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Working on Trust (6): Each Child Is Different

As children grow up, many parents are surprised to realize that their blueprint for them does not quite match the reality. A video from Kenya. The sixth in the series "Working on Trust."

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It is normal for parents to have a blueprint for their children in their mind, outlining who they will be and

how they will develop. As one's children grow up, however, many are surprised to realize that each child is different and that the blueprint does not quite match the reality. The sooner the parents realize that they are the ones who have to adjust and respond rather than dictate, the fewer headaches they will have in raising their children.

In this sense, it is better to approach parenting with an open mind: as much as the parents do need to direct at times, they should also be ready to learn from each child. Sometimes the easiest option in a given situation is not necessarily the best one for a particular child. Thus, an important aspect of educating is the capacity to respond to the personal needs of each child, since the specific needs of each one vary.

Below are some questions that can help you take advantage of this video, when you see it with friends, at school or in the parish:

Questions for dialogue:

- What shapes the mental blueprint that parents have of their children?
- Do you dialogue with your husband/wife about how you will bring up the children? What are the critical stages in a child's upbringing when a parent has to learn to listen?
- Does the education system in the country encourage the growth of each child as an individual? If not, what can be done to enhance this? What initiatives can parents undertake to encourage this?
- Do you think it is worthwhile knowing the personality type of each of the children so as to

encourage them to develop their full potentialities? How can parents help their children grow in self-knowledge and appreciation?

- What enables you to know the balance between making demands on the child and letting them choose freely what they want?
- What can help parents become closer friends and role models of their children?

Some suggested action steps

- Are you able to describe the personality, talents, possibilities, character defects of each of your children?
- What are your dreams for each child? Are these in resonance with who you (as a couple) perceive them to be? What does each one need so as to grow optimally? What can you do for

each of the children within the limits of resources available (time, money, experience, etc.)?

- Do we as a couple, dedicate some time to reflect on how each child is and the direction to lead them? Do I dedicate some time to be together with the family and do I try to spend time with each child?
- What are the family and couple development programs that you can get involved in so as to learn how to be better parents and to individualize the education of each child?

Quotes from Sacred Scripture and the Catechism

- “Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild

animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth. God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (*Genesis* 1: 26-27)

- “The word of the Lord came to me: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.” (*Jeremiah* 1: 4-5)
- “Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (*1 Peter* 2:4-5)
- It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children,

and all members of the family exercise the *priesthood of the baptized* in a privileged way “by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity.” Thus, the home is the first school of Christian life and “a school for human enrichment.” Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous – even repeated – forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1657)

Quotes from Pope Francis for reflection

- “Children know our joys, our sadness and our worries. They manage to grasp everything and, since they are very intuitive, they reach their own

conclusions and their own teachings ... Therefore, one of the first things I would say to you is: care for them, care for their heart, their joy and their hope.” (Pastoral Visit to Milan, 25 March 2017)

- “I always ask parents, when they say to me that they lose their patience with their children, as a first question: “How many are there?” – “Three, four,” they say. And then I ask them a second question: “Do you play with your children? Do you play?” And they don’t know how to answer. Parents these days cannot, or have lost the habit of playing with their children, of ‘wasting time’ with their children. Once a father said to me, “Father, when I leave to go to work, they are still in bed, and when I return in the evening they are already in bed.

I only see them at the weekends.” This is bad! And this is the life that takes away our humanity. But keep this in mind: playing with your children, “wasting time” with children, is also transmitting faith. It is the gratuitousness, the gratuitousness of God.” (Pastoral Visit to Milan, 25 March 2017)

- “Children are a gift, they are a gift: understood? Children are a gift. Each one is unique and irreplaceable; and at the same time unmistakably linked to his/her roots. In fact, according to God’s plan, being son and daughter means to carry within oneself the memory and hope of a love which was fulfilled in the very kindling of the life of another, original and new, human being. And for parents each child is original, different,

diverse.” (General Audience, 12 February 2015)

- “I am very fond of dreams in families. For nine months every mother and father dream about their baby. Am I right? [Yes!] They dream about what kind of child he or she will be... You can't have a family without dreams. Once a family loses the ability to dream, children do not grow, love does not grow, life shrivels up and dies. So I ask you each evening, when you make your examination of conscience, to also ask yourselves this question: Today did I dream about my children's future? Today did I dream about the love of my husband, my wife? Did I dream about my parents and grandparents who have gone before me? Dreaming is very important. Especially dreaming in families. Do not lose this ability to

dream!” (Meeting with Families in Sri Lanka and the Philippines, 16 January 2015)

Quotes from Saint Josemaria

- “The parents are the first persons responsible for the education of their children, in human as well as in spiritual matters. They should be conscious of the extent of their responsibility. To fulfil it, they need prudence, understanding, a capacity to love and a concern for giving good example. Imposing things by force, in an authoritarian manner, is not the right way to teach. The ideal attitude of parents lies more in becoming their children's friends—friends who will be willing to share their anxieties, who will listen to their problems, who will help them

in an effective and agreeable way

"Parents should find time to spend with their children, to talk with them. They are the most important thing—more important than business or work or rest. In their conversations, parents should make an effort to listen, to pay attention, to understand, to recognize the fact that their children are sometimes partly right—or even completely right—in some of their rebellious attitudes. At the same time, they should help their children to direct their efforts and to carry out their projects properly, teaching them to consider things and to reason them out. It is not a matter of imposing a line of conduct, but rather of showing the human and supernatural motives for it. In a

word, parents have to respect their children's freedom, because there is no real education without personal responsibility, and there is no responsibility without freedom.” (*Christ is Passing By*, 27)

- “But we have come to understand, with the passing of the years, that our parents were right in many things in which they were guided by their experience and their love. That is why it is up to the parents to make the first move. They have already passed through this stage. It is up to them to be very understanding, to have flexibility and good humor, avoiding any possible conflicts simply by being affectionate and farsighted. I always advise parents to try to be friends with their children. The parental

authority which the rearing of children requires can be perfectly harmonized with friendship, which means putting themselves, in some way, on the same level as their children. Children—even those who seem intractable and unresponsive—always want this closeness, this fraternity, with their parents. It is a question of trust. Parents should bring up their children in an atmosphere of friendship, never giving the impression that they do not trust them....” (*Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá*, 100)

- “For me there is no clearer example of this practical union of justice and charity than the behaviour of mothers. They love all their children with the same degree of affection, and it is precisely this same love that impels them to treat each one

differently, with an unequal justice, since each child is different from the others. So, in the case of our fellow men, charity perfects and completes justice. It moves us to respond differently to different people, adapting ourselves to their specific circumstances so as to give joy to those who are sad, knowledge to those who lack it, affection to the lonely ... Justice says that each person should receive his due, which does not mean giving the same to everyone. Utopian egalitarianism can give rise to the greatest injustice. In order to act in this way always, the way good mothers do, we need to forget about ourselves and aspire to no other honour than that of serving others, in the same way as Jesus Christ, who preached that 'the Son of man has not come to be served but to

serve'. This requires the integrity of being able to submit our own wills to that of our divine model, working for all men, and fighting for their eternal happiness and well-being. I know of no better way to be just than that of a life of self-surrender and service.” (*Friends of God*, 173)

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