

DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCES on the FAMILY

A CATHOLIC GUIDE TO FAMILY HAPPINESS

The Sixth in a Series on Family Happiness

CHAPTER EIGHT

Protect Your Family From Destructive Influences

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YOU are about to send your little boy to school, and it is pouring rain. How do you handle the situation? Do you let him go skipping out the door without any rain gear? Or do you pile on so many layers of protective clothing that he can hardly move? Of course, you do neither. You give him just what is needed to keep him dry.

In a similar way, parents must find a balanced way to protect their family from the destructive influences that rain down on them from many sources - the entertainment industry, the media, peers, and at times even the schools. Some parents do little or nothing to shield their family. Others, viewing nearly all outside influences as harmful, are so restrictive that the children feel as if they were suffocating. Is a balance possible?

FAMILY HAPPINESS

Yes, it is. Being extreme is ineffective and can invite disaster. (Ecclesiastes 7:16-17 [verses 17 -18 in the Vulgate] says: “Be not over just: [by an excessive rigour in censuring the ways of God in bearing with the wicked,] and be not more wise than is necessary, lest you become stupid. Be not overmuch wicked: [That is, lest by the greatness of your sin you leave no room for mercy:] and be not foolish, lest you die before your time.”) But how do Christian parents find the right balance in protecting their family? Consider three areas: education, association, and recreation.

Review Questions:

- (a) From what sources do destructive influences that threaten the family come?
- (b) What balance do parents need in protecting their family?

WHO WILL TEACH YOUR CHILDREN?

Christian parents place a high value on education. They know that schooling helps children to read, write, and communicate, as well as to solve problems. It should also teach them how to learn. The skills children acquire in school can help them to succeed despite the challenges of today's world. Additionally, a good education may help them to perform superior work. – See Proverbs 22:29.

Review Question: How should Christian parents view education?

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY FROM DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCES

However, school also brings children together with other children -many of whom have distorted views. For example, consider their views on sex and morals. In a secondary school in Ghana, a sexually promiscuous girl used to advise her fellow students about sex. They listened to her eagerly, even though her ideas were full of nonsense that she had gleaned from pornographic literature. Some of the girls experimented with her advice. As a result, one girl got pregnant out of wedlock and what is even more terrible she died of a self-induced abortion. This tragedy, involving the death of mother and defenceless pre-born child, grew from this evil advice.

Sad to say, some of the sexual misinformation at school comes, not from children, but from teachers. (Even sadder, sometimes our own Catholic schools have, at times, let parents down in this regard. Parents, be on your guard! Take care!) Many parents are dismayed when schools teach children about sex without presenting information on moral standards and responsibility. Said one mother of a 12-year-old girl: "We live in a very religious, conservative area, with a high Catholic population, and yet right in the local high school, they're handing out condoms to the kids!" She and her husband became concerned when they learned that their daughter was getting sexual propositions from boys her own age. How can parents protect their family from such wrong influences?

Review Question: How may children at school be exposed to distorted information on sexual matters?

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Is it best to shield children from any mention of sexual matters? No. It is better to teach your children about sex yourself. (Go and read Proverbs 5:1 for an idea of how devout and wise Jews imparted some of their instructions to their children.) True, in parts of Europe, Australia, and North America, many parents shy away from this subject. Similarly, in some African lands, parents rarely discuss sex with their children. "It's not part of African culture to do so," says a father in Liberia. Some parents feel that to teach children about sex is to give them ideas that will lead them to commit immorality! But what is God's view?

Review Question: How may sexual misinformation be best countered?

GOD'S VIEW OF SEX

The Bible makes it clear that there is nothing shameful about discussing sex in a proper context. Sex itself is a gift from God. In Israel, God's people were told to gather together, including their "little ones," their children, to listen to the reading aloud of the Mosaic Law. (See Deuteronomy 31: 10-12; Joshua 8:35)

The Law frankly mentioned a number of sexual matters, including menstruation, seminal emissions, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, incest, and bestiality.

(See Leviticus 15:16-19; and 18: 6, &18:22-23; Deuteronomy 22:22)

After such readings parents no doubt had much to explain to their inquisitive youngsters.

