

Your Job As A Parent

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IF YOU could carefully study families that are genuinely happy — those in which father and mother truly love each other and their children, and where children obey, respect and love their parents — you would find that they have many traits in common. These characteristics are distinct and recognizable, and sharply differentiate these families from those in which there is unending tension, bickering and bitterness.

No institution has had the opportunity to observe the characteristics of happy families, as has the Church. Through the centuries, she has recognized the family as the ideal means of helping parents and children to lead holy and happy lives, and she has carefully noted which factors best encourage holiness and happiness. What she has long known has been borne out in recent years by the studies of social scientists. These researchers have questioned thousands of persons who, by their own testimony, are members of happy families; and they have questioned other thousands who admit that their family life is not happy. From such beginnings, they have uncovered the characteristics of happy families, which are lacking in the other kind. The findings of the Church, tested over the centuries, and of sociologists, using modern scientific methods, agree that there are five main characteristics of a happy family.

First, it places full, unquestioned trust in God. Father, mother and children accept the Almighty as their Creator without reservation. They show love and respect for Him and His laws in the everyday conduct of their lives. They pray together; they attend Mass and receive Communion together; they practice other devotions together; they make their home a little sanctuary, with pictures and statues to remind them of Our Lord or the Blessed Mother.

The father who believes and trusts in God is best equipped to perform his functions as head of the family. Aware of his responsibilities to the Lord for his children, he strives to instill moral virtues by his own example. The mother who holds the Blessed Virgin as her model develops the love and patience, which nurture the spiritual and emotional growth of her children.

When father and mother give living evidence of their faith in God, they no longer need spend so much time trying to decide which course to pursue in bringing up their children. They usually know what to do, because they have a standard to guide them. They only ask: What does God want of us as parents? When they seek to understand His way and to follow it, they free themselves of the confusion, which besets parents without standards upon which to rest.

Children in a home where God is worshipped also know where they stand. They are taught to respect the Creator and, in respecting Him, to respect all lawful authority. They learn in a precise way what conduct is acceptable and what is forbidden. In their study of religion and religious truths, they learn at an early age that punishment will inevitably follow wrongdoing; thus, they learn the major principle, which will guide their conduct throughout their lives.

Many authorities have observed that a major sign of danger in marriage arises when one or both of the partners stops attending religious services regularly. Records of the nation's courts clearly prove that the home which worships God does not produce the child who appears before a judge on charges of juvenile delinquency. Studies of unwed mothers prove that the girl who has learned the virtue of purity in a religious setting at home is not the one who gets into trouble in her adolescence.

Second, the happy family puts interest in its home in first place. Father and mother fully recognize that the most important work they can do is to train their children to be a credit in the eyes of God.

One sometimes encounters a father who spends long hours at business during the week and then spends his week ends with business associates. In pursuing success or wealth — and perhaps believing that he is a good father in doing so — he refuses his children's fundamental need to know him as a human being. On the other hand, one often sees men who hold positions which, by the world's standards, are low in social prestige. Perhaps they sacrifice material progress by devoting their leisure time to their children — playing and talking with them, sympathizing with their problems and encouraging them in their aspirations. Regardless of what the world thinks, the first type of father is a failure and the second type is a success.

In a happy home, parents often hold firm against other allurements, which tempt them to put the needs of their children in an inferior place. Such allurements include the desire for an overly active social life, the constant pursuit of pleasure in the form of commercial entertainment and the exclusive choice of hobbies (golf, cards, dancing clubs, et cetera) from which children are excluded.

Obviously, men must work to provide for their families. It is also obvious that parents are entitled to entertainment away from their children — in fact, an evening alone can have a pronounced therapeutic effect. Nor is the desire to succeed in business or to enjoy one's self blameworthy. But when a father becomes overly ambitious and sacrifices his children for his career advancement, or when a mother engages in an unending round of social activities, the great bond of unity in the family is weakened. Mutual love and respect, which are born and held only in intimacy, are the ingredients that make for true family life, and they cannot thrive when the father or mother places other objectives ahead of them.

