

Growing Up Catholic **RECONCILIATION LEADER GUIDE**

Use this guide to get organized and get started!

Thank you for leading this process. Please allow the parents to have this time with their children. By guiding their children using the *Growing Up Catholic* coaching resource, they will grow themselves. We hope it will be a fun and rewarding experience for you and everyone involved!



The Pastoral Center

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FOR QUESTIONS OR CORRESPONDANCE

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How Does It Work?

The Time Is Now

We hear concerns from parish leaders all the time:

- Families are not attending Mass regularly, not even the ones with children preparing to receive their sacraments!
- Once children receive their sacraments, we never see them again.
- Kids don't understand or prioritize their faith.



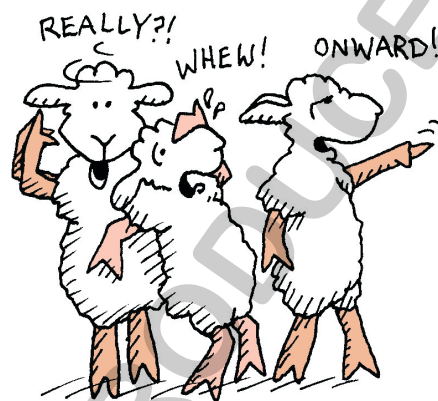
Studies have consistently shown that parents are the most influential factor in whether their children remain Catholic into adulthood. Catholic parents who show that faith is essential to them—through their words and actions—are much less likely to have children who leave the faith. No matter how hard we try, we cannot replace parents and their essential role in sharing faith.

Coaching Parents

The answer is to partner with and coach parents, giving them the tools and support they need. We have seen, again and again, that **when this is done well it is incredibly effective**. The key to evangelizing and catechizing children is evangelizing, engaging, and equipping their parents. And the Eucharist sits at the very center of this challenge.

This looks rather different from the drop-off classroom model that we have become accustomed to in parish life. It requires a new kind of catechetical event:

- Parents and children attend the event.
- Parents will practice teaching their children about faith.
- Parish facilitators will coach the parents.
- Both parents and children will grow in their faith.



Designed for This Challenge

Our team has been testing and refining our resources to coach parents for over 15 years. We have found that parents are delighted to step into this role when given the opportunity and good support. Our approach is:

- **Evangelization-first**, making a convincing case for our faith (assuming a skeptical audience) and drawing families closer to Christ and the Church.
- **Focused on the most central aspects of our faith**: the Gospel message and our call to live it out as disciples in the world.
- **Humorous, entertaining, and thought-provoking**. Faith formation should not be dull.
- **In plain English**, not advanced theological language that may confuse or turn off families.
- **Inviting and accessible to parents**. We don't scare them with a heavy textbook or assume they know the answers, but help them grow into their role as primary catechist.
- **Family-focused**, helping them to bring faith into their homes in concrete, practical, long-lasting ways.
- **Teaches the fundamentals** of our faith, as grounded in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and Sacred Scripture.

Why Revival Editions?

Preparation processes for First Eucharist and First Reconciliation cover concepts very core to our challenge: Mass, living a moral life, and the sacraments themselves. If families do not appreciate these central parts of our faith, what hope do we have that they will draw closer to Christ and the Church?

Our *Growing Up Catholic* resources teach these concepts in a particularly enlightening way. The content is fresh, relevant, and helpful to all families, not just those with children preparing for the sacraments.

For these reasons, the Revival editions are almost identical to the preparation editions, with the exception of references to receiving for the first time.

This means that you can easily host whole family events including families using both resources (especially during this time of Eucharistic Revival in the United States).



Features & Options

EDITIONS

Each session is made available in a variety of formats to meet your ministry needs.

- **English Language.** We offer a general English edition and a Commonwealth edition for our friends in Canada, the U.K., Australia, and beyond.
- **Spanish Language.** Our bilingual edition has parent text in Spanish and child text in English. All-Spanish editions are also available.

- **Age Levels.** Family handouts are available in editions for ages 7-9 or ages 10-14.
- **Print Options.** Parishes can purchase the full-color printed booklets or licenses to print themselves.

SETTINGS

The curriculum is designed to work well wherever your families will be using it.

- **Parish-Hosted.** We highly recommend hosting the sessions in the parish where you can coach families and hold them in community.
- **At Home.** Families can follow the sessions at home, with the support of booklet prompts and videos.
- **Hybrid.** Some parishes send home every other session or let families who miss a session complete it at home.

COMPONENTS

The only required component is the family booklet, but we provide a number of options to offer a richer experience, whether at home or in a parish setting.

- **Family Handouts.** These color booklets are the core of the curriculum, with parent instructions, activities, and question prompts.
- **Leader Guides.** Thoughtful facilitator instructions guide you through how to best host sessions at the parish or prepare families for a home experience.
- **Prayer Songs.** The prayer celebrations feature prayer songs, often with simple hand motions. Optional sing-along videos are provided.
- **Presentations.** Optional Powerpoint presentations help you to lead in-person sessions with a little bit of flair.
- **Videos.** Short, publicly available videos help parents prepare, enliven the prayer songs, and step families through the process at home.
- **At-Home Website.** Families can follow a scannable link to a web page with resources to help them with their at-home goals for the week.

Learning to Coach Parents

A Whole Family Method

The unique method of *Growing Up Catholic* is its sole focus on coaching parents to form their own children. Your role as a parish leader changes under this focus. You become the one who forms other adults—the all-important parents or guardians preparing their children to receive sacraments or continue their journey in faith.

This focus is so important to *Growing Up Catholic* because we know that if the parents are not invested at a high enough level to walk their own children through the formation and preparation process, there's virtually nothing you can do to overcome that. If the parents aren't involved, the parish program simply cannot substitute for them. Period.

Growing Up Catholic is a rich collection of resources, many free and some available for purchase. It is a “life plan” for parents who want their kids to grow up Catholic. *Growing up Catholic* begins at baptism and the early childhood years, accompanying families as the children move toward adulthood. All of our resources can be found on the GrowingUp-Catholic.com website.



Developing Households of Faith

Our approach addresses questions including:

- What prayers should each child know by heart? How can we best invite them to enter into regular conversation with Jesus?
- What core church teachings should the parent be teaching on a daily basis as they interpret the events of the world through the lens of the Gospel and the Church?
- What values and virtues emerge from our teachings?
- What does a “Catholic household” look like? How can it be created if both parents are not Catholic, while respecting the religious background of both?

Parents tell us that this approach is a dream-come-true. They want to do this! They have a great desire to help their own kids, but they simply don't know how. *Growing Up Catholic* is a resource that can really help them!

Responsibilities of a Coach

This does not mean you can simply send this resource home to the parents and tell them, “Goodbye and good luck. Keep warm and well fed!” Our team believes that you need to see these parents often to prime their pumps and keep them moving. You have to help them in-person with this key part of their parental role.

