



The Catholic Youth Community of St. John Neumann

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Do you know that feeling you get in your stomach the moment when you see your teenager make a decision that disappoints you? Maybe you find out they cheated on a test or maybe they lied where they said they would be. Maybe they borrowed the car without asking or are making some random choices you don't respect. Every parent on the planet has experienced feeling disappointment in their teenager in one way or another. It's normal and developmentally appropriate within the parent-child relationship. So, the question is: What do we do when you're disappointed? Here are four tips...

First, remember their identity. They are a child of God and YOUR child - they are loved by the almighty God and you. Regardless of what your son or daughter did, no matter how big or small, they will not be separated from the good, kind, and loving God. **Romans 8:38-39** says, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." And I am sure that if you took a breath before you lose your mind on them over the latest thing they did or said, you will remember that you love them, too – even at the moment when you want to kill them. (Lol) Because your teen's identity is defined by Christ and your love and care for them, their actions and decisions are separate from the person, which leads to Tip #2.

Tip #2 - Help identify that the disappointment lies in the action, not the person. This moment of clarity is important enough to set aside a sacred moment with your teenager. Because as parents, you may be caught up in what they did, at first, you may have a hard time seeing this truth. If needed, give yourself a moment. Take a break. Maybe two...

Tip #3 - Then remind yourself of what we covered in Step #1. Their identity is set in God by Jesus. As stupid as you may feel it is, your teen's actions do not define them, now or later. And because that is true, there's work to be done for the parent to acknowledge **the action is separate from the person**. In addition, remind yourself of people in your life who always seemed to embarrassingly bring up the past and shove it in your face. Do you want to be that person for your teen? Learn to let it go.

Because your son or daughter is a teenager, the only thing they will see is their mistakes, failures, and the disappointment on their parents face. So now is the time to step in and remind them they are NOT their mistakes and their identity is set by God's love and yours. Remind them of their true identity - a child of the King – and yours! - and how mistakes are meant to be learning lessons.

Tip #4 - Grieve. This is an important part of the process, so you let it go and, therefore, not bring it up down the road. Because disappointment is on a scale, you may feel it from minutes to months. It's like when you expected a bike for Christmas and got socks. Spend time grieving and accepting the fact it happened, and you are sad, so you don't continue to hang on to it. This process looks different for each person, from taking runs on the trail to a quiet afternoon on the golf course, to a five-page journal exercise every morning. The goal is to give yourself space to wrap your mind around the fact that it happened and then take the next step.

At some point, every parent experiences disappointment in their child, and when it happens, you have the power to decide what you do with it next. You can't control when your teenager makes a disappointing decision, but **you can control how you respond: remember, identify, remind, and grieve.**

Please take a look at the resource following my note here and watch the YouTube video in the main email! I am cheering you on, Parents! You're only human. Give yourself a break and some grace. Be encouraged!

Peace,

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“I’m Disappointed In You”

101 Ways To Screw Up Your Kids For Life – Just kidding...

By Sayeh Beheshti

Of all the common ways in which we screw up our kids, one of my personal “favorites” is telling kids that we are disappointed in them. It sounds like such an innocuous statement and it is used often in the American culture, but it’s so gosh darn damaging.

Why on earth do we ever think it’s OK to lead our children to believe they have disappointed us? I think it’s just lazy parenting, meaning that it’s much easier to make this general statement to your child than it is to discuss something they have done that we don’t agree with and to review with them the consequences of their actions.

What does it mean when we say “I’m disappointed with you?”

Dictionary.com defines the word “disappointed” as “depressed or discouraged by the failure of one’s hopes or expectations.” According to this definition, when we say we are disappointed with our child, we are saying that we had an expectation of them which they failed to meet. Furthermore, we are telling them that their failure to meet our expectations is causing us some form of distress.

Does this sound accurate to you? Are these the messages you want to give your children, that they are failing your expectations and therefore causing you distress? If your answer is no, then for heaven’s sake, never use this sentence again. If your answer is yes, please read below to see why giving your children these messages is wrong.