Third, in happy families, father and mother occupy a position of equality, but there is no misunderstanding that he is the head. The importance of the mother is an accepted fact. She is the heart of the family — the custodian of love and warmth, the first comforter and educator of the children. In according her a just status, however, we must not weaken the father's traditional position.

By nature and temperament, he should exercise headship. When he fails to do so, his children lack an appropriate male model to guide them in their conduct, and they are likely to reach maturity without properly understanding the roles they must play as men or women. But while he must be the leader, he should not be like a common type of fathers of the past — the tyrant whose word was law, and whose wife and children constantly trembled before him. Such a father does more harm than good; his children either become submissive before everyone, or become so rebellious against authority that they cannot lead normal lives as law-abiding citizens. In happy homes, the father is the just dispenser of punishment, but he also wins the respect of his children by the reasonable rules he imposes and the merciful way he enforces them.

Fourth, the happy family is based upon mutual sacrifice. In such a home, Dad will forgo desserts at lunch to save for a family vacation, which all members of the family may enjoy. Mother will wear a

dress that is several seasons old so that her daughter may take piano lessons; and the children will save for weeks to buy her a special gift for Mother's Day. When Dad must do extra work at home for his employer and Mother can help him, she gladly does so. When guests are coming and the house needs a thorough cleaning, Dad rolls up his sleeves and does his share of the manly work. Johnny washes the windows as his regular chore, Billy sets the table for dinner, Mary washes the dishes while Mother rests, and after school Tommy sometimes watches the baby in her playpen while Mother shops. In this family, everyone makes sacrifices for the common good.

Fifth, the happy family runs on rules. The children know exactly what they can do without offending others, and what they cannot do. They know what their punishment will be if they break the rules. And they know that it will not vary from time to time or from parent to parent.

Establishing clear-cut family rules requires complete agreement between father and mother. Few things disturb a child more than when his father establishes one standard of conduct and his mother makes continuous exceptions to it. Once a father and mother agree, neither should change the rules without consulting the other, or the child will not know what is expected of him. And both father and mother must share in enforcing them.

Probably the happiest homes are those in which each family member imposes rules upon himself. One wife becomes unduly disturbed whenever references are made to the alleged inferiority of women in any area of activity. She becomes angry at jokes about women drivers, women who are late for appointments, women who can't balance a checkbook. Out of respect for her feelings, her husband never raises such subjects even in a joking way. Many husbands have similar quirks in their make-up which may be unjustified from an objective point of view but which their wives respect for the sake of harmony. Sometimes children also become sensitive about certain points. When family members are motivated by a spirit of Christian tolerance, they willingly impose the rule upon themselves not to raise such touchy subjects.

As this review of the characteristics of happy families suggests, achievement of a genuinely Christian environment in your home will not result from mere chance.

Rather you must put into effect the principles that follow from recognition of the fact that the family should be a triangle with God at its apex, or else it is doomed to failure. For the very characteristics that make a home holy, happy, and a source of strength and solace for its members come from nowhere but Almighty God. The love which the mother displays for her infant, the just and consistent way in which the father exercises his authority — these are but human copies of the loving authority which God exercises over all His children. And the respect for God and each other that family members display in the truly happy and Christian home springs from the two greatest commandments — that we love God with all our minds and all our hearts, and that we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Advantages of the large family.

Before marrying, many young couples decide how many children they will have — a decision, which often reveals that they are more concerned with how few children they will have rather than how many. Thus, they begin their marriage with intentions of limiting the number of offspring. In this respect they reflect the birth-control frame of mind so prevalent today — a frame of mind which regards children as a liability rather than a blessing.

