

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

We all know what it's like to beat ourselves up after we make a mistake. We've also probably contributed to our kids doing the same thing. Rather than perpetuating that cycle, how can we help our kids—and ourselves—grow from mistakes and accept forgiveness? Ann Ponath and Rob Guenther show us what Scripture says.

—Nicole Balza

## HOW DO WE HELP OUR KIDS MOVE ON FROM MISTAKES?

AT FIRST, it's the angry toddler hurling mud at an unsuspecting playmate or a grade-schooler struggling with spelling. Then it's the teenager swearing at a teacher or having a beer at a homecoming bonfire, messing up the last play of the game or singing a solo off-key. The list of possibilities is endless, but as a parent of children of any age, mistakes/bad choices/sticky situations will occur. How do we help our kids move on?

**“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Ephesians 6:18).** As Christian parents, we will turn first to our heavenly Father, who expects us to “train up a child in the way he should go” (Proverbs 22:6 English Standard Version). Big or slightly bigger parenting problem, long or short prayer, God promises to hear and answer. He knows training up is no small task! Praying for your child can also include praying with your child or helping him or her write a prayer to use when faced with a challenging situation. God is an ever-present refuge and strength in every situation (cf. Psalm 46:1)!

**“If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness” (Psalm 130:3,4).** All mistakes are a result of the imperfect world in which we live. Do not shy away from pointing out sin, but never neglect the reassurance of your unconditional love and forgiveness and God's amazing grace and forgiveness in Jesus! Apologies or reparations may also need to be part of this process.

**“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14).** Although we make mistakes, God does not. From a young age, remind your child that he or she is a unique individual created by God. Talk about the valuable talents your child has and how these can be used in his or her life and in service to others.

**“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me” (1 Corinthians 13:11).** Every situation is different, but perhaps now might be the time to share one of your past mistakes and how you dealt with it. Help your child see that no one is perfect and that you do not expect perfection.

**“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28).** Seeing the blessing of a certain situation is hard at the time, but when the time is right, help your child see that God uses all things for our good—especially for our spiritual good. Maybe someday this lapse in judgment or that mistimed play at the plate will help your child help someone else.

**“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Colossians 3:23).** Encourage a growth mindset in which your child sees mistakes as signs that learning is taking place and errors as only short-term setbacks. If we don't take risks and never make mistakes, we probably aren't learning and growing. (This can apply to parenting too!) Experts also remind parents that

### HAVE PARENTING QUESTIONS?

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stepping in to clean up our children's mistakes or keep errors from occurring altogether blocks this learning.

My husband recalls several difficult games for one of the players he coached who also happens to be our son David. "He felt really bad, but we talked about how life still goes on; sometimes you just have to let these things go." David ended up a confident high school quarterback who led his team to a state championship. Today he coaches other high school athletes and leads a teen Bible study. Despite our mistakes, God forgives us, accepts us, and keeps working for good in our lives!



*Ann Ponath and her husband, Dave, raised four children and are now enjoying their first grandchild.*

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**"OOPS!" YOU HEAR** your kid scream, followed by the sound of shattering glass. Another glass broken. Or another plate in pieces on the floor. Another puddle of milk spreading under the kitchen table.

Let's face it, our kids are bound to make mistakes—and likely lots of them. So how do we as parents help them move on from their mistakes?

**First, expect mistakes.** Accidents happen. We make them. Everyone does. Because we live in a fallen, broken world, we're imperfect and so we—all of us—will make mistakes. Lower your expectations that your kids will always do everything right. They won't. Just like you don't.

**Next, ask, "Which kind of mistake is this?"** Is this an "Oops! I goofed up!" situation, a forgotten homework assignment, or a lost shoe? Then remember the old maxim, "Don't cry over spilled milk." Kids are kids. They're still learning. They're still developing. As they grow in their coordination, they will be clumsy at times. They will spill the milk. As they grow in responsibility, they will forget their coat and lose their shoes. Be patient and help them to learn from those "oopsies." "Let's work together to clean this up. How can we fix this or make it right? What can we do to prevent this next time?"

But what about when the mistakes are of another kind? What about the clear rebellion, the defiance of authority, the sins against God's commands? We all make those too. Solomon admitted in 2 Chronicles, "When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin" (6:36). So expect sin too. And when those "mistakes" happen, help them learn from those "more than oopsies" as well.

## NEEDED: Teen writers

Do you know a teen who likes to write or has a story to tell? *Forward in Christ* is looking for personal articles written by teens that touch on issues affecting Christian young people today.



Encourage teens to visit [forwardinchrist.net/teens](http://forwardinchrist.net/teens) for examples and to submit stories.

Perhaps these 4 Rs will help: Review. Repent. Refresh. Resolve.

Review what happened. Help your children see where they went wrong. What did they say or do that wasn't in line with what God wanted? Then point out that it wasn't just a mistake but a sin.

Next, whether that sin was by accident or on purpose, help lead them to repent. "What you did was more than a mistake; it was a sin against God for which you deserve his punishment."

When they do repent, help them to find refreshing grace in the gospel. Solomon also wrote in 2 Chronicles 6, "When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin . . . and [they] repent . . . and if they turn back to you . . . forgive your people, who have sinned against you" (vv. 36-39). Assure your children that God has promised forgiveness. Because of Jesus' perfect life and innocent death on our behalf, he will always forgive. Then help them resolve to fail forward and learn from this as they consider strategies to avoid falling into this sin in the future.

**Finally, know that this is a process, not a one-and-done activity.** This is a process that we are all in each day, parent and child alike. Review. Repent. Refresh. Resolve. As we live it and then teach it, God will continue to help both us and our kids move on from mistakes.



*Rob Guenther and his wife, Becky, are raising four boys in New Ulm, Minnesota.*

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