looking” is a poem written by Mary Rita Schilke Korazan. The poem provides every parent with much food for thought – it reminds us that we are always teaching. Our children watch and hear everything; we model with more power than we speak. When we model consistent behaviours they become enmeshed in our children’s actions. They are watching how we speak, love, forgive, care, act towards others and so much more. The importance of faith is also modeled in family. Do they see their parents praying, attending and engaging in Mass, thanking God for the gifts in their lives, making faith a priority? Our children will become what we model, so remember, they are seeing you even when you think they are not looking!

Tip #81 – “I love you!” Important words for every child to hear, but knowing what these words mean is even more significant. Loving someone is about looking outward beyond our own needs and wants to see what is best for the other; it is caring and compassion; it is empathy and mutual respect. In short, love is more about what we give to a relationship than what we get from it. For our children, teaching them about good relationships and the true meaning of love allows them to love in a mature way when they get older and to expect a healthy love for themselves.

Tip #82 – Prayer and the education of children in the faith are seen as specific responsibilities of Christian parents, as well as grandparents. Our world is fast paced and we sometimes forget that our children need a place that will act as a cocoon, making them feel safe, loved and protected. We need to create purposeful moments when we gather as a family and share our values through conversations and family activities and where we share our faith through pray and perhaps reading and discussing a passage from the Bible. Families build the foundation on which our children stand in the world – educating our children in their faith is a proven way to make that foundation solid enough to withstand anything.

Tip #83 – In the Christmas carol O Holy Night we hear these words: “Long lay the world in sin and error pining. Till He appeared and the Soul felt its worth.” The words are a beautiful reminder that we are loved by God and that Christ’s birth reminds us of our inherent value. In a world that can, at times, be hurtful, our children can seek refuge in loving families and through a personal relationship with Jesus. Christmas is a lovely time to remind our children that when Jesus was born he came to live among us and that he still wants to be with each of us today. Through prayer, attending Mass and simply talking to God about the highs and lows of their day, children can develop a friendship with Jesus who loves them deeply. This Christmas, give your children a powerful gift by helping them develop a friendship with our Saviour.

Tip #84 – Lent is a time for us to focus on important practices of our faith: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. During Lent help your children see that prayer is both formal and informal and that God wants to hear from us in many ways; teach them that we can fast from a favourite food or drink, but also from a bad habit or mean spirited action; remind them that almsgiving provides support for those in need and can take the form of money, goods, or time and talent. Lent is about focussing in on how we can be better people and so it is a great teaching tool to help your children grow.

Tip #85 – When children identify role models they look up to, they are often action heroes, including cartoon heroes, who have powers that are superhuman. Children need assistance to recognize true role models living amongst them; individuals a child can and should emulate as they mature. Good role models have clear values, willingly look to assist others with any need, are passionate about what they do, accept each person for who they are and are guided by the light of faith. Help your children identify role models in their lives and to discover the positive qualities these people possess and watch them thrive as they become inspired to develop similar qualities.

Tip #86 – This is the time of year when many graduations occur: from kindergarten to grade 1, from grade 8 to high school, from high school to post-secondary or the workplace, from post-secondary and graduate school to the workplace. Many accolades are given at this time, but often we forget that success comes from a solid foundation built by the family. In family children learn about everyday events and life-impacting situations; they learn about values, commitment, caring and love; they are given support through failures and congratulations on successes, allowing growth and an acceptance of challenges; they learn how to be somebody in their own right, while feeling secure because they also belong; they learn about faith and spirituality, so they can be sustained as they navigate life. Parents are the most influential people in their children's lives - your role and how you fulfill it really does matter!

Tip #87 – The word family by its very definition is a collective term, one that unites those associated with a particular family on many levels, during many different shared moments and occasions. Investing time with your family is hands down the best investment you will ever make. You will reap the benefit of children who have stronger bonds with their families, have better academic success, are more mentally and emotionally stable and who will ultimately learn the skills needed to be better parents themselves. Pope Francis recently encouraged parents to “waste time with their children,” specifically, I believe, because time with your children is anything but wasted!

Tip #88 – Children thrive on routine because it gives them a sense of control and security in their lives. As parents we can offer great benefits to our children by providing routines, setting limits and ensuring there is structure to our family commitments and obligations. When we model these actions to our children they learn organizational skills that will help them as they move into adulthood and take control of their own lives.

Tip # 89

The best way to assist your children to thrive is to give them a good sense of security and self-worth. These feelings are best accomplished when parents understand their role as leaders of their families: they set the rules, make sure the rules are followed and discipline when necessary. In order to assure good balance in their family role as leaders, parents need to spend quality time with their children, which helps their children know they are loved, valued and important. Parents need to be an authoritative figure in their children's lives, which means they can't always be the fun friend, but they can love their children enough to help them become healthy and well-functioning adults!