The ideal setting would be to host six sessions where the parents and children work together, but under your supervision and guidance. (If you need to host fewer, this resource is designed to support that, also.)

Our team does realize that parishes are busy places. We realize that there are many competing demands on people's time. But we believe that as parish leaders, we simply must find (1) the space at the parish, (2) the staff

to lead, and (3) the time to schedule sessions for parents with their kids. Faith formation should last a lifetime. And it will if we coach the parents to form their own kids.

Here's What We Know Does NOT Work

- It does not work for a parish leader to try to form and teach a child if the parents are not involved.
- It does not work well for most parents to form their children without the support of the parish.
- It does not work for all the learning to be "head learning."
- It does not work for children to be exposed to long textbook lessons—no matter how often you do it—unless there is a parent or guardian at their side, witnessing, assisting, touching, and guiding that child.

The Players

THE CHILDREN

The kids in your program probably range in age. Many children are receiving their sacraments for the first time at an older age. Many of them live in homes where the parents are not engaged with the parish. Many of them have had very little formation prior to this moment in their lives.

As a growing number of studies tell us, many may already be "turned off" to Catholicism, having decided it is not for them. These studies also tell us that their parents—and what they say and do—are the largest influence on whether those children continue to embrace their faith into adulthood.

THEIR PARENTS

In order to be successful in this ministry, you also must guide and form the parents of the children. If the parents (whether or not they're both Catholic) don't know or believe what the Church teaches, then how will their children ever have faith?

While many parents may want to give their child the gift of faith, they may not know how. Many lack the confidence, language, and tools to do so. Many have been discouraged by the message that their only responsibility is to drop their child off at the parish and let professionals do the rest.

Some parents are on the margins of the parish, not necessarily attending Mass regularly, and perhaps skeptical about what the parish has to offer them.

Growing Up Catholic is specifically designed for this situation. The teacher, catechist, or small group leader is actually coaching the parents how to form their own children. The lessons are designed to be learned via parent-child conversation and cooperation. It is an evangelizing process that helps both parent and child to appreciate what the Catholic faith has to offer.

If no parent or guardian is available for some children, then a grandparent, godparent, or other adult could step in. But the best approach is to plan to have the parents and the children together for learning.

YOU AS PARISH LEADER

You are a very important part of the process, and we have done everything we can to set you up for success. We know that it may be a little challenging for you to shift into a different role if you are used to working directly with kids. Keep reminding yourself that your role is primarily to minister to the parents: to educate them, form them, and give them the confidence they need to teach their children about their faith from now on!

We also invite you to pray for this process and the role you will play in it. Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you to minister well and be a loving presence.

Finding Balance

A key part of your success will depend on you and your team finding the right leadership balance. Reflect on the role of sports coaches. Their job is to develop the skills of their players, equip them, and offer them support. The coaches do not play the game for their



players. They cheer them on from the sidelines!

Likewise, those of us who are used to leading religious education sessions need to be careful not to take over the process. A majority of the time in these sessions should be spent "on the field" between parents and their own children.

On the other hand, as previously mentioned, we shouldn't leave parents to their own devices. They need coaching! So your role includes:

- ▶ Being an evangelist for the role of parents and processes like this one that support them.
- ▶ Listening to parents to understand their needs and accompanying them on their faith journey.
- ▶ Welcoming parents and families into the process, and helping them form community with other families and the rest of the parish.
- ▶ Orchestrating the faith formation process, whether hosted at the parish or sent home.
- ▶ Helping parents to understand their role as primary catechist of their own children, and to practice that role.

Planning & Preparation

Format and Schedule

Growing Up Catholic is a flexible program that can be adapted to many different situations and preferences.

PROGRAM FORMAT

- Are you going to use *Growing Up Catholic* in parent-with-child gatherings at the parish, led by a catechist?
- Are you going to use it in a traditional school or religious education setting?
- Are you going to use it in neighborhood clusters of families meeting in homes? These clusters could also meet at the parish.
- Will you entrust parents to use it at home on their own?

This is your first decision. We generally recommend the first option above, but the materials can be used for any of the others, too. Learn more about each of these formats later in this section.

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Determine the dates well in advance. Make sure you have the rooms you need, and set the date for the liturgical celebration when the liturgical plan for the year is being prepared.

Don't forget to also schedule any parent/guardian retreat or family retreat/rehearsals.

It is necessary to be practical about the schedule. Some flexibility may be needed if families are doing the preparation in their homes or in neighborhood clusters. Will there be a cut-off date for accepting candidates?

Hosted vs. At Home

The sessions are designed so they can be hosted in individual family homes (a "home school" option) or as a community event in a parish, school, or neighborhood cluster setting.

We encourage you to host as many sessions as possible, for a variety of reasons:

- ▶ This helps your families set aside focused time to work through the sessions. Even well-meaning families can struggle to do so at home, resulting in them rushing through the process or skipping over content/sessions.
- ▶ Hosting a group allows you to coach parents interactively, answering their questions and gauging where they need help.
- ▶ Holding sessions makes them community events. That means we are able to pray together, feed off the energy of the group, and help families connect with each other. This all strengthens the Body of Christ.
- ▶ The group setting gives you additional opportunities to connect with families and accompany them on their faith journey. We must always pay attention to how the parish can best serve individual families and their particular needs.

Even if you decide to send the sessions home, we encourage you to consider hosting the first session in the parish to help your families learn how it works. Our process does a good job of explaining this, but nothing replaces in-person facilitation.

Purchasing Family Handouts

Be sure to purchase the correct number of licenses or booklets from The Pastoral Center for the current year. We appreciate your parish working with our honor system.

You will need one license or booklet per *child* in the program. Since children will write on the handouts, they will not be able to share them with a sibling in their family. Each handout contains the parent information, so parents do not need a separate handout.

PRINT BOOKLETS

Most parishes purchase full-color booklets from us. You will need to carefully specify the quantity of each language or age-level edition you wish to purchase.

RESOURCE LICENSES

We also offer licenses that grant you permission to print your own family handouts.

- ▶ The cost of licenses is lower, but you have to take into account your actual printing (and labor) costs.
- ▶ We provide a grace period for purchasing licenses. You may begin using the program and printing booklets as long as you purchase licenses before your program ends for the year. We recommend that you wait for your late registrees until you submit your order for the year (rather than placing multiple smaller orders).
- ▶ Licenses give you greater flexibility, as you don't have to wait for us to ship your booklets.
- ▶ All editions are available to you when you purchase licenses. You do not need to report to us which language or age-level editions you are using per child.

The Problem with Binders and "Class"

As the new *Directory for Catechesis* reminds us, catechesis is (or should be, at least) closely intertwined with evangelization. They are both about growing in faith: both head and heart.



