

A Matter of Priorities

Florence y Denis Courtois are married and live in Paris with their 6 children. Returning to school after summer is always a small revolution for the family, which is best lived with a Christian spirit...

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The start of classes is sometimes a bit stressful for parents. How do you cope? Florence: Although we can never avoid the last minute rush, we try to anticipate a little so that the

change is not so drastic. Towards the end of the holidays, we try to restore the rhythm of school, especially with regard to bedtime and rising.

Moreover, we usually have special celebrations for the last days of vacation, so the start of the academic year is usually a big change. **Have you thought about extracurricular activities?**

Yes, we select them together, keeping in mind the preferences of the children and our possibilities. My husband and I talked a lot about each child, so that, for example, we encourage the one who is more timid to take up artistic activities; and the one that is a bit selfish, a team sport. It is not about keeping the children 'busy', but to form them. If an extracurricular activity does not educate or if it breaks the normal function of the rest of the family, we stop it.

And in general, we prefer to limit these activities of the children to the weekend because that is when we can see one another, talk and listen... If these activities become a family burden, like a football match which takes up the whole Sunday, it's not worth it. As a rule, with flexibility, each child gets two extracurricular activities: one sports and the other, something intellectual. **What is your goal as a parent?**

As a mother, with the birth of each child, I tell myself: *I have to help them grow, to be able to say yes to what God expects of him or her* . God has entrusted our children to us; he expects us to prepare them to be independent, free, capable of coping with life. That's why education is much less about combating defects than increasing the qualities of each one; watering the good plants so that they outgrow the weeds within us all. All this helps us to focus on the year

that just begun. **Do you help them with their homework?**

We try to be demanding on this point from the first day, also with the ones who are smarter. It is very important to strengthen their will, so that each child can be the best that he can be. Once they are on track, they can be left alone, otherwise it is very difficult; I would say, impossible. Parents have to be attentive at the beginning: when the results come out, little can be done then. **What about the activities offered by the Opus Dei for young people?**

As parents, we know that there are 3 components that influence the education of a child: the parents, the school and friends. It is essential that at least one of these components coincides with our educational plans, especially during adolescence. If the school environment is good, that may be sufficient. But perhaps these days,

it is not sufficient. That is why we encourage our children to attend a youth club of Opus Dei which organizes activities and get to know its spirit; the atmosphere of the club is magnificent. We invite them to try it out, and after that, they decide.

Denis, what is the role of fathers at the beginning the school year?

The dialogue between husband and wife about the children is paramount. I squeeze my schedule a little to reach home early to be with my wife and to resolve the questions the children have. It is essential to propose sensible solutions to their problems as teenagers or children. Parents can help each other by exchanging views so that nothing stands in the way of their education.

What do you do if you have a lot of work?

It's true that sometimes it is very tempting to stay in the office working

late, so that the boss sees you, so that the pressure is less for the following day... instead of coming home early: to talk about the day, to assist the children with their homework, or to bathe the smaller ones. Sometimes, you do need to stay in the office. But you should always ask yourself that question: *Now, where am I needed more, here or at home?* And answer honestly.

Saint Josemaría Escrivá said that children are our greatest asset, and you have to be ready for anything in order to take care of this treasure - to give up a promotion or to receive some criticism at work. It is a matter of priorities.