Tip # 90

Pope Francis, in his book *The Name of God is Mercy*, writes that “the family is the first school for children, it is the unwavering reference point for the youngit is there that we have been loved and learn to love, have been forgiven and learn to forgive.” As parents our role is to teach with love, to raise up children of faith and to teach the ways of mercy. Parents allow, elicit, or maintain behaviours by their response to their children's actions. A child's future ability to thrive depends on parents taking the time to create habits and behaviours that will lead to success. Schools of love provide support, love and discipline to help their children grow.

Parenting Tip 92

Parents can help their children develop emotional and mental well-being by assisting them to develop strategies and skills for coping with stress. Parents can do so by allowing their children to experience a little stress, so they will learn to cope with bigger stresses. Teach them how to handle stress: breathe deeply, talk in a self-calming way, discuss their feelings with friends and family, actively work at problem solving, talk to God and listen in their heart for his response. With their parents help, children can learn the skills needed to ensure resiliency in the inevitable ups and downs of life.

Parenting Tip 93

Most parents want their children to be happy and spend a great deal of their energies trying to ensure this is the case for their children. A new study released by the World Leisure Journal suggests that it may be much simpler than we believe. A variety of leisure activities, including hiking, board games and visiting local tourist attractions, can be combined with time spent at home undertaking activities as a family. Being together produces feelings of satisfaction and happiness. Simple undertakings can be the best way to bond as a family and feel connected to each other. Combine activity with attending weekly Mass and praying together each day and your children will benefit in numerous ways!

Parenting Tip 94

At Christmas it is easy for children to get so wrapped up in what they want that they forget the reason for the season: the birth of Christ. Jesus came to offer a great sacrifice – his life so our sins could be forgiven. He taught us to look toward others; to feed the hungry, care for the sick and so much more. The greatest gift we can give our children is the ability to look outward towards what others need, as opposed to looking inward to what “I” want. When we teach our children what Christmas really represents and why we celebrate, it helps them know God loves them and to spread his love to others.

Parenting Tip 95

Spending quality time together will pay great dividends to all involved, especially our children. Time together allows for positive interaction, the ability to learn about each other and the chance to build strong bonds and memories. A great starting point is a shared family meal, but reading together, playing a board game, or working on a puzzle together are but a few of the many ways we can build connections. The result will be higher self-esteem for children, a greater cohesiveness in the family unit and the desire for more time as a family. Try it, you won't regret it!

Parenting Tip 96

Lent is the perfect time to focus on our faith journey. Help your children look beyond giving something up, to the deeper meaning of Lent. Remind them that Lent is about looking forward to Christ's Resurrection, which opens us to the joy of eternity. During Lent help your children reflect on what Christ's coming meant for us - he taught us how to live good and holy lives; he showed us what it means to be faithful to a promise; he gave us the gift of Salvation and the hope of eternity; he reminded us that God has a plan for each of us. Pray together, attend the Stations of the Cross; read the Bible, commit to fasting as a family (perhaps from arguing with siblings, or speaking back to parents), give alms as a family unit. When you take your task of helping your children understand Lent and its purpose to heart, everyone benefits!

Parenting Tip 97

Spring brings new joy and new opportunity as the weather warms and we spend more time outdoors. It is a great chance to draw our children's attention to the greening grass, flowers sprouting from the ground and leaves opening on the trees. Nature has a cycle and so too does life - remind your children of the creative power of God in making all this happen year after year. Help them to see our role in nature and how our Catholic faith calls us to respect, care for, love and nurture all of God's created gifts in this world, both human and those in nature.

Parenting Tip 98

Children thrive on routine and schedules, as do most adults. As summer approaches and the days grow longer, it can be difficult to keep established timetables in check. Helping your children flourish in mind, body and spirit this summer is possible, but as parents you must take control. Keep track of the nutritional value of the food your children consume each day; work hard to be sure they get the proper amount of sleep since it will provide benefits both now and into the future; remember to celebrate God's beauty in nature, to say prayers at meals & before bed and to attend Mass as a family. Children's growth doesn't take a break during the summer months, so be vigilant and they will blossom.

Parenting Tip 99

September tends to bring order to the joyful, but sometimes chaotic summer months. Now is a great time to sit as a family and set some family goals for the coming year. Your goals might include: increasing the time you will spend together as a family; setting a specific number of meals you will eat together (at a real table!); agreeing to detailed ways in which you will increase your faith practices; deciding on the amount of exercise you will engage in as a family; agreeing to increase the patience you will have for each other. The possibilities are endless! Remember, setting goals will both help you accomplish something beneficial and send a message that your family is a priority.

Parenting Tip 100

In order to feel confident and connected, children need to feel that they belong. Their sense of belonging comes, in large part, from how they connect to their families – do they spend time together having fun, do they participate in chores and contribute to the household, do they have a sense of family values and traditions? As parents we need to be diligent in making sure our children feel a secure attachment within the family unit, so they can thrive when they venture away from us.