Although the first purpose of marriage is the procreation of children, Catholic couples will not necessarily have offspring. There may be many reasons why they cannot have babies or why they are limited to one or two. Some wives have difficulty in carrying a foetus to full term and have many miscarriages. Sometimes the husband or wife may be sterile — unable to do his or her part in conceiving a new life. There may be mental, eugenical, economic or social reasons, which make it justifiable to practice the rhythm method [or other natural methods such as the Billings Ovulation method]. The fact that a Catholic couple has no children, therefore, is no reason for concluding that they are guilty of any moral lapse.

In most marriages, however, there probably are no physical hindrances to births or justifiable reasons to limit them beyond those limitations, which nature herself and unchangeable circumstance impose. Hence, the typical Catholic family will have many more children than are found in the average family of other beliefs.

The large family provides many distinct advantages for both parents and children. For instance, it brings the mother and father closer together, giving them a joint source of love, and they achieve a closer sense of unity in planning for their children's welfare. Their love for each child extends their love for each other, and in each child, they can see qualities, which they love in their mates.

Children help parents to develop the virtues of self-sacrifice and consideration for others. The childless husband and wife must consciously cultivate these qualities, for the very nature of their life tends to make them think first of their own interests. In contrast, a father and mother who might have innate tendencies toward selfishness learn that they must subjugate their own interests for the good of their children, and they develop a spirit of self-denial and a higher degree of sanctity than might normally be possible.

The fact that children help to increase harmony in marriage has been proved in many ways. The sociologist Harold A. Phelps, in his book "Contemporary Social Problems," reports that 57 per cent of the divorcees in one large group had no children and another 20 per cent had only one child. Other researchers have established that the percentage of divorces and broken homes decreases as the number of children in the family increases.

Large families also teach children to live harmoniously with others. They must adjust to the wishes of those older and younger than themselves, and of their own and the other sex. In learning to work, play and, above all, share with others, the child in a large family discovers that he must often sacrifice his own interests and desires for the common good. For this reason, the "spoiled child" who always insists on having his own way is rare in the large family, if he can be found there at all. For the child who will not co-operate with others has a lesson forcibly taught to him when others refuse to co-operate with him.

In the typical large family, one often sees a sense of protectiveness in one child for another that is the embodiment of the Christian spirit. Children learn to help each other — to hold each other's hands when crossing the street, to sympathize with each other in times of sadness or hurt, and to give each other the acceptance, which we all need to develop as mature human beings. This willingness to help one another is often strikingly evident in schoolwork: the oldest child instructs his younger brother in algebra, while the latter helps a still younger one in history.

Another advantage of large families is that they teach each child to accept responsibility for his own actions.

Unlike the mother with one or two children, the mother of a large family usually lacks the time and energy to concern herself with every little problem of her children. She must observe sensible precautions with her children, of course, but she is not guilty of supervising her child's life to such an extent that he has no chance to develop his own resources. Precisely because she cannot devote her full time to him, he must make decisions for himself. Moreover, he acquires a better understanding of the rules by which the family is run. He sees his brothers and sisters punished for various breaches of conduct and learns what he himself may and may not do. And as he watches the progress of older children, he learns what privileges he may expect as he too advances in age. This knowledge gives him a greater sense of security.

Another reward for members of the large family, to which those who are now adults can testify, is that it gives the children close relatives upon whom they can depend all their lives. Occasionally, of course, brothers and sisters cannot agree as adults and break off relations completely. More often, however, they retain a close bond of kinship with each other and the reunions and family get-togethers on occasions like Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter form one of the great joys of their lives. In most cases, the child brought up in a large family never feels utterly alone, regardless of adversities, which may strike in adulthood. If he is troubled or bereaved, in desperate need of financial help or sympathetic advice, he usually can depend upon brothers and sisters to help. Forlorn indeed is the man or woman who, in time of stress, has no close and loving relatives to tell his problems to.

