

Parents Crosslink

Linking parents to one another and the cross

Preparing Children for Success

Katie Martin

My husband and I got the list and dutifully checked it twice. The paper is wide ruled, the one-subject spiral notebooks are in the appropriate color, and we trekked all over town to snag the last package of washable markers in primary colors. The supplies have been labeled with our child's name and packed neatly into a shiny new pencil box. Whether we've procrastinated until the night before orientation or have spent the summer checking the sales and stocking up, the back-to-school shopping is complete. The only thing that remains is the obligatory first day of school photo of our child holding a chalkboard inscribed with his grade level. Although this phase of preparation may be complete for another year, we understand that our involvement in our child's education goes far beyond this.

Most likely we wouldn't dispute our responsibility to purchase school sup-

plies for our child's classroom. Yet we may call into question just how big of a role we play in our child's academic success. How do we help our child succeed in school? What can we do to promote achievement in the classroom? Just a moment of research online will supply you with a plethora of articles, videos, and even downloadable lesson plans that you can do at home with your child to foster academic success. And while there is merit in doing more reading on the subject, here is a list of a few simple things that each parent can do to promote success in school. None of these suggestions will break the bank or put stress on overscheduled calendars.

1. Encourage proper amounts of sleep.

Although parents might enjoy the quiet hours in the evening, an early bedtime for children has far more important benefits than allowing time for parents to relax. Sleep deprivation

in children (and adults) can lead to obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. It can also contribute to learning disabilities and a weakened immune system. The National Sleep Foundation recommends between 10-11 hours of shut-eye every night for your grade school student between the ages of 5-12. Sleep is paramount for improving concentration and enhancing a child's ability to learn.

2. Be involved. But what does that mean? Do we need to be the room parent who bakes brownies, chaperones every field trip, and serves as the PTO president? What should our involvement entail? Busy schedules, younger siblings, or work demands often limit the amount of time we can volunteer within the school, but these factors shouldn't totally keep us from being involved. We can start the

(Continued on page 2.)

school year off right by meeting the teachers, understanding their expectations, and discussing them with our children. We will want to attend school functions whenever possible, but far more important is our everyday involvement with our children at home. It is important to check that homework is being completed every day, allowing for more independence in that task as our children grow. We need to read the notes the teacher sends home and discuss the classroom happenings at home. We will talk with our children daily about what they are learning both academically and socially. And ask questions to find out what they are excited about and which relationships are creating some difficulty for them. If problems arise, talk to the teacher and ask, "How can I help my child succeed?" Sometimes a little suggestion from the teacher, like doing the most difficult subject first during homework time, can make a huge difference in performance.

3. Read, read, read. The importance cannot be ignored or overstated. Reading plays a huge role in a child's success in school. Studies highlight the importance of reading aloud to our children from birth on. Reading to children can be a huge indicator of future academic success. Pam Allyn, executive director of LitWorld, noted in a recent interview, "When I walk into a kindergarten class, within the first 10 minutes I can tell which children . . . have been read to before they came to school. Their engagement with literature in the classroom, their capacity to listen deeply, to remain engaged, their stamina for early reading—all of those factors are potentially built right from birth."¹

Scientific research on brain development supports this idea as well. A

24-month-old child has twice as many synapses (connections between neurons) as an adult. "Reading to babies helps 'wire in' those synapses, so that babies get an early intellectual boost."² Even as your child learns to read on his own, don't deprive him (or yourself) of that bonding time. Time spent reading together not only promotes academic success but also fosters conversation and discussion.

4. Be positive. While the prior three suggestions deal primarily with the physical and intellectual development of our children, this one gets to the heart of it. We are raising children of God in an unbelieving world. Regardless of whether your child attends a Christian or public school,

children will be forced to work with all types of people and personalities. As our children watch us deal with difficult relationships with positivity and kindness, it will breed that behavior in future relationships.