Parenting Tip 101

Christmas is a season of great excitement and joy, filled with gifts, sharing love and visiting with our family and friends. These are wonderful parts of Christmas, but it is important to help our children remember that the holiday is really about the birth of Christ. Start during Advent by having an Advent wreath, where each week you pray and talk about what each candle represents: hope, peace, joy and love. Find ways as a family to spread these into the world in which you live. Jesus taught us to look toward others; to feed the hungry, care for the sick and so much more. The greatest gift we can give our children is the ability to look outward towards what others need, as opposed to looking inward to what "I" want. Help your children to learn that is in giving that we truly receive.

Parenting Tip 102

January begins a new year, a perfect time to reflect on your parenting role. Ask yourselves what you are doing well, what you might improve on and where you may need some supports. Assess whether you are spending enough quality and quantity time with your children because both matter. Reflect on whether you are providing a strong faith foundation and a strong connection to the Church community, since both have positive health and spiritual impacts. Now with a clearer vision, set some family goals for the coming year!

Parenting Tip 103

Parents often ask their children what they would like to be when they grow up, but the better question to reflect on is 'who' you want to be when you grow up. Lessons learned in childhood, along with the modelling from significant adults in their lives set a foundation for the adults our children become. Do you expect respect, the use of manners, that your children treat others with caring and compassion? Are you modelling the traits of a good parent and spouse? Do you help them to see how God can and does support them as they grow to develop the gifts they have been

given to use in our world? Good people are happier and healthier people, so help your child develop the 'who' part of themselves and what they will be will take care of itself!

Parenting Tip 104

Lent is a time of preparation which allows us to fully celebrate the joy of the Resurrection and reflect on the gift of salvation. Help your children, no matter their ages, to understand that Lent is more than just "giving something up". Lent is a time for prayerful reflection which allows us to properly celebrate and understand the gifts of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life given to us through Christ's passion, death and resurrection. Pray as a family, talk about what these gifts mean and teach about the symbols of Lent, since all of these lead us to the joy of Easter. Instead of dreading Lent, you can help your children rejoice in its ability to bring all of us closer to God.

Parenting Tip 105

Our children are treasures and bring us much joy! They are however, from a very young age, in need of our leadership to help them grow into competent and capable adults. When a child is two their behaviours and temper tantrums may seem funny and even cute, but by four those behaviours are no longer funny, by ten they are causing family tensions and by the teenage years may make it very difficult to parent. Praise your children, spend time with your children and model good behaviours, but remember to teach them self-control, manners and good behaviours from a very early age, which will make all the other parenting years less stressful.

Parenting Tip 106

Children are impacted, from the day they are born, mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually by our responses, both to their needs and to the way we engage with the world around us. As parents we should provide expectations for our children's behaviour, but it is also important to reflect on whether or not we expect the same of ourselves. If a child acts or speaks in a way we don't like, we should correct them, but it is essential to ask if they might be learning that specific behaviour from watching us, their parents. Our actions and words matter - children need us to model the behaviour we want from them.

Parenting Tip 107

Experts have known for a long time that what children can't express they act out. As parents it is our role to analyze what may be causing poor behaviour and then help our children identify and work through their angst. Once children learn to use their words and express their feelings, life will be calmer in your household and they will gain skills that will help them throughout their lifetime. When your children act up, suppress your anger and help them to understand what is really going on; you will find both of you will be smiling more often.

Parenting Tip 108

Children learn about life and themselves from every interaction they have with others, but the most profound impact comes from family. A study published by Psychology Press titled, Social Understanding and Social Lives, argues that the quality, as well as the quantity of conversations adults have with their children concerning thoughts and feelings, helps children's social understanding to grow. As parents we have the ability to help our children identify, cope with and manage their thoughts and feelings. We do this by helping them recognize thoughts and feelings as they arise and then by providing them with ways to manage their inner selves. This leads to children healthy in mind, body and spirit - so talk it through, your kids are listening!

Parenting Tip 109

February is the month we celebrate love on Valentine's Day, but the commercialism of the day can confuse children and make them believe that love is only about giving and/or receiving something. While that may be part of love, true love unfolds every day in the way we treat each other, help each other and care for each other. True love takes work, requires action and seeks to meet the needs of the one we love. Talk to your children, no matter the age, about what real love actually looks like, so they can grow up to give and expect that kind of love in their lives.

Parenting Tip 110

Adults have experienced the growth and ultimate explosion of the internet/social media world, but for children it is the world in which they have grown. While it contributes to learning, we cannot be oblivious to its real dangers. Experts agree that most children have their first view of pornography between the ages of 8 and 11 yrs. of age; they usually stumble on it by accident on the internet. It is recommended that, in order to protect them, children under the age of 16 should not have unsupervised access to the internet - this includes on any computer, tablet, phone, TV, or gaming system. Being naïve about what your children are seeing will hurt them, so protect them. Talk about what is good and what is not and why. Give them the tools they need so that they will not be negatively impacted by the media world.