There are passages in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Proverbs that convey loving parental counsel on the dangers of sexual immorality. These verses show that immorality may be tempting at times. (Proverbs 5:3; & 6:24-25; & 7:14-21) But they teach that it is wrong and has disastrous consequences, and they offer guidance to help young people avoid immoral ways. (Proverbs 5:1-14, & 21-23; and 6: 27-35; and 7:22-27) Furthermore, immorality is contrasted with the satisfaction of sexual pleasure in its proper setting, within marriage. (Proverbs 5:15-20) What a fine model of teaching for parents to follow!

Review Question: What fine information on sexual matters is found in the Bible?

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Does such teaching lead children to commit immorality? On the contrary, the Bible teaches: "The just shall be delivered by knowledge." (Proverbs 11:9) Do you not want to rescue your children from this world's influences? One father said: "Ever since the children were very young, we've tried to be totally frank with them when it comes to sex. That way, when they hear other children talking about sex, they're not curious. There's no big mystery."

Review Question: Why should giving children godly knowledge about sex not lead them to commit immorality?

As noted in earlier parts of this series, sex education should start early. When teaching little children to name body parts, do not skip over their private parts as if these were somehow shameful. Teach them the proper names for these. As time passes, lessons about privacy and boundaries are essential. Preferably both parents should teach the children

that these parts of the body are special, generally not to be touched by, or exposed to, others, and are never to be discussed in a bad way. As children grow older, they should be informed as to how a man and a woman come together to conceive a child. By the time that their own bodies begin to enter puberty, they should already be well aware of the changes to be expected. As was discussed in “*Child Rearing*” Chapter 5 in this series, such education can also help to protect children from sexual abuse.

- See Proverbs 2:10-14.

Review Question: How can children be taught progressively about the intimate matters of life?

HOMEWORK THAT PARENTS HAVE

FAMILY HAPPINESS

Parents need to be ready to counteract other false ideas that may be taught at school - worldly philosophies, such as atheistic evolution, excessive nationalism which has become idol-worship, or the idea that no truths are absolute. (On worldly philosophies First Corinthians 3:19 says: “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written: ‘I will catch the wise in their own craftiness’. [Job 5:13] And again: ‘The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain’ [Psalm 94:11 or 93: 11 in the Vulgate].” Compare Genesis 1:27 which says: “God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.” Leviticus 26:1 condemns all idol-worship when it says: “I am the Lord your God: you shall not make to yourselves any idol or graven thing, neither shall you erect pillars, nor set up a sculptured stone in your land, to adore it: for I am the Lord your God.” Jesus says in John 4:24: “God is a spirit; and they that adore him, must adore him in spirit and in truth.” In John 17:17 Our Lord (who, in fact is Truth Himself) prays for His followers: “Sanctify them in truth. Your word is truth.”) Moreover many sincere school officials attach undue importance to further education. While the matter of supplementary education is a personal choice, some teachers hold that it is the only route to any personal success. – Many of them overlook the truth expressed in Psalm 146:3-6 [Psalm 145: 3-6 in the Vulgate]: “Put not your trust in princes: in the children of men, in whom there is no salvation. His spirit [or breath] shall go forth, and he shall return into his earth: in that day all their thoughts shall perish. Blessed is he who has the God of Jacob for his helper, whose hope is in the Lord his God: who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all things that are in them.”

Review Question: What distorted views may often be taught in schools? What is taught in your school?

If parents are to counteract wrong or distorted teachings, they have to know just what instruction their children are receiving. So parents, remember that you have homework too! Show a genuine interest in your children's schooling. Talk with them after school. Ask what they are learning, what they like most, what they find most challenging. Look over homework assignments, notes, and test results. Try to get to know their teachers. Let teachers know that you appreciate their work and that you want to be of help in any way you can.

Review Question: How can children attending school be protected from wrong ideas?

YOUR CHILDREN'S FRIENDS

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY FROM DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCES

“Where on earth did you learn that?” How many parents have asked that question, horrified at something that their child has said or done and that seems completely out of character? And how often does the answer involve some new friend at school or in the neighborhood? Yes, companions affect us profoundly, whether we are young or old. The apostle Paul warned: “Be not seduced: ‘Evil communications (and bad friends and associations) corrupt good manners’.” (1 Corinthians 15:33. He is quoting a saying of the Greek Menander. Proverbs 13:20 says: “He that walks with the wise, shall be wise: a friend of fools shall become like to them.”) Youths in particular are susceptible to peer pressure. They tend to be uncertain about themselves and may at times feel overwhelmed by a desire to please and impress their associates. How vital it is, then, that they choose good friends!