5. Understand the journey. Although I don't like to admit it, helping my child with her geometry formulas reinforces how much of my worldly knowledge has been lost over the years. And while this earthly knowledge is important, we, as Christian parents, seek to equip our children with far more than a secular education. No matter what level of academic success our children gain, it cannot be taken beyond this world. More important to our children's journey in this world is the wisdom of salvation. The knowledge of a Savior who loves them and died for them will give them purpose in this world and usher them into eternal life. Listen

Our child's ability to respect his or her teachers is encouraged or discouraged by our own attitude within the home.

he will have teachers who make mistakes, are unfair, or have unrealistic expectations. She may struggle to learn from a teacher she doesn't connect with or may disagree with the way a teacher runs a classroom. But at the end of the day, whether your child has an awesome teacher or one we see as less than stellar, the Bible is clear about how we are to act. The Fourth Commandment reminds us how we are to treat those God has put in authority over us. Our children's ability to respect their teachers is encouraged or discouraged by our own attitudes within the home. Certainly this doesn't mean you should sit back and do nothing if a bad situation arises in your child's classroom. Rather, this gives us an opportunity to model problem solving with positivity, love, and respect on the tips of our tongues. What do our children hear us say about their teachers? In the future, our

to how the apostle Paul encourages his young "student" Timothy: "As for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus . . . so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Our journey on this earth is to learn more about Jesus and share him with others. As we promote academic success, may we strive to glorify God and shine the love of Jesus into each heart we encounter.

Katie Martin lives in Jefferson, Wisconsin, with her husband, Pastor Josh Martin, and their four children.

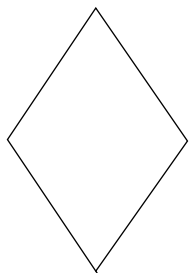
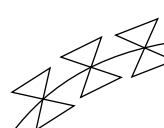
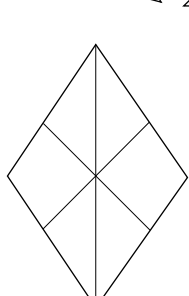
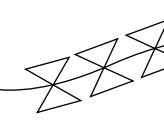
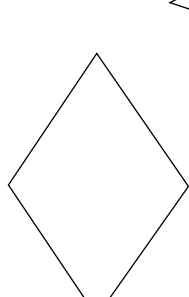

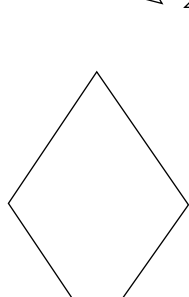
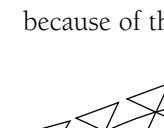
¹ <http://www.bankrate.com/finance/smart-spending/give-kids-academic-advantage.aspx#slide=6>

² <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/infants-toddlers-how-read-very-young-children>

catechism connections

Review the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer and its catechism meaning. Draw a line to connect the words near each kite with the words that come next in the meaning. Kite number 2 shows what to do. Then decorate the kites! Another game: Use blank cards to make commandment puzzles. Write the commandment on the left side of a card and its meaning on the right. Cut each card into two puzzle pieces, each card cut differently. Put together each puzzle and read the words.

The Fifth Petition: Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. What does this mean?

 <p>1. We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven</p>	<p>a. but we ask that he would give them all to us by grace;</p> 
 <p>2. for we are worthy of none of the things for which we ask, neither have we deserved them,</p>	<p>b. deserve nothing but punishment.</p> 
 <p>3. for we daily sin much and surely</p>	<p>c. gladly do good to those who sin against us.</p> 
 <p>4. So we too will forgive from the heart and</p>	<p>d. would not look upon our sins or because of them deny our prayers;</p> 

Physical Abuse

Sheryl Cowling

It had been too long since John had seen his brother, niece, and nephew. He was thankful when they were finally able to get together on a beautiful summer weekend—a chance to fire up the grill and to hear the sound of children laughing and splashing in the pool in the backyard. As his nephew ran by to retrieve a pool toy, John noticed what looked like fading bruises on his back. Later in the afternoon, John pulled his nephew aside and asked what had happened to cause such marks. John's nephew hung his head. Tears ran down his cheeks and fell to the ground. His voice shook, "It was Daddy. Sometimes he gets so mad at me when I get a bad grade or forget to pick up my toys. Then he hits me . . . hard. It really hurts. I tell Daddy I'm sorry for being such a bad boy and promise him that I'll do better." John embraced his nephew and thanked him for being honest. He told his nephew that he is a wonderful boy and that he loves him very much.