What do our children hear when we say “I’m disappointed with you?” “It’s not about you, it’s about me”

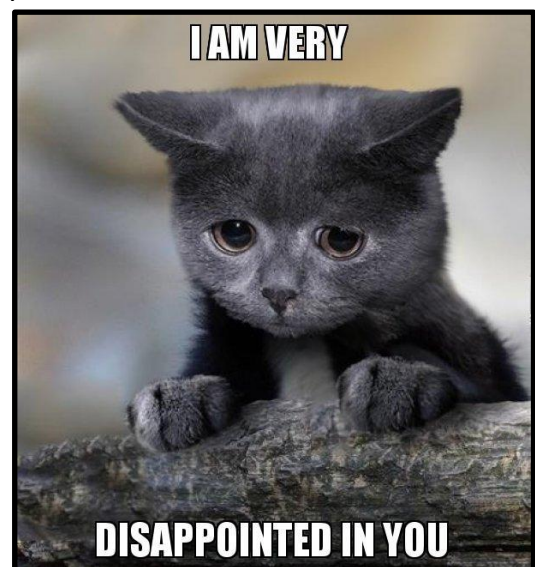
Most of us claim that we love our children unconditionally, but let’s face it, we do have conditions and expectations of our children, and that is just fine. It is actually a part of our job as parents to make sure that our children learn to act

responsibly and to teach them how to survive in the world as adults without depending on us. When we say “I’m disappointed in you,” however, we are not teaching them anything useful. What we are teaching them is that their lives are not about them at all, but about us. We are telling them that the main purpose in their lives is to please us, and if they don’t, then they will disappoint us.

Imagine these two different examples of teaching your son to wash his hands:

- “If you don’t wash your hands when you come home, then all the things you have touched may have left some germs on your hands, and you may catch the germs and get sick.”
- “If you don’t wash your hands when you come home, you will disappoint me.”

The first statement above teaches the child to care about himself and his well-being. It teaches him to love himself and motivates him to do things that are good for him. The second statement tells the child that his main purpose in life is to please you and make sure not to disappoint you. Washing his hands becomes not about his hygiene at all but about you!



So many of us adults spend so much energy in our lives trying to please our parents and gain their approval. I would argue that we do so because when we were children, we were taught that their feelings and opinions of us were our top focus and priority. We were taught that we are “bad” if we disappoint our parents.

“Shame on you for causing me distress.”

Again, the word “disappointed” implies that we are somehow saddened or distressed. Kids love their parents, and even more importantly, depend on their parents for their own survival. It is incredibly stressful for them to think that they have rattled us in some way. I believe we intuitively know this, so we use the awful sentence to shame our kids into behaving differently. We think that by shaming our kids, we are motivating them to do what we want them to do.

Shaming our children may (or may not) motivate them to do things on a short-term basis, but they pay a very high price for it. Feeling shame can lead to feelings of guilt and worthlessness. It can lead to a low sense of self, major insecurities, and ultimately cause the development of depression. Don't shame your kids; it's so damaging to them.

“You can't redeem yourself”

We are telling our children that not only they have failed to meet our expectations, and should be ashamed of themselves, but they also cannot redeem themselves.

The word ‘am’ in “I am disappointed in you” has a finality to it. The consequences have already occurred. I am telling you that I have become this disappointed entity. You can do nothing to undo the being I have already become. The only thing you can do is to hope that you won't disappoint me any further in the future.

Why on earth would you ever want to punish your child like that? With one simple sentence, we can shame our child into feeling like a failure without any chance at redemption.

What can you say or do instead?

Hopefully, I have convinced you to never again use that sentence on your children (or yourself, your spouse, co-workers, parents, friends, pets, or even your plants! We still need something to say or do when our children don't meet our expectations.

Replacing “I'm disappointed in you” with something more constructive takes a bit of work. That's why I called the use of the sentence “lazy parenting” above. But I implore you to put in the work because it pays off for both yourself and your child.

To make it a bit easier to conceptualize my suggestion, I'm going to use this scenario: your daughter's school called and informed you that she's been missing her homework and she may be failing her class (or even the school year). You do feel distressed. Here are my suggestions as to how you can approach this.



Take a moment to define to yourself what it is that you expect.

I know this sounds elementary, but do you always really know what you expect of your child? In the above example, one parent may say “I just want my child to do her homework,” while another parent may say “Anything less than an A+ is unacceptable in my house.” Notice how different those two expectations are. If you want your child to meet your expectations, you and your daughter both need to know what they are, otherwise she will never meet them!