Review Question: Why is it vital that godly children choose good friends?

As every parent knows, children will not always choose well: they need some guidance. It is not a matter of choosing their friends for them. Rather, as they grow, teach them discernment and help them to see what qualities they should value in friends. The main quality is a love of God our Father, of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of doing what is right in God’s eyes. (Mark 12:28-31 records: “There came one of the scribes that had heard them reasoning together, and seeing that Jesus had answered them well, asked him which was the first commandment of all. And Jesus answered him: ‘The first commandment of all is, Hear, O Israel: the Lord your God is one God. And you shall love the Lord your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole

mind, and with your whole strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like to it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these'.”)

Teach them to love and respect those who possess honesty, kindness, generosity, diligence. During the family prayer time and during family Bible study, help children to recognize such qualities in Bible characters and then to find the same traits in others in the parish and in the Church. Set the example by using the same criteria in choosing your own friends.

Review Question: How can parents guide their children in choosing friends?

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Do you know who your children's friends are? Why not have your children bring them home so that you can meet them? You might also ask your children what other children think about these friends. Are they known for demonstrating personal integrity or for living a double life? If the latter is true, help your children to reason on why such association could hurt them.

(Psalm 26:4-5 & 9-12 [Psalm 25: 4-5, & 9-12 in the Vulgate] says: “I have not sat with the council of vanity: neither will I go in with the doers of unjust things. I have hated the assembly of the malignant; and with the wicked I will not sit. . . Take not away my soul, O God, with the wicked: nor my life with blood-thirsty men: in whose hands are iniquities: their right hand is filled with bribes. But as for me, I have walked in my innocence: redeem me, and have mercy on me. My foot hath stood in the direct way: in the churches [assemblies] I will bless You, O Lord.”) If you notice undesirable changes in your child's behavior, dress, attitude, or speech, you may need to have a talk about his or her friends. Your child may be spending time with a friend who is exerting a negative influence. - Compare Genesis 34:1-2 where the story of the teenager, Dinah and her dreadful rape, is sometimes attributed to the foolishness and licentiousness of her female companions.

Review Question: How may parents watch their children's choice of friends?

Yet it is not enough simply to teach your children to avoid bad associates. Help them to find good ones. One father says: "We would always try to substitute. So when the school wanted our son on a particular football team, my wife and I sat down with him and discussed why that wouldn't be a good idea - because of the new companions that would be involved in this particular team. But then we suggested getting some of the other children in the parish congregation and taking all of them to the park to play ball. And that worked out fine."

Wise parents help their children to find good friends and then to enjoy wholesome recreation with them. For many parents, though, this matter of recreation presents challenges of its own.

Review Question: Besides warning against bad associates, what practical help can parents give?

AN EXAMPLE HE DID NOT FEEL DEPRIVED

Christian parents Andrew and his wife, Margaret, both excellent Catholics, organize gatherings at their home from time to time. They make sure that the gatherings are well supervised and of a manageable size. They have good reason to believe that their children benefit.

Margaret relates: "The mother of a classmate of my six-year-old son, Peter, approached me to say that she felt sorry for Peter because he sat apart and didn't join in class Halloween activities and parties. (Our Family had decided that as good Catholics we should pray for the souls of the dead on the evening of All Saints Day [All Hallows], but the school activities being organized smacked too much of mere superstition and a peculiar fascination with demons and witches which had been imported from some American text-book. Thus, young Peter was asked by us not to join in the school 'celebrations'.) I said to her: 'I really appreciate that you care about my son that way. It says a lot about the kind of person you are. And probably there is nothing I could say that would convince you that Peter doesn't feel that he's missing out.' She agreed. So I said: 'Then please, for your own sake, set your mind at ease and ask Peter yourself how he feels.' When I was not around, she asked Peter, 'Don't you mind missing out on these nice parties the school has each year?' He looked up at her, surprised, and said: 'Do you think that ten minutes, a few cupcakes, and a song make a party? You should come to my house and see what a real party is like!' That's what he told her!" The boy's innocent enthusiasm made it clear-he did not feel that he was deprived or missing out!

WHAT KIND OF RECREATION?