A final, but by no means least important, advantage is that they virtually insure the parents against loneliness, which has often been called the curse of the aged. How often do the father and mother of a large family remain young at heart because of the love they give to, and draw from, their grandchildren? In fact, many say that old age is their happiest time of life because they can enjoy to the fullest the love of the children and grandchildren without the accompanying responsibility. On the other hand, how lonely and miserable are the typical old people who have no children or grandchildren to love them?

One should not overlook the fact that there are some disadvantages to both parent and child in the large family. However, an objective review of these disadvantages would surely establish that they are outweighed by the advantages. For example, the large family may require the parents to make great financial sacrifices. They may be unable to afford as comfortable a home, own as new an automobile, or dress as well as can the husband and wife with a small family. But they have sources of lasting joy in the love, warmth and affection of their children — a joy that money cannot buy. The children of a large family may also be required to make sacrifices. Their parents may be unable to pay their way in college. But this need not mean that they will be denied educational opportunities. Thanks to scholarships, loan programs, and opportunities for student employment, the bright boy and girl who truly desires a college education can find the financial resources to obtain one. And having to earn at least a part of their own way will make them better students. Researchers have established that students who drop out of college most frequently have had all their expenses paid for them and have never learned the true value of an education.

Considerations for parents of small families.

If you have but one or two children, you should try to create for them opportunities such as exist in larger families to develop their characters. In particular, you should discourage selfish tendencies — a natural hazard in the small family. Since you can concentrate all your attention upon your child,

you may tend to worry about him to a greater extent and to bow to his whims more often than do parents of a large family. There is a natural danger, therefore, that he will become accustomed to having his own way and will not recognize that others have desires, which should be accommodated too.

In training an only child, it may help you to remember that self-denial is the virtue from which other virtues spring. You should therefore strongly resist the tendency to do everything for him and not permit him to want for anything. So that he may learn to get along with others, encourage him to cultivate friends. Invite them to your home where he will be the host and thus must exert himself to please them.

Finally, give him the freedom to develop in his own way. You must control the impulse to worry unduly about every ailment, to stand guard over him at play, to check up constantly on his teachers to make sure that they are doing their job right.

Such actions would betray a tendency to interfere abnormally in your child's affairs. Unless you avoid them you may find yourself ultimately trying to dictate where he should work and whom he should marry, and you will make it difficult for him ever to make decisions for himself.

How to be a good father.

Probably nobody denies that the typical father exercises less authority in his home today than at any time in history. Reasons for this decline probably are of no interest or help in the present discussion; but the effect of it cannot be overlooked. For evidence accumulated by psychiatrists, social workers and similar experts proves unmistakably that when children lack a strong father to guide them, they suffer serious damage in many important ways. Consider these facts:

There is a startling growth in homosexual tendencies among the young, and most authorities agree that the boy who develops feminine characteristics usually has had unsatisfactory relations with his father in one or several important respects. Increases in juvenile delinquency — a headlined trend in every part of the country — are also due to the weak position of the father; the lack of an affectionate and understanding relationship between father and son is a prevalent characteristic in the background of boys charged with criminal offenses. Many authorities also blame the shocking rates of divorce and marriage breakdowns to this cause. The fathers of those who cannot succeed in marriage often never gave their children a realistic example of how a man should live with his wife in this relationship.

The importance of the father as an example of manhood to his son and daughter probably cannot be overestimated. For example, one day your son may marry and have a family. To be a successful father, he should know how to train his children; how to treat his wife and their mother in their presence; what to discuss with them about his work; how to show them manual skills, such as repairing a chair or painting furniture; how to perform in countless other important areas. The best way to learn how to act as a father is to observe one in action.

What ideals will he display as husband and father? To a large extent, that answer will depend upon those he has learned from you, his father, in your own home. What part will he play in the religious education of his children? The answer will largely depend upon whether you have led the family to Mass each Sunday, whether you say grace before meals in your home, whether you take an active part in the spiritual life of your parish. How should he act toward his wife — aloof, affectionate, domineering, docile? Here too the answer will mainly depend upon your example.