Once you decide what your expectations are, then do a measure of how important they are to you right now, and how rigidly you want them met. For example, if you expect only an A+ from your

daughter, but right now you and her dad are going through a divorce and your daughter has been really sad, then you may decide that her grades are not at this moment very important to you.

Ask yourself why this situation causes you distress.

Why are you disappointed with your daughter in our example? Are you worried about what your own parents will think, and how they will judge you as a parent? Are you worried that your child will be embarrassed in the community? Are you concerned that your daughter may drop out of school and end up living on the streets? What are the natural consequences of her actions that are scaring you?

When you look at a situation objectively, then you will have a better chance of having a constructive conversation with your daughter. For example, if she's always wanted to go to an Ivy League university when she grows up, then you can speak with her and find out how she expects to do that if she doesn't work hard at school right now. This gets tricky if your expectations of your daughter do not match her dreams.

If it's you who wants your daughter to go to Stanford, while her dreams are to play soccer for the local university, then she may be intentionally doing poorly in school to ruin her chances of going to Stanford. It is really important to know what is going on if you want to make a difference in your child's life. Never impose your dreams onto your children. They need to grow up and live their own dreams, not yours.

What consequences are you prepared to enforce?

Since you have decided that the lazy consequence of shaming your child into feeling like a failure is not good, then you do need to decide what consequence you are going to give. The key here is that the enforcement of the consequences falls on you. For example, you can threaten your daughter that you will not allow her to go to summer camp if she fails her class, but then you have to be prepared to cancel her summer camp. If you make a threat and then don't carry it out, you lose all credibility.

This is why it's good to think of the consequences before you approach your child about the matter. This way you won't have to make any impulsive, usually outrageous threats.

My recommendation is to make the consequence related to the "crime." For example, a natural consequence for the daughter in our example is to sign her up for tutoring. If that is not affordable, then a "free" consequence is to have zero time on electronics every day until she sits down with you at night and goes over her homework with you to make sure she's done everything. Only then can she have access to her electronics for a couple of hours at the most.

Or, if your son is not cleaning his room, then he can't have friends over because you don't want the mess to get worse. Or if your kids aren't helping you wash the dishes as you expect them to, you can serve them food on paper plates or dirty dishes the next day. It's not always easy to relate the consequence to the behavior, but you get the point.



Talk to your child when you're good and ready.

Once you know what you're worried about and what consequences you're willing to enforce, talk to your child. Make sure to talk to them calmly. People generally can't hear what you are saying to them if you are yelling it. Think about it; how open are you to criticism if it's being yelled at you? Also, if you look disgusted or angry with them, then you are just putting them down and shaming them. They won't hear you that way either.

When you talk, express your expectations clearly, and describe the consequences very specifically. Make sure you ask them what is going on first, and then talk about the expectations and consequences. You could say, for example: "Your

school called today and told me you're not doing your homework." Then follow it with "What is going on?" Or even better, "How can I help you succeed in school?"

The open question will hopefully shed some light on the reasons why your child is not meeting your expectations. Your child may try to make excuses or lie, in which case you'll need to tap into all the patience you've ever had and persist in trying to understand what's going on. On the other hand, if you're lucky, your child may just spill the beans and tell you exactly what is going on in their lives, followed by exactly how you can help.

Depending on the explanation you get, you can decide how to proceed. Again, make your expectations and consequences very clear. Say something like "Well, I've given this some thought, and I think I need to be more involved in your homework. Let's sit down every night at seven and go over what you have due the next day to make sure you've done everything. I'll need you to hold off on using any of your electronics until we have made sure you've done all your work. If there are no problems with school for a week, then you can start using your electronics at six every day."

Or it may be something completely different like your kid is not doing her math homework because she's struggling in the subject. Then you'll need to address the specific problem, rather than just give consequences.

Instead of telling your kid that they are failures, you are telling them that you are invested in them, and you are willing to work with them to help them be successful. This way, you give the kid the message that they can't just get away with misbehaving without breaking their spirit.

THE VERY FACT
THAT YOU WORRY
ABOUT BEING A GOOD
PARENT MEANS THAT
*you already
are one.*

JODI PICOULT