

The Ten Commandments of Parenting a la Francis *Based on the Franciscan charism as set forth in the OFS Rule*



Parenting is a challenge, no matter where you live or what you have. With the thousands of attacks on the Christian family today and the various family dynamics, we are confused, angry, shaken. We feel undermined and overwhelmed. We ask ourselves: how do we lovingly guide our children so that they can make smart, healthy decisions? How can we keep them safe, protected and firmly founded in a faith that gives them strength to tackle the challenges and the courage to tell the truth in the face of misinformation? How can we help them find the hope to envision a future in God's kingdom? How can we model the love necessary so they can embrace the lost, confused, misguided, marginalized and the poor?

That sounds like an overwhelming task! As parents, we must face the fact that **WE** are the ones holding the banner. We are the bearers of truth. We are the only ones who can truly forge ahead to bring our societies back in line with truth, goodness, wisdom, justice, peace, true love, and an understanding of right and wrong. We are the models of hope for a more positive future – for ourselves and, most importantly, for our children.



So, where do we begin?

St. Francis of Assisi who walked in the footsteps of Jesus inspires some practical and impactful tips and guidelines. We'll call them the Ten Commandments of Parenting:

1. Go two by two. (Mark 6:7) Parents should come in twos – mother and father. When possible work closely with each other and support each other in the parenting process. Even separated parents can work together for the sake of ensuring continuity for their children. Francis told his friars to go out and preach two by two.



2. Be authentic and joyful. Live what you preach. Set good examples. St. Francis wanted his friars to be models of love, to live the Gospel fully, to love God and to show that love through our actions. He lived joyfully among the little creatures of the world, never wanting to harm even the lowly, little worm.

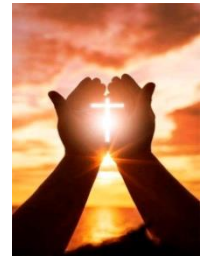


3. Do not pander to today's attacks on the human being, the family and the challenges to the good and the right. Stay firm in your beliefs. Remind your children that morals and

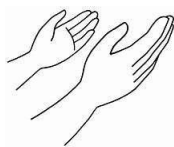


ethics matter. They make us stronger, better, more positive, more committed to the good. They affirm all that is good in us. In Admonition 11, St. Francis says: "that one must not be seduced by bad example. To the servant of God, nothing should be displeasing save sin."

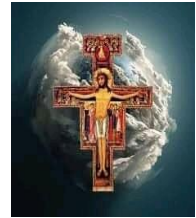
4. Pray. Stay close to the Lord. Talk with him. Share your concerns and fears. Be open to what He whispers. St. Francis spent 60% of his time in prayer, putting himself completely in the presence of the Lord. Invite your children to pray with you. St. Bonaventure, a follower of St. Francis, listed several powerful reasons why we should pray: Prayer illumines the mind and stimulates the desire for the true good; it gives us strength to fulfill our responsibilities, and assures that our actions are virtuous; it discourages sin; it harmonizes and synchronizes our words with our actions; it kindles in us the love of God, and makes us pleasing to God; it gives us confidence; it teaches humility to the heart and tenderness; it strengthens us in the face of adversity; it makes us joyful when we do good works. Remember, prayer can be a rosary or going to Mass together. These are beautiful ways to pray. But, prayer should begin at home, as part of the family dynamics -- with a family conversation around the dinner table where we invite the Lord to join us. We want to develop the practice for our children to have conversations with the Lord. We want them to build that personal relationship with the Lord where they trust in His truth and can always find comfort and support in His arms.



5. Dialogue with your children and be truthful in what you see. Speak boldly but lovingly always. Listen intently to their concerns. Respect them. Be merciful and loving while still maintaining the truth. St. Francis used the power of dialogue when he visited the Sultan. His goal was to convert the Sultan. They became friends instead. That friendship translated into allowing the Franciscans the custodial care of the Holy Land – which continues to today. He dialogued with the wolf of Gubbio and the townspeople and got the wolf to stop hurting them and the townspeople to provide food for the wolf. They lived happily ever after.



6. Provide a strong foundation of faith for your children. Speak often of Jesus, his life, his passion and his love. Francis used the Gospel as a guideline for his rule for the friars and for the brothers and sisters of penance. He lived His faith, quoted the Gospel often and defended the church, even priests who were sometimes less than perfect. "If I were to meet at the same time some saint coming down from heaven and any poor little priest, I would first pay my respects to the priest and proceed to kiss his hands first. I would say, 'Ah, just a moment St. Lawrence, because this person's hands handle the Word of Life and possess something that is more than human. These hands have touched my Lord, and no matter what they be like, they could not soil Him or lessen His virtue . . . To honor the Lord, honor His minister . . . He can be bad for himself, but for me he is good.'"

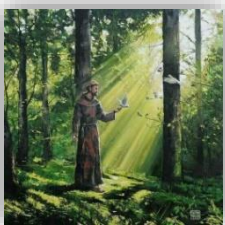


7. Remind your children that pain and suffering, while unwanted and difficult, have value.



They make us spiritually stronger. They help us become more compassionate and understanding of others. Francis desired to share Christ's passion so much that he received the stigmata. He asked to walk the passion of Christ. As we walk in pain, let us offer that pain as part of Christ's passion, as part of what Francis called "perfect joy" for the salvation of souls.

8. True love of others means that we want them to find God's kingdom. In order to do this, we must sometimes respectfully address behaviors which take them away from this focus. With tenderness and gentle prodding, open the doors to true dialogue which can help to bring them back home and on their path to the Lord. Francis was very honest and truthful the brothers and sisters of penance. In his letter to them he listed point by point what would happen to those who would "do penance" and those who "do not do penance".



9. Love our neighbor as ourselves and love Sister Earth. We should remind our children to take care of the world around us, to respect and appreciate the gifts of the Earth and to become its caretakers. Francis wrote the Canticle of Creatures where he acknowledged the beauty of Sister Earth and the praise that it gives to God who created all.

10. Remind your children that the Lord forgives us daily. Due to our own human weakness, we may fall often and because of that, we should keep working daily toward becoming better human beings. Our Franciscan Rule calls it “daily conversion”. Patience. Do not expect immediate results and changes in behavior. It takes time, a consistent, positive effort and daily conversion.



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