John had been concerned that he would repeat the cycle of abuse with his own children.

John's heart was breaking, for he knew all too well how his nephew felt. Both John and his brother were raised by a father who had little patience and whose discipline erupted from a quick, hot temper. They had been on the receiving end of too many incidents that involved slapping, punching, or kicking because they had made some minor mistake, or maybe for no reason at all. What John hated more than anything else was how his father would quote Bible passages about discipline to justify his abusive parenting. Both John and his brother had grown up fearing their father, but not in a respectful way. Over the years, their fear had turned to resentment and bitterness. In response, John had gone through a time of pronounced rebellion. He was thankful to have met his future wife in high school, because she and her family provided John with the love and stability he never received from his own parents. He shuddered to think what might have become of him without her and without God. John's brother wasn't so fortunate. He started drinking in junior high and by high school was experimenting with illegal drugs to numb the pain. He had been

in trouble at school and with the law. His troubles eventually destroyed his marriage. Only recently had he started to turn his life in a positive direction with much support from John, his new girlfriend, and his pastor.

Both John and his brother had once pledged to parent and discipline very differently than their own father had. But John knew how hard it was to break the pattern they had learned as children. Now his mind raced. He knew he had to talk with his brother. Apprehensive, but motivated by love, John pulled his brother aside and asked to talk with him privately.

John had been concerned that he would repeat the cycle of abuse with his own children. Because of his fears, when his wife had become pregnant with their first child, he had consulted with a counselor. John talked with the counselor about his childhood—the good and the bad. He talked about wanting to take his own kids to the ballpark like his father did with him, for those were some of his very best memories. He talked about needing knowledge, skills, and strategies to love, discipline, guide, and encourage his children, things that had been missing from his own childhood. And most of all, he needed to ensure that he would never, ever physically abuse his own children.

From the counselor, John had learned about positive Christian parenting strategies. He had talked with his therapist about setting realistic expectations, having a few basic rules for the household, agreeing with his wife on negative consequences for their children's poor choices, and rewarding their good choices. He had been encouraged to read some Christian parenting books where he had learned even more specific strategies about how to best meet the needs of each of his children given their unique, God-given temperaments and personalities.

John also had tucked into his wallet several Scriptures he had copied down while at an early morning Bible study. He lost count of how many times he had pulled these from his wallet as he felt his frustration rising when one of his children was disobedient or defiant.

Ephesians 6:4: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

James 1:19: "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."

Psalm 127:3 "Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him."

As John and his brother made their way to the basement rec room for a private talk, John silently prayed that God would guide their conversation so that it would bear good fruit. John then told his brother that he loves him and knows how much his brother loves his children. He shared how challenging parenting can be for himself, especially on the really tough days when he is stressed about his boss,



bills, or health issues. He reminded his brother how awful it was when their own father took out his anger and frustration on them, two innocent little boys. Then he shared his concern about the marks on his nephew's back.

His brother's anger flared, and he accused John of being on a witch hunt, looking for abuse when there was none. He told John to mind his own business, stormed out of the room, told his children to get in the car, and left.

John felt so sad about his brother's reaction. He hadn't denied that he had inflicted the bruises. He wasn't able to calmly offer some other reasonable explanation as to how or why his nephew had marks on his back. Sadly, in a way, his brother's reaction confirmed that he had difficulty controlling his temper, and when confronted with the truth, wasn't able to handle it in a mature, adult way.

John didn't sleep well that night. The next day he called his brother, hoping they could talk more once his brother had a chance to calm down and think about their discussion. In reply, his brother texted John with a few choice words and told John never to call him again.

John remembered that no one had protected him and his brother from their father's wrath. Not their mother, because she was too afraid of their father, or other relatives, because "they didn't want to get involved in a private family matter." John knew he could not sit idly by and allow his nephew to continue to be abused. He picked up the phone and called Child Protective Services in his county. He provided them with basic demographic information and shared what he saw and heard. He expressed the fact that his brother can be a great father but that he needs help.

