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## LIFESTYLE

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# 3 Positive parenting tips from the Venerable Fulton Sheen (VIDEO)

*Fr. Michael Rennie | Aug 06, 2017*

*It's not about rules, but cultivating the "instinct" for relationship.*

**T**he Venerable Fulton Sheen had a television show in the 1950s called *Life is Worth Living*. The entire show consists of Sheen, dressed to the nines in the finest garments a bishop could possibly wear, standing in front of a chalkboard that he occasionally uses, and talking directly to the viewer for about half an hour. He has no notes. There are no guests. He has no special effects or graphics. The show is absolutely mesmerizing.

I know I'm not the only one who feels this way, because he won an Emmy and successfully competed for viewers with talk-show comedians like Milton Berle. His talent for engaging his viewers was recently impressed on me when I watched an episode on parenting and was shocked to realize I'd watched the entire half-hour because it felt like he'd only been speaking for a few moments.

This particular episode, originally broadcast in 1956, remains engaging and relevant as the day it was aired. In it, Sheen breaks down three points that are worth thinking about when it comes to raising children. But first, he reads from a journal of the activities recorded by a father who has been left home to watch his children without mom's help:

"Changed diapers fifteen times... they kept falling off." □

"Requested children in a kind voice to be quiet once. Told children in a firm voice to make less noise twice. Hollered at children to stop shouting FIFTEEN TIMES!" □

"Warned children not to cross the street sixteen times. Watched the children cross the street forty-eight times." □

“Children asked ten times when is mommy coming home. I asked myself the same question every four minutes.” □

In other words, getting kids to behave is exhausting. Fulton Sheen thinks it's possible, though. And not only is it possible but it is the absolute best gift we can give them as they grow up. He has a unique approach. In his mind, “training” □ a child isn't about telling them what not to do and disciplining them when they break the rules. Rather, it's the way to help a child mature into a happy, fulfilled adult by working with — not against — a child's natural instincts.

Here are three fundamental instincts that Sheen says parents should encourage in a child...

## **The instinct for eternity**

Have you ever been in the room with a young child when mom has to leave? They treat it like the apocalypse. There's so much sadness and crying because, to a child, when Mom leaves, it seems to be forever. Children think of most things in terms of absolutes “Mom is GONE!”

But this instinct doesn't need to be eliminated from a child's way of thinking. Quite the opposite, the instinct for eternity is a vast reservoir that can be filled with wonder and joy. Sheen says, “Because a child understands the infinite, he understands truth.” Children want truth; they thrive on it. They want to know what things are called, what they do, how the world works, what is right and wrong. The more truth they know, the more purpose and beauty will bring warmth to what might otherwise seem a cold, vast universe.

If we refuse to give them truth because we assume it's better for them to figure everything out on their own, what actually happens is they may find their place in the universe permanently shrunken. Encourage this instinct, and your child will grow up with a sense of wonder and purpose.

## **The instinct for love**

“Every babe assumes love,” says Sheen, pointing out that parents bring children into the world because of love. He goes on to tell a story about a little girl who “gave her mother a little perfume bottle and asked her mother to kiss the perfume bottle. And when she went to school she put it on her desk to remind her of her mother's love all day long.”

That story touches home for me because I, too, remember holding on to keepsakes like that when I was little because of the feeling of love and protection they provided. If the instinct for love isn't nurtured at home in a steadfast way, if a child doesn't feel unconditionally loved, he may end up looking for love in unrewarding outlets or cease believing in love at all.

Love doesn't need to be earned or given as a reward, it's a gift to be poured out on the worthy and unworthy alike. This may sound obvious, but I know when I first became a father I overestimated how much I should discipline my children and underestimated how insistent I needed to be with them about my love. I've since learned to tell them over and over (and over) that they are loved. I do discipline them when needed, but that isn't my primary duty as a father. My primary duty is to make clear that they are loved. By doing so, they will be prepared to both give and receive love as they mature into adults.

## **The instinct for the divine**

To young children, fathers are almost omnipotent and omniscient. Dads are super strong and smart, towering icons of a supreme power. Mothers, too, are like superheroes and are viewed as icons of ultimate mercy – always forgiving, always ready to nurse a scraped knee, always ready to hold a child tight. Mom and dad represent spiritual qualities such as justice and mercy in a way that forever colors their children's view of the universe and the sort of God that created it. When parents display these virtues with their children, they nurture their natural instinct to practice those same virtues. We can't simply tell our kids about God, or send them to Church and hope some holiness rubs off on them, we actually are living examples of those qualities in our homes.

I love how positive these tips are, and that they focus on the relationship we as parents develop with our children. There's no shortcut or secret method to practicing parenting, but developing the natural instincts of our children in the long run is the best way to both foster a good, loving home environment and to help prepare them for happy lives. Don't work against the natural instincts in children, instead strive to bring out the best in them.

Training of Children - Archbishop Fulton Sheen



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