When we treat religious education as purely an academic subject, children act as students who "graduate" and leave their faith behind. Also, parents and their children are usually not very enthusiastic about spending more time in "class." Children spend plenty of hours at school already, and more school doesn't sound all that fun.

In a whole family context, parents may find the notion that they will be teaching their own children in "class" to be intimidating, especially if textbooks are involved.

For all these reasons, we recommend that you move away from language that connects your sessions to a school model. Call them sessions or events instead of classes (or come up with a fun brand name for your program). Avoid the term students (perhaps "disciples" would be more appropriate).

We've found that Protestant communities usually do a much better job making their children's programs sound fun, so you might take a peek at your neighboring churches to learn from them.

When possible, we also recommend giving out the curriculum one session at a time, as individual booklets. Compiling them into binders or even distributing them as a set can make them feel like a textbook.

Welcome & Hospitality

A strong, intentional welcoming will communicate that the program and parish as a whole value the families who are attending. This is simply part of being a faithful Christian community, but it also will encourage these families to become more active members of the parish. It is essential whether sessions will be hosted in the parish or sent home.

- **Guide them in.** Make sure it is completely obvious to families where to find your office and/or gathering. You may take your parish buildings for granted, but it will not always be clear to others. Place signs where they will be visible and obvious from the parking lot, if necessary.
- **Special circumstances.** Especially reach out to those in family situations that the church might sometimes call "irregular" in

some way: non-Catholic parents, same-sex parents, single parents, remarried parents, etc. Make sure these families clearly understand that they are welcome at the parish and in these session. We're glad they are here! This is ideally the first step in accompanying these families so you can better understand their situations, help them discern how God might be leading them (in the context of Church teaching), and bring them closer to the Church. For example, this can be an excellent time to encourage couples to pursue an annulment or to convalidate their marriage. This requires a thoughtful, gentle, clear approach rooted initially in listening. Learn more about pastoral accompaniment at ArtOfAccompaniment.com and through our other resources.

Bibles

A major goal of the Growing Up Catholic program is to familiarize families with the Bible, especially an edition that they can use at home afterwards. We prompt families to find each session's Scripture reading in a physical Bible.

Ideally, participants will bring their family Bible with them to the sessions and use it. However, some families do not have a Bible, don't know where it is, or have one that is not practical for common use (it may be huge or have a less helpful translation).

These sessions are a perfect time to help families get their own age-appropriate Bible for use at home. Gift one to your families who need them or make them available at a reasonable cost. Have loaner Bibles available for the sessions, and give them the option to purchase them at the end of the process. You should always have extras on hand for when families forget to bring them.

In today's digital world, it can also be helpful to show your families how to download a Bible app on their phones so they can have access to it wherever they are.

Sending the Music Home

Purchase of family booklets/licenses includes permission to use the prayer celebration mu-

sic during these faith formation sessions. You also have the option to purchase download licenses or audio CDs of the songs to send home with your families. The song collection is bulk priced at very affordable prices. This is a great way to help them reinforce and extend the experience in the months and years ahead!

Advance Preparation

After finishing this Leader Overview, read through the facilitator guide and family booklet for each session well in advance (whether you are sending the sessions home or facilitating them in a parish setting). This will empower you to best coach the parents and accompany the whole family throughout the process.

Kick-Off Meeting

As you're getting ready for the year, hold a planning meeting. Invite to this meeting every principal participant in the program:

- ▶ the pastor
- ▶ the liturgical and music leaders of the parish (if being used for sacramental preparation)
- ▶ the one responsible for coordinating all religious education in the parish
- ▶ the one coordinating sacramental preparation
- ▶ several of the lead catechists in your program
- ▶ school leaders if there is a school involved

It might also be wise to invite several parents to this meeting. After all, with *Growing Up Catholic*, in the end it's the parents who do the teaching.

The next section has a suggested agenda for this meeting. (Note: Don't start with prayer. Make that your second item since some people are bound to arrive late and are less likely to miss or interrupt the prayer.)

Growing Up Catholic Kick-Off Meeting Sample Agenda

A. Begin with a general conversation about intentions. What do we want the children to get out of the formation process for the sacraments? What do we want their parents to get out of it?

- ▶ Let everyone say what they want, allowing discussion as people speak.
- ▶ Write responses on a whiteboard or flip chart and affirm what is spoken.

B. Offer a brief prayer, opening your hearts to the Holy Spirit who is your Guide and Counselor, using these or similar words:

Dear Holy Spirit,
thank you for calling us
to this marvelous work.

You know that we love our children,
and that we want them to know and love
you.

We want them to grow up Catholic,
to appreciate what you are revealing
through the prayers, customs, liturgies,
and life of the Church.

We want them to have a home here
for the rest of their lives.

Now grant that, by your light,
we might press forward and offer them
and their parents the assistance they
need.

Work through us with great power. Amen.

C. Decide program logistics.

1. Format and schedule (see Chapter 2)

- ▶ Which program and session format will you use? Review questions/issues based on the format.
- ▶ Set the program schedule, including sessions and registration deadlines.

2. Eligibility (see Chapter 3)

- ▶ Do you have criteria for eligibility or readiness? Who will handle them?

3. Invitation (see Chapter 4)

- ▶ How will you invite families, especially those who do not regularly attend Mass?

4. Building Your Team (see Chapter 5)

- ▶ Who else will help with the program? When will you train them?

5. Family Matters (see Chapter 7)

- ▶ How will you work with different family situations and special needs?

D. Decide on any sacramental celebration logistics.

1. Schedule

- ▶ When will the sacramental celebrations occur?
- ▶ If there are many candidates, it may be impractical to fit them into a single celebration.

2. What kind of dress will be expected of the participants?

- ▶ Many parishes no longer recommend the use of uniform dress.

3. How will the “housekeeping” details be handled? This may include:

- ▶ Arranging for a photographer and setting ground rules for photography.
- ▶ Providing a large and genuine welcome for all guests.
- ▶ Planning a reception for the children and their families.



Session 1. Made to Love

This first session explains how God made each of us for a purpose: to love others. It also introduces the Sacrament of Reconciliation, what it is for, and how it works.

