

*Raise
Them Well*

*Physical
Maturity*



Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

Please Pray That

- Parents will teach their children to honor their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit.
- Families will work together to embrace physical health as a way to build respect for the body.
- Children will come to see themselves as persons who are supremely loved by God as an integration of body and spirit.
- Families will include physical maturity as part of their striving for holiness together.
- Children will grow into adults who have holy attitudes toward the body and healthy physical habits.
- Our culture will embrace God's beautiful truth about the body.
- The Domestic Church (the family) will be effective in leading children to be disciples of Jesus.

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Physical Maturity: Setting Standards & Boundaries

Physical maturity according to God's plan begins with the realization that the body is good. God created the human person as an integration of body and spirit. The body expresses the spirit. So our bodies reveal the "Imago Dei" - the image of God - to the physical world.

God calls us to respect both our bodies and our spirits. Saint Paul teaches

Or know you not, that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God; and you are not your own? For you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Our goal as parents is to lead our children to physical maturity. This means teaching them to treat their bodies with dignity. That is what motivates us to teach our children healthy habits.

Different families have different approaches to physical health. So, you may face different challenges in this task. My family is not a "health nut" family. That makes working for physical maturity in our pre-teen children a bit of a challenge. As parents, we know that our task is to lead the way. We need to set the standards for our family. We also need to role model those standards. Unfortunately, like most people, we enjoy junk food a little too much. We also don't enjoy exercise nearly enough. That means we need to put some extra effort into establishing standards, boundaries, and strategies for our whole family to be healthy.



Families who are more athletic or more health conscious may find establishing healthy habits to be easy. But in this case, the family may struggle to put physical health into its proper context. Parents may inadvertently send the wrong message. They may end up teaching their children that this earthly life matters more than anything else.

In either case, the goal of physical maturity is to firmly establish in children that the body is a gift from God. We want to teach them to appreciate and respect their bodies. When children view their physical body as a gift, they become more receptive to living a wholesome lifestyle that keeps their body healthy and free of disease to serve God in all they do.

Here are some strategies that may help both kinds of families.

Healthy Eating

Enjoying a family meal together offers an excellent opportunity to teach children healthy habits surrounding food. Begin by purchasing healthy food for your family's consumption. When appropriate, ask your kids to help with menu planning and shopping. Include your children in food preparation. Explore food options together. Children can learn that "broccoli" doesn't have to mean one thing. Roasted broccoli is different from steamed broccoli. While they may not prefer one, they may like the other.

Setting healthy eating rules can also help your children build healthy eating habits. There is some concern that the old "eat everything on your plate" rule may contribute to bad eating habits. But that shouldn't keep you from creating rules such as the "no thank-you bite" rule. My son has often refused to eat something that I have prepared. He knows that he has to take a "no thank you bite anyway. Once in a while, he takes one bite and then fills his plate. He realizes that his prejudice about the "gross" food was wrong. Set rules that encourage your children to eat a balanced diet and to try new foods. Also, set the expectation that you are not a short-order cook. You're not going to make separate meals for each individual. Doing so will develop two wonderful family virtues; humility and temperance. Finally, consider reserving dessert for special occasions like holy days, feast days, and special celebrations.

Healthy Activity

God created human persons to move and to move often. For some, like our active son, this isn't a problem. But for others, like our daughter and her parents, this is more challenging. In both cases, children need guidance on when and how to exercise.

Vague instructions like "go outside and play" are too ambiguous to build any kind of virtue. Instead, try setting up a system that teaches your children how to balance their own schedule. For example, match an hour of playing video games with an hour of playing basketball. Or pair one hour of reading with one hour of walking around the neighborhood. Choose a physical activity that your child will stick with. Better yet, let your child choose what she does. Also, adjust the time to fit the activity. Shooting hoops for one hour is a lot less strenuous than going for an hour-long jog. This may seem like basic bargaining at first. But the goal goes beyond rewarding children for doing what we want them to. The goal is to teach balance and deepen their appreciation for the role physical activity plays in physical health.

Being a good role model is another critical part of teaching good physical habits. We know that "do what I say, not as I do" isn't useful. Try finding a variety of family activities that everyone can enjoy together. You don't have to join a gym or a sports team. Put up a net in your yard and play volleyball, badminton, or pickle-ball together. Take bike rides or walks as a family.

Lead Your Children to Physical Maturity

1. Teach your children about the dignity of their bodies. This should be done in age-appropriate ways. But don't assume your children will just "pick up" the proper attitude about their bodies. Be the primary educator and lead the way!
2. Schedule regular family activities. Consider shorter activities during the week and longer ones on the weekend when you have more time to get outside and enjoy being together.
3. Make physical health a family goal. Schedule it, or it will be overlooked.
4. Thank God as a family for the gift of your bodies and your health. Include prayers for everyone's health into your family's intentions.
5. Strive for balance. Being healthy can include an occasional dessert and some "junk food." What it doesn't include is an extreme swing from this fad to that one. The virtue of temperance calls us to both health and enjoyment.

This article tells about just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the [Teaching the Way of Love](#) program, which can be found at the same website.

This article series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, authors of the [Teaching the Way of Love](#) home study series for parents. Find out more at www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love.

