

13 tips for praying the Rosary with kids

This article is adapted from the book *77 Ways to Pray with Your Kids*.

A lot of Catholic parents would love to say the rosary with their kids . . . if the experience wasn't quite so, erm . . . *fraught*. At our house, we barely make it out of the preliminaries before the littles are swinging their beads around like lassos . . . which inevitably become airborne missiles . . . and if you have ever been whacked in the face by a rosary mid-Hail Mary, you know it kind of ruins the mood.

Our older kids are better, but I personally remember doing some groaning and eye-rolling as a teen when it came time for the rosary.

Fortunately, we've come up with a couple insights that help us to pray the rosary as a family in a more sane and meaningful way.

1. **The rosary is supposed to be a form of meditative prayer.** Listen to the words of Pope Paul VI: "Without contemplation, the Rosary is a body without a soul, and its recitation runs the risk of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas. . . . By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord's life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord" (*Marialis Cultus* #47). Realizing that the rosary is primarily a form of meditative prayer opens up whole new horizons for teens . . . and adults.
2. **The rosary can be adapted to kids.** Mary is many things, but she is first and foremost a mom . . . a mom who

undoubtedly understands what it is like to deal with kids! (Yeah, Jesus might have been a good kid, but she undoubtedly mothered the children of relatives and neighbors, too.) So why do we feel enslaved to saying the entire rosary with small kids? Realizing that we could do a mini-rosary with the littles made saying the rosary as a family do-able.

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On this point, we have the words of St. John Paul as encouragement. “It could be objected that the Rosary seems hardly suited to the taste of children and young people of today,” he says in [Rosarium Virginis Mariae](#) (#42). “But perhaps the objection is directed to an impoverished method of praying it. Furthermore, without prejudice to the Rosary’s basic structure, there is nothing to stop children and young people from praying it—either within the family or in groups—with appropriate symbolic and practical aids to understanding and appreciation.”

By the way, if you haven’t prayed the rosary before, here’s [how to say the rosary](#). (Or find a one-sheet [printable guide at New Advent](#).) And if you have been reluctant to pray the rosary because it seemed too simplistic or Mary-centered, check out the Talking Points section below for some reasons to give it a try.

So, without further ado, here are some different approaches to praying the rosary with kids.

Younger children

1. Skip the beads, or get kid-friendly ones.

If you're praying with children too young to follow direction, say the rosary without the aid of rosary beads. (Very young children may end up whipping them around.) When your kids are old enough, purchase a durable, kid-friendly rosary, such as a cord rosary. If you *really* want your baby or toddler to have a rosary like everyone else...or if you just want to keep them distracted long enough for you to say it, consider getting the [Chews Life rosary](#)...it's made out of food-grade silicone.

2. Start with one decade.

Praying one decade of the rosary should take a little longer than five minutes. Be sure to introduce the mystery in advance; meditate on a different mystery each time, so that you eventually work your way through all the mysteries.

3. Shorten the decades.

Say the entire rosary, but only say three Hail Mary prayers for each decade. This is a good way of introducing your children to the order of the mysteries and the rhythm of the entire rosary; plan on spending about fifteen minutes.

4. Use pictures to aid meditation.

Find pictures (online or in a book) illustrating each mystery of the rosary. Display the pictures as you briefly explain and then pray each mystery. Or check out [The Illuminated Rosary](#). Each book contains works of sacred art illuminating a different set of mysteries; young children can follow the rosary by looking at the pictures (one per bead), and older children can use it to help them learn the prayers. If you don't want to invest in books, pull together pictures on your own.

5. Set a prayerful mood.

Before you begin the rosary, set the mood with [Smells and](#)

[Bells](#), singing a Marian hymn, or practicing [Thirty Seconds of Silence](#).

6. Ignore the kids and pray.

If your children act up while you're praying, ignore them as best you can and pray the rosary yourself. Someday, your kids will "grow into" the practice, and in the meantime, Mary, mother of us all, surely sympathizes. A variation: just pray the rosary by yourself, or with your spouse. Tell your kids that mom and dad are going to have their "rosary time," and shoo them away.

