

## AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE FOR PARENTS HEADED FOR TROUBLE

This picture of a PARENTS HEADED FOR TROUBLE is merely a composite sketch, not a comprehensive description (cf. <http://www.parentleadership.com/signs.html>). Certainly there are gradations among parents and families; some parents will show some of these characteristics, but not all of them. Nonetheless, what follows below is a sort of collage of those unfortunate “normal” homes where children are poised for later trouble. That is, if you looked back to the childhood of many troubled adolescents and young adults, as described above, what traits of their family lives would you see over and over again with striking regularity?

1) PARENTS HEADED FOR TROUBLE live consumerist lives. These parents live divided lives. They live as producers at work but consumers at home. In fact, to their children they seem to work only in order to consume. Their home, far removed as it is from the real-life world of responsible adult achievement and ethical interpersonal dealings, is a place arrayed with entertainment gadgets, a site devoted to comfort, relaxation, and amusement. But this universe of comfortable delight is all that their children see—and for children, “seeing is believing.” This cocoon of pleasant escapism wholly envelopes children and shapes their sole experience with life. It becomes the ambiance within which they fashion their deepest attitudes and habits, indeed their whole outlook on life: “Life is all about pleasure.”

*Is my home filled with gadgets? An entertainment center? Do I have to have all the latest gadgets? Do I get upset at children for interrupting my entertainment time? Do I provide my children with gadgets to keep them occupied? Is recreation greater than entertainment in our home? Do I recreate with my children? Do I try to escape my duties at home with excessive work? Do I recreate more with my friends than within my family? Am I reluctant parent? Am I working to provide for my family or striving after ideal pleasures? Are we raising our children or are they being formed by the movies they watch and music they listen to? Are they learning true reality or fictional ideals? Nature abhors a vacuum. We judge a tree by its fruit, so also our parenting by our children.*

2) PARENTS HEADED FOR TROUBLE, being self-absorbed and centered mainly on the present, seldom think about their children’s futures—that is, what sort of men and women their children will grow up to become. Their time horizon stretches, at most, only a few months or couple of years ahead. Almost never do they picture their children as grown men and women in their late 20’s with job and family responsibilities of their own. When the parents do think of their kids’ futures, they think in terms of career, not character. They think of what their children will *do*, not what they will *be*.

*Is my house dedicated to raising up good citizens of heaven first and foremost, and then of earth second of all? Can my children do basic household repairs? Cook a decent meal? Work at new places to learn new skills? Do they have wholesome hobbies? Do I ask regularly what they did today and what they learned? Do we dress, speak, and act as modestly as we want our children to? Do we encourage them and*

*show our pleasure at their good deeds? Do we have unreasonable expectations of them? Does it seem they can never do the right thing? Have they stopped trying?*

3) PARENTS HEADED FOR TROUBLE seem to expect—in fact, utterly take for granted—that their children will naturally grow up OK as long as they're kept busily amused and shielded (more or less) from outside influences. In other words, they think that adult-level ethics, conscience, and sound judgment will just gradually form in their children in a natural and unaided way, along with the children's physical stature. When the parents think of character at all, they think it's something to be *maintained* in children, not *formed from scratch*.

*Do I respect my elders? Priests, parents, bosses, leaders...? Do I explain in a timely way the moral truths of the Faith? Do I take advantage of those catechetical moments in life to teach them right from wrong? Or do I wait too long? Until it is too late? Do I let them educate themselves? Do I read what they read? Study books together? Do I spend time alone with my child in order to give them a chance to unburden their conscience? As parents do we get in fights or yelling matches in front of our children? If so, do we make up in front of them? Do we show them how to fix mistakes by making up in front of the children? Or do we run away? Do we teach our children how to endure difficult situations and work through them reasonably? Am I insulating my children from the world, the flesh and the devil, or isolating them and not properly preparing them for the battles ahead? Do we teach them to speak and interact with others politely, especially those established in authority? Do we teach them to respect others property? Do I let siblings of the opposite sex share a room? Do I teach them how to have ordered relationships with others by having an ordered relationship with my spouse? The amount of harmony in a marriage often affects self worth in the children. Do I work harmoniously with my spouse?*

4) PARENTS HEADED FOR TROUBLE come down to the children's level, as indeed all parents should—but (and here's the point) they *stay* there. By their own evident devotion to a "hassle-free" existence at home, off the job, they neglect to raise their children to grown-up levels of responsible thinking and acting. They do little to prepare the children for later life and lead them toward responsible service. Indeed, their children seem to have no concept what "adulthood" means—except for what they see in movies and T.V. dramas. The parents seem clueless that they have a job to do, an action to take, a change to make in their children's minds, hearts, and wills: to strengthen each child's conscience and character for life.

