

Tim Sullivan Family Life Director

Children must know their parents will never quit or give up

Looking for some good tips on parenting? Here are some issues raised by parents and the responses given by a panel of experienced parents, headed by Tulsa psychologist Dr. Mark Sadler, at a recent workshop hosted by the diocesan Family Life Office and the Pastoral Studies Institute.



Many parents submitted questions about the effective discipline of children. While most of the panel believed that physical discipline was normally not helpful or necessary, Donna Felzke of Sapulpa, who has raised two musicians, emphasized that parents must communicate to their children that they will do "whatever it takes" to get a particular problem or behavior under control.

This doesn't mean that parents are totally unrestrained, but that the child must know that the parents will never quit, will never give up, until their task is accomplished. Parents can't let children wear them down.

Dr. Sadler said that children need to understand that they are expected to be respectful, responsible and pleasant. That's their assignment in the household. Parents can employ time-out techniques to help children accomplish this objective. Allow one minute of time-out for each year of the child's age.

A couple of parents mentioned that the children behave better for the father than the mother. Dr. Sadler emphasized that the parents need to work together as a team, and where children more quickly respond to the father, the father and mother need to join forces to get the children to obey the mother as well. Honoring the other parent is critical to teamwork.

Several parents worried about the honesty of their children. As one mother said, "I can't help but think my teen-

age boy is lying every time he opens his mouth!" Dr. Sadler stated that fear is often the underlying problem for children who lie. It's important to get the child to open up about what that underlying fear might be.

A couple on the panel, Terry and Laurie Boyne, said that parents can do a lot to help their children understand the harmful consequences of lying. Where a household has a lack of trust, everything starts falling apart. Parents need to consistently model honesty to their children. If parents exceed the speed limit when driving, for example, they need to acknowledge their mistake if asked by one of the children whether they are going too fast.

For a child who has lost the trust of the parents, this trust needs to be rebuilt by the child's performance, one step at a time. Through discussion between the parents and child, there should be a clear understanding of what specific actions the child will take to re-establish the parents' confidence. Ideally, the child will propose the corrective actions to be taken.

At a time when many children spend countless hours watching television, surfing the Internet and playing video games, the parenting panel stressed that one way to keep these activities within acceptable limits is to put the TVs and computers that the children use in an open, central location. That way parents know what their child is doing and how often they are doing it. Along similar lines, access to the phone should be restricted on school nights.

Dr. Sadler believes that an allowance should be given to children at an early age to help young ones develop a sense of responsibility and an ability to manage money. Through a properly managed allowance system, the children will not be constantly bothering the parents for money.

The panel emphasized that, in this age of rampant

materialism, it is important for parents to communicate to their children that the family will not engage in the consumerism that is so prevalent in our society. In this regard, parents need to help children understand that their family is different, that their values are different and that the children will not have everything their peers have or do everything their peers do. The Gospel calls us to be accountable for the material things we have.

One of the biggest problems parents confront today is the pace of life and the many activities in which children are engaged. Dr. Sadler said that many children today are so busy and their time so structured that they don't have the opportunity to simply play. As a result, they have low levels of creativity and imagination. This trend is described in a recent book, "The Unhurried Child."

Dr. Sadler felt that it would be helpful if parents curtailed their children's outside activities. For example, his two young sons are not playing spring sports this year. This allows the family the opportunity to spend spring evenings at home, enjoying one another and relaxing. Kids need to be kids, not performing all the time.

It's especially important for Sundays to be set aside as a time to slow things down, to focus on God and one another. No shopping. No sports. No organized activity. Just simply being together.

The parenting workshop proved to be very helpful for those who were present either in person or through interactive video. Videos of the workshop are available through the Family Life Office.

Our closing verse is from the Book of Sirach: "He who honors his father atones for sins; he stores up riches who reveres his mother."

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