

10 tips to help your kids make Reconciliation a lifelong habit

by Kristen M. Soley

As a child, I never once looked forward to going to confession, and never fully understood the beautiful grace I received each time I nervously bared my sinful soul to our dear parish priest.

I had no idea.

As a result of this “disconnect,” I fell away from the sacrament from the time I graduated from religious education (after confirmation) and would not return for almost two decades.

After about twenty years away from the sacrament, I had the privilege of participating in a Steubenville Youth Conference where they offered the sacrament pretty much from sunup to sundown. I knew it was time for me to come clean.

Panic-stricken as I approached the priest, I felt the same fear I did as a child—only my sins were a lot bigger, and there were a lot more of them to confess. Adding insult to injury, I did not even remember how to make a good confession.

Things continued to go downhill fast as I pondered my sins,

and then realized there was no safe, concealing screen through which I could confess my lifetime of misdoings—I was staring directly into the face of my confessor.

The fact that I am writing this post is evidence that, by God's grace, I survived this terrifying encounter—free, forgiven, and grace-filled, all because I allowed God to humble me enough to receive his grace through the beautiful sacrament of Reconciliation.

And I wanted my children to have *that* experience of the sacrament.

Confession is essential to raising saints

When my husband and I learned that we were expecting our first child, we were elated (and a little scared) to be parents. Nevertheless, God began to reveal to us that being a parent is more than raising good, kind, responsible, obedient, humble, eager, chaste, Christian children with great character and possibly some grit.

He was calling us to raise saints.

Whaaaaaaaaaat? Yup, it's true. That is why God created each of us. "God made us to show forth his goodness and to share with us his everlasting happiness in heaven." We are called to be saints—all of us.

So what does this have to do with Reconciliation? A lot!

We need God's grace to allow him to make us into the saints he desires us to be. Grace is the generous gift from God, through Jesus' love, to help us on our path to heaven—sainthood. Prayer and the sacraments are the primary sources of this life-giving grace. So, to be clear, simply by praying and receiving sacraments we avail ourselves of his generous gift of grace, thereby making us holy and helping us to become

saints.

10 tips to prepare your children for a lifetime of loving Reconciliation

Here, then, are ten tips for fostering a lifelong habit of receiving Reconciliation regularly.

1. Commit to Christ on a personal level with a commitment card.

Invite your children to commit to a lifelong relationship with Christ on their own. Typically, both reception of the sacrament of Reconciliation and first holy Communion fall in the same year. A beautiful way of guiding your children into surrendering their life to Jesus is to do this formally. Making a commitment, on their own volition, is empowering, and is made simple by using a [commitment card](#). In our home, we print the form on nice cardstock and frame it for our children to display in their bedrooms.

2. Illustrate the reconciliation that occurs in our relationship with Jesus through confession.

You can use a live illustration to help your children appreciate the reconciliation that occurs through confession. It demonstrates the effect of sin on our soul, how it affects our relationship with Jesus, and how confession reconciles us with him:

1. Ask your children to watch as you stand in front of a crucifix facing Jesus and explain that you choose your will over God's, by sinning (possibly speak uncharitably to a sibling). Then take a step away from the crucifix,

still facing Jesus. Ask: "Who moved, me or Jesus?"

2. Explain that you commit another venial sin (disobey mom or dad). Take another step away from the crucifix. Ask: "Who moved, me or Jesus?"
3. Explain that you commit a mortal sin (miss Mass). Turn around with your back facing Jesus on the cross and take a big step away. Ask: "Who moved, me or Jesus?"
4. Explain that you go to the sacrament of reconciliation, confess your sins, and receive absolution (your sins are forgiven). Turn around to face Jesus again, and walk toward him, such that you are near him again where you first began.

3. Go to confession.

Let your children see you go to confession before and as they prepare to receive the sacrament (both Mom and Dad). Make it something to look forward to. My husband and I joke how we float out of the confessional, and follow up that statement by celebrating the "Grace, Grace, GRACE!" we just received!

4. Bring your child who is preparing for their first reconciliation into the confessional with you.

When children are preparing for Reconciliation, if your priest allows, and you are comfortable doing so, take them into the confessional with you. I did this for each of our children, and it removed the fear, giving them more confidence their first time. We started this the summer before they began preparing to receive their first Reconciliation.

Your priest may not be comfortable allowing your child to remain with you during your confession. (Canon law requires that anyone who is present during a confession, such as an

interpreter, is also obliged to secrecy...a responsibility many kids aren't ready to take on.) If that's the case, bring your child in to meet the priest, see what the confessional is like, and then excuse him or her before making your confession.

5. Teach them how to make a good examination of conscience.

I created this straight-forward [examination of conscience worksheet](#) enabling our children to perform a good examination without the fear of "missing something." We also teach our children to write their sins and bring them along, so they don't worry about forgetting any. The worksheet also guides them through the sacrament, including prayers, further instilling confidence. It is good to mention that even if they forget to confess a sin, ALL sins are forgiven through the sacrament of Reconciliation. However, they can also confess it next time they receive the sacrament.