Overview and Timeline

Start Time	Time Period	Title	Focus	Page	Parent Boxes
	0-10 min	1. Welcome & check-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greeting, hospitality, logistics 	-	-
	0-10 min	2. Icebreaker (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strings of Love 	-	-
	14 min	3. Introduction: What Are We Made For?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction to the process Meet the Flock No matter what What are we made for? Living for God's purpose 	1-5	1-8
	7 min	4. Scripture Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jesus Loves the Children (Mark 10:13-16) 	6-7	9-12
	12 min	5. Prayer Celebration: Loving and Being Loved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening prayer Song: "Exactly As I Am" Prayer slips Closing prayer 	8-9	13-16
	10 min	6. Love & Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Greatest Commandment Loving neighbor, self, and God. 	10-11	17-20
	5 min	7. The Sacrament of Reconciliation: Preparation / Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why receive? Preparing to receive The Reconciliation room 	12-13	21-24
	5 min	8. Missing the Mark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missing the mark Target practice 	14-15	25-26
	5 min	9. Closing & Sending Forth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At-home goals Holy child blessing 	14,16	27-28



Checklist

SUPPLIES (ALL SESSIONS)

- ☐ Family session booklets
- ☐ Name tags and markers
- ☐ Chime or bell
- ☐ Projector, screen, and computer for slide presentation and/or prayer music video (optional)
- ☐ Music and music player for background music and/or prayer music.
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Prayer slips
- ☐ Prayer slip basket
- ☐ Prayer altar items (Bible, cross, candle, altar cloth, etc.)
- ☐ Pencils with/and erasers
- ☐ Pencil sharpeners (optional)
- ☐ Pens

SUPPLIES (SPECIAL FOR SESSION 1)

- ☐ Icebreaker materials: Ball of yarn

VOLUNTEERS

- ☐ Greeters: _____
- ☐ Scripture reader: _____
- ☐ Snacks: _____
- ☐ Cleanup: _____

Add-On Options

Here are some extra ideas for extending the session.

MUSIC

These songs have a thematic fit to this session. Play them as your families are gathering, during break time, or after the session. You can also repeat the prayer song.

- ☐ [“We Gotta Love”](#) by Tom Booth, Israel Houghton, and Matt Maher (OCP.org song #31017)
- ☐ [“O Love of God/Amor de Dios”](#) by Bob Hurd (OCP.org song #14794)
- ☐ [“Love Never Fails”](#) by Ken Canedo and Jesse Manibusan (OCP.org song #64975)

Custom Pencils

This initial session uses pencils as an analogy for how God created us to love. Each family will need at least one pencil with an eraser for the session.

If you want to make a real impression on your families and help them remember the teaching in the months and years ahead, order a large number of custom imprinted/engraved pencils to give away during your event. Search online for “customized pencils” to find a vendor.

Request a message that will serve as a strong reminder, such as:

- God loves you and made you to love! —St. Mary Parish
- I was made to love! —First Reconciliation at St. Bart 2024
- Pencils are made for writing. You were made for loving. —First Penance at Corpus Christi 2024

Reconciliation Room

This session introduces the Reconciliation room/confessional and encourages parents to visit it with their child to make them comfortable. If possible, please make arrangements so this will be easy for them, perhaps just after the session.

Talking Points

This document includes instructions and talking points for you to facilitate the session. The talking points are indented:

- Like this!

Adapt as you see fit and follow the rubric instructions highlighted in *red italic text*. You always have the option to present less content with the big group (and you may want to do so especially if you are not using the slide presentation). The booklets include step-by-step instructions to guide the parents through all parts of the session.

1. Welcome & Check-In

Make the Growing Up Catholic experience a positive one from the start. Remember that many of your participants may not be very familiar with your parish community. Give them a warm welcome.

Read the general leader guide for more on this topic, including how to help families navigate your parish grounds to find your event and being especially hospitable to those who are on the margins of the parish or in special circumstances.

- **Welcome slide.** If you are using the session slides, project the first slide as your group arrives. **SLIDE 1**
- **Meet them outside the door.** If possible, have friendly members of your team waiting for families to arrive, especially the first couple of weeks. You could ask a family who will be participating in the program who is very active in the parish to play this role. Have them warmly greet the families and give them confidence that they are in the right place.
- **Check them in.** Set up a table just inside the door to greet attendees again and:
 - Give them a family booklet and Bible.
 - Explain where they can find a spot to sit.
 - Ask them to put on name tags.
 - Give them materials for the icebreaker activity if you are using it (see next section).
 - Note in your records that they have arrived.

2. Icebreaker Activity: Strings of Love (optional)

This activity works best for a group of 10 to 40. The game is uninteresting with too small a group, and boring and cumbersome with too large a group. If you have too large of a group, split into smaller groups for this activity.

SLIDE 2

MATERIALS

A large ball of yarn.

DIRECTIONS

The leader begins holding a large ball of yarn. The leader says her name and something she particularly likes that begins with the same sound. For example, "My name is Kathy and I like cookies." It is important to use the same sound rather than the same letter, especially if you have younger children present in the group who do not know how to spell.

As the leader speaks, she grasps the end of the yarn and throws the ball to someone else in the group. The second person grabs the yarn, pulling it taut with the leader, gives his name and something he likes that begins with the same sound, and tosses the yarn ball to someone else.

The game continues until everyone has been thrown the ball and is holding a piece of the yarn. (It is necessary to frequently remind people before they throw the ball to hold on to the yarn.) The yarn will form a web across the center of the group.

The leader should then tug on the yarn, demonstrating that everyone can feel the pull.

Explain:

- In this session we will be learning how we are all connected to each other through our loving relationships. Sometimes those relationships are strong, and we can do things to weaken or even cut them off.
- In a community, what affects one of us affects all of us. The web is distorted if any member drops an end, but the community can still support it.

If there is extra time, the community can try to unweave the web by having the last person throw the yarn ball back to the person from whom it was caught, naming the person and what she likes. This is far more difficult than it sounds: the yarn can get badly tangled if the ball drops, but it can be fun!

When the group knows names a little better, the game can be repeated, having the person who throws the ball name the person to whom it is thrown.



3. Introduction: What Are We Made For?

Have families sit at their tables. Be sure to move through this material quickly and with energy. We don't want to bore families, especially right at the start.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROCESS

Note: If you are leading a group using bilingual booklets, you may want to give some guidance. For example, some families may want to read aloud in English, with parents referring to the Spanish for any terms they don't understand. Others might want to read aloud in Spanish, with children checking the English as necessary. Or they could read both languages aloud.

Briefly explain how the booklets and process will work:

SLIDE 3

- ▶ Welcome to Growing Up Catholic Reconciliation! We're here to learn together about how our faith can help us grow into the people God made us to be, and how the Sacrament of Reconciliation can help.
- ▶ For part of the time, we will learn as a big group, but for most of the time, parents will help their own children learn. Parents, you will find step-by-step instructions that look like this in the booklets. *(Point to screen/booklet.)*
- ▶ **SLIDE 4** Some pages will have text that you will read out loud as a family. In those cases, decide together who will read it, or just take turns.

*Introduce your **attention getter/signal**, whether it is a bell, chime, or some sort of prompt. Practice it with them.*

INTRODUCE THE FLOCK **SLIDE 5**

- ▶ These cartoon sheep are called The Flock. Jesus talked about sheep a lot and called himself the Good Shepherd. We are all like sheep who are learning to follow Jesus. The Flock will help us figure it out!

It's up to you whether you want to present the content in the next few sections or let families read it out of the booklets for themselves. Either approach will work.