John prayed every day that his brother would get the help he needs to be a great dad who disciplines in Christian love, not a dad who abuses in anger.

(See page 8 for more information on abuse.)

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Not That Awesome

Christopher Doerr

I like that you sharpen so many pencils for it,” my eight-year-old says.

Some weekends I forget. But about half of the time, either at supper on Saturday night or before breakfast on Sunday morning, I sharpen eight pencils and tear a sheet of loose-leaf paper into eight pieces. Then we all (except for the one-year-old) write down some of our sins. It’s supposed to help us appreciate it more when we go to church and hear that our sins are forgiven—to help us each be mindful: Yeah, I know a whole list of reasons why I need this forgiveness.

Nobody complains about making these lists, but the older kids definitely seem to get more out of it. I guess if the main benefit my eight-year-old sees is that there ends up being more sharp pencils around the house, you sense that he could take it or leave it. And my five-year-old says he doesn’t like it “that much” and it’s hard for him to think of sins to write down. But I know we’re setting a good example for these younger boys anyway. We’re show-

ing them by our actions that the news of forgiveness isn’t something we want to let go in one ear and out the other. It’s something we want to be ready to treasure—something we prayerfully want to make room for in our hearts through the remembrance of our sins.

What do the older boys say?

“Sometimes it helps me, but sometimes by the time I get to church I forget about it.”

“It helps me remember I’m not that awesome.”

“I like it. It gives me a chance to realize how many sins I have. It gives me something to pray about and try to get better at. It helps me at Communion, to think of what I’m getting forgiven for. It is satisfying to rip the list up after church, because it’s all forgiven.”

“It reminds me to pay attention to the confession of sins in church. It makes me think that there are a lot of

I’m glad for it too.

I know some people struggle with the temptation to imagine they can work their way into God’s love. And I’ve met people who struggle with the temptation to doubt whether God really forgives them: Can I really be sure?

Those aren’t usually my struggles. Personally, I struggle with apathy, with not caring.

I like going to church. I love singing. I love my pastor. I love the beautiful building. I love sitting with my

family for an hour and eating the treats afterward. But the best part of church—the news of forgiveness—is very natural for me to take for granted. It’s been that way for me since I was a little boy.

That isn’t how I want my boys to remember going to church.

Not that they will be saved by making lists of their sins or by how much they get themselves to appreciate the gospel. But Jesus will keep his promise: “Those who hum-

ble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 18:14). Jesus will show the beauty of his mercy to those who hunger for it and seek it. These are things I very much want for my children.

Christopher (Topher) Doerr and his wife, Carrie, have six sons and one daughter at home with them, within walking distance of Miller Park in Milwaukee. Topher is Broader Reach Editor at NPH.

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sins besides what I write down, that I don’t even remember doing. It helps me acknowledge that the things I did were sinful.”

My wife would like it better if I remembered on Saturday nights instead of Sunday mornings. Sunday mornings are stressful enough trying to get everyone to church on time. She has a good point. But overall she’s glad we’ve started this habit.

The Catechism: A Real Memory Treasure

Ray Schumacher

I recently observed the morning chapel service at a Lutheran elementary school. In this particular school, all students in kindergarten through eighth grade, as well as their teachers, gather together every day in the church. On this particular day they spent a significant portion of the service time reciting, as a group, all Ten Commandments. It was evident from the robust chorus of voices that the practice of reciting the catechism was a regular part of their morning chapel routine. Judging from the amount that was recited, they probably can get through all six chief parts in less than two weeks. What a great practice that is!

I'm sure the kindergarten students listen more than they speak, certainly at the beginning of the year. Maybe even into the first grade. But they are hearing the parts of the catechism regularly. And as they become more familiar with the words, they will speak the parts they can remember. By the time they are in the middle grades, I'm guessing they will be able to recite the catechism quite well. By the time they reach the upper grades, when life's distractions can interfere with time for memorization, and changes in attitudes can diminish the desire to memorize, they will already know the catechism. The pastor will be able to spend less time cajoling the students to memorize, and more time teaching the meaning.