The adage, “Like father, like son,” is firmly based on fact. No matter how much he may resist your influence, your son will be like you in many different ways. If your influence is wholesome, the effect upon him will be wholesome. If you are a bad father, you will almost surely corrupt him in some significant way. Remember also that you represent God before your child because you are — or should be — the figure of authority in your home. He will be taught that he can always depend upon the mercy and goodness of the eternal Father, but it will be difficult for him to grasp the full importance of that teaching if he cannot rely upon the goodness of his earthly father.

It has been said that, in addition to giving wholesome example, a good father follows four fundamental rules in his dealing with his children. First, he shows himself to be truly and sincerely interested in their welfare. Secondly, he accepts each child for what he is, and encourages any special talent which the youngster possesses. Thirdly, he takes an active part in disciplining his children. And finally, he keeps lines of communication open with them at all times. Each of these rules is worth detailed consideration, because the typical American father often ignores one or more of them. (Is this true in our own country?)

1. Show an interest in your child’s welfare. You can do this by devoting time to him, every day if possible. Try to discuss with him his experiences, problems, successes and failures. By giving yourself to him in this intimate way, you give him the feeling that he can always depend upon you to understand and help him in his difficulties. In a large family, it is especially important that you find time for intimate moments with each child. Every youngster should know that his father is interested in him as an individual, and is sympathetic with him and devoted to his welfare.

Modern fathers may find it more difficult to make their children an intimate part of their lives than did men of a few generations ago. Today’s fathers often work many miles away from home. They leave for their jobs early in the morning and do not return until late in the evening, perhaps after the children are in bed.

Unlike the men of an earlier age who often worked close to their homes, today’s fathers may seldom see their youngsters during the week. To offset this condition, they should try to devote as much of their week ends to them as possible. This does not mean that you should be a “pal” to your children or that you must act like a juvenile, when aging bones may not permit this. But at family gatherings, picnics, trips to the ball park or even visits to the school, you are sharing leisure moments with them.

2. Accept your child and encourage his talents. One man hoped for a son, and found it impossible to conceal his disappointment when a girl was born. He now spends much time trying to inculcate masculine virtues in her and berates her constantly because she is not proficient at sports. A successful lawyer prides himself upon his intellect and once hoped that his son would achieve great scholastic success. But the lad, now in high school, has shown no pronounced ability in academic work; however, he is skilled at working with his hands. He must face unending sneers from his father about his “stupidity”. A third man married a beautiful woman and expected his daughters to be beauties too. One girl is extremely plain, however. Even at the age of ten, she knows that she is a complete disappointment to her father.

All of these examples indicate ways in which fathers display a lack of acceptance of their children. It is a fact that the qualities a child inherits — his physical attributes, aptitudes, and many other characteristics — are the result of chance. He may be a genius or an idiot: you should not claim credit if the first possibility occurs any more than you should feel ashamed for the second. The

moral is plain: your children are a gift from God, and you should always accept each of them in a spirit of gratitude. In fact, the saintly father will accept a defective child with greater gratitude, for God has offered him an opportunity to provide more love, affection and direction than the ordinary youngster might need.

Remember also that your child is an individual, with talents, which you perhaps cannot appreciate. Let him develop them in the best way possible. In attempting to learn why many gifted children do not go to college, researchers have found that their parents often have actively discouraged them. In a typical case, a father became wealthy through real estate investments and could easily afford college for a son with a strong aptitude in science. But the father accused the boy of trying to “put on airs” whenever college was discussed. Thanks to him, the son is now a misfit.

3. Don't shirk unpleasant tasks of parenthood. “See your mother; don't bother me” is a remark commonly made by one type of father. He returns from work, eats his dinner and then settles down to an evening behind his newspaper or before the television screen. When his children seek his aid with their homework or when they become unruly and require a strong parental hand, he is “too busy” to pay attention. Such an attitude tells a child that his mother is the true figure of importance in the family, while Dad is only the boarder who pays the bills.