NO MATTER WHAT **SLIDE 6**

- ▶ The first thing you need to know is that **God loves you no matter what, and there's nothing you can do about it.** *(If necessary, clarify that this is a joke, but it's also saying something very important.)*
- ▶ There is nothing you can do—no sin so serious—that it will make God stop loving you.
- ▶ Parents, please now read box number 3 and briefly talk to your child. We'll take just a minute or two.

 Parents & guardians, these numbered steps guide you through the process.

1

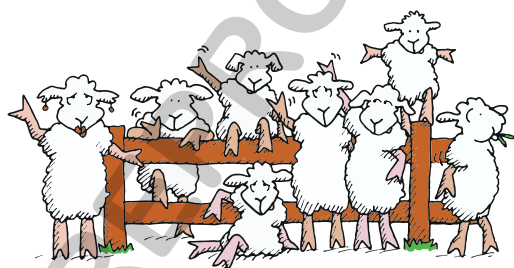
Thank you for guiding your child through this process. Please **scan the code** or **enter the link** found on the back of this booklet to watch a short video explaining your role and how this session will work.

You will need an unsharpened pencil with an eraser, plus a pencil sharpener or sharpened pencil for this lesson.

2

Introduce your child to the cartoon sheep on the right, called The Flock. Explain that Jesus talked about sheep a lot and called himself the Good Shepherd. We are all like sheep who are learning to follow Jesus. The Flock will help us figure it out through these sessions!

The main text in this guide is meant to be **read out loud**. Either you or your child can be the reader. Decide who will read the text below and have them start.



NO MATTER WHAT



As you prepare to receive your First Reconciliation, it's important to know that

God loves you no matter what, and there's nothing you can do about it! There's no sin you can commit that will make God stop loving you.

3

Did your child get the joke? Tell them that **you love them, too, no matter what**. Explain that there is nothing they need to do to earn your love—just like God's—and nothing they can do to lose your love.

Add that they will do things that make you angry or sad, but not love them any less.



Growing Up Catholic

First Reconciliation

Ages 7-9

Session 1



WHAT ARE WE MADE FOR?

4

Give your child an unsharpened pencil. Pick up this booklet so you can read without them reading along. You will ask them a series of questions found in bold text (we will tell you in the parentheses what answers you should look for). Feel free to use your own words.

5

Ask your child the following:

- **What is the thing you're holding called?** (pencil)
- **What is it for?** (to write with)
- **Is it doing a good job of being a pencil?** (Any answer is fine.)
- **How do you decide if it's doing a good or bad job?** (It's "good" if it writes, "bad" if it doesn't.)

Say: So it doesn't matter if it's pretty or plain, long or short, new or old, right? A pencil is doing a good job if it writes, a bad job if it doesn't.



1-2

WHAT ARE WE MADE FOR?

Use your bell/signal to get the group's attention. Tell the group to put down their booklets for now and just to listen.

Adapt the following talking points based on whether the group is starting with sharpened or unsharpened pencils (with sharpener available).

Keep this section moving along with a good pace and energy. You'll be asking the group questions, and guiding them to the right answers as necessary. Begin by holding up an unsharpened pencil.

- **SLIDE 7** Please pick up one of these from your table. What are these called? (*A pencil.*)
- And what is it for? (*To write with.*)
- Is it doing a good job of being a pencil? (*Any answer is fine.*)



6

Continue:

- **Can I write with it now?** (Not until it's sharpened)

Have them sharpen it and give it to you, or switch to a sharpened pencil. Poke them with the sharp pencil.

- **Hey look, I can use this thing to hurt others. Is that a good use for my pencil? Why not?** (Any answer is fine.)



1-3

- How do you decide if it's doing a good job or a bad job? (*It's "good" if it writes, "bad" if it doesn't.*) So it doesn't matter if it's pretty or plain, long or short, new or old, right? A pencil is doing a good job if it writes, a bad job if it doesn't.
- Can I write with it now? (*Not until it's sharpened.*)

Have the group sharpen their pencils, and sharpen your own.

- Hey look, I can use this thing to hurt others! (*Poke someone with the pencil.*) Is that a good use for my pencil? Why not? (*Any answer is fine.*)

LIVING FOR GOD'S PURPOSE

7

Point your child to the table in the middle of the next page and continue:

- Today's lesson isn't really about pencils. It's about US! (Have them write "Persons" to the right of "Pencil.")
- A person who makes pencils has a clear *purpose*: to make a tool for writing.
- Who made persons? (God)
- And what is God's *purpose* in making us? What did God make *us* to do? (There are many ways to answer, but we're looking for "to love." Have your child write it in below "Persons.")

8

Continue with the text in the frames at the top and bottom of the next page. You or your child should read it out loud.



14

LIVING FOR GOD'S PURPOSE

- **SLIDE 8** Please turn to pages 5 in your booklets. Today's lesson isn't really about pencils. It's about US!

Point the group to the table in the middle of page 5. Have them write "Persons" to the right of "Pencil."

- The person who makes pencils has a clear *purpose*: to make a tool for writing.

- Who made persons? (*God.*) And what is God's *purpose* in making us? What did God make *us* to do? (*There are many ways to answer, but we're looking for "to love."*)

Prompt the group to write "to love" in the box below where they wrote "Persons."

- Now, as individual families, work on page 5 together. Read the text out loud and follow the instructions. We will ring a bell when it's time to wrap up.



Pencils are made to write, and pencil makers start with a **plan**. They design them to write well, making them out of wood and graphite.



People are made to love, and God also started with a plan. **God designed us to love well:**

- God gave us a **conscience** to help us decide what is the most loving thing to do. (*Write "Conscience" on the row labeled "Plan."*)
- God also gave us **freedom to make loving choices**, because it's not love if we're forced to do it. (*Write "Free will" in the same box.*)

PURPOSE

PLAN

PROCESS

<i>Pencil</i>	
Writing	
Blueprints List of materials	
Sharpener	



Pencils can't write unless they stay sharp. So we have a **process** for making and keeping them sharp: pencil sharpeners!



When creating us, God gave us a *process* to help us **learn how** to love and **choose** to love. (*Write "Learn" and "Choose" on the "Process" row.*)

Instead of making us sharp and pointy, this process makes us **holy**. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a big part of the process, which continues throughout our lives.

1-5

It helps to play music quietly in the background during exercises like this. It provides a shield of privacy to the parent-child groups and serves as a backdrop to the conversation.

Let parents take the lead on these activities. Your task is to simply float through the room, guiding and affirming where needed.

After a few minutes, ring the bell and give families 30 seconds or so to finish. If necessary, ring a second time to get their full attention.

SCRIPTURE READING

Based on
MARK 10:13-16

9

Remind your child that God sent his son Jesus into the world to teach us about God's plan for love. Then **pick up your Bible** and explain that we can look in this book to learn what Jesus did and said about God and about how we were made to love.

