

# DEALING WITH MISBEHAVING

## How do we live as Holy Families when children misbehave?

It can be very stressful and confusing when a child suddenly starts to misbehave in school and/or in the family home. When children misbehave in rebellious or defiant ways, it is often a sign that something has changed and they are unsure how to express their feelings about that change. It can also mean that they feel powerless to affect the change that has taken place.

People often give children more credit for being "resilient" than they actually deserve. We adults see what we want to see at times, especially if we are more tuned in to our own needs/desires than the need/desires of our children. When children feel things are unstable or they don't have control over their environment, they will instinctively look for ways to cope with that loss of stability and control. If it's a short-term change, they may be flexible with it, but if the changes are detrimental to their lives (in their view, not in ours as parents) or last for an extended period of time, then children may begin to act out in various ways to grab our attention. If one way fails to work, then another will be experimented with — even if it means negative consequences for the children.

As parents, it is our first priority to love and nurture the children that God has gifted us with. As St. Paul preached,

*"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Cor. 13:4-7)*

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If we become consumed with our own lives or even just comfortable with the status quo, we may miss the developmental and emotional needs of our children, and they will let us know in some very creative ways! Identifying the pattern of negative behavior and its root cause is the first and most important step in turning things around. It may mean that our own behavior (or bad behavior) as

parents needs to change. It may also mean that we as parents need to work with our children to intervene in external situations.

It is important for parents to be spiritually and emotionally healthy in order to raise healthy children who thrive in this world and live faithfully in God's kingdom. Drawing on Jesus' mandate to love as he first loved us can help us focus on the needs of our children so that they will grow up to be healthy and well-adjusted individuals. When children misbehave, it is an opportunity to pull together as a family. We can tune in to one another and focus on communication. It also provides an opportunity to demonstrate mercy and grace to one another.



**Topical conversation starters to help parents stay on the same page with each other and their families.**

### Things to Pray and Talk About:

- How have you seen children in other families act out, rebel, or create negative situations for themselves? Do you have any idea what was behind all of that emotion?*
- When in your young life, parents, did you act out in anger or hurt? What did you learn from that experience?*
- Reflect together on St. Paul's words about love found in 1 Corinthians 13.*
- How might you improve your relationships with one another in your family?*

### Asking for God's Blessing:

*Holy God, you have given us to each other to be a family, and you watch over all our days. Give us courage to discuss important issues within our household when we need to. Help us to be loving and patient during the times when we need to solve problems or ask for forgiveness from one another. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.*