Parenting Tip 111

April ushers in spring with its new growth and warmth and this year the celebration of Easter. Easter reminds each of us of God's infinite love, that after suffering comes the joy of the resurrection and that God will never abandon His people. Help your children understand that Easter is so much more than the Easter Bunny; it is our moment of Salvation. God can be a constant stabilizing force in your children's lives if they learn to rely on him, so teach them how to pray, how to talk to God and how to embrace the gift of faith we celebrate this Easter.

Parenting Tip 112

As the warmer weather makes its way into our lives, it is a perfect time to help children learn about the beauty of God's created world and our task to be stewards of his creation. Cleaning the yard after winter, planting flowers and vegetables, picking up garbage left behind once the snow melts - these are all great ways to teach your children to honour God's world. And as a bonus, you will spend time outdoors as a family. The world is our home, help your children learn to engage with the earth.

Parenting Tip 113

As summer approaches life tends to become a little more relaxed. Longer days mean bedtimes become less specific, warmer days mean our food and drink consumption changes and, hopefully, we take full advantage of these lovely days by spending more time with our children. This summer, be specific and plan what you would like to accomplish with your children: more reading together, more time hiking, more family game nights, more time spent preparing and cooking as a family, etc. Time spent together creates confident, healthy children; when we include daily prayer with our family, life is golden!

Parenting Tip 115

September brings cooler weather, shorter days and a reestablishment of order as school and fall programs start up. It is a good time to examine busy schedules and discern if you are spending enough quality time as a family. Are you eating together, praying together, spending time playing together and yes, even cleaning together? Nothing will have a greater impact on a young developing mind and body than spending time with the people they depend on and love the most, their family. Make it priority number one and fill in the schedule around established family time, not vice versa!

Parenting Tip 116

Helping our children to become less focussed on themselves and more interested in their neighbour is an essential role of every parent and caregiver. Children do not often think of others before themselves in the early years of their lives, so from a young age be sure to set clear limits on their behaviour and the "things" they get, so they don't become entitled; praise them whenever you witness an unselfish act, no matter how small; model unselfish behaviour both within and outside the home by sharing time, goods and talents. Children thrive in relationships, show less anger and aggression and feel good about themselves when they look outward, not inward. Jesus himself taught that next to loving God, loving neighbour is our most important role in this world.

Parenting Tip 117

The Bible has so many wonderful messages for us, but an excellent example for families is in the Creation Story, where we hear that on the seventh day God rested. When do we rest in the family? Do our children see the family as a priority because we make it one, or is family time squeezed in between work, school, sports and/or other activities? These are all wonderful portions of our lives, but when we don't take time to rest and just "be" family, the toll can impact all of us. Teach your children the value of family by making it a priority. God talks to us through the Bible -perhaps he wants you to have the seventh day for rest too?!

Parenting Tip 118

For Catholics, Christmas is about so much more than gifts: it is the promise, through the birth of Jesus, of goodness and light coming into our lives. Do your children know this is the focus of Christmas? Advent and Christmas are perfect times to highlight the "reason for the season". Read stories about the Advent wreath so they understand what each candle symbolizes; read the story of the Nativity (more than once!); be sure the tree is adorned with symbols of the faith; read family Advent reflections daily during Advent; attend Mass and reflect on the readings each week, including Christmas Day. Faith sets a foundation on which to stand and Christmas is a perfect time to bring Christ into your family activities!

Parenting Tip 119

Colder days in January can mean more time indoors, a perfect time to connect as a family. Board games, puzzles, movie night, sharing a decade of the Rosary, baking or cooking a meal together – these are all great ways to interact and learn about each other. The more time we spend with each other, the greater the connection we feel for the other. Children need to feel they are valued and nothing speaks to their hearts more compared to time spent together!

Parenting Tip 120

Hugs, kisses, spending time together and looking after our children's needs are all ways of letting them know they are loved, but experts are telling us we also need to use words to convey this important message. I love you - three simple words with a powerful impact. Children, especially as they age, need to hear us tell them they are loved, over and over again. So tell them you love them each time you greet them, remind them you love them as they leave, say goodnight and add those three powerful words and your child will know that they are indeed loved!

Parenting Tip 121

Lent is an important time in the Church and a great time for parents to talk to their children about it. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Thursday, a six week period where we set aside time to reflect on Jesus' suffering and dying, which ultimately led to His Resurrection and eternal life for all who believe and live the faith. Lent is a time for fasting, prayer and reflecting on how much God loves us. Talk to your kids about Jesus and how he tried to change the world; work together as a family to better yourselves as His followers; consider giving something up for Lent and talk about how that small suffering can help relate to how Jesus suffered for everyone. Easter is a time of great celebration, use Lent to help your children understand why!