10

Show your child the Bible reference and explain that the reading comes from the Gospel of Mark, from Chapter 10, verse 13 through verse 16. **Open your Bible to find the passage together.**

Explain that the story below is the same one re-told in a way that is easier for kids to understand. Now read the text below out loud to your child or have your child read it to you.



The families were bringing their children to see Jesus.

And Jesus was happy to see them.

He blessed them all!

Some people told these children and their parents to go away because they thought he didn't have time for the children.

But Jesus made it very clear that he loved the children.

He wanted them to be near him.

"What I am teaching you is for these children," he said.

In fact, he told everyone,

"You should all have the simple faith of these children!"

Then he hugged them all and blessed them.



1-6

4. Scripture Reading

Note: One of the differences between the editions for ages 7-9 and 10-14 is that the younger version has a paraphrase of the Bible story that is easier to understand and the story in the older edition comes from a standard Bible translation.

Now move on to this next section as a group.

- ▶ **SLIDE 9** In this next section, you will read a Bible story together. You will be asked to look up the passage in your Bible.

Give them some direction here, as many parents are not used to using a Bible:

- ▶ This Bible reading is from the Gospel of Mark near the beginning of the New Testament. You can look for



11

Ask your child to retell the story to you in his or her own words.

12

Explain that Growing up Catholic means being a friend of Jesus. He wants to be your best friend and always has time for you.

One of the best ways to be Jesus' friend is to regularly talk to him, which we call prayer.



Reading for Ages 10-14

Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples scolded the people.

When Jesus noticed this, he was angry and said to his disciples,

"Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them.

Scripture taken from the Good News Translation in Today's English Version: Second Edition Copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

1-7

the book of Mark in the table of contents. It's usually about three-quarters of the way through.

- Parents, you can now follow the instructions on pages 6 and 7.

Float around the room in case families have questions or need help. Give them some time to navigate the Bible, but step in to offer help if they become frustrated or are falling behind.

After each family has had some time to read and review the story, ring the bell to bring them back to the big group.

PRAYER Celebration

LOVING AND BEING LOVED

13

Prepare your space to pray together, lighting candles and preparing your prayer basket.

Also get ready to play the song "Exactly As I Am" during the service. The video and lyrics can be found on this week's web page (scan the code or type the link on the last page of this handout).

14

Begin the prayer by making the Sign of the Cross with your child, slowly and prayerfully. Be sure to say all 16 words!

Then lead the prayer below with your child.

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Leader: All-loving God,
you sent your Son Jesus to show us how much you love us
and how we should love others.

All: Help us to become more holy.

Leader: You know that we are not perfect.
Thank you for loving us anyway, even when we hurt others.

All: Help us to become more holy.

Leader: Give us what we need to prepare our hearts
to love better, forgive others,
and receive your forgiveness.

All: Help us to become more holy. Amen.

15

Explain that you will now play a song about how God loves us no matter what.

Practice the hand motions, one for the first part of each line and the other for the second part. Say the words and practice the motions together.

Now **play the song**. Sing along with your child, and listen carefully to the lyrics.

1-8

5. Prayer Celebration: Loving and Being Loved

*When the conversation has died down, gather everyone for prayer. **SLIDE 10** Do this by inviting them to push their chairs toward the altar, bringing their booklets with them. There is no need to move the tables for this. The crushing together and moving about creates its own space for prayer.*

Turn off any background music and pass out blank prayer slips, one for every parent and one for every child.

- Please open your booklets to page 8 for the prayer.

OPENING PRAYER

- We begin, slowly and prayerfully, with the Sign of the Cross. *(Demonstrate the motion clearly.)* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
- All-loving God, you sent your Son Jesus to show us how much you love us and how we should love others.
- *(All respond:)* **Help us to become more holy.**
- You know that we are not perfect. Thank you for loving us anyway, even when we hurt others.
- *(All respond:)* **Help us to become more holy.**
- Give us what we need to prepare our hearts to love better, forgive others, and receive your forgiveness.
- *(All respond:)* **Help us to become more holy. Amen.**



Tap hands on
heart to the beat.

I am loved exactly as I am, exactly as I am.
Thank you God for making me and telling me that I will
and that you'll always love me always be your child
exactly as I am.



Hug yourself and
rock to the beat.



16

Now take two prayer slips from the prayer basket, one for you and one for your child. Explain that each of you will write a note to Jesus telling him what you would like him to do for you during this process of preparing for First Reconciliation.

When you are both done, share them with each other, then place them in the prayer basket. Close by leading the final prayer.

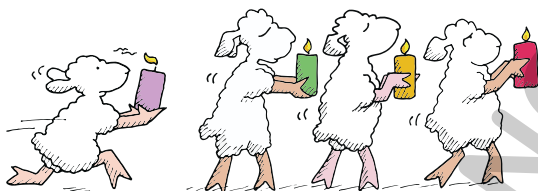


Leader: Let us pray together.

Jesus, you choose us and love us
like the best parent ever.

We know that you will
never stop loving us.

All: Jesus, help us to believe
that you are with us every day.
Help us to remember
that you call us
to spread your love in the world.
Amen.



1-9

PRAYER SONG: "EXACTLY AS I AM"

Note: The song recording is only available in English, but a Spanish translation of the lyrics is available as open captions on the song video, on a reproducible handout, and on each session's at-home web page. For the all-Spanish edition, the lyrics are offered as a poem-prayer to be read out loud.

- ▶ We will now play a song about how God loves us no matter what.

Demonstrate the hand motions as shown in the family booklet and the music video. Then play the video in the slide presentation or separately. **SLIDE 11**

PRAYER SLIPS

When the song comes to a close, prompt families:

- ▶ **SLIDE 12** We invite you all—both parents and children—to write a note to Jesus on your prayer slip. Tell him what you want him to do for you during this

process of preparing for First Reconciliation (*Adapt if using Revival edition*). You can share these within your family in a couple minutes.

After a couple minutes:

- ▶ Now you can briefly and quietly share what you wrote within your family. After you have done so, please place your slips in the basket.

CLOSING PRAYER

- ▶ Now please turn to the bottom of page 9 for our closing prayer.
- ▶ Let us pray together. Jesus, you choose us and love us like the best parent ever. We know that you will never stop loving us.
- ▶ *(All pray:)* Jesus, help us to believe that you are with us every day. Help us to remember that you call us to spread your love in the world. Amen. *(Pause.)*
- ▶ Now please return to your tables.



17

Point your child to the next page. Tell them the **figure with hands raised** represents them. Have them write their name below it and decorate it to look like them (hair, clothing, etc.). Then have them read the two points just to the right out loud.



When we say God made us to love, we're talking about what God wants to happen in all of our **relationships**. Read the speech bubbles at the top of the next page to see how Jesus answered when asked what God's most important rule is.