*Do I teach them as a parent not as a friend or fellow traveler? Do they have a healthy fear of us? Will they come to us in a crisis because we will understand, or because we will really help them? Are we raising the children, or are the children raising us? Are we thinking and acting responsibly in front of the children? Are we seeking our own fulfillment and self indulgence as parents...loving them for what they can do for us? Are we trying not to punish our children because we feel our own parents were too strict? Are we going to the other extreme and taking out our anger on the children? Are we using our children to provide something we never received in our own childhood--filling some hole in my life? Do I try to keep my child as a child, or do I strive to form them into respectable and responsible men and women? Do I hang on to*

*my children too tightly as they approach adulthood? Do I teach them to make responsible decisions, or do I micromanage their life?*

5) PARENTS HEADED FOR TROUBLE readily give into children's wishes and "feelings," even when they judge that this might be a mistake. Very often in family life they permit what they disapprove of. That is, they let children's pleas and whining override their parental misgivings. The parents are moved by their children's smiles, not their welfare, and so they will give in on many issues to avoid a confrontational "scene." Unwittingly, through their example of giving in, these parents teach their children to let strong desires, or even whims, routinely override judgments of conscience. So the children fail to distinguish between wants and needs; to the children, wants *are* needs. As a result, "feelings," not conscience, become a guide for action. (So, what happens later when the kids are tempted by the powerfully pleasurable sensations of drugs, alcohol, promiscuous sex? What is there to hold them back?)

*Do I act to just keep the peace? Avoid confrontation? Do I end up just saying yes to all their requests? Do I allow my children to contact and be friends with whomever they want? Do I teach them to love in a self-indulgent way? Do I teach them how to say 'No' to themselves? That one must merit in order to receive a reward? Do I teach them there are negative consequences to misdeeds? Do I follow through, or just give a never ending list of threats, then excuse them afterwards? Do I let my child go on sleepovers without one parent being present? Do I let them spend time alone in the company of the opposite sex? Do we keep a reasonable daily routine? Do we let our children stay up as late as they want? Alone? Do we let them sleep-in all they want? Do we let them spend excessive time in the bathroom? Do we let them eat whenever they want, or do we have established meal times? Do we let them eat whatever they want, or do they learn to eat what has been made?*

6) Among PARENTS HEADED FOR TROUBLE the FATHER is a weak moral figure in the home. He does not teach right from wrong in a confident, purposeful way, and he does nothing to prepare his older children for their later lives outside the home, especially in moral matters. He defers "children's things" to his wife. To his kids, he appears mostly as an amiable, somewhat dull figure, even a sort of older sibling. In family life, the kids see him wrapped up entirely in his own leisure activities (like watching T.V., playing sports) and minor repairs. Since they never see him work, they have no idea how he earns his living, or even what this term means. Moreover, he seldom shows much outward respect and gratitude toward his wife—so she, too, seems a weak figure to the children.

*Do I correct in a timely manner or store it up until too late? Do I see my children as an extension of myself -- carrying on my name? Am I giving them a name worth carrying on? Am I giving them an example worth living up to? Do I confirm my children in their adulthood with due compliments, encouragement, and attention? Do I show that I love my wife, even in difficult moments? Do I speak badly of my wife? In the presence of my children? Do I let them speak disrespectfully of her? To her? Do I make derogatory "jokes" about her, or laugh when my child does? Do I support her*

*commands, or do I disagree with her in front of them? Do I let them play one against the other? Do I take my wife out without the children on occasion? Do I let my daughter play like the boys, or do I confirm her in modest femininity? Do I let my spouse coddle my son, or do I confirm him in chivalrous manhood?*

7) PARENTS HEADED FOR TROUBLE are minimal in the practice of religion. Though the family may attend Sunday Mass regularly, this is done as thoughtless social routine. Family life includes little or no prayer, except maybe before meals. So children never witness their parents living a sense of responsibility toward God or some strong internalized ethic. "God" is just a word (sometimes an expletive), not a person, certainly not a friend. In the children's eyes, parents do not seem answerable to anyone or anything, except a relentlessly busy calendar.

*Do I lead prayers? Do I insist on daily prayers, especially the Holy Rosary? Is the Sacred Heart of Jesus enthroned in my home? Do I attend devotions? Make pilgrimages? Teach children to give alms to the Church and the poor? Do I acknowledge Christ to be the King of our family? Does my family sit together at Mass? Am I a distraction to others by whispering, playing with, or touching my children at Mass? Do we have times of silence in our home to teach the children how to be silent at Mass? Do we teach our children the importance of behaving well in sacred places? Do I keep my child quiet by feeding them snacks while assisting at Holy Mass instead of taking them outside? Do we wait to use the restroom in the middle of Mass? Do we make sure they use the restroom before Mass or stop drinking long enough before Mass begins? Do we wait to use the restroom in the middle of Mass? Do we make sure they use the restroom before Mass or stop drinking long enough before Mass begins? Do I leave things as I found them, whether it be the pews or the restrooms or other places? Do I leave the cleaning up after my family or myself to others? Do I let my children go unmonitored after Mass?*

8) PARENTS HEADED FOR TROUBLE watch television indiscriminately and they allow "adult entertainment" into the home. Though they may restrict, more or less, their children's access to inappropriate material, they are driving home a powerful message: "When you're old enough, anything goes." Consequently, to the children, the right-wrong dichotomy becomes strictly a matter of age: "Whatever's wrong for kids is OK for grown-ups, so just wait till I turn \_\_\_\_\_!"

*As the leader so those who are being led. Am I acting now as I want my children to act when they are grown? Do I use crass words or expressions? In their presence? Do I have age limits that I allow my child to watch a movie rated \_\_\_ when they turn \_\_\_ years old? Do I make or laugh at inappropriate jokes? Do I listen to discordant music? Do I misuse alcohol? Do I drink socially in recreation, or to be "cool"? Do I make jokes or brag about drinking large or excessive amounts? Do I treat my spouse as I would have my child treat them as adults?*