Parenting Tip 122

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we live in very real ways. Children are not immune to the impact that the virus has had and have probably heard more than we realize between media news clips and overhearing adults talking. This is a time to talk to your children and help them understand more fully what is going on in the world. Tell them that they can help themselves and others to be healthy and safe by following the instructions given by their parents, by teachers at school and by other adults who care for them. Remind them that our Catholic faith adheres to the fact that every person has dignity and each of us has to do our part to keep all people as safe as possible. As a family pray daily for all people to remain vigilant in their actions so we can defeat this virus. Empowering our children with concrete information and actions to undertake can prevent the development of very real anxieties from developing.

Parenting Tip 123

The present pandemic has brought changes that have been stressful for families, but it has also allowed for some positive developments. The pandemic has allowed most people and families more time to relax. Have you taken advantage of the extra time to build family ties? Playing board games or cards, going for walks or hikes, or joining, as a family, to engage with music or art - these are all great ways to relax together! Additional relaxing time also gives us more time to engage as a family in prayer - as we eat together, engage in nighttime bedtime rituals together, or as we take time to offer prayers for our family and those in need. Experiencing these positive times together will help to counteract the stress everyone feels thinking about the safety of those they love.

Parenting Tip 124

November is the month in which we both pray for and remember our dead. We also celebrate Remembrance Day, a day we give thanks to all those who have died for our protection and freedom. It is a wonderful month to speak to your children about others who have gone before you. Share the legacy and traditions your ancestors have left for your family and the influence they have had on your lives. Talk to them about how we honour them by our daily actions and remind them to pray for them, not just in the month of November, but all year long. November is a month to discuss our own history, but also the history and traditions of our Catholic faith: All Saints Day, All Souls Day, attending Mass, the prayers we say at Mass, prayers before meals and bedtime, to name a few. Those that have gone before us have influenced us; let us help our children know and reflect on all they have left us.

Parenting Tip 125

Christmas during COVID will change many of our traditional outings and gatherings as a family, but we can still easily take part in our faith traditions. Centering our celebration on the birth of Christ is a great way to remind our children that Christmas for Catholics is the same this year as in other years. During Advent set up an Advent wreath and each week pray and talk about what each candle represents: hope, peace, joy and love; read the story of the Nativity (more than once!) and set one up in your home; adorn the tree with symbols of the faith; attend Mass and reflect on the readings each week, especially on Christmas Day. The joy of Christmas is not gone because of COVID since Christmas reminds us of something that will never change, God's great love for each of us.

Parenting Tip 126

Children love to read the same book repeatedly, eat the same lunch every day and they do best, in fact thrive, on a daily routine. The predictable makes children feel secure and competent because they know what to expect. With little children, routines for mealtimes, bed and bath times, prayer time and even playtime, can be a great comfort, making for happier children. This same wellness from routines also works for older children. The more routine in their lives, the more relaxed and happy their personality. So, start the New Year by creating a schedule for all family members, try it out and see how much peace can come to your household!

Parenting Tip 127

Two kinds of love are on display in the month of February this year – one on Valentine's Day celebrating romantic love and one on Feb. 17th, Ash Wednesday, celebrating the infinite love of a merciful God. When we recognize the depth of God's love, so powerful that nothing can separate us from it, we feel secure that God is always with us. Both these loves are important and this is a great month to help children understand that God is responsible for both. Talk to them about how He created us to want to be in relationships, care about others and love important people in our lives. Help them to understand that the six weeks of Lent ends with the celebration Easter. Easter,

the day we rejoice over Christ's resurrection and through his love, our ability to spend eternity in Heaven.

Parenting Tip 128

The amount of time spent together as a family during COVID might be considered by some to be too much, but it may also be filling a real need. Past research has shown that children consistently identify a desire to spend more time with their parents and family. Time for them means direct, active engagement. The long-term benefits to family relationships are proven: children grow up healthier in mind, body and spirit. Enjoying quality time with their family's means children are more likely to turn to their family for love and support, keeping them healthy. So play with your kids, watch a movie together and discuss its message(s), pray together, be active together, cook together and/or clean together; the possibilities are endless. So remember, time with family is powerful when it is interactive, shared by all and fun!

Parenting Tip 129

As winter melts away and spring approaches, it is a perfect time to help children see, as flowers and trees bud and bloom, the beauty of nature. During his General Audience in August of 2020, Pope Francis reminded the faithful that God gave the earth to all of us to care for and cultivate. As Catholics, we are to be stewards of the earth, called to cultivate and care for its beauty. Point to the splendour of nature unfolding, birds returning and wildlife coming to life. Tell your children that God loved each of us enough to create the world for us and we return his love by honouring his creation.