7. Try an edible Rosary

Edible rosaries are another fairly easy way to make our Catholic faith fun, memorable and "hands on," and to show how our faith is not just an hour on Sunday. Rather, Catholicism lends itself to be woven into our daily lives with prayer, fellowship, food and fun using the liturgical calendar filled with feast days for inspiration. Using edible rosaries is a clever way to motivate children and families to pray the rosary, even if it's just a decade to start. To keep children's attention, I find it works best to set up the rosaries using a small treat like chocolate chips or blueberries and then as each prayer is recited, kids can eat each "bead." And if making and displaying an entire rosary is too much time, you always can make just a decade using 10 pieces of your favorite food item.

Older children and teens

In addition to the ideas above, consider the following for older kids and teens:

8. Make your own cord rosaries.

Teens have been crafting their own knotted and dyed rosaries from nylon cord since the 1980s; you can find supplies and instructions at Rosary Army (rosaryarmy.newevangelizers.com).

9. Introduce the rosary as a form of meditation.

As Pope Paul VI says in the quote above, the rosary becomes an empty ritual if it is nothing more than the repetition of words. Instead, take time to introduce each of the mysteries very intentionally, and go over the [principles of meditative prayer](#) with your kids. You may also find that introducing other forms of meditative and [imaginative prayer](#)—and mixing up the way you pray together as a family—supports and enhances your practice of praying the rosary. And once you've introduced the principles of meditative and imaginative prayer so that kids have an idea of what they're aiming for, then for heaven's sake, *slow it down*. Racing through the rosary, as several popes have pointed out, is not ideal. If time is an issue, then try praying a single decade slowly and meditatively.

10. Pray the Scriptural rosary.

As the name implies, the Scriptural rosary incorporates very brief, relevant Scripture readings before each Hail Mary; for example, the first joyful mystery, the Annunciation, would be interspersed with lines from Luke 1, taking the reader through the Biblical account of the Annunciation. You can purchase a Scriptural rosary book, or [find different versions online](#). Alternatively, focus on one mystery (and pray one decade) at a time over the course of a month, reading the corresponding Scripture before praying the decade *slowly and meditatively*. You could also incorporate a [lectio divina](#) component to your reflection.

11. Pray with music.

Try praying with soft instrumental music playing in the background; alternatively, preface each mystery with the relevant song from Catholic artist Danielle Rose's excellent [Mysteries](#), in which she has composed a gently meditative song with appealing contemporary styling for each mystery of the rosary; it's well-reviewed on Amazon.

12. Get older kids and teens to lead.

Research shows that the more agency we give kids around religious practices, the more likely they are to retain and integrate those practices into adulthood. Letting kids lead prayer is always a good idea, with appropriate support and guidance, so don't hesitate to let kids lead the rosary with the help of an appropriate resource. You might begin while they're younger by inviting them to offer their own intentions.

13. Pray the rosary for your kids.

If all else fails, and you just can't convince your older kids or teens to say the rosary with you, then pray it for them. As you pray, focus on entrusting your kids to the intercession of Mary and the care of her Son, and ask for the humility and grace you need to be a good parent.

Be creative in your family practice of praying the rosary...and be persistent. As Pope John Paul II says, "If the Rosary is well presented, I am sure that young people will once more surprise adults by the way they make this prayer their own and recite it with the enthusiasm typical of their age group."

Talking points: Why pray the Rosary?

In the rosary, we ask Mary to "pray for us sinners"—in other words, to join us in our prayer. Mary is "favored" by God and "blessed among women," according to the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:28), because of the role she plays in fulfilling God's plan of salvation. So reciting the Hail Mary—a prayer rooted in the Gospel of Luke—makes sense: We ask Mary to join us in our prayer just as we would ask any close friend to pray with us, but Mary is much more than just another friend; Jesus appointed her as our "spiritual mother" (John 19:27).