Underline "**love your neighbor**" in the speech bubble. We'll start there!

18

Have your child continue reading on the right, but **be ready for the question** (blue question mark). When you get there, help your child brainstorm. If possible, share an example of something you did (a sin) that hurt someone. Sins by kids include spreading rumors, saying mean things, bullying, stealing, etc.



We need to love our neighbors!



Draw a line between you and the person with arms crossed to represent the invisible loving connection God wants you to have with your neighbor (another person).



What actions could we take (or not take) that would hurt our love relationship with someone else?



When we hurt a relationship, it's called a **sin**. So when we do loving things, we make the love lines darker, but when we do unloving things, we make the lines lighter. Erase the line you just drew a little bit.


19

Continue reading. **Stop at the question**, which is a hard one! Explain that this can happen when we do something unsafe or dangerous, don't live healthy lives, or don't believe we are loved.



We also need to love ourselves!



Underline "**love yourself**" in the speech bubble. Draw a circular line starting and ending at you, like this: 



How could you hurt your relationship with yourself?



Erase the line a little bit.

20

Keep going. **At the question**, help your child know there are two ways to sin against God:

- Directly. For example, by choosing other things over God.
- Indirectly. Because God loves everyone, all our *other* sins also disconnect us from God.



Last, but not least, we need to love God!



Underline "**love the Lord your God**" in the speech bubble and draw a line between you and Jesus.



What might we do (or not do) to hurt our connection with God?



Erase the line between you and Jesus a little bit.

1-10

6. Love & Relationships

Once everyone is settled back in their places, introduce this section:

- **SLIDE 13** Now please turn to pages 10 and 11 in your booklets. You'll be doing the next few activities in the booklet as individual families. Stop before you get to the blessing, which we'll do together.

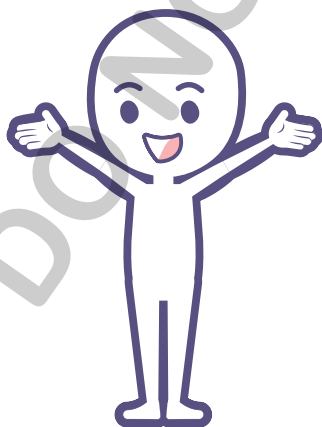
Give families time to work through the exercises, but be sure to leave at least a little time for the final blessing and to review the "At Home" page. You may want to restart the background music.

Float around the room to watch for any families that might be a little lost and answer any questions.



What is the
greatest
commandment?

You shall love
the Lord your God...
You shall love your neighbor
as you love yourself.



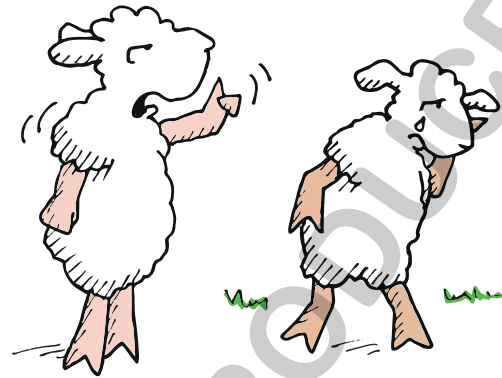
1-11

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

21

In each session, we will learn about parts of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which helps us restore the lines we erased on the last page.

Explain that this sacrament is also called the sacrament of confession, penance, or conversion.



WHY RECEIVE?

SACRAMENT OF GOD'S MERCY

When we sin, we do something on purpose that hurts our relationships with God, ourselves, and/or others (including the people who make up the Church). This sacrament mends those connections. When we lose our way, God's mercy calls us back.

When we decide to leave sin behind and turn back to God, it is called repentance or conversion.

22

It helps a great deal to **share with your child what it's like** for you when you go to confession. If you have not been to the Sacrament of Reconciliation lately, this is a great time for you to return and make a confession. Usually the parish offers this at a certain time every week. Check your parish website or call the parish office to make an appointment.

1-12

7. The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Advance to **SLIDE 14**, ring the bell, and gently prompt the group to move toward pages 12-13 if they haven't already. Make sure no families are falling too far behind.



PREPARING TO RECEIVE

GET READY

Before we receive the sacrament, we need to examine our conscience to think about what we have done wrong. We need to be sorry for how we have sinned and intend not to do it again. Here are some ideas for how you can prepare:

- Spend time in quiet prayer, thinking about ways that you have sinned.
- Ask God to help you be honest and humble.
- Review an "examination of conscience" to help you remember how you sinned recently.
- Trust that the priest will help you.

23

Talk your child through the ideas above and explain what works best for you.

Show them an **examination of conscience** and read through a few questions (find a link on the last page of this handout).



THE RECONCILIATION ROOM

THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENS

The sacrament usually happens in a room with chairs and a Bible. The room may be called a confessional, and there may be a screen between you and the priest so you can hear each other but not see each other.

The priest will be waiting for you to come in and sit down or kneel.

24

If possible, **take your child** to see the reconciliation room. Assure your child that you will be there that day with them, just outside the room.

1-13

MISSING THE MARK



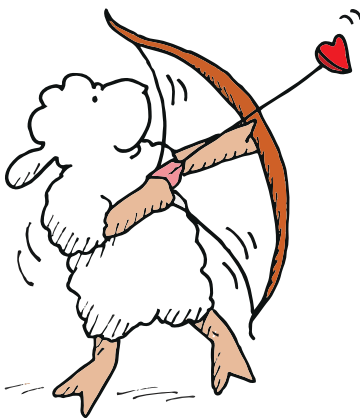
The word for sin in the Bible means "missing the mark," like when a person shoots an arrow at a target and misses.

What is it that we should we be aiming for?

25

Prompt your child to answer the question (we should aim to love!) and help them understand that God wants us to be as loving as we can in every situation, even when it's hard. It's much more than just trying to be "nice."

Also stress that **none of us is perfect**, so we all miss sometimes and that's okay (God forgives us). In future sessions, we'll learn how we can take better aim and practice so we can do a better job at loving.



26

Now play the game on the next page together.

HOLY CHILD BLESSING

- + This is a holy mind.
May it be filled with thoughts of God.
 - + These are holy eyes.
May they see God in those around you.
 - + This is a holy mouth.
May it always speak with God's kindness.
 - + This is a holy heart.
May it be filled with the love of God.
 - + These are holy hands.
May they always do the work of God.
- (Hug!) You are my holy child.
May we learn together
about God's great love. **Amen!**

27

End the session by blessing your child with the prayer on the right. Make the Sign of the Cross over each body part (forehead, eyes, etc.) while you say the lines beginning with a green cross (+). Hug them on the last line.