Parenting Tip 130

COVID-19 continues to dominate and control much of our lives. All of this affects children, but since they take their cues from adults in their lives, we can help them to feel resilient. Remind them of how happy you are, despite all that is happening that you are together as a family. Remind them of the beauty of nature that is all around for them to see and enjoy, that technology lets them connect with other family and friends and that through all of this we can continue to pray and ask for God's blessings. When they hear anger and frustration they feel worry and concern; when they hear optimism and calm, they too feel those emotions as well. Let us remind our children how much we love them; help keep them strong during the pandemic.

Parenting Tip 131

June is a good time to help your children reflect on the successes and challenges of the past school year. God provides every person with gifts to use in the world and it is good to remind your children that we are called to use our God-given gifts. Ask them to reflect on the gifts they see in themselves and share the gifts you see in them. Help them realize that they are indeed special and have good things to offer to others in their lives.

Parenting Tip 132

September arrives with a flurry of activities, such as planning for school start up and looking to see what activities in which children might participate. This year holds even greater challenges with the unknown status of many of these events due to COVID. There is a great way to control the busy days and calm the fears of the unknown: take time for daily family prayer. It need only be a few minutes, but during this time, come together as a family to thank God for the good things in each of your lives, to mention out loud anything that each family member may need support with and ask for his protection for your family, extended family and all people in the world. Not only will this draw your family closer together, it will be a reminder to your children that God is with them and desires to converse with them!

Parenting Tip 133

October brings cooler air and the final harvests of the season. It is a time when we see the beauty of nature and the creative mind of God in providing this world for each of us. Children spend a lot of time wishing for things they don't have, instead of focussing on what they do have, including love from family members, their faith community and friends and neighbours who care for them. During this month of thanksgiving, help your children focus on giving thanks for all they have by writing a daily gratitude journal. Each day they can write about the goodness's of their day and at the end of the month they will have documentation about how much they have to be grateful for - both to God and everyone else who contributes to their lives.

Parenting Tip 134

Our children are healthier and happier when their emotional, physical, intellectual and social needs are looked after. Add to this list one more essential need that requires care - a child's spiritual well-being. A relationship with God is as essential to their welfare as water. The month of November is the month we pray for and remember those who have already died. This is a wonderful month to pray for the deceased and help your children understand that God is always with us and when we seek his help to live as we are called, we too can share in eternity. So, pray together, attend Mass as a family, share readings from the Bible, talk about the awe of God's creation and remind your children that God is always present. His love will guide them and be a source of comfort as they grow.

Parenting Tip 135

The excitement of Christmas begins to build even before Halloween. Children are targeted with ads and commercials to ask Santa for the latest toys, electronic device or game. As parents we love to see the anticipation, but our task is a greater one - it is to keep the reason for Christmas at the forefront of our children's minds and understanding. Are they as excited about the coming of Christ and it's meaning for all people? Do they have a sense that long after every gift they desire from Santa is gone, the truths, love, care, compassion, guidance and stability from God will live on to help each of us to live and, ultimately, receive the gift of eternity? The true gift of Christmas should never be the last one we think of, or get excited about, since it is indeed the most valuable. Advent is the perfect time to daily bring all of this to light!

Parenting Tip 136

Our children are, in many ways, like sponges absorbing all we say and do. Even when we think they aren't watching or listening, they are often taking in our comments, actions and attitudes. In fact, our influence lasts their entire lives and impacts them throughout their lifetime. Equally important is what we don't say about something they are seeing or hearing or doing, since silence is considered consent. Parenting takes constant work, which is why it is considered a vitally important vocation. The rewards, however, of seeing your children grow into healthy, strong adults is worth the effort.

Parenting Tip 137

Children of all ages, but especially very young children, take their clues on how to respond to the world for the most part from their parents. No one will have a greater impact on your child. So, as you go about your day, know that your children are watching and listening to everything you say and do and taking lessons from you. Communicate about actions, life, the faith, on a day to day basis to help solidify what is important. Check your own actions and remember, silence is consent, so if hear or see something that you know is wrong, speak up and tell your children why. We need goodness in our world and you have the power to teach it.

Parenting Tip 138

Lent is a time of reflection for all Catholics and a perfect season to help children understand why we engage in prayer, works of charity, care for all and practicing self-control, since all of these can bring us closer to God. Spend time on your Lenten journey as a family by attending Mass and discussing, in simple language, the readings you hear. Decide as a family on prayers and reflections to engage in each day of Lent and together look at how your family might use their resources to give to others. Your children can bring hope to the hearts of others during Lent and their spiritual journey will be enhanced by your presence and guidance.

Parenting Tip 139

Parents can become exasperated by the behaviour of their children, yet may unknowingly be contributing to it by not practicing more control in some areas of their children's lives. You can help your child to be the best version of themselves by ensuring a balanced diet, by making sure they get enough rest (something severely lacking in many children), by ensuring they have lots of active movement each day and by praying as a family daily. Besides these proven benefits to children, there are other actions also proven to help: controlling screen time (all screens) to the recommended time for their age, spending quality time with parents every day, sharing meals as a family, ensuring they have downtime and are not too activity heavy and by knowing the right expectations to have for the age of your child. Many poor behaviours can be turned around when parents take on a strong leadership role in their families.

