

How to Talk to Children about Sin

Sin is a harsh reality of this world, and its effects (in this life and the next) are often difficult for us to acknowledge. Even some adults struggle with this topic, so how can it be introduced to children while preserving their innocence?

As important as it is to encourage the love of their Creator, children should also begin to learn the importance of living by His commands. The beautiful love and trust in God that children naturally develop should be tempered with respect for His supreme authority and an understanding that actions have consequences. Introducing these ideas early will help children develop habits that will serve them well as they encounter more of life's temptations.

The Holy Bible (referenced below from the New American Bible Revised Edition) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) provide solid foundations for this topic.

What is sin?

Talking Points:

- God gave us free will, which means we can choose to do right or wrong.
- When we choose to do wrong, it is called sin.
- Part of loving God means to do what He asks of us.
- In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. This was the first sin, and it caused Adam and Eve to lose the Garden of Eden and their friendship with God. As their ancestors, we now have original sin.
- God gave Moses the 10 Commandments to guide us in doing right instead of wrong.
- God asks us to follow certain rules to keep us safe and help us live in a peaceful world with our neighbors.
- Sin hurts our relationship with God, and sometimes it also hurts people around us.
- God wants to heal and forgive us so that we can be happy with Him in heaven, and He does this by giving us sanctifying grace.
- We should think about how we have wronged and offended God with our sin and ask Him to forgive us.

Accompanying Infographic:

- The Effects of Sin on the Soul (<https://www.catholicpearls.org/church-teachings-1/effects-of-sin-on-the-soul>)
- After we are baptized, our souls are perfectly clean, and we are in a state of grace (whole and clean like the first bottle). Our original sin is removed and we are restored to perfect union with God.
- When we sin, our relationship with God is damaged, and our souls are injured. Some sins hurt our souls more than others (reference the second bottle, broken by sin).
- God will forgive and heal us if we ask for His help (reference the third bottle, whole again).
- God's mercy and forgiveness are great gifts that He gives to us because He loves us. Once our souls pure again and in a state of grace, we will be ready to go to heaven (reference last bottle, made whole again).

References:

- The Fall of Adam and Eve: Genesis Chapter 3
- Moses accepts the 10 Commandments: Exodus 20:1-17
- Sin is an offense against God: “Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight.” Sin sets itself against God’s love for us and turns our hearts away from it. (CCC 1850)
- Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice; this deprivation is called “original sin.” (CCC 417)
- To return to communion with God after having lost it through sin is a process born of the grace of God who is rich in mercy and solicitous for the salvation of men. One must ask for this precious gift for oneself and for others. (CCC 1489)
- Sanctifying grace is the gratuitous gift of his life that God makes to us; it is infused by the Holy Spirit into the soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. (CCC 2023)

Going Deeper: Types of Sin

Talking Points:

- Some sins hurt our souls more than others because they are more severe and serious.
- When we disobey a moral law in a *less serious* manner, we commit a venial sin.
- Venial sins weaken our relationship with God and may increase our risk of committing a more serious sin.
- The *more serious* sins are called mortal sins, and they destroy our relationship with God. A mortal sin violates one or more of the 10 Commandments.
- By committing any sin, we are choosing our selfish desires over love for God.
- If we commit a mortal sin, we are no longer in a state of grace.

Accompanying Infographic:

- The Effects of Sin on the Soul (<https://www.catholicpearls.org/church-teachings-1/effects-of-sin-on-the-soul>)
- Point out the damage done to the second bottle, which represents our soul hurt by sin.
- Venial sin could be compared to a scratch or chip on the bottle, which would weaken it and make it more likely to break. Venial sins put our soul in a fragile state.
- A mortal sin would be represented by the bottle fully broken or shattered. The life of God is destroyed in our soul when a mortal sin is committed.