At the same time, the rosary is a profoundly Christ-centered prayer. When we ask Mary to accompany us in praying the rosary, she leads us to Jesus (John 2:5). As we recite the

prayers that make up the rosary (the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be), we also meditate on the “mysteries” of God’s plan of salvation as described in the Gospels: the announcement of Jesus’ birth, his ministry, his Passion, his Resurrection and Ascension, and so on. (There are twenty mysteries of the rosary in all.)

As even this brief explanation suggests, the rosary is a complex, multilayered form of prayer. On one level, the repetition of its vocal prayers makes it accessible even to children, as does the sensory aspect of fingering the rosary beads. But it is also a form of meditation, and when intentions are offered prior to each mystery, it also becomes a form of petition or intercessory prayer. Finally, the call-and-response rhythm of the prayers when the rosary is said in a group joins our prayers together to become the prayer of the whole Body of Christ, the Church.

Pope John Paul II on the Rosary as a family prayer

From [*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*](#) #41-42:

41. As a prayer for peace, the Rosary is also, and always has been, *a prayer of and for the family*. At one time this prayer was particularly dear to Christian families, and it certainly brought them closer together. It is important not to lose this precious inheritance. We need to return to the practice of family prayer and prayer for families, continuing to use the Rosary.

In my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* I encouraged the celebration of the *Liturgy of the Hours* by the lay faithful in the ordinary life of parish communities and Christian groups; I now wish to do the same for the Rosary. These two paths of Christian contemplation are not mutually exclusive; they complement one another. I would therefore ask those who devote themselves to the pastoral care of

families to recommend heartily the recitation of the Rosary.

The family that prays together stays together. The Holy Rosary, by age-old tradition, has shown itself particularly effective as a prayer which brings the family together. Individual family members, in turning their eyes towards Jesus, also regain the ability to look one another in the eye, to communicate, to show solidarity, to forgive one another and to see their covenant of love renewed in the Spirit of God.

Many of the problems facing contemporary families, especially in economically developed societies, result from their increasing difficulty in communicating. Families seldom manage to come together, and the rare occasions when they do are often taken up with watching television. To return to the recitation of the family Rosary means filling daily life with very different images, images of the mystery of salvation: the image of the Redeemer, the image of his most Blessed Mother. The family that recites the Rosary together reproduces something of the atmosphere of the household of Nazareth: its members place Jesus at the centre, they share his joys and sorrows, they place their needs and their plans in his hands, they draw from him the hope and the strength to go on.

42. It is also beautiful and fruitful to entrust to this prayer *the growth and development of children*. Does the Rosary not follow the life of Christ, from his conception to his death, and then to his Resurrection and his glory? Parents are finding it ever more difficult to follow the lives of their children as they grow to maturity. In a society of advanced technology, of mass communications and globalization, everything has become hurried, and the cultural distance between generations is growing ever greater. The most diverse messages and the most unpredictable experiences rapidly make their way into the lives of children and adolescents, and parents can become

quite anxious about the dangers their children face. At times parents suffer acute disappointment at the failure of their children to resist the seductions of the drug culture, the lure of an unbridled hedonism, the temptation to violence, and the manifold expressions of meaninglessness and despair.

To pray the Rosary *for children*, and even more, *with children*, training them from their earliest years to experience this daily “pause for prayer” with the family, is admittedly not the solution to every problem, but it is a spiritual aid which should not be underestimated. It could be objected that the Rosary seems hardly suited to the taste of children and young people of today. But perhaps the objection is directed to an impoverished method of praying it. Furthermore, without prejudice to the Rosary’s basic structure, there is nothing to stop children and young people from praying it – either within the family or in groups – with appropriate symbolic and practical aids to understanding and appreciation. Why not try it? With God’s help, a pastoral approach to youth which is positive, impassioned and creative – as shown by the World Youth Days! – is capable of achieving quite remarkable results. If the Rosary is well presented, I am sure that young people will once more surprise adults by the way they make this prayer their own and recite it with the enthusiasm typical of their age group.

Learn more

- [Luke 1:26-56](#)
- [Catechism of the Catholic Church #963-976 \(Mary, Mother of God\); 2673-2679 \(rosary\)](#)
- [The Rosary of the Virgin Mary \(*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*\)](#)
- [Marialis Cultus](#)

