

Worried about your kids leaving the Faith? Here are 3 ways to keep your kids Catholic

Recent news about the loss of faith and religious commitment in young adults may leave parents feeling helpless, as if the monster of secularism and apathy will inevitably swallow up their kids. In fact, when we look at the childhoods of young adults who continue growing in and practicing their faith after leaving home, we see patterns that should give Catholic parents hope and direction.

Here are three ways every Catholic parent can help their kids internalize the Faith so it will continue to shape their identities and choices in adulthood.

1. Show your affection for the Faith

Catholic sociologist Christian Smith [remarks](#) of parents, “We get what we are.” In other words, our children absorb our attitudes about the Faith – or, at least, what they believe are our attitudes, whether or not their interpretations are accurate. If they believe the Church’s traditions, liturgy and teachings give our lives direction and meaning, they are far more likely to turn to the Church for direction and meaning in their own lives in adulthood. But if they believe the Church doesn’t make any difference in our lives, it won’t mean much to them either.



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So, what do our children witness in our faith lives? From their perspective, does being Catholic matter to us? For example, if we have a rich prayer life, but our kids never see us praying or hear about how our prayer life makes a difference to us, then they'll assume it doesn't matter much to us. If we attend adoration every Friday, but our kids never attend with us or even hear about it, they will assume it's not important to us and unlikely to matter much to them.

Parents who successfully transmit the Faith to their children tend to talk about their faith in everyday conversations with their kids. Being Catholic forms their identity. So, don't be shy about sharing your affection for the Faith with your kids. It'll be contagious! Share moments when your prayer leads to insight, or share your favorite devotions, prayers and saints.

2. Create a beautiful Catholic home culture

Local Catholic communities were once tightly knit and offered much of what a family needed – schools, sports leagues, unions, health care and even newspapers. Back then, Catholic culture animated the lives of Catholic families and created a robust shared identity. Those cultural ties have eroded. Today, most Catholic families have only a thin connection to

their parishes and little sense of a coherent Catholic identity.

It's easy to dismiss the importance of culture. We might overhear somebody comment that so-and-so is only "culturally Catholic," suggesting this person is not a particularly committed Catholic. However, [according to Church historian Robert Louis Wilken](#), the Christian faith can't be sustained without the support of a nurturing, vibrant Christian culture. It's true, culture alone won't lead our children to mature faith, but if Wilken is right, without culture, our children's faith won't survive.

Parents can provide their children with a distinctively Catholic home culture that recovers some of the lost roots of their Catholic heritage. Fortunately, Catholic culture (especially our liturgy, art and music) is irresistibly beautiful; it's a natural source of evangelization. Fill your home with the sights and sounds of our faith. Play sacred music and share sacred art with your kids; explore and celebrate feast days and saints with crafts and tea parties; curl up together and read faith books. You can find many free resources online.

3. Be firm and warm with your kids

Psychologists and developmental theorists tend to break parenting approaches into three primary categories: authoritarian, permissive and authoritative.

- Authoritarian parents are controlling and harsh. Their kids may obey, but often out of fear and not because they've internalized virtue or self-control.
- Permissive parents are kind, but they fail to set clear boundaries or enforce rules. Their kids tend to become entitled and controlling.
- Authoritative parents seem to get the balance

right between rules and warmth; they set and enforce clear rules and boundaries, but their default demeanor is kind and welcoming. Their children feel safe and “at home” with them.

Not only do authoritative parents raise kids who tend to do better socially and academically, but according to sociologists [Christian Smith](#) and [Vern L. Bengston](#), their kids are also more likely to continue practicing their faith in adulthood. Bengston notes that “relationships with parents that are felt to be close, warm and affirming are associated with higher religious transmission than are relationships perceived as cold, distant or authoritarian – regardless of the level of parental piety.” Notice Bengston says relationships that kids felt to be close and warm; it’s not what we intend but what our kids experience in their relationship with us that matters.

There are many more ways parents can nourish their children’s faith so it sticks, but these are three great places to start.

Kim Cameron-Smith is the founder of International Catholic Parenting and the author of “[Discipleship Parenting: Planting the Seeds of Faith](#)” (OSV, \$18.95).