It is not fair for fathers to enjoy all the pleasures of parenthood — to play with the children, to boast about their growth — and to give mothers all the painful duties. A father should discipline as often as the mother. If he fails to do so, he gives the children the idea that he does not stand with the mother in her efforts to instill proper manners and acceptable forms of behavior. As a matter of fact, in major matters the good father is likely to be the court of last resort. This is as it should be for his authority is more impressive and its effect more lasting than that of the mother.

4. Keep lines of communication open with your children. Teenagers often say that they cannot talk to their fathers about questions, which disturb them.

This breakdown in communication usually stems from one of three factors, or a combination of them.

The father may be so severe in his discipline that he appears as a dictator in the youngster's mind; in the past he has always been “too busy” to keep on close terms with his boy; or he has not given his youngster the respectful attention he should have.

Stalin-type fathers fortunately are on the way out in America and elsewhere, for most men have learned that it is easier to train a child with loving kindness than with brute force. But some stern unyielding fathers remain. They may beat their child into patterns of behavior that offend no one, but in the process, they often create a bitter adult who is never able to confide fully in another human being.

The second and third possible explanations for a child's unwillingness or inability to confide in his father may have even worse effects than the first. In the first instance, unless the father is a calloused brute, his child may at least discern evidence that his father is interested in his welfare. But when a father does not even care enough to concern himself with the child's upbringing in any serious way, he evidences a complete absence of love or interest.

There are many things that human beings prefer to keep to themselves, and it is probably good that this is so. Your child should not feel that he must lay bare his innermost thoughts and desires. But he should know that in times of stress and strain he has a sympathetic and loving adviser to turn to.

You will fulfill that role if you strive always to treat him with courtesy and sympathy, and with an understanding based upon your memory of the difficulties, problems, fears and aspirations of your own boyhood. Never ridicule him: it is the opposite of sympathy and probably locks more doors between father and son than any other action.

How to be a good mother.

In view of the many social evils resulting from the decline in the father's influence, one of the most important functions the modern mother should perform is to help maintain or restore the father's position of authority in the family. In doing so, you will fulfill your own role as a wife and mother to a greater extent than is possible when you permit your husband to be the lesser figure. This was the secret of the success of olden fathers. Even though they worked twelve hours a day, their dominant role in the home was guaranteed and protected by the mother.

You can make your greatest contribution to your family as the heart of your home — not its head. From you, your children should learn to love others and to give of themselves unstintingly in the spirit of sacrifice. Never underestimate the importance of your role. For upon you depends the emotional growth of your children, and such growth will better prepare them to live happy and holy lives than any amount of intellectual training they may receive.

Most of us know persons who have received the finest educations which universities can bestow, who yet lead miserable lives because they have never achieved a capacity to love. On the other hand, we also know of men and women whose intellectual achievements are below normal but whose lives are filled with happiness because their mothers showed them how to love other human beings. It follows that in helping your child to satisfy his basic emotional needs to love and be loved, you give something as necessary as food for his full development. So do not be beguiled by aspirations for a worldly career or by the desire to prove yourself as intelligent as men or as capable in affairs of the world as they. The father must always remain a public figure. The mother is the domestic figure par excellence. In teaching your child the meaning of unselfish love, you will achieve a greater good than almost any other accomplishment of which human beings are capable.

You are the most important person your child will ever know. Your relationship with him will transcend, in depth of feeling, any other relationship he probably will ever have — even the one with his marriage partner. As noted above, from you he will learn what true love really is. From the tenderness you show and the security you give, you will develop his attitudes toward other human beings, which will always remain with him.

