



How to Deal With a Child Who Goes Astray

One of our biggest worries and sources of anguish as parents is when our children leave home and then fall away from the teachings of the Church. This is true especially in regards to sexual behaviors. Let's assume for this discussion that the parents have provided a loving relationship for the child and have joined with them in daily prayer and regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church. In other words, the parents have done everything "right" in the child's Orthodox upbringing. Even in such a case, when a child leaves home, he or she is now, often for the first time, under the guidance of their own free will. It is not unusual that your child will misuse this God-given gift, just as you surely have in your younger years.

What is a parent to do when they find out their child has gone astray?



Elder Paisios has a surprising answer.

Even the most serious fall of the children shouldn't make parents desperate, for sin has become fashionable in our time. They should always keep in mind the following: Now days, young people will be granted certain "extenuating circumstances" and will be judged with leniency for their transgressions. Today a grade of "seven" for conduct is the equivalent to the "ten" – "excellent" of our schooldays. Of course, parents will always try to help their children, but they mustn't be overly anxious. Children will get more sensible and experienced with time. Right now they may not understand what is good because their mind has not yet matured. Their mind is cloudy and it lacks clarity to discern the danger that lies ahead and the irreparable damage they can suffer.

Realizing that today's culture is much more difficult than the one we as parents were raised in, how are we to react to the misadventures of our children. Are we to get upset and confront them? Should we try to constraint them in any way? Should we disassociate ourselves from them as long as they engage in sinful activities? What are we to do?

Elder Paisios says,

It would be good if the parents indicated to the child that they do not get upset over unacceptable behavior; but they mustn't become overbearing; and of course, they should continue to pray. Prayers, spoken with pain, are effective. If the child does something very serious, the parents must intervene



appropriately. If it is not so serious, they they can overlook it a little, so as not to provoke the child and make the situation worse by causing the child to distance himself from them. They must pray to Christ and Panagia to protect their child.

He is saying that we need to let them know that we are understanding of the difficult condition that they now face and our love for them is unconditional. We want them to know that they can continue to confide in us and we will try and offer loving advice that will be helpful to them as they mature and struggle to overcome the difficulties of life lived out of their own free will. We can share with them our own struggles. And most importantly we must offer fervent prayers in their behalf.

The Elder tells a story:

When I was at the Skete of Iveron, a young man came by chance and found me. He was wandering in Chalkidiki, found some group of pilgrims coming to the Holy Mountain and came with them to the kellion. My goodness, he was an atheist, blasphemous, most imprudent! He had a devilish cleverness and believed in nothing. He swore at all the other pilgrims, young and old. With patience and a little effort, I brought him to some reckoning; I gave him a haircut, too, because he had very long hair. "Look", I told him, "may your mother be well, for it was certainly her prayers that brought you here." "You are right, Father," he told me. "I was wandering in Chalkidiki, and I don't even know how I got here." "If your mother finds out that you have come here to the Holy Mountain and sees you with your hair cut, she will feel such joy for you!" "How did you know that, Father? My mother will truly be overjoyed to see me so changed!" he responded. God turned him this way and that way and guided him to the ... master! How much prayer his mother must have poured out for him!