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY FROM DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCES

Does the Bible condemn having fun? Far from it! The Bible says that there is 'a time to laugh . . . and a time to dance [or 'skip about']' (Ecclesiastes 3:4) [The Hebrew word here rendered "to laugh" can, in other forms, be rendered "to play," "to offer some amusement," "to celebrate," or even "to have fun".

God's people in ancient Israel enjoyed music and dancing, games, and riddles. Jesus Christ attended a large wedding feast, (See John 2:1-2) and "a great feast [a big reception feast]" that Matthew Levi put on for him. (See Luke 5:29.) Clearly, Jesus was no killjoy. May laughter and fun never ever, ever, be viewed as sins in your household! In saying this, the Catholic Church most definitively opposes the heresies of Calvinism, Puritanism and Jansenism – heresies which portray Christianity as something dour and disagreeable to the very nature that was created by God Himself.

Review Question: What Bible examples show that it is certainly not sinful for families to have fun?

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First Timothy 1:11 tells us of the "sound doctrine which is according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which hath been committed to my trust." Now another legitimate translation of the Greek word used for 'blessed' is 'happy'. So this verse is telling us that God, the True God, our Father in Heaven, is "the happy God." So worship of the Lord God our Father should be a source of delight, not something that casts a shadow of joylessness over life. (Compare Deuteronomy 16:15 where the Hebrews are told to have a seven day feast! and to be filled with joy!) Children are naturally exuberant and full of energy that can be released in play and recreation. Well-chosen recreation is more than fun. It is a way for a child to learn and mature. A family head is responsible to provide for his household's needs in everything, including recreation. However, balance is required.

Review Question: What should parents bear in mind in providing recreation for the family?

Since Our Lord Jesus ascended into Heaven, we, the Christians of Christ's Mystical Body are privileged to live in the time of the "last days". In these troubled "last days," human society is filled with people who are "lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God," just as was spoken of in the Bible.

(2 Timothy 3:1-5 tells us: "Know also this, that, in the last days, shall come dangerous times. Men shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, haughty, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, wicked, without affection, without peace, slanderers, incontinent, unmerciful, without kindness, traitors, stubborn, puffed up, and lovers of pleasures more than of God: Having an appearance indeed of godliness, but denying the power thereof. Now these avoid!") For many, recreation is the main thing in life. There is so much entertainment available that it can easily crowd out more important things. Further, much modern entertainment features sexual immorality, violence, drug abuse, and other grossly harmful practices.

(Proverbs 3:31 says: "Envy not the unjust man, and do not follow his ways.")

Review Question: What pitfalls exist in recreation today'?

HANDY HINT

Well-chosen recreation, such as a family camping trip, can help children to learn and to grow spiritually.

What can be done to safeguard youngsters from harmful entertainment?

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY FROM DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCES

Parents need to set boundaries and restrictions. But more than that, they need to teach their children how to judge what recreation is harmful and to know how much is too much. Such training takes time and effort. Consider an example. A father of two boys noticed that his older son was listening to a new radio station quite frequently. So while driving his truck to work one day, the father tuned in to the same station. Occasionally he stopped and jotted down the lyrics of certain songs. Later he sat down with his sons and discussed what he had heard. He asked viewpoint questions, beginning with "What do you think?" and listened patiently to their answers. After reasoning on the matter using the Bible, and their understanding of the Church's teaching on the Ten Commandments, the boys agreed not to listen to that station.

Review Question: How can parents train their children to make wise decisions as to recreation?

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Wise Christian parents in loving Catholic homes check the music, TV programs, videotapes, comic books, video games, and movies that interest their children. They look at the art on the cover, the lyrics, and the packaging, and they read newspaper reviews and watch excerpts. Many are shocked at some of the "entertainment" directed at children today. Those who wish to protect their children from unclean influences sit down with the family and discuss the dangers, using the Bible and Bible-based publications produced by its true interpreter, our Catholic Church. One resource you might examine is the website:

[Catholic Books for Catholic Youth and Teens from CatholicMom.com](http://www.catholicmom.com/Youth%20Books.htm)

<http://www.catholicmom.com/Youth%20Books.htm>

Another good site to examine is the library of books which can be found at Mother Angelica's EWTN site on the Internet.