Just a few weeks after that visit, someone put an article on my desk in which a father told how his family uses the catechism for informal family devotions. As a part of those devotions, they also recite the catechism together. At first the family learned the commandments—just the commandments—one at a time. Then they asked and answered, “What does this mean?” Eventually they moved on to the Apostles’ Creed

and the other parts of the catechism. By the time his son was five years old, he knew all six chief parts of the catechism.

Now, you don't need to expect or require your children to be able to recite the catechism by age 5. But what a blessing it will be for your children if they hear it regularly and begin to learn it. Perhaps equally as important, they see that you value and cherish the catechism. They will see by your example that the catechism has value for your life and theirs, well beyond confirmation class.

And it does have value beyond confirmation class—beyond serving as an outline for learning biblical doctrine. When your child sits in the college classroom and the professor tries to undermine the belief in a Creator-God, the First Article—indelibly etched in the long-term memory file cabinets, along with the Bible passages that are the basis of our statements of faith—may provide the needed strength to sift out the false messages that bombard the student's ears. When a friend asks your child why we baptize babies, much of the answer will be at the front of his or her memory banks. When the regularity of the Lord's Supper threatens to reduce the celebration to just another

church routine, words that were memorized early in life can renew an understanding and appreciation for the blessings received through the Sacrament.

Each child is different, and the course of each life will take a different path and present different challenges, but the truths of Scripture that your children will learn through the catechism will be with them for the rest of their lives.

When Luther first wrote the catechism, he hoped that parents would teach through it many times each year. That goal is still a good goal today.



**Equally as important,
they see that you value and
cherish the catechism.**

The Definition of Abuse

Sheryl Cowling

Physical abuse of a child is defined by federal and state laws. It is often defined as a nonaccidental injury to a child caused by a parent or other caregiver. Examples include hitting, kicking, or burning a child. Signs of childhood physical abuse include bruises, welts, broken bones, and burns. Behavioral signs of physical child abuse may include poor grades, depression, anger, anxiety, low self-esteem, negative attention seeking, destruction of property, fatigue, difficulty making friends, or bullying. Most professionals who work with children—including doctors, teachers, and counselors—are mandated to report abuse or suspicions of abuse.

The statistics about child physical abuse are alarming. Of course, even one case of abuse of a child is one too many. But according to childhelp.org, “the United States has one of the worst records among industrialized nations—losing on average between four and seven children every day to child abuse and neglect.”

There are many resources to aid adults who want to protect children. FreedomForCaptives.com is a website designed by the WELS Committee on Mental Health Needs that includes a variety of resources for pastors, teachers, and other adults. There are online resources, parenting support groups, parenting books, and professional counselors who can help.

Last but not least, anyone who is genuinely concerned for a child’s safety is encouraged to contact their local Child Protective Services or law enforcement to share their concerns. A child’s life may depend on it.

“The United States has one of the worst records among industrialized nations.”

Illustration: Shutterstock

Parents & Crosslink

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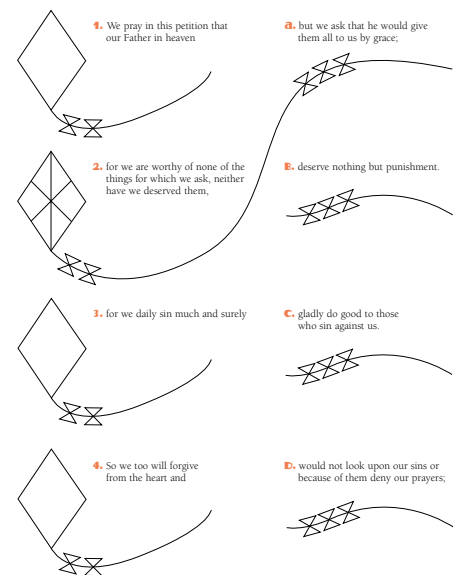
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Answer key for page 3:
1.D; 2.a; 3.B; 4.C



“You would save a lot more if I didn’t go back!”

Cartoon: Ed Koehler