

How to Talk  
to Children  
about

MAKING GOOD  
CHOICES

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# Introduction

“How do I talk to my child about...?” This is not an uncommon question among parents as well as teachers and catechists. Abstract concepts, hard-to-broach subjects, and sensitive issues all require a particular kind of language that gives a child enough information without being overly complex or confusing. The same is true for aspects of our faith. How do we talk to children about the great big concept of God or about the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus? How do we explain the gestures, symbols, and ritual of the Mass or approach issues of morality and making sound choices?

This series of books provides parents as well as teachers and catechists with a range of questions about these topics. Each one offers terminology relatable to a young child’s experience as well as family activities to stimulate further conversation and comprehension. In sharing these responses, you are likely to find yourself more than capable of talking to your child about these and other topics of faith and practice.

# *But I didn't do it.*

## Helping children tell the truth

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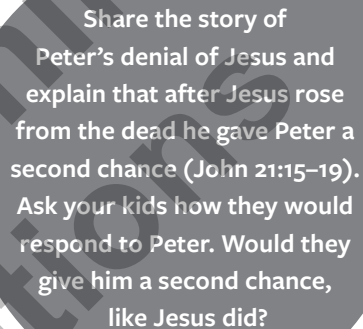
### **For your information**

You're at the playground with your kids and you look away for a second. Suddenly your older child shouts, "I didn't do it," as your toddler runs sobbing toward you. You see the goose egg forming on his little forehead and the bucket still in your daughter's hand. You can pretty much surmise what's happened, but your daughter insists she didn't do it.

We lie. We all do. The Bible is full of stories about people who lie. Think of Jacob and his falsely furry arms to curry his father's favor. Think of St. Peter in the courtyard, lying about knowing Jesus. Sometimes it's hard for anyone, whether you're an Apostle or a seven-year-old, to remember that Jesus says, "I am the truth." The lack of impulse control that led your child to smack her sweet little brother with a bucket is also what makes her cover her tracks to avoid punishment. So it's pointless and even unfair for parents to demand the truth in the heat of a moment like this. We only feed that fear and goad our kids into more lying and anger. Remember that the more Peter is pressed into a corner, the more his rage grows. He even curses. The Bible doesn't excuse falsehoods, and we read that Peter wept bitterly later on. But the Bible also records a beautifully redemptive conversation after the resurrection, in which Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Then Jesus gives Peter an important new task. That conversation holds the key to handling these situations.

## Talking to your child about honesty

In a scenario like the one here, you could start by acknowledging what's happening. You might say something like, "I can see that you're upset. But your brother is hurting right now. Can you help me make him feel better? Go and get his special toy for him." This helps your child focus on the one who needs help, and it buys everyone some time as you comfort the child who is hurting. Once everyone has calmed down, you can say something to your child like, "We all make mistakes. Is there anything you want to tell me about what happened?" Talk about how much Jesus loves us and how much he wants us to tell the truth. This isn't about punishment or guilt, but helping your child make a more loving choice next time. So say something like, "If you were angry with your brother, what do you think you could have done differently?" That gives your child a chance to solve a problem. Like Jesus with Peter, you show your confidence in your child's ability to come clean and do the right thing.



Share the story of Peter's denial of Jesus and explain that after Jesus rose from the dead he gave Peter a second chance (John 21:15-19). Ask your kids how they would respond to Peter. Would they give him a second chance, like Jesus did?

## Pray together

*Lord Jesus, we love you. Whenever we think it might be better to lie and not get blamed for something, give us your grace to remember how much you love us, so we can be strong and tell the truth.*

*He started it!*

# Helping children solve problems rather than blame others

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## **For your information**

We all know adults who can't accept responsibility for their actions. They might blame their parents, society, or something else. How will our kids avoid becoming these people someday? Don't worry. As Catholic parents, we have wonderful tools to help us raise loving, self-respecting children who understand that accepting responsibility is a step toward making themselves better people. One of those tools is the sacrament of reconciliation. Because Jesus himself has given it to us, the parenting techniques it models are perfect. We'll explore some of them throughout this booklet, but for now, think about this: Who goes with us into the confessional? No one. We're alone with our sins and with Christ (in the person of the priest). There's no one else to blame. What does that mean for parents? Well, when our kids start pointing fingers, we can remember that in confession, Jesus doesn't ask who started it. In the same way, we focus on each child's behavior. We don't encourage excuses or take sides.

Another thing to remember is that in confession, we name our sins. But we don't leave them hanging there to feel guilty about them. We express our sorrow and our commitment to avoiding them in the future. Often, the priest will ask us questions that can help us uncover some of our motivations. Jesus himself (again in the person of the priest) responds with love as he forgives us. We