

On the **Feast of our Lady of Arabia** in which we ask our Mother Mary to bless our families here is some **advice for Parents** about raising children: (This is not primarily about your adult children but about your minor children)

**1. The greatest gift you can give your children is your solid and healthy marriage. Show them a marriage that has stability, consistency, joy, faithfulness, affection, laughter, openness to life, generosity, hospitality, humility, forgiveness, adventure and unity in diversity.** The playground of your marriage will allow your children to feel safe enough to grow and bloom. **Let them see in your marriage a living model of what love looks like.**

**2. Order your home with** rhythms of time and **predictable patterns**, within which spontaneity means something. Too much rigid structure can stunt the unfolding of their playful uniqueness, while **too much freedom can leave them without the safety of boundaries or good habits.**

**3.** As parents, you are sacramentally consecrated as priests, domestic priests who are empowered to bless your children and intercede for them in their needs. **Bless your children every day**, all their lives. **Make it a bedtime routine every night, a brief ritual that will be for them a gesture of care and tenderness from you and from God.** A sign of the cross on their foreheads with brief words, a formula that you make your own, including the Trinitarian invocation, perhaps with a splash of holy water. **Pray for them every day.** Sacrifice for them quietly every day, especially in times of need, celebrations or rites of passage.

**4. Teach them to pray. Yes, have them memorize the traditional prayers from the earliest age possible. But also encourage them to speak to God from their own heart with meaning and sincerity** (knowing that they speak to a God who loves them). **Do this from the first days they can speak.** Never make prayer a punishment. Never discipline them with anger during prayer.

**Make daily family prayer time short, sweet and consistent, using a variety of forms.** Give them a role in creating prayer forms as they get older. **Use sacramentals as much as possible in prayer — candles, holy water, incense, holy images, relics, rosary beads, etc.** Soak their senses with the Holy.

**5. Make the Lord's Day, Sundays, or in this country perhaps Fridays if you go to Mass that day. Make it a special day of worship, catechesis, joy, fun, food, and family. Develop traditions that set apart the Lord's Day as a special time of family leisure and celebration. Have Sunday Mass stand as a centerpiece of the day. On the Lord's Day, have a special meal, or offer hospitality to others, or visit a nursing home, or play games, or take trips to the park.** I recommend "screen free Sundays" as much as possible to protect face to face interaction: no, or almost no, electronic devices with screens all day, except for family movies or family sports.

**6. Teach them to work, sacrifice and serve in age-appropriate ways by**

**giving them home responsibilities early on (i.e. chores).** Though your example as parents as a life of hard work, challenge them from a young age to work. **Everyone must "Do your part."**

Responsible care for and use of their own personal possessions, as well as responsible care for common areas and things in the home, should be part of every stage of their growth as they learn self-control.

**7. Let them learn love for the poor, the sick and the needy.** Make sure they are never far from those who suffer and help them develop, age-appropriate compassionate, merciful hearts. **Keep close to the poor and lowly. Teach them to live simply so that others may simply live.**

**8. Oversee their friendships.** As you know, friendships are of extreme importance in the growth of children, and ensuring their friendships are healthy and compatible with your family values is crucial. **Get to know the families of their friends and try to connect your families as much as possible, so they see friendships and family life form a natural unity.**

**But that said, don't be overprotective helicopter parents that require perfect friends who will not challenge and stretch your children.** Let them learn how to fight and reconcile, to deal with differences and learn patience and tolerance which they will need all through their lives. For God's sake, **don't try to protect them from all disappointments, mean & hurtful words, or the ups & downs of relationships.** Let them learn some of life's harder things for themselves, a little bit at a time.

**9. Expose them to great art from the earliest years of life: music, paintings, theatre, good movies. Encourage their love for painting, sculpting, drawing, singing and building. Get them into hands-on learning as often as possible. Sing with them and teach them to sing, to play instruments, to write poems and stories.** Teach them to make beauty!

**10. Cultivate a love for reading. Read to them, teach them to love to read, especially literature that grows their moral and spiritual imagination.** Let

their imaginations run wild, sometimes without the help from screens. Don't moralize your children, browbeating them with moral teachings, but **inspire them with stories of goodness in the midst of evil, stories of sin & redemption.** Let their consciences grow gradually. Don't expect too much altruism or selflessness. Don't impose a rigid code of moral rectitude at too young an age. If you press too hard, they may explode later in life. Let them experiment and learn in the playground of your family.

**11. Help them to see the beauty of the natural world by spending lots of time outdoors, exploring the mysteries, adventure, excitement and dangers of nature.** Let them get dirty and muddy and wet. Teach them to fish, spot birds, explore the wild world and breathe the fresh air deeply. Let them feel cold and hot, rough and smooth, sharp and soft. Let them get stung and pricked, and get scraped knees. Let them be afraid of the thunder, awed by the wind and thrilled by the first snowflake.

**12. Have clear rules for technology. Don't be afraid of teaching them how to live in a digital world, but have clear guidelines and keep faithful to them.** Don't trust their online explorations for a long time in their lives— filter everything. Protect their imaginations when they are to be innocent, but help them face the dark images of life when it is time as they mature. Don't leave them naive when they should not be.