1-14

8. Missing the Mark

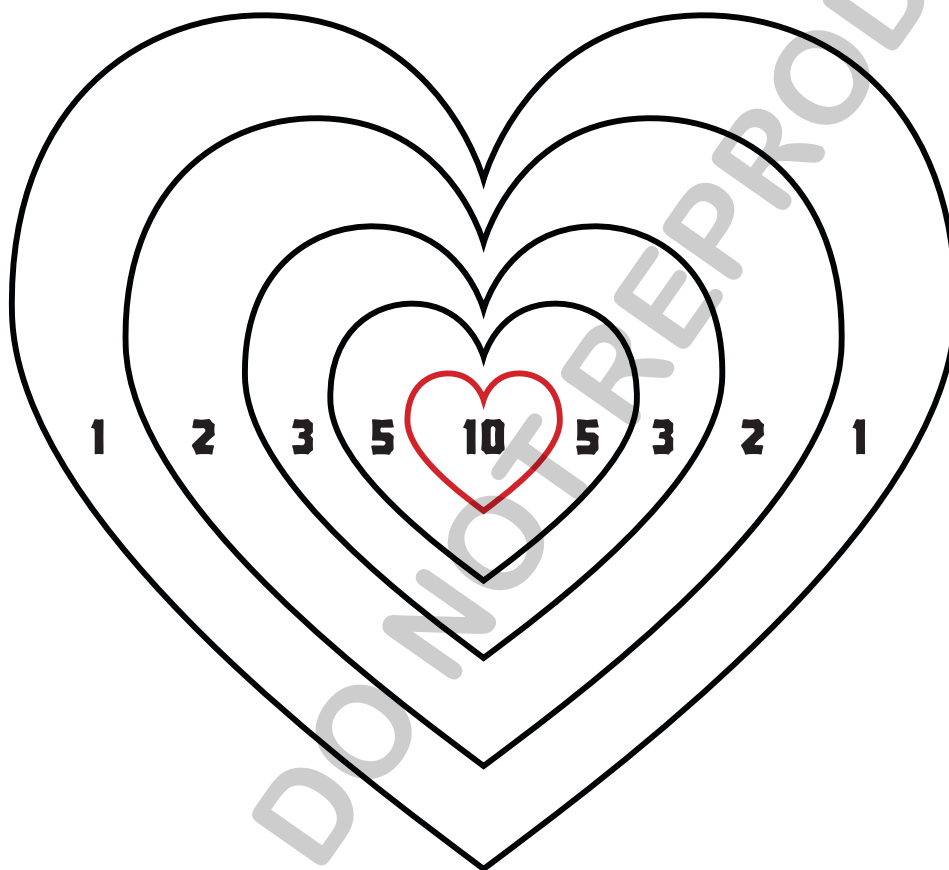
Similarly advance to **SLIDE 15** and prompt the group to move to pages 14-15, reminding them to stop before the blessing.



TARGET PRACTICE

Play this game together, taking turns.

- Each player holds the pencil about a foot above the page, closes their eyes, and then lowers the point onto the page, trying to land at the center of the target.
- A player gets the number of points marked inside the heart that they land in.
- The player with the most points after five rounds wins.



1-15

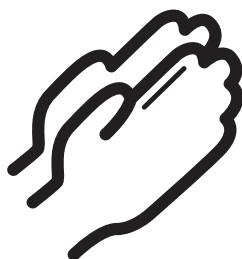


28

Each week we will give you suggestions on this page for how to bring faith into your household, interesting follow-ups, and extra resources. Visit this week's web page using the code or link on the right.



→ <https://reconciliation.family/1>



Please make sure that your child knows the basic Catholic prayers listed on the right, practicing especially during the next couple weeks.



Talk through an examination of conscience with your child. You can find a good one for children on this week's web page.



If you don't already, start a practice of regularly telling your child (out loud) that you love them, perhaps at bedtime or when they leave for school.

PRAYERS TO LEARN

Help your child learn these prayers by heart this week:

- Sign of the Cross
- Hail Mary
- Our Father
- Glory Be

Find the full text of these prayers on this week's web page (see top of this page).

PRAYER LEARNING TIPS

- When helping your child memorize a prayer, take it one line at a time. Practice with your child until he or she learns it.
- Help your child practice these and pray them together at bedtime each night.
- Another good time to practice could be on the way to Mass each week or when traveling to these sessions.

1-16



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9. Closing & Sending Forth

Get the group's attention to close the session.

This is a good time to help parents arrange to visit the Reconciliation room/confessional with their child, perhaps after the session. Otherwise, make sure families know how they can do this on their own.

AT-HOME THIS WEEK

- ▶ **SLIDE 16** Before our final blessing, please turn your attention for just a couple minutes to the last page of your booklet.
- ▶ This page will help you bring faith into your homes during the week.
- ▶ Every week you will find a link and QR code on this page that you can scan with your phone or enter on your computer. It points you to the Growing Up Catholic website with some great videos, ideas, and tools.
- ▶ **SLIDE 17** This week, we encourage you to work on the following three goals together:
 - ▶ First, make sure your child knows the prayers listed on the page by heart. You can practice them on your way to or from these sessions.
 - ▶ **SLIDE 18** Second, talk through the examination of conscience on the web page.
 - ▶ **SLIDE 19** Third, we encourage you to be thoughtful about saying—out loud—that you love each other.
 - ▶ **SLIDE 20** Finally, we would love to have you celebrate Mass with us on Sunday. Decide together which Mass you will attend.

Make a friendly, gentle request here that families be especially attentive to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation during the preparation process. Trying to force or guilt them into doing so will probably backfire. Instead, make a more personal invitation and explain that it is a privilege and opportunity to attend Mass. Note which Masses might be the best fit for families, and which one you attend.

HOLY CHILD BLESSING

You will lead this blessing as a call-and-echo prayer, having the parents repeat your words and actions at each step. Be sure to practice this beforehand until you are comfortable leading it smoothly. If possible, memorize the words.

This first time, it may be most helpful to demonstrate the full blessing all the way through with families just watching. Then say the words through a second time, pausing as parents repeat.

- ▶ **SLIDE 21** Now please stand for our holy child blessing.
- ▶ During this blessing, parents will make the Sign of the Cross over each body part—forehead, eyes, etc.—while you say each line. Then you will hug them on the last line. So, parents, repeat after me:
- ▶ This is a holy mind.
May it be filled with thoughts of God. *(Pause.)*
- ▶ These are holy eyes.
May they see God in those around you.
(Pause.)
- ▶ This is a holy mouth.
May it always speak with God's kindness.
(Pause.)
- ▶ This is a holy heart.
May it be filled with the love of God. *(Pause.)*
- ▶ These are holy hands.
May they always do the work of God. *(Pause.)*
- ▶ Now hug on this one! You are my holy child.
May we learn together about God's great love. *(Pause.)*
- ▶ And let the church say... Amen!