

Another confusing element for children as they progress in their development is the idea of intent. Children often struggle to understand this concept because it is so abstract. Parents can help children understand the concept of intent by using some simple examples. For example: If you miss Sunday Mass because you are ill, it is not a sin. It was not your intent to miss Mass since, were it not for your illness, you would be at Mass. However, if you skip Sunday Mass in order to watch a football game, it is a sin. It is your deliberate intent to miss Mass. You may also find it helpful, as you speak with children about wrongdoing, to simply ask them, "What exactly did you intend when you acted in that way?"

It is very important to remember that parents and children need to have a continuing dialogue on temptation, wrongdoing, and sin. This is not a conversation that happens only around the time

of first Reconciliation. This conversation needs to be an ongoing conversation, a discussion that continues through adolescence. A parent might initiate such a conversation by asking opening questions such as:

- ❶ How can you tell when you've done something wrong?
- ❷ How can you tell when wrongdoing is sinful or serious?
- ❸ What are the temptations in your life?

Home is where children learn about right and wrong. Parents are responsible for teaching children how to deal with the temptations of life. As children grow, their understanding of sin changes, and parents need to maintain a strong presence in the lives of their children if they are to influence the behaviors and values of their children.