6. Commit to go to confession on a regular basis.

With your child, commit to a specific date and time each month to receive the sacrament. Here is a helpful [commitment form](#) you can use. The bishops suggest going once per month, and the [precepts of the Church](#) say we are to "confess our sins at least once a year."

7. Practice with your child before their first reconciliation.

Review the dialogue involved in the sacrament. The [confession worksheet](#) can help facilitate this exercise.

8. Perform a family examen.

Practicing the Daily Examen as a family, but only with respect to sins that disrupt the happiness of family life, will foster a habit in your children when they are young, so that they may perform this on their own in the future. In making a [Daily Examen](#), you will review your actions each day, which can carry over to the confession worksheet.

9. Read to them about the great saints of the confessional.

St. Padre Pio and St. John Vianney are beautiful examples of holiness and fostering a love for the Sacrament. [Eternal World Television Network](#) has wonderful DVDs on both saints through the My Catholic Family series.

10. Try these other great resources.

If you are able, inundate your children with beautiful resources about our Catholic faith. All the above links have been compiled into a handbook entitled [“My Confession Handbook, Jr.”](#) by me, Kristen M. Soley. This book provides three or more years of confession worksheets among other resource to aid in preparing your children for a lifetime love of the sacrament of Reconciliation. The book was given the Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur by the Archdiocese of Minneapolis and St. Paul. It can be found on Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble as well as Westbow Press.

“My Catholic Family” Sts. Padre Pio and John Vianney DVDs ([The entire DVD set is worthwhile.](#))

“King of the Golden City: Mother Mary Loyola” ([Our preferred](#)

[version has study material by Janet P. McKenzie\)](#)

[“A Reconciliation Reader-Retreat: Read-Aloud Lessons, Stories, and Poems for Young Catholics Preparing for Confession” by Janet P. McKenzie](#)

[“Brother Francis: Forgiven!” DVD](#)

[“Guidebook for Confession for Children” edited by Beatriz B. Brillantes](#)

[“The Most Beautiful Thing in the World” by Gerald Brennan](#)

[“The Young Life of St. Maria Faustina” by Claire Jordan Mohan](#)

[“Children’s Book of Virtues” by William Bennett](#)

[Holy Heroes Audio CDs](#)

[“A Child’s Rule of Life” by Robert Hugh Benson](#)

[“Angel Food for Boys and Girls” \(Set of four\) by Father Gerald T. Brennan](#)

The Bible, read aloud daily to your children, starting with the Gospels. (We use both an adult translation and the Golden Children’s Bible, by Golden Books. You can find [approved Catholic translations here.](#))

Talking points: Why do kids need Reconciliation?

What if your family isn’t convinced of the importance of the [sacrament of Reconciliation](#)?

Here’s my own take on why kids need reconciliation:

The path to heaven (sainthood) is like climbing a mountain: a steep and daunting precipice, with rocks, steep inclines, and at times, scorching heat. The ascent up this mountain creates in us an unquenchable thirst; if it were never satisfied, the

ascent would be impossible. The sacraments provide the living water (grace) that satisfies our thirst and refreshes our soul, giving us the grace to forge onward. Not only are the sacraments grace-filled, they are necessary for our salvation.

Reconciliation is the sacrament that reconciles our relationship with God, when we turn away from him by choosing our will over his—by sinning. Reconciliation allows Jesus to shower his mercy upon our sinful souls. Each of us needs this reconciliation with him. We are all sinners. The good news? As Jesus assured St. Maria Faustina, “My mercy is greater than your sins and those of the entire world.”

Not only are we reconciled with Jesus by confessing our sins to him in the person of our priest, we receive the generous gift of grace (the life-giving water) that helps us as we climb the mountain toward holiness (sainthood).

If we can foster a love for this sacrament in our children when they are young, they will be stronger in their faith and have a well-formed conscience as adults. If our children are going to be well-formed, virtuous, and obedient to God in their adult years, we will have to guide their souls into a loving relationship with Jesus in their formative years. In our children’s human weakness, they will need the assurance that they are loved and forgiven, because they most assuredly will fall again and again. Each time they fall, Jesus will be there in the sacrament of Reconciliation, waiting with love and mercy to pick them up and help them to begin again.

Kristen is married to her best friend and business partner, Nathan. They live in Minnesota, where they homeschool their seven children. Kristen embraces her vocation of wife and mother as her path to holiness. Author, writing since 2000, and blogging since 2011, with Nate’s encouragement, Kristen has also been leading a mother’s group, and speaking to women

on their path to sainthood through the vocation of wife and mother. This ministry is a passion, but is secondary to family commitments.

With Nate's technical expertise, Kristen has two websites, kristen.soleyfamily.com and myconfessioncompanion.com; she blogs at kristen-soley.blogspot.com.