**No mobile phones until they absolutely need them. Stand strong with this, because the pressure to give in will be fierce. And when they get them, impose limits on their use, as to when, where and how much.**

**13. Guard your speech. Create a pattern of language in your home that you would like them to imitate all their lives. Be especially careful about any type of gossip, and speaking negatively about others.**

**14. Don't talk about your children in front of them, unless you feel they must hear what you say and would benefit from it.**

**15. Don't yell. Yelling means that you have lost control.** Avoid it at all costs, and try to keep to calm and serene.

**16. Regarding discipline, work hard, extra hard, to learn to give your children consequences for their bad behavior; firm, immediate, consistent and nonviolent consequences as much as possible.**

**17. Work hard as a couple to be on the same page for applying discipline to the children.** You will differ, yes, and you will have to work on that always, but never let your children see you divided on essentials. And unless you have agreed on it for some specific purpose, avoid the good-cop, bad-cop routine, for example, dad's nice and easy on us, mom's hard and mean. Kids pick up on that and will exploit it. **Kids lose respect for parental authority when they see division.** Though there tends to be the natural division of responsibilities in a marriage (one is better at discipline than the other), you must work hard to keep toward a happy medium and a united front. Fathers never undermine the mothers. Mothers never undermine the fathers.



**18. Practice forgiveness. Let your children see you forgiving each other.**

Let them hear about people who forgive others. **Forgive your children often and teach them how to forgive and reconcile. Be humble when you are wrong. When you make a mistake, ask your children for forgiveness.** Help them to see that forgiveness is not overlooking wrongdoing, but that it requires a change in the person who is forgiven, and that forgiveness is not a sign of weakness but of strength. Help them develop a healthy conscience that sees *mercy* as the major element with regards to sin and failure. Let mercy be the way in which they learn the meaning and value of the sacrament of Confession. **Have a family tradition of going to Confession**, even before their first celebration of the Sacrament. Once they receive it, have a post-Confession celebration every time that links the experience of forgiveness with the experience of joy.

**19. Teach them how to recognize sin, face it, repent of it, and to rise up from it, full of hope and joy.** Help them

to distinguish sin from weaknesses and imperfections, to avoid scrupulosity and obsessive guilt.

**Help them see that sin is really about relationships, and the greatest harm of sin is not the violation of a moral code, the Ten Commandments, but the damaging or destroying of a relationship with God and other people.** But know that process of developing a conscience is gradual and uneven, is Spirit-led and a work of art. So you need to beg the Spirit to guide you, as He alone is the truest teacher of their souls. **20. Teach them how to suffer and fail. The natural instinct of a parent is to protect their child from suffering and failure, and to a certain extent this is appropriate.** But it must be balanced with teaching them how to suffer with grace and courage, how to offer their sufferings up to God for good, how to learn from suffering and to not be afraid of it (unless, of course, there is good reason to). The best teacher is to allow as many of the natural consequences of their actions as possible to befall them, so they learn the world of cause-

and-effect, personal responsibility and how to avoid bad decisions in the future. Natural bad consequences are often far better teachers than manufactured ones. **You have to teach them how to fail, how to accept failure and its consequences, to learn and grow by failures and not be crushed by them.** Start this lesson early, and cultivate, age appropriately, virtues like courage, humility, patience, longsuffering, perseverance.

**21. Talk about the faith openly & frequently, embrace your role as primary catechists. Don't default to allowing your parish (or Catholic school) to do your work for you.** Whether you choose to home school or not, what they learn from you is their most important source of faith formation. **Talk about the Mass, the sacraments, the Trinity, the saints, and especially Mary. Talk about their patron saints & guardian angels. Teach them to pray for the dead, and visit graveyards so they know how to reverence the dead.**

**22. Teach them to honor their mother and father, first of all, by never**

**allowing them to disrespect either of the two of you.** Let them know that you guard each other's honor, and will not stand for any dishonorable behavior. **Honor your own parents openly and visibly. Never speak disrespectfully of your parents in front of them, or of any of their relatives. Though you may have to speak difficult truths to them about family members now and again, always do so in charity, justice and respect.** Teach them to intelligently honor all authorities in their life (e.g. teachers, priests), and never speak of these people with disrespect, even though, again, you may have to speak difficult truths about these people.

**23. Let them always know that they can tell you anything, no matter how bad or scary it is, and you will not respond with anger or outrage. Yes, you will have to respond to certain things with firmness, but you will never respond to anything they tell you with a harsh or angry or punishing response** but always with love that is in their best interests.

**24. Every night when they go to bed, let them talk freely.** It may take patience and you will have to draw some boundaries of time, but **they should feel that there is a designated time and space for sharing their inner lives and that you are interested in everything they say. Building trust from the beginning is the pearl of great price.** And let me say, bedtime is a very opportune time to let them open up.

**25. Remember your children are not your possession. They belong to God. You cannot control their lives and must not try to.** Your main task is to help them learn to hear the voice of God for themselves and be ready to consent to His will when they know what it is. **Your primary task is to show your children, as best you can, the Face of God each day in your own faces, especially in your smiles.**

**Give them great memories that they can draw on all their lives, memories of a childhood and young adulthood that one day they will laugh and cry over,**

**a childhood that they can remember fondly and celebrate all the days of their lives.**

Wisdom from the Fathers of the Church:

*Let everything take second place to our care of our children, our bringing them up to the discipline and instruction of the Lord. If from the beginning we teach them to love true wisdom, they will have greater wealth and glory than riches can provide. If a child learns a trade, or is highly educated for a lucrative profession, all this is nothing compared to the art of detachment from riches; if you want to make your child rich, teach him this. He is truly rich who does not desire great possessions, or to surround himself with wealth, but who requires nothing. Don't think that only monks need to learn the Bible. Children about to go into the world stand in an even greater need of Scriptural knowledge.*

— St. John Chrysostom