References:

- 1 John 5: 16-17: “If anyone sees his brother sinning, if the sin is not deadly, he should pray to God and he will give him life. This is only for those whose sin is not deadly. There is such a thing as deadly sin, about which I do not say that you should pray. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not deadly.”
- Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity. The distinction between mortal and venial sin, already evident in Scripture, became part of the tradition of the Church. (CCC 1854)

- Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to Him. Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it. (CCC 1855)
- One commits venial sin when, in a less serious matter, he does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when he disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent. (CCC 1862)
- Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not break the covenant with God. With God's grace it is humanly reparable. "Venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness." (CCC 1863)
- Mortal sin is a radical possibility of human freedom, as is love itself. It results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices for ever, with no turning back. (CCC 1861)

Going Deeper: The Sacrament of Confession

Talking Points:

- In His endless generosity and mercy, God has established a way for us to heal the effects of sin.
- Jesus created the Sacrament of Reconciliation for this purpose. (AKA Penance or Confession)
- With the authority given by Jesus, the priest hears our confession.
- After confessing our sins, we receive forgiveness and absolution from Jesus through the priest.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation restores us to a state of grace.
- It is important to remember that the effects of our sin remain after being forgiven, so the priest will ascribe an act of penance to help make amends for the sins we committed.

Accompanying Infographic:

- The Effects of Sin on the Soul (<https://www.catholicpearls.org/church-teachings-1/effects-of-sin-on-the-soul>)
 - Refer to the third bottle, whole again. Point out how you can still see where the bottle was cracked even after it was put back together.
 - The effects of sin remain even after being forgiven.
 - A similar correlation can be made with a piece of paper: A fresh sheet of paper is unblemished, like our souls after baptism. Allow the child to crumple up the paper, signifying an act of sin. The paper can be unfolded and smoothed out again, but it will never be the same, and one can easily see how the "sin" effected it. Unfolding and flattening the paper is akin to going to confession, and the remaining wrinkles are the effects of sin that need to be removed before our souls are pure again (like the fresh sheet of paper) and ready to enter heaven.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation (<https://www.catholicpearls.org/sacraments-1/reconciliation>)
- Definition Matching Worksheet - Sin/Reconciliation

References:

- 1 John 1:9: "If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing."

- “On the evening of that day, the first day of the week,” Jesus showed himself to his apostles. “He breathed on them, and said to them: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’” (Jonn 20:19, 22-23).
- The forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism is conferred by a particular sacrament called the sacrament of conversion, confession, penance, or reconciliation. (CCC 1486)
- The confessor proposes the performance of certain acts of “satisfaction” or “penance” to be performed by the penitent in order to repair the harm caused by sin and to re-establish habits befitting a disciple of Christ. (CCC 1494)

Going Deeper: Redemptive Suffering and Purgatory

Talking Points:

- We understand that sin not only harms our relationship with God but also hurts ourselves and those around us.
- We must make amends for these forgiven sins, and this can be done through redemptive suffering in this life, or through purification in Purgatory after we die.
- Examples of redemptive suffering in this life helps to expiate the effects of our sin include prayer, works of mercy, service of our neighbor, voluntary self-denial, and sacrifices.
- If we die in a state of grace, that is without any mortal sin on our souls, there is still a chance that we did not complete sufficient acts of penance in this life to atone for our forgiven sins.
- God allows us to be purified through suffering in Purgatory, where our souls will be made pure again by His justice.
- Once our souls are restored and pure, we can enter into heaven!

Accompanying Infographic:

- The Effects of Sin on the Soul (<https://www.catholicpearls.org/church-teachings-1/effects-of-sin-on-the-soul>)
- Recall the restored bottle with visible cracks remaining where it was pieced back together.
- Before we can enter heaven, we must be made perfect again as we were in our baptized state before any sin occurred. The bottle with repaired cracks must be perfected, and this is done through acts of penance during our life, or by being purified in Purgatory.

References:

- “But nothing unclean will enter [heaven], nor any[one] who does abominable things or tells lies. Only those will enter whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Revelation 21:27
- “Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sin.” 2 Maccabees 12:46
- Suffering, a consequence of original sin, acquires a new meaning; it becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus. (CCC 1521)
- The penance the confessor imposes must take into account the penitent’s personal situation and must seek his spiritual good. It must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear. Such penances help configure us to Christ, who alone expiated our sins once for all. They allow us to become co-heirs with the risen Christ, provided we suffer with him. (CCC 1460)

- All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. (CCC 1030)