



**PEP
TALKS**
FOR

**Catholic
parents**

ENCOURAGEMENT,
SUPPORT,
GUIDANCE

CONNIE CLARK



**TWENTY-THIRD
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Introduction

You're better at this than you know!

When my husband heard the title of this book he thought it was a great idea, until I mentioned who the author was. He diplomatically tried to hide his double take, and I knew exactly what he was thinking:

Haven't you needed a pep talk yourself every day for the past twenty years? But really, that's the point. We could all use a pep talk now and again, but each of us is qualified to give them too. That's because God in his wisdom has chosen us for our jobs as parents of our children. That means no one is more qualified to raise your kids than you. Not your parents, your best friend, your boss, or even the pope.

You are a holy family. Sure, you've made mistakes; we all do. But God created you, called you, and dedicated you for this job, and God doesn't make mistakes. "We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures," said St. John Paul II. "We are the sum of the Father's love for us and our real capacity to become the image of his Son."

So read on, dear holy family, take what you need, and share the Father's love. You won't find the usual parenting magazine tips here. Instead, you'll find resources from the church's great treasure chest of devotions and parenting tools that can help you live God's dream for you and your family in his kingdom—today, tomorrow, and for all time.

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I'm anxious and worried. What if I do a terrible job?

The shaking had started in the delivery room. My baby's heart rate had slowed, and by the time the nurses wheeled me into surgery for an emergency C-section, my entire body trembled violently in fear. Now, long past midnight, in a darkened recovery room, I couldn't stop shaking. Why now? My baby boy had arrived, healthy and safe. Everything was okay. But new worries beset me. How would I do this parenting thing if I couldn't control my own fears?

Until now, I hadn't noticed a faint glow on the hospital bed. Someone, a nurse maybe, had left the light on in the adjacent bathroom, and for a moment I was a seven-year-old kid, afraid of monsters in the dark. Back then, all I had to do was call out, and my mom would leave the bathroom light on until I fell asleep. Tonight in that hospital room, I knew Mom was still with me—even though she had died years before—reminding me that God always leaves the light on.

All parents worry. You may even physically tremble at times. But know this, and repeat it whenever things seem darkest: "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."

TO DO » Next time you're at church, notice the candle near the tabernacle—the sign of Jesus' presence. Picture him next to you as you pray.

TO PRAY » *Jesus, I worry about so much. Show me that your light shines on me.*

What will I do when they leave “the nest”?

A few days after leaving the hospital, I tearfully complained that our sweet baby would leave us in only five years’ time for kindergarten. My husband patiently explained that school was a long way off. We had plenty of time.

Sometimes parenting is more goodbye than hello. When they walk without our help, leave for school, or take off for college, we snap pictures and smile, but inside we’re crying a little. Last week I watched doves build a nest over the front porch, and I thought of Jesus’ words: “Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them.”

If you want to get through your goodbyes in one piece, remind yourself that God has given you these beautiful children to raise, but they, like you, are always in God’s hands. So say a quick prayer when you drop them off at school. Give a quiet blessing when they drive off in your car. On their birthdays, go to Mass for them. And tell yourself that whenever you say goodbye to another year, grade, or phase, you’re really saying hello to a whole new way to love your child.

TO DO » Come up with your own blessing or prayer for when you say goodnight or goodbye to your child.

TO PRAY » *Lord Jesus, when I say goodbye to my child, I trust that you say hello.*

My older children don't come to church. What can I do?

My friend is fretting. Her three teenagers have stopped coming to Mass. “I always told them that once they reached age fifteen, going to church was their decision,” she says. We sit in a pew as she explains that she refused to force church on her kids the way her parents forced it on her. I listen but can't help thinking that despite whatever her parents did, here she is, back in church. We walk to the back, pausing at the holy water font, where she asks what to do. I have no answers other than what a spiritual director once told me when her son announced he didn't believe: keep listening, keep asking questions, and keep praying for them. It isn't the answer she wants, and it probably doesn't help you if you're in the same boat. But as my hand touches the holy water I'm reminded of the lame man by the pool with no one to carry him when the angel stirs up the water. The man waits thirty-eight years for Jesus to heal him. We can do nothing on our own, but Jesus will bring our children to him in his time and way. Trust him.

TO DO » Get some holy water from church to keep in your home. Bless your car, your child's room, bed, and toys—anything—with it.

TO PRAY » *Angel of God, stir up the waters of baptism so that my child may respond to the Father's love.*

How can I deal with unwanted advice?

A neighbor insisted I had time for exercise—all I had to do was to plant the kids in front of the TV for a half an hour every day and announce mommy’s time. Great. Except I hadn’t asked her advice.

It happens to all of us. Whether it’s the relative who sniffs about the number of toys our kids have, or the stranger on the plane who sermonizes about our breastfeeding (or lack of breastfeeding), someone is always ready to share their wisdom with us poor, pathetic moms and dads whenever we don’t ask for it. Sometimes we can laugh off unsolicited advice, but other times it leaves us sputtering and angry. So how do we handle it?

It’s best to politely acknowledge the advice giver, but avoid tangling in explanations or arguments: “Thank you. I appreciate your concern.” That’s it. Firm, not snarky.

Jesus dealt with bossy pants scribes and Pharisees all the time. “Why don’t your disciples fast?” “How can *you* forgive sins?” Scripture tells us that Jesus “knew what was in their hearts.” So here’s an opportunity. When you think about it, most advice givers really do want to help, misguided as their actions may be. So ask yourself what’s really at heart here. A prayer for compassion (even as you end the conversation) just might make all the difference.

TO DO » Next time you’re confronted with unwanted advice, say a quick prayer—for them, and for you.

TO PRAY » *Lord, give my heart some extra room for patience and compassion.*

Sometimes I think my discipline efforts need some discipline themselves.

“See that?” The vet points at a white blob on the x-ray. “That’s your cat’s stomach. It should be on the other side of his body.” I glare at the young hooligan sitting next to me, recalling the times he and his brother played catch with our family fur ball. Driving home, I’m about to deliver a ripping-good lecture when I look in the rearview mirror. The tears he bravely held at the vet’s office now flow freely. This isn’t the time for a sermon. I pull over and climb into the back seat. I say nothing, and my hooligan feels small in my arms.

Our cat lived many years with his anatomical oddity, and whether it was my kids’ doing or he was born that way we’ll never know. The point is that it’s never easy to strike (pardon the pun) a balance when it comes to discipline. Most parents feel we could do better in this department, but one tool always helps us: silence. Assessing the situation, listening to your child, and understanding his signals before you act or speak—that’s a moment of grace. That’s when God is there, helping you be the great parent he made you to be.

TO DO » Go on a silent retreat for three minutes today. Listen to God’s voice within you.

TO PRAY » *God, give me silence when needed, your words when needed, and your grace to know the difference.*