

DEALING WITH CRITICISM

How do we live as “Holy Families” when we get criticized?

Dealing with criticism is something we have to learn to do from a very early age. The trouble is, it never becomes easy. It can be tough to hear criticism from others, even when it may be warranted. It's important to distinguish between corrective criticism and just plain old hurtful remarks. As parents, this is where we can offer some assistance.

It is helpful to keep in mind that even Jesus was criticized by others in his life. Even though he was the perfect Son of God, people found fault with his words and actions. Jesus' words were not unkind or unhelpful, but because he challenged others to see their own shortcomings and disobedience toward the Father, people rejected him and his words. They neglected to live lives of grace and mercy and instead looked out for themselves in fear and selfishness. While we cannot expect to align ourselves with the perfection of Christ, we can take solace in the knowledge that we are in good company when it comes to being blamed, chastised, or even bashed by others.

In faith, we teach our children to speak kindly and respectfully to adults and those in authority over them, encouraging them to attend to the full meaning of the fourth commandment, “We should fear and love God so that we do not show contempt for our parents and others in authority, nor provoke them to anger, but respect, obey, serve, love, and honor them.” (*Small Catechism*) But how do we encourage them to handle criticism when it comes their way? It can and will come from family members, bosses, teachers, coaches, and others with whom we have relationships, but it is not always meant to help us improve ourselves. When it is corrective we need to help young people hear the truth of what is being said so that they might learn from the experience; but when criticism comes in the form of disdain, jealousy, or hatred, learn how to shake it off and recognize the intention of the words that are hurled at us.

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Try to keep in mind in the face of criticism:

- 1) Another's hurtful words are often a reflection of their own pain and frustration.
- 2) In the face of criticism it can be helpful to ask for clarification or instructions on how to improve or do things differently.

3) Our self worth comes from the way that God sees us. He loves us, wants the best for us, and will help us to improve, overcome our shortcomings, and grant us forgiveness.

4) We are called to let our love be genuine, even in the face of conflict or criticism. The Holy Spirit will help us respond faithfully.



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

Things to Pray and Talk About:

- a) How do you discern between helpful criticism and unhelpful disparagement?
- b) How might we encourage our children to be gracious in the face of helpful criticism so that they might learn something about themselves?
- c) What feelings arise in the face of criticism? How did Jesus handle those very real human feelings?
- d) How do we live lives of love, even in the face of those who would reject us?

Asking for God's Blessing:

Holy and Loving God, your Son Jesus was treated with contempt and criticism in his life. We know that he understands our pain when we face it because he experienced it too. Give us the courage to love and forgive, even in the face of those who are unkind. Help us to see their pain and not take things too personally. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.