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Working on Trust (3): "Mom, can I have a cell phone?"

At what age should children begin to have their own cell phone? How can parents guide their children's use of this technology? The third episode of "Working on Trust," a video series that seeks to help parents in educating their children.

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"Working on Trust" is a series of videos that draw upon the teachings

of Saint Josemaria, who was passionate about freedom and the educational role of parents. The videos suggest topics for conversation between spouses and with other families. Each one is accompanied by a selection of texts for reflection, questions for discussion, and links to further material.

According to a well-known journalist, “There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots, the other wings.”^[1] “Wings” represent trust, a value that is indispensable in education, since it is the foundation of any relationship between people.

Trust is a fragile virtue: it is difficult to build and easy to lose. For this reason, it always has to be mutual.

With the internet, children and adolescents have access to all kinds of information and this enables them to discover realities that their parents would rather they avoided or at least waited to experience. Today, there is an ever greater need to educate one's children in freedom, without avoiding certain topics and instead, encouraging reflection.

Below are some questions that can help you get more out of this video, in screenings with your friends, in your school or at your parish:

Questions for dialogue:

- How can I create a climate of trust in the family that is compatible with having some rules, though not excessive? What reasons could I give my children for asking them to behave a certain way, or for advising them not to do something?

- How do I react when my children make mistakes? Do they know that they can confide in me, even when they have done something wrong? Do I help them think about the consequences of their actions and reflect about what they could have done to avoid going astray? Do I transmit fortitude and hope to them in the face of difficulties?
- Am I present in my children's lives, and do I know how to make it easy for them to speak to me about their lives in a natural way? Do I wait for my children to talk about themselves, or am I always the first one to ask, which might give the impression that I want to control every step they take?

Some suggested action-steps:

- Dedicate time to listening to your children and being attentive to the events in daily life that are important to them: a soccer game, a test, a dispute between friends... Sometimes it is in the apparently trivial matters that we find the key to important ones.
- Freedom is different from permissiveness: in order to teach someone to make free decisions, it is important to make evident the positive and negative consequences of the actions we carry out.
- Take the first step: adapting yourself to their level, talk with your children about the concerns in your life, including problems or difficulties that they could understand and on which they could even offer advice. In this way, they will

understand that the door is open for them to do the same.

- Being attentive to your children does not mean monitoring their every move. Always having to corroborate that what they tell you is true, or analyzing everything they do, generates a climate of distrust. Advise without censuring them: sometimes a person needs to make a mistake in order to discover what they should avoid.

Quotes from Sacred Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church for reflection:

- “Train the young in the way they should go; even when old, they will not swerve from it.” (Proverbs 22, 6)
- “Therefore, do not throw away your confidence; it will have great recompense. You need

endurance to do the will of God and receive what he has promised.” (Hebrews 10, 35-36)

- “There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love. We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4, 18-19)
- “The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults. the education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1784)

- “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. the home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2223)

Quotes from Pope Francis for reflection:

- “The gift of discernment has become all the more necessary today, since contemporary life offers immense possibilities for

action and distraction, and the world presents all of them as valid and good. All of us, but especially the young, are immersed in a culture of zapping. We can navigate simultaneously on two or more screens and interact at the same time with two or three virtual scenarios. Without the wisdom of discernment, we can easily become prey to every passing trend.” (Gaudete et exsultate, 167)

- We are free, with the freedom of Christ. Still, he asks us to examine what is within us – our desires, anxieties, fears and questions – and what takes place all around us – “the signs of the times” – and thus to recognize the paths that lead to complete freedom. “Test everything; hold fast to what is good” (1 *Thess* 5:21). (Gaudete et exsultate, 168)

- “Love needs time and space; everything else is secondary. Time is needed to talk things over, to embrace leisurely, to share plans, to listen to one other and gaze in each other’s eyes, to appreciate one another and to build a stronger relationship. Sometimes the frenetic pace of our society and the pressures of the workplace create problems. At other times, the problem is the lack of quality time together, sharing the same room without one even noticing the other.” (Amoris Laetitia, 224)
- “Nor is it good for parents to be domineering. When children are made to feel that only their parents can be trusted, this hinders an adequate process of socialization and growth in affective maturity” (Amoris Laetitia, 279)

Quote from Saint Josemaria for reflection:

- “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 fulfill 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” (*Christ is Passing By*, #27)
- “After giving their advice and suggestions, parents who

sincerely love and seek the good of their children should step tactfully into the background so that nothing can stand in the way of the great gift of freedom that makes man capable of loving and serving God.”

(Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá, #104)

- “They shouldn’t be scared of you. They need to know that you were rebellious too at their age. Let’s be honest. Hands up anyone who didn’t give his parents any trouble... Nobody can raise his hand! It’s only fair that your kids make you suffer a bit too. So one day you should get hold of the rebellious one, take him out, give him something nice, and tell him, ‘You know, when I was your age I gave your Grandad and Grandma a hard time. I did this and that to them, and they forgave me right away. And

now I'm really sorry I treated them so badly – it's a shame!' He'll understand, he'll realize you're able to understand him, forgive him, and love him, with all his bad points. With all his bad points! He'll improve little by little. Who could be a better personal trainer than a father or a mother? If you're good Christians, your teaching role is terrific.” (Enxomil, Oporto (Portugal), 31 October 1972)

Additional articles and resources:

- Smart Phones for Young People: Pros and Cons
- Resources for educating in the good use of technology

[1] Hodding Carter, *Where Main Street Meets the River*, Rinehart & Company, New York (1953). 337.

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