

AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE FOR CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE

This picture of a CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE is just a composite sketch, not a comprehensive description (cf. <http://www.parentleadership.com/signs.html>). Certainly there are gradations among children; some children will show some of these characteristics, but not all of them. Nonetheless, over and over again, the features listed here show up in the personal histories of troubled adolescents and young adults who have come--we must stress this --from apparently normal homes.

- 1) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE are habituated to pleasant sensations. They like to be liked, and in fact they expect to be liked no matter what they do. Since they're used to treating adults (including their parents) as equals, they appear naïvely lacking in respectful good manners. With some troubled exceptions here and there, they seem entirely carefree. Indeed most of them really are carefree, for now.

Do I expect to be treated as an adult? Do I act as if I am an adult by placing myself on an equal footing with the adults in my life by how I speak to them or work with them? Do I interrupt them? Demand that they stop everything to give me their undivided attention? Do I lack good manners? Do I try to help the adults in my life carry the burdens of the day?

- 2) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE have a low tolerance for discomfort or even inconvenience. They are horrified by physical pain, however slight, or even the threat of it. They successfully plead and badger and stall their way out of unpleasant commitments and "hassles" such as promises and previous agreements, music lessons, homework, chores, appointments, deadlines.

Do I try to get out of my responsibilities? Do I complain about what is distasteful to me? Do I harass or badger my parents until I get my way?

- 3) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE believe that just about anything may be done for a laugh. If a prank or ridiculing remark toward someone amuses them and their peers, they indulge in it no matter who gets hurt. They think their entitlement to fun must shove aside other people's rights and feelings. Indeed, the existence of other people's rights and feelings almost never enters their minds. Their outlook on life remains unchanged from infancy: "Me first!"

Do I do anything for a laugh? Do I say I am sorry when I hurt others? Do I try to make up for past wrongs to others?

- 4) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE enjoy an abundance of spending money and leisure time. As a fixed habit, they overindulge in soft drinks, sweets, and junk food. They spend countless hours wholly absorbed in electronic sensations (computer games, television, the

Internet) and other types of amusement. They are generally free to consume whatever they want whenever they want it, and this they do.

Do I spend much of my time in front of the computer without a good reason? Do I seek to escape my troubles by seeking electronic sensations?

- 5) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE show little or no respect for people outside the family: guests, their parents' friends, teachers, salespeople, the elderly. They seldom, if ever, display good manners in public. *Please* and *thank you* are missing from their speech. On birthdays or holidays, children rip through a mound of presents, but they neglect to write or call to say "thank you" to relatives--and see no reason to. In some instances, children may be superficially pleasant to people (as long as this costs them nothing) but have zero concern for others' needs or interests.

Am I polite to adults? To visitors and guests? Do I say thank you and please? Do I thank those who have given me things? Done things for me?

- 6) Ironically, for all the parents' efforts to provide a pleasant home, CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE hold little or no respect for them. The kids view their parents as "nice," and they'll admit they "like" Mom and Dad most of the time. But they simply do not esteem their parents as strong, and therefore, people to imitate. When asked whom they do admire, they rattle off a long list of entertainment figures, especially comedians, rock performers or sports heroes.

Do I thank God for my parents? Do I let my parents know that I love them? Do I seek to do things for my parents without being told? Do I look upon my parents as people to imitate?

- 7) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE know next to nothing about their parents' personal histories, and nothing at all about grandparents and forebears. So they have no sense of family history and moral continuity, that is, how they are the latest in a long line of mutually loving people who struggled, often heroically, to serve each other and stick together through good times and bad.

How do I show my parents that I love them? Do I converse with my parents or do I avoid talking with them? Have I pondered on all the sacrifices my parents have made for me? Have I thanked my parents lately for all they do for me?

- 8) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE have no heroes in their lives, no real people or historical or literary figures who surpassed themselves in service to others and, by fulfilling duties, accomplished great deeds. In the absence of heroes to imitate, the kids admire and pattern themselves after coarsely freakish media "celebrities" and make-believe

cartoonish figures. (As someone wise once said, "If kids have no heroes, they'll follow after clowns.")

Do I look for my heroes among those who are in heaven, the Saints, or among the sinners of this world? Who are my heroes and Why?

- 9) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE don't care about causing embarrassment to the family. Often they don't even understand what that might mean, for they have no framework for grasping what's shameful. They are unmoved by any cultivated sense of "family honor." If children's dress and public behavior cause shame to the parents, that's just too bad.

Do I work at representing my family well in public? Do I dress modestly? Do I seek to attract others by how I dress or act in public?

- 10) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE complain and whine about situations that can't be helped: bad weather, reasonable delays, physical discomfort, moderately heavy workloads, personality differences, and the like. Their most common word of complaint is "boring." Since their lives at home are micromanaged rather than directed, they're accustomed to having their problems solved by grown-ups. They've found through experience that if they hold out long enough, someone will eventually step in to make their troubles go away. Consequently they learn to escape problems, not solve them. They learn to shun discomfort, not endure it.

Do I try to get my parents to do all the hard work in my life? Do I complain about what cannot be helped? Am I bored with my life? My family? My room? My studies? Do I keep putting off my work until my parents finally come in and save the day?

- 11) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE have no serious hobbies except television watching, computer games, surfing the Web, and listening to music (mostly rhythmic noise). Their lives seem entirely plugged in to electronic devices and they don't know what to do without them. Their thinking is dominated by the entertainment culture; in some senses, they *believe* in it. They know the words to dozens of songs and commercials, but they know nothing of the Ten Commandments.

What are my hobbies? Do I make electronic devices my hobby? Are my hobbies disturbing to others (make noise and take too much room)? Do I force myself on others through my hobbies and favorite things to do? Do I escape from the family by putting on headphones?

- 12) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE (even older ones and teens) tend to form opinions by impulse and vague impressions. They are scarcely ever pressed to rely on reasons and factual evidence for their judgments. Thus they're easily swayed by flattery, emotional appeals,

and peer-group pressures. They fail to recognize the traps in advertising, pop culture, and politics when they see it. They follow the crowd wherever it goes. They loosely sense that something is “cool,” but they cannot express why.

What are my reasons for my being who I am? Wearing what I do? Acting as I do? Are these reasons compatible with Christ Jesus and His Church? Would my patron saint do these things?

- 13) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE never ask the question “Why?” except to defy directions from rightful authority. They are intellectually dull, even inert, showing little curiosity about life outside their family-school-playground universe. In school, moreover, they’re often incorrigibly poor spellers and sloppy writers. That is, they are careless in work and do not take correction seriously. For them, nearly all enjoyment comes from escapist amusement, not from work well done, serious accomplishment, fulfillment of duty, serving others, or personal goals achieved through purposeful effort. If a task isn’t “fun,” they’re not interested.

Do I question my parents when I do not like what they ask of me? Do I take correction from my parents well? Or do I talk back to them? Do I only work at having fun? Or do I try to do what is right or what needs to be done no matter how hard? Do I talk about my parents in a bad way to my brothers and sisters?

- 14) CHILDREN HEADED FOR TROUBLE have little sense of time. Since they hardly ever have to wait for something they want, much less earn it, they have unrealistic expectations about the time needed to complete a task. They estimate either too much or too little. Consequently, large tasks are put off too long or small jobs appear mountainous. Even older children approaching high-school age have virtually no concept of deadline or of working steadily within a self-imposed time frame. The children seem to drift along in a free-floating, ever-present *now*--and this state of mind continues well into adolescence and even young adulthood.

Do I put off doing what I am called to do? Am I constantly behind? Are my parents constantly badgering me to do my work? Or do I try to get my work done before being asked?