



# Forgiving Hearts

First Penance

## Ten Things to Teach Children About Forgiveness

by Kathy Hendricks



A vital part of Christian faith is learning how to forgive. Here are ten ways that parents can help children

learn how to seek, initiate, and extend forgiveness.

### 1. Acknowledge our choices.

The first step in seeking forgiveness is facing the way we hurt others through what we say or do.

Developing a conscience is an important part of a child's healthy growth, both spiritually and morally. Facing our sinfulness and weakness is as much a part of becoming a mature Christian as celebrating our gifts and capabilities.

### 2. Consider what hurtful behavior does to us.

The insidious part of sin is that it not only breaks relationships with those around us, but is also harmful to ourselves. Hurtful behavior can overwhelm us with guilt, anger, resentment, or worry. Reading stories and discussing how the characters feel when they have done or said something mean or spiteful can help a child explore his or her own feelings.

### 3. Name what we have done.

The old saying, "confession is good for the soul," still rings true. The Church gives us a sacrament in which to confess our weaknesses and failures, not to make us feel

*(continued on page 2)*

"'God is Love' and love is his first gift, containing all others. 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.' Because we are dead or at least wounded through sin, the first effect of the gift of love is the forgiveness of our sins." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 733-734*)

For articles, prayers, and scrapbooking ideas, visit the *We Believe & Celebrate* web site, [www.webelieveandcelebrate.com](http://www.webelieveandcelebrate.com).

## Web Watch

For more ideas on scrapbooking, visit [www.webelieveandcelebrate.com](http://www.webelieveandcelebrate.com).



## Prayer of Absolution

God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
(The Rite of Penance)

## Did You Know?

There are other spiritual traditions that use the practice of confession.

**Native Americans** use a variety of confessional practices. The Arhuaco tribes from Columbia confess their sins to a holy man, a shaman. The sins are then symbolically transferred to a shell or stone. It is placed in the sun to be bleached, thus signifying the sins being taken away.

For **Jewish** people, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) is a time to recite special prayers and privately confess sins.

There are **Buddhist** practices of confession that go back to ancient times. One of these includes a Text of Repentance in which sins of greed, anger, and stupidity are confessed.



### Ten Things to Teach Children About Forgiveness

(continued on page 1)

worse, but in order to liberate us from the crippling effects of sin. Children carry pain, often secretly, that can burden them with unhappiness, guilt, and shame. Encourage them to let go of such feelings by talking to someone they can trust. Participating in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is one of the most valuable ways to do this.

#### **4. Be an initiator of forgiveness.**

Stubbornness about being the first to initiate the forgiveness process can slow it down or stop it altogether. It is not often easy to be the first to ask for forgiveness, but doing so can provide us with an immediate sense of relief.

#### **5. Seek the help of others.**

In daily life, it can help to enlist a third party when a conflict or disagreement reaches an impasse. This is especially true when the people involved are unable or unwilling to initiate the forgiveness process. People who take on this role—parents, guardians, teachers—need to be careful not to take sides, get enmeshed in the argument or try to “fix” the problem. The most important thing is to listen and encourage those involved to

look for ways to respond in a forgiving manner.

#### **6. Use the language of forgiveness.**

The language of forgiveness includes spoken words, such as “I’m sorry,” “forgive me,” or “I love you.” Body language is also important. Actions do speak louder than words, especially when it comes to forgiving and being forgiven. When we hug, share a meal, or lend a helping hand, we send a message that the conflict is behind us and we are ready to move on. Children learn this best when they see it modeled by parents and other influential adults in their lives.

#### **7. Let go.**

Holding a grudge is one of the biggest obstacles to true forgiveness. It is also one of the most common ways hurts are sustained. When we let go, we put the hurt behind us and release the power it has over us. This is another example of behavior that children must see modeled by adults.

#### **8. Recognize that forgiveness takes time.**

Children should not be pushed into forgiveness in superficial ways, such as extracting insincere apologies when they are still obviously angry. All

of the preceding steps may take time and cannot necessarily be reached in a single day.

#### **9. Emphasize that God forgives us—no matter what!**

Jesus told many stories that taught about the forgiving nature of God. The parables of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–31) and the Lost Sheep (Luke 15: 1–7) are two of the most familiar ones. Use them to talk about God as one who seeks and cherishes us, even when we do not make loving choices. Encourage children to pray for a forgiving heart and to thank God for the great love that is extended to us at all times—even when we don’t feel very good about ourselves.

#### **10. Celebrate forgiveness.**

Talk to children about what a relief it is to forgive and to be forgiven. This draws attention to the benefits of forgiveness and helps instill in children the desire and practice of seeking, initiating, and extending forgiveness throughout their lives.

Kathy Hendricks is a creative consultant for William H. Sadlier and a contributing writer to many of their programs, including the *We Believe & Celebrate* sacrament series. This article was originally published in *Religion Teacher’s Journal*. Reprinted with permission of the author.