



In my 20 years of parenting I have gone through almost every possible clever method of Catholic child-rearing one could imagine. Most of them worked (for a while) to support the faith and values that we wanted to raise our kids with. Some were really creative, like saint card albums to create litanies for kids who can't read yet, star charts for when a little ones does an act of virtue, representing the stars they will have when they receive their crown in heaven. Some were old-school, like regular confession, mass every Sunday (NO.MATTER.WHAT.) and praying the rosary.

For many years my kids have participated in Conquest and Challenge programs run by Regnum Christi to support the faith we are raising them with. Conquest and Challenge are 'powered by ECyD' and I recently learned what that means with the publication of their new statutes. In the statutes, **ECyD talks about 5 parts of their methodology: prayer, team life, formation, personal accompaniment and mission.** It dawned on me- that list summarizes the way we found our groove in raising our kids. We are parenting powered by ECyD! Which makes sense, since the primary educators of kids are the parents- any youth group is meant to support and strengthen the values that are learned and built in the family. The 5 elements of ECyD are so practical and 'real life' that they are a framework possible for any iteration of crazy family life.

Prayer You need to pray. Your kids need to pray. Pray together, pray alone, pray formally, pray spontaneously. Here are some things that work for us.

Mass – every Sunday without fail (except if someone is too sick to go- that is the only excuse)

Prayer before meals and before bed

Praying a 'hail Mary' in the car when we see an emergency vehicle- for whoever needs help

Confession- once a month as a family followed by ice cream to celebrate our squeaky clean souls!

For children who are becoming more independent we found devotional books really helped. My pre-teens loved **“Jesus Calling: 365 Devotionals for Kids”** by Sarah Young. My younger kids loved the easy to read saint-a-day books or the kid-friendly bibles we would read a chapter of before bed each night. My youngest son actually has a bible told in Minecraft...no joke. Don't worry, we use a real one when pray together. But he loves his Minecraft bible too. **My teenage daughter loves the daily devotional “He Speaks to You”** by Sister Helena Burns. All of these books encourage the growth of personal prayer. Don't be afraid to challenge older teens in their prayer. Introduce them to rebels like St. Augustine.

Retreats. You need them- at least annually, and your kids do too. From age 11 on, our kids have gone on 1 day to 3 day retreats to give them a time to go deeper with Jesus. The ones the Rivardlets have frequented are put on by Conquest and Challenge.

Team Life

Teams, man, do we have teams. We got soccer teams, fencing teams, mathlete teams, and volleyball teams. All kinds of teams... But team 1 is team Rivard. For us, team life means family life.

St John Paul II said: “The family is the first and fundamental school of social living: as a community of love, it finds in self-giving the law that guides it and makes it grow. The self- giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving that must be practiced in the relationships between brothers and sisters and the different generations living together in the family. And the communion and sharing that are part of everyday life in the home at times of joy and at times of difficulty are the most concrete and effective pedagogy for the active, responsible and fruitful inclusion of the children in the wider horizon of society.” (Familiaris Consortio 37).

Family dinner every night we can. I always look forward to this as a lovely time to teach our kids manners, share our days and calmly enjoy each other, but inevitably, it ends up being when the silliest most embarrassing things come out in conversation... oops...

Family vacation, according to whatever budget you have. Our lives our hectic-crazy every single day and night. Vacations force us to unplug and tolerate (I mean enjoy) each other's company, rediscovering the beauty of family. Take lots of pictures. They'll forget the squabbles on vacation but the pictures will bring back the happy times.

Chores. They must be done. Everyone should have a part in doing them.

Have the big kids help the little kids. The little ones LOVE their heroes spending time with them and there is nothing like a little kid to draw a self-centered teenager out of themselves to think about someone else. If you have no little kids, consider changing that. Really- I'm serious! Be not afraid! Some of my best friends had 2 kids age 12 and 10 when they became pregnant with twin boys in their early 40s... it has been the most awesome thing to ever happen to an already awesome family. No pressure...but don't be afraid either!

Remember the extended team, and your team in Heaven. Love and make the aunts, uncles, siblings, grandparents a big part of your kid's lives as much as you can. And don't forget those who passed away. We regularly talk about and pray to our 3 kids who died in miscarriage (named Gabriel, Raphael and Michael) they are still close to us, and I remind the 6 here on earth that 1/3 of my children are already saints.... Just sayin'...

Don't forget that your little family team is part of a bigger team- the Church! Get them involved in their parish, have your priests over for dinner, try as much as you can to expose them to the vocation to consecrated and religious life as something 'normal', because ya never know.... the next one might be in your home!

Formation

Solid Catholic education is a huge gift and boost to the formation of kids. Whether it is in a Catholic school, homeschooling or CCD, our kids need a structured way to learn their faith- to learn the reasons our family lives the way they do. Why we believe what we believe. They need a backbone of Catechesis to learn to make decisions from.

Programs like Challenge, Conquest, and Mission Youth have been really helpful for strengthening the formation of our kids, and connecting them with their peers who believe what they do and live like they do.

Personal Accompaniment

One-on-one time. Sometimes it is special, like taking a kid to a concert or professional sports game. Sometimes it is conversation alone in the car. All of our kids need it. Regularly. There are a billion ways to do it.

When one-one-one time means discipline, try to be merciful as your Father in Heaven is merciful. Kids learn their image of God from us (SCARY) ... Even if you are freaking out inside, make the family and their relationship with you a sanctuary, a place of calm for them, a strong, stable unconditionally loving place. Their foundation. PRAY for the help you need to do this.

Mission

Your family is meant to love inside and outside of itself. It is incredibly fulfilling.

Serve the poor or homeless together. It is very impactful for your kids to meet those loved deeply by our lord who are poor and need help.

Look at the corporal acts of mercy and talk about where you can live them as a family. Pick 2 to do together this year.

Volunteer at the parish.

Be an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist, encourage your kids serve Mass, be readers, work in the soup kitchen or food pantry. Ask your pastor or DRE what your family can do to help and try to do it together! This is a tradition your kids will cherish.

Go on mission trips- near or far. Leaving your home and going out to serve someone is an incredible experience. We are stewards of the gifts we are given, including our time and abilities. Many people in our world need your help. The inevitable surprise (does that even make sense?) is that you go to give Christ and his love to others, but you end up receiving Christ's love from them. It's awesome.

In the end, the acronym of ECyD speaks volumes in family life. It means “Experiences, Convictions, YOUR Decisions”. We can give the experiences and help build the convictions, but they have to make the decisions. I have little kids, teenagers and young adult children. The five things above may be foolproof ways to live our Catholic faith concretely, but foolproof does not mean freedom-proof. Expect imperfection. As adults we are imperfect. We make mistakes and bad choices all the time- hence the beauty of confession. Our kids will too. God-willing, they will keep coming back to the King of Mercy. We know that the only ones who can make their decisions are...them... in the end. And as parents, we entrust to the Lord. His grace is more active in their hearts than even our best parenting is. If it causes us sadness or stress to see them walk away from their faith, imagine how He feels... he will never stop reaching into their lives and souls to ask for their hearts. The most important part of parenting isn't having a perfect plan, it's letting go and letting God.