<http://www.ewtnreligiouscatalogue.com/Books/cid=526/shop.axd/Category>

or

<http://www.ewtn.com/>

Good Catholic Bookshops have many similar books and youth magazines. The "Annals Australasia" magazine is just one example of the many fine youth and general interest magazines produced by various groups within the Catholic Church. You can find their contact details at <http://jloughnan.tripod.com/annals.htm>

When parents set firm limits, being consistent and reasonable, they usually see good results.

- See Matthew 5:37 where Our Lord says: "But let your speech be yes, for yes, and no, for no: and that which is over and above these, is of evil."

Philippians 4:5 says: "Let your modesty be known to all men. The Lord is nigh."

Review Question: How may parents protect their children from unwholesome entertainment?

Of course, restricting harmful forms of recreation is only part of the battle. The bad must be countered by the good: otherwise children may drift into a wrong course. Many Christian families have countless warm and happy memories of enjoying recreation together-picnicking, hiking, camping, playing games and sports, traveling to visit relatives or friends. Some have found that simply reading aloud together for relaxation is a great source of pleasure and comfort. Others enjoy telling humorous or interesting stories. Still others have developed hobbies together, for example, woodworking and other crafts, as well as playing musical instruments, painting, or studying God's creations. Children who learn to enjoy such diversions are protected from much unclean entertainment, and they learn that there is more to recreation than simply sitting passively and being entertained. Participating is often more fun than observing.

Social gatherings can also be a rewarding form of recreation. When they are well supervised and not outlandishly large or time-consuming, they can give your children more than just fun. They can help to deepen the bonds of love in the Church and among your fellow parishioners. - Compare Luke 14:13-14; Jude 1:12.

Review Question: What are some wholesome forms of recreation that families can enjoy together?

YOUR FAMILY CAN OVERCOME THE WORLD

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY FROM DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCES

Without question, protecting your family from the world's destructive influences requires much hard work. But there is one thing that, more than any other, will make success possible. It is love! Close, loving family bonds will make your home a safe haven and will promote communication, which is a great protection from bad influences. Further, cultivating another kind of love is even more important love of God our Father. When such love permeates the family, the children are more likely to grow up hating the very idea of displeasing God by succumbing to worldly influences. And parents who love God our Father from the heart will seek to imitate Him. To have a personality that is loving, reasonable and balanced.

(See Ephesians 5:1-2 which says: "Be you all therefore followers of God, as his most dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has delivered himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odour of sweetness." James 3:17 says: "But the wisdom, that is from above, first indeed is chaste, then peaceable, modest, easy to be persuaded, consenting to the good, full of mercy and good fruits, without judging, without dissimulation.")

If parents do that, (imitate Him,) their children will have no reason to view worship of God our loving Father as just a list of things they are not allowed to do or as a way of life devoid of fun or laughter, from which they want to run away as soon as possible. Rather, they will see that worshiping God, following Jesus His Son, and belonging to His Church is the happiest, fullest way of life possible.

Review Question: When it comes to protecting the family from unwholesome influences, what is the most important quality?

FAMILY HAPPINESS

Families that stay united in happy, balanced service to God, endeavoring wholeheartedly to remain "spotless and unblemished" from the corrupting influences of this world, are a source of joy to God our Father. (2 Peter 3:14 says: "Wherefore, dearly beloved, waiting for these things, be diligent that you may be found before him unspotted and blameless in peace." Proverbs 27:11 says: "Study wisdom, my son, and make my heart joyful, that you may give an answer to him that reproaches.") Such families follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, who resisted every effort of Satan's temptations to defile him with sin and impurity. Near the end of his public ministry, at the Last Supper, Jesus proclaimed: "In the world you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) May your family also overcome the world and enjoy life forever at the banquet of the Heavenly Lamb!

Review Question: How can a family overcome the world?

HOW CAN THESE BIBLE PRINCIPLES HELP...

TO PROTECT YOUR FAMILY?

Knowledge leads to wisdom, which can give life to a person.

- Ecclesiastes 7:12.

“For as wisdom is a defence, so money is a defence: but learning (knowledge) and wisdom excel in this, that they give life to him that possesses them.”

"The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

- 1 Corinthians 3:19.

Bad associations and communications must be avoided.

- 1 Corinthians 15:33.

While recreation has its place, it should be controlled and fit into its proper place.

- Ecclesiastes 3:4.