Parenting Tip 140

As the buds begin to sprout and the weather allows us to head outdoors more often, take some time to discuss the importance of God's created world with your children. Point out the connectedness of each of us to nature and our dependence on it to survive. Help them understand that every person is tasked with being a steward of God's world. Explain how we can each participate in caring for nature and remind them that when we each do our part, nature thrives and so do we.

Parenting Tip 141

Summer days are upon us, a perfect time to unwind a little and spend some quality time as a family. Playing outdoor and indoor games, walking in nature, having water balloon fights and taking time to thank God for our many blessings are all ways to build relationships with each other. Children need to be well connected to their family in order to feel safe, secure and important. Time together is the best way to build these significant bonds.

Parenting Tip 142

As parents we love our children unconditionally, but the tasks involved are still challenging. There are many moments when our children can annoy us, test us and even defy us! Our response can be the difference between positive learning and damage to our relationship. What is a parent's best strategy? Learn to pause between the time a problem occurs and the time you respond. Take a moment to count to ten, take a deep breath, close your eyes, say a quick prayer, or take your own time out. When you are calm and collected, address the issue in the way you feel will work best to solve the issue, not one based on high emotions.

Parenting Tip 143

When faith is important to parents they sometimes worry that their children may drift away from the faith as they get older. But there is important research that tells us there are ways to help our children to stay connected: 1. Demonstrate a strong faith yourself; 2. Live out the Gospel values in all you do; 3. Read the Bible as a family (and adding discussions about what you read helps too!). It may seem too simplistic, but it can and does work. The reward for your children will be the confidence they feel in knowing that they have a God who is always with them, guiding all they do.

Parenting Tip 144

Parents hold two important roles in their family, they lead and model. Healthy families develop from parents who take both roles seriously. As leaders you set the household tone by staying on the same page (even if parenting from a different household), setting rules to be followed and by ensuring children know you are in charge. More importantly, is your role as a model, since children watch more than they listen! Modelling happens when you spend time with your children, really listen to them, encourage them and have deep and important conversations. When you take on these two vital roles you will become the primary influencers of your children and they will feel loved and secure.

Parenting Tip 145

Christmas is an exciting and busy time of year, a time when it is vital for parents to counter the secular side of the holiday, so heavily promoted, by helping their children understand the real 'reason for the season'. Ensuring you have a nativity set and Advent wreath in your home are important reminders that it is Christ we celebrate. Attending Mass, placing Jesus in the manger before opening presents on Christmas morning, giving to charity and reminding your children Baptism calls all of you to do so, are ways to give a place of importance to the birth of Jesus. If Christmas becomes only about Santa, it is a real loss for your children and their faith.

Parenting Tip 146

As the New Year begins we often set "resolutions" to changes habits, behaviours or actions. This year set a resolution that will benefit the whole family: decide to purposely spend more time with your children, sending a message that family time matters. Build a snow fort together, make snow angels or go for a midnight walk in the snow. Cook, clean and play together. Look back on family albums and share memories and stories. Pray before/after meals, attend Mass and say the Rosary, all as a family. The possibilities are endless, as are the benefits.

Parenting Tip 147

Manners matter because they promote respect between your child and every person with whom they engage. Doing so will promote higher self-esteem, making your child feel more confident in all areas of their lives. Manners are both taught and caught, so continually remind them about, as well expect them to use, manners. More importantly, model manners in all you do, including your own interactions with your children.

Parenting Tip 148

Family is the most powerful influencer in any person's life. What we learn from our family has lifetime implications, influencing how we act, see ourselves and feel about others. As parents it is important that we don't treat our children as mini-adults, but instead view them as a child of a certain age. There are normal patterns to children's brain development and when we understand those stages, we can more fully understand how to love, teach, discipline and support our children throughout their lives. Family and faith provide a solid foundation for each child when parents take the time to learn about their child's developmental age and ability.

Parenting Tip 149

As spring begins we see new life erupting everywhere. This is a great chance to point out the beauty of God's creation to your children, as buds form, trees bloom and flowers grow. Remind them of God's creative power and how he created all this for us, but also gave us the task of caring for His creations. We must nurture and protect God's created world. It is also a chance to remind them that life too has cycles and we can begin anew – the Sacrament of Reconciliation allows us to seek forgiveness and start anew, just as nature does each spring!