However, his dependence on you begins to wane soon after birth — and continues to wane for the rest of your life. In his first years, naturally, he will rely upon you almost entirely — not only for food, but also to help him perform his most elementary acts. But soon, he learns to walk and to do other things for himself; when he goes to school, he can dress himself; when he reaches adolescence and strives for the freedom that adults know, he will try to throw off his dependence so violently that you may fear that you have lost all hold upon him.

Your job is to help him reach this state of full and complete independence in a gradual fashion. And your success as a mother will depend to a great extent upon the amount of emancipation you permit him as he steps progressively toward adulthood. Therefore, you should try to judge realistically when your child truly needs your help and when he does not.

If you can reach the happy medium wherein you do for your child only what he cannot do for himself, you will avoid dominating him or overindulging him. The dominant mother makes all decisions for Johnny and treats him as though he had no mind of his own; the overindulgent mother will never permit her Mary to be frustrated in any wish, or to be forbidden any pleasure her little heart desires. The overindulgent mother may do without the shoes she needs to buy a doll for her Annie; she may stop what she is doing to help Peter find the comic book he has misplaced; she may eat the leftovers in the refrigerator while she gives the freshly prepared food to her children.

The overindulgent mother is a common character in literature. Probably every American woman has seen movies and television programs, and has read stories in magazines and newspapers, in which these defects were pointed out.

Yet every new generation of mothers seems to practice the same extreme of behavior. Some excuse themselves by saying that they want to give their children every advantage in life. Such an intention is laudable, perhaps, but the method is impractical. If you want to do the best for your child, let him develop so that he can face life on his own feet. Overindulging him denies him his right to develop his own resources and thus defeats the purpose of your mission as a mother.

Someone once remarked in jest that as part of her education for motherhood, every woman should visit the psychiatric ward of an army hospital. If you could see the countless examples of mental disorders caused largely by the failure of mothers to sever the apron strings to their child, you could easily understand why — for the sake of your child's emotional self — you must make it a primary aim to help him to develop as an independent person.

Priests and psychiatrists often see problems from different angles, yet they display striking agreement in pinpointing other kinds of maternal conduct, which do great harm to the child. Their advice might be summarized as follows:

Don't be an autocrat who always knows best. Your child may have his own way of doing things, which may seem to be inefficient or time-consuming. Have patience and let him do things his way, thus giving him the opportunity to learn by trial and error.

Don't be a martyr. Naturally, you must make sacrifices. But do not go to such extremes that your child feels guilty when you deny yourself something which rightfully should be yours, in order to give him what rightfully should not be his. A typical martyr worked at night in a laundry to pay her son's way through college. Before his graduation, he asked her not to appear at the ceremony — he said she would be dressed so poorly that he would be embarrassed.

Don't think you have the perfect child. Some mothers, when their child receives low grades, appear at school to determine, not what is wrong with him, but what is wrong with the teachers. When such a mother learns that her son has been punished for disobedience, she descends upon the school officials and demands an apology. By her actions, she undermines the child's respect for all authority — including her own. You will probably be on safe ground, until your child is canonized at Saint Peter's, if you conclude that he has the same human faults and weaknesses that you see in your neighbors' children (and even canonized Saints had many faults to overcome).

Don't use a sick-bed as your throne. The "whining" mother feigns illness to attract sympathy and to force her children to do as she wills. Who would deny the last wish of a dying person? In this vein, she often gets what she wants — for a while. The usual, final result, however, is that her children lose both sympathy and respect for her.

Don't be a "glamour girl." Motherhood is not a task for a woman who thinks that ordinary housework — preparing meals, making beds, washing clothes — is beneath her. Of course, mothers should strive to maintain a pleasing appearance, but they should also realize that they are most attractive when they are fulfilling the duties of their noble vocation. You would embarrass your family if you insisted on acting and dressing like a teen-ager; and, if you adopted a demeaning attitude toward household tasks, you would teach your children that motherhood and its responsibilities are unworthy of respect.

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