

## **JACK'S CORNER**

**QUESTION:** My 5-year-old came home from school yesterday saying the “F” word. She said she heard it at school. I didn’t think I’d have to worry about this kind of stuff so soon. How should I handle it?

**ANSWER:** It is sad that you and your child have to deal with this issue at such a young age. It would have been better if you could have decided the time, and then proactively approached the issue in a few years. Now, you have to react. But, take heart; you can use this opportunity for great good!

We parents must always thoughtfully and prayerfully think through when to equip our children to handle various kinds of evil. **In the scheme of life, equipping is better than protecting.** As our children grow, our job changes from protectors to equippers. We don’t want to violate their innocence, nor do we want to expose them to evils before they are ready. On the other hand, we don’t want them to enter the world naïve and vulnerable... “wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove” (MT 10:16 ). We must prepare them, but the judgment call of exactly when and how to equip them in specific issues is a decision based on (1) knowing our individual child spiritually, socially, emotionally and cognitively and (2) lots of fervent prayer.

Mom and dad should sit down with her/him calmly and seriously. Your mood is critical to this learning opportunity; don't over-react. Kids learn early that certain words have power to elicit reactions; power is attractive. Show your child you can handle this situation with confidence and conviction! In five-year-old language (don't use words like "inappropriate"), explain that some words are not to be used by anyone in your family because God does not want us to say them...they are "bad" and/or "mean". Make certain your child does not hear **you** use the very kind of language you don't want him/her to use. It is powerful for you as parents to say: "You don't, and you won't, hear that word used by mom or dad. God wants good and nice words to come out of our mouths. That word is not good or nice."

At five, you don't need to have a lengthy conversation. Your child may or may not want to know the meaning of the word. You will have to decide if some kind of definition is needed. At five, your child won't understand much, if any, of the literal meaning, but they can understand intent. What is important is: what we say is an indication of who we are ("Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" LK 6:45). You might want to say something like: "God wants us to be like Him. He wants us to do the good and kind things that He would do. He wants us to use the good and nice words that He would use. He even wants us to have

the good and kind thoughts that He would have. God gives us His Holy Spirit to help us!” Don’t miss this opportunity.

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