

Center for Youth and Family

Confession is Good for the Soul—and the Family!

by Jim Burns, Ph.D.

As a parent, you don't have to be perfect, but kids don't want to follow the leadership of a hypocrite either. The parent who tries to come across as perfect is making a big mistake. In fact, you'll probably be amazed at how much credibility you gain with your children when you're honest with them about your shortcomings. Believe it or not, apologies actually improve communication! Let your children know you're human. Admit your mistakes and take the pressure of perfection off. Admitting your mistakes clears the channels for real communication and removes barriers that may be in the making. Admitting mistakes also promotes sharing and often creates warmth and understanding.

Admitting failures curbs unrestrained idealism. What I mean by this is that if your children go too long observing unreal parents who act as if they have no problems or flaws, the eventual shock of watching parents fail can end up being destructive. When you are honest about your imperfections with your children, you open up the way for a more mature type of problem-solving. If your kids feel valued enough that you would share a struggle or a hurt, they will most often respond maturely. One caution would be not to get in the habit of dumping all your problems or marriage issues on your children. After all, they are your kids, not your counselors.

This generation of kids are motivated by sincerity and turned off by pretense. Today's kids have a built-in, highly sensitive "hypocrisy detector." So, if you're trying to come across as perfect to them, they'll see right through you—and that's a big mistake on your part. It is much better to live out an authentic life in front of your kids, showing how you follow Christ despite your mistakes and failures along the way, in order to be an example of what it looks like to live as a Christian in the real world.

As a parent, it's important to note that the spirituality of your kids is very dependent on the examples they see you setting at home. You must set the pace! If you desire your children to have vibrant spiritual lives, then they need to see an authentic faith lived out in your life. No one expects perfection, but a "do as I say, not as I do" attitude is not likely to produce a vital Christian lifestyle in your teenager's life either.

In the end, your goal as a parent is to be an authentic person who isn't afraid to apologize when you see the need. Proverbs 10:9 says, "The man of integrity walks securely." The children of the man or woman of integrity will walk securely also! Truly, confession is good for the soul—and for your family as well!

*Excerpted and adapted from the book, **The 10 Building Blocks for a Happy Family** by Jim Burns, Ph.D.*

Azusa Pacific University's Center for Youth and Family with Jim Burns, Ph.D., serves as a research and training institute dedicated to providing biblically-based resources for parents and youth to help build healthy families.