Parenting Tip 150

Frenemies is a term used to describe a relationship where people are friendly, but share an underlying dislike or rivalry. Unfortunately, sibling relationships can often end up in this category. As far back as Cain and Abel we see sibling rivalry impacting relationships. Parents can prevent sibling rivalry by remembering the following: allow each child to develop different interests; praise each child equally for their different gifts and talents; spend individual time with each child; refrain from taking sides in an argument, but help children to work it out between themselves; engage in fun family activities together; pray for each other by name. Parents can indeed help reduce the amount of sibling rivalry in their children's lives and help them to find love and support from their siblings that can last a lifetime.

Parenting Tip 151

Summer should be a time of relaxation, slowed schedules and time spent together as a family. All three of these are essential elements for good mental health for all family members, including children. So, together spend time outdoors, play games, cook or bake and pray because these are the moments that will strengthen your family bond. Take a holiday from social media and devices while doing so, which can help to prevent the negative mental health issues in children they are known to produce. Renew your commitment to in person, device free time together this summer and watch your children thrive.

Parenting Tip 152

As summer ends and school begins, it is time to get back to a more scheduled lifestyle. As you organize your family, remember that our priorities are what we give the most time to and what we schedule time for, so do not forget to schedule family time, prayer time and Church attendance into your schedule. Place these items on the calendar because they matter to your whole family and seeing them there raises up their importance!

Parenting Tip 153

October is the month we celebrate Thanksgiving, a time to reflect on all God has blessed us with in our world. The harvest is evident at this time of year, but remind your children of the intricate way God created the worlds so humans could live. Remind them that they are part of his creative plan and their gifts and talents are life food for the world to thrive. And remind that that God ensured they would have faith and family to support them throughout their live. There is so much to be thankful for and an attitude of gratitude has provide positive impact on our emotional and mental health, so help your children give thanks for all they have been given!

Parenting Tip 154

Underlying the relationship between parents and children is a depth of love hard to describe. Our children are an important part of who we are and we have the most influence on who they become. One of the ways we can help our children navigate the trials they experience as children, is to remind them of all the good they have in their lives. Together buy a book to serve as a journal and have them write one thing they are grateful for (anything they choose!) each day for a month, but do not let them write the same thing twice! At the end of the month, sit together and look at all the good things in their lives. Seeing it in print and thinking about it will help them focus more on the good and not the challenging. Encourage them to continue the habit – perhaps by doing the same thing yourself!

Parenting Tip 155

Children love Valentine's Day because of the exchange of cards and little parties at school. It is a great time to talk to them about what real love is: giving, receiving, caring, thinking of the other before self and putting others needs above your own. Your children will develop deeper and healthier relationships now with this understanding. They will especially know what to look for when they grow up and find someone to love in their future. Do not forget to remind them that God loves them completely and unconditionally, so they can and should pray and talk to him about their life anytime.

Parenting Tip #156

Vacations or 'Stay-cations' are a wonderful time to step away from the busy-ness of everyday family living and reconnect with each other. As you laugh and play this March break, do not forget to stay connected to your faith. Be the family that plays and prays together. Take some time to talk about Lent and how it leads us to the great celebration at Easter!

Parenting Tip #157

Parents are the most influential people in their children's lives. Even in the teen years, when peers become so important, parents are still influencing their children in almost every way. As their role model it is important to ask yourself if what your children are seeing and hearing from you is how you would like them to act and speak. Do you speak kindly to family, friends and strangers? Do you limit the amount of time you engage on your phone and/or tablet/computer? Do you show them that you rely on God through prayer, attending Mass and talking about times God has helped you through? Your children are watching you to know how to act and behave, so look inward at how you act and speak and be sure you are the person you want your child to become.

Parenting Tip #158

The data continues to grow on the dangers the internet can pose to children and on the benefit of time spent in play, both indoors and outdoors. For younger children this means play that uses their imaginations and does not include the internet. For older children, it may include such things as playing board games, doing puzzles and hiking. Whatever the age of your children, time without the internet supports good growth. So, spend time playing as a family and you will see the positive benefits for you children!

Parenting Tip #159

As summer approaches and we plan for holidays, camps and childcare, remember to ensure that family time makes a strong appearance in your calendar. These years with our children are about forming a foundation both for their futures and for our adult relationship with them. Don't let too many scheduled activities remove the most important one, time spent together as a family. In addition, remember that praying and attending Mass together are great bonding moments as well. (From: Teresa Hartnett, Family Ministry Office; 905-528-7988 ext. 2250)

Parenting Tip #160

The first day of July starts with a celebration of Canada and all that our country has to offer. It is a wonderful month to celebrate summer with family and friends and a great time to remember to pray for our country, be thankful for our freedom to celebrate our Catholic faith and to look at the many riches our country has to offer us. So, speak to your children about their wonderful country, about the beauty God has created here for them and about the many blessings they experience as Canadians. It is easy to dwell on the negative, but teaching our children to have an attitude of gratitude for their blessings makes for a healthier frame of mind! (From: Teresa Hartnett, Family Ministry Office; 905-528-7988 ext. 2250)