

Parental Love Is...

Leader Guide

This resource can be used simply as handouts that you send home with your parents or as the basis for small faith-sharing groups. Read on to learn more how to use them.

HANDOUTS

This resource consists of twelve single-page handouts, which each include a reflection on *The Joy of Love*, a set of bulleted “Parent Ponder Points,” and three reflection questions. While they are in color, they will also reproduce well in black and white.

If you are simply giving them to your parents as handouts, you may wish to distribute them on a weekly basis, perhaps at the end of religious education sessions. Send them home on twelve occasions or make six double-sided handouts.

FOR PARENT DISCUSSIONS

We encourage you to use these handouts as the basis for small group discussions. They will be even more valuable to your parents in the context of discussion. Sessions can be self-led by the parents themselves, without the need for a staff leader. It would be helpful to have a parent volunteer to get the group started.

Consider using them in the following ways:

- ① Gather in small groups as their children go to their religious education classes. The available time will probably allow discussing one to three pages at a time, depending on the size of the group and the amount of sharing.
- ② Schedule “Parents’ Nights” or other regular gatherings of parents (perhaps just after Mass) to reflect on these handouts. Providing child care will enable more parents to attend.
- ③ If you minister to a parish school, a short discussion of a single handout could be added to the end of your PTA meetings or other gatherings.

However you may gather your parents, be sure to be hospitable. Members of your group may be new to a small group experience or the larger community. Facilitate introductions and be sure everyone feels welcome.

We recommend that the content in the handouts be read aloud rather than silently. An excellent way to get everyone’s voices heard early on is to simply go around the circle having each participant read one paragraph/bullet point.

GROUND RULES

While this is a very simple resource that does not need much direction, it could be helpful to review these ground rules. Parents can have strong opinions about parenting, so they'll need to

- ① Our goal is to grow together into a deeper intimacy with Christ and to connect our faith with the way we parent and live our lives. Keeping this goal in mind will help us get there!
- ② Confidentiality. What's said in the group stays in group, unless you have the permission of the person who spoke it.
- ③ Start on time—and end on time. Everyone can help by arriving promptly and being attentive to time.
- ④ Discussion involves everyone. Make it possible for everyone – even those who are naturally more quiet – to take part. Don't share a second time until everyone has had an opportunity to share the first time.
- ⑤ Remember your manners. Avoid dismissing the thoughts of others, don't laugh at others when they've shared (unless they've just told a joke), and no putdowns of any kind.
- ⑥ Share from your own experience and speak for yourself. Don't try to problem-solve for another person or tell them what to do, but you can share what you have found helpful in your own life.
- ⑦ It's OK to agree to disagree. It's just a fact of life that everyone has different opinions. If the group has differing thoughts on an issue, there's no requirement that everyone agree. Respect everyone's opinions and where they are at in their journey.
- ⑧ Turn off mobile phones before the group begins! Put your electronic lives on hold for this short time to be fully present to others.

Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *The Joy of Love* spotlights love in the family. In chapter 4, he helps us see what love looks like in practice by reflecting on St. Paul's "love homily" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Read on to explore how these insights can inform us to become better parents.



Based on *The Joy of Love*, #91-92

Patience is the virtue of showing restraint; holding back a bitter remark, responding respectfully and gently so that the door is open for repentance and the offender can save face. A patient person "does not act on impulse and avoids giving offense." (#91)

A patient mindset recognizes that all people have a right to live according to their insights even when their ways are different. "It does not matter if they hold me back, if they unsettle my plans, or annoy me by the way they act or think, or if they are not everything I want them to be." (#92)
Patient love accepts others as they are.

Love
IS PATIENT

Parent Ponder Points

✎ "Accept" and "approve" are not synonyms. A parent may disagree with or disapprove of a child's opinion, decision, or behavior. At such times, parent voice, volume, mannerisms, body language, and eye contact can communicate acceptance of the child even while correcting him/her.

✎ Gandhi advised, "Hate the sin, love the sinner." During a correction, try to separate the person from the behavior. Communicate that you love your child, but the behavior is unacceptable and needs to change.

✎ Avoid speaking from your own parent-need or ego. Make correction a "teachable moment" that focuses on the child and the negative effects that the behavior has on the child and others. Engage the child in brainstorming solutions to apply in the future.

Reflection Questions

- ① When do you find it easy to be patient, and when is it most difficult—both as a parent and otherwise?
- ② Have you ever been reproved in a manner that made it easier for you to accept the correction and eager to improve? Explain what made it so.
- ③ Brainstorm how you might demonstrate love/acceptance for your child even as you express disapproval of his/her behavior.



Based on Pope Francis' The Joy of Love, #93-94

"Love" and "like" are not synonyms. Love is more than a feeling. It is an action, a choice, a decision to do "the good" for another person whether or not you "like" him/her. For example, love is including someone in conversation or activity, asking help, inviting an opinion, speaking respectfully, providing for needs. Love benefits and helps others. "Love is ever ready to be of assistance." (#93)

Pope Francis writes that love "shows its fruitfulness and allows us to experience the happiness of giving, the nobility and grandeur of spending ourselves unstintingly, without asking to be repaid, purely for the pleasure of giving and serving." (#94)

Actions speak louder than words. The attitude, body language, and facial expression that accompany our actions are possibly more important than the actual task. A person offering service safeguards the dignity of the recipient by communicating joy or enthusiasm with no hint of being bothered, annoyed, or condescending.

Parent Ponder Points

✂ Completing household chores in a timely, peaceful manner is a way family members serve each other. Engage your child in identifying specific ways to go beyond assigned chores. For example: pairing socks from the laundry basket, reading to or playing with a younger sibling, turning down the bed covers, offering the favorite chair, controlling volume of voice, etc.

✂ The best way to teach your children how to serve others out of love is to serve along side them. Find a way for your family to get involved in a service opportunity, perhaps through your parish, to serve the poor or others in need. Demonstrate joyful enthusiasm as you do so!

✂ At dinner or bedtime, invite everyone in the family to name one or more people for whom they wish to pray.

Reflection Questions

- ① When do you find it easy to serve others, and when is it most difficult—both as a parent and otherwise?
- ② Generally, is your heart more oriented to giving or to receiving?
- ③ Have you ever received the service of another person and thought, "If that's your attitude, don't bother! I'd rather do without." What about that person's attitude was a turn-off to you?



Based on Pope Francis' The Joy of Love, #95-96

Jealousy resents the achievements, prosperity and success of others. It takes pleasure when another person fails or meets with misfortune. Envy views another person as a threat to personal well-being and it causes us to close in on ourselves.

On the contrary, Pope Francis writes, true love "recognizes that everyone has different gifts and a unique path to life. So it strives to discover its own road to happiness, while allowing others to find theirs." (#95)

Parent Ponder Points

✎ Sibling rivalry is a form of envy most likely to occur when children are less than 3 years apart in age and when they are of the same gender. Feelings of jealousy, resentment, hostility and competition can surface for any event that threatens the identity of the child. Sibling rivalry can be exhausting to live with, but some parenting practices can ease tension between siblings. Read more detail and practical suggestions at: <http://goo.gl/5vBdpq>

✎ Brainstorm characteristics, achievements, and notable memories about each child in your family. Store the information in your "spiritual pocket" so that you have it on hand whenever conversations of comparison surface. For instance, when Henry says of his brother Austin, "He always wins awards in sports," be ready to respond, "And you are famous for your sense of humor, creativity, and practical helpfulness."

✎ Establish a birthday custom in which each family member identifies two positive characteristics or achievements of the birthday person. Publish it in some visual way.

Reflection Questions

- ① When do you find it easiest to show pleasure in the good fortune of another person, and when is it most difficult—both as a parent and otherwise?
- ② How do you combat the human tendency to be jealous, competitive, or arrogant on behalf of your child?
- ③ How frequently do you speak words of encouragement, affirmation and validation?

Love is not BOASTFUL or arrogant

Based on Pope Francis' The Joy of Love, #97-98

People who love well refrain from speaking too much about themselves. They focus on others and they do not need to be the center of attention. They do not seek glory, domination, or competition. Nor are they haughty, nitpicking, pushy or inflated with their own importance. Humility makes it possible for them to understand, to forgive, and to serve others joyfully.

Some people mistakenly define their self-worth or sense of importance on the basis of knowledge, power, or achievement. They act superior and condescending towards others. "Yet what really makes us important is a love that understands, shows concern, and embraces the weak.... Christian love is not about importance and power," Pope Francis reminds us (#97-98)

Parent Ponder Points

✚ Humility is the antidote for pride. Guide children in the ways of humility. For instance, practice expressing interest in the affairs of others, withholding your opinion until others have expressed theirs, asking for advice, complimenting others, expressing appreciation; celebrating the achievements of others, and speaking admiration for others.

✚ "Me, myself, and I" is the hallmark of pride! Guide children to adopt the language of "we/us/ours" as their primary expression rather than "I, me, and mine."

✚ Adopt as a family motto: "It is nice to be important but it is far more important to be nice!"

✚ Remember WHO you are and WHOSE you are! You are a child of God, made in the image of God. All that you are is an unearned gift. As someone once said, "Who we are is God's gift to us. What we make of ourselves is our gift to God!"

Reflection Questions

- ① Give an example of a teachable moment, when you have the chance to model humility rather than pride to your children.
- ② Pride is ego-based. Consider that EGO might mean "Edge God Out." Think of a time when you were prideful in a way that pushed God out.
- ③ If an impartial, invisible guest spent the last three days in your home, would he/she view you as humble and approachable or prideful and egotistical?

Plus eight additional handouts:

- Love Is Not Rude, Impolite, or Harsh
- Love Is Not Irritable or Resentful
- Love Is Generous
- Love Rejoices with Others
- Love Forgives
- Love Forgets
- Love Never Gives Up
- Love Is Optimistic

SAMPLE - DO NOT REPRODUCE