

## FEATURE

## 'You let your kids say \_\_\_\_\_?!'

A few weeks ago, my young son, Bobby, came home from a neighbor's house and said, "At 'Joey's' house he's allowed to call his sister 'stupid' and tell her to 'shutup' without getting in trouble. How come those are bad words in our house but not at Joey's?"

As a parent, this line of questioning makes me very uncomfortable as well as nostalgic for the days when my kids were toddlers and could barely speak, never mind ask probing questions. It's important to my husband and me to be very clear about what's acceptable behavior in our house without putting down another parent or making a judgment about their parenting style. This is a real challenge for moms and dads because it's our job to make sure that our kids understand respect, courtesy and kindness in a society that often emphasizes disrespect, selfishness and power.

I know that even with some of my closest friends we have each staked out our own limits regarding language, toys, movies and behavior. I'll never forget one summer night during our vacation when my husband and I discussed this subject with four of our closest friends. As our kids played in the next room and one child used a certain word, a discussion followed about the parameters of acceptable and unacceptable words in each of our homes. It quickly turned into a session of laughter and teasing: "We allow the word \_\_\_\_\_, but not \_\_\_\_\_ in our home."

"You let your kids say \_\_\_\_\_ but not \_\_\_\_\_?"

"You say \_\_\_\_\_, but don't allow your kids to say \_\_\_\_\_?"

And on it went. Although there are differences in each of our homes, each of us had clear limits with our kids. This doesn't mean our children have never tested those limits!

As parents, we establish boundaries and rules based on our own upbringing, the uniqueness of our kids and our life and faith experiences. One of my closest friends often tells me what a struggle it is for her not to swear around her two boys because she grew up in a home where four-letter words were the norm. Some of my close friends who have children with special needs, hyperactivity and attention deficit, have helped me to understand that they're basically having a good day if "shut-up" and "stupid" are the worst words that comes out of their child's mouth that day.

Still, it's upsetting than to hear young children use foul language. About a year ago there was a TV program on this subject. A reporter followed young children around and recorded their bad language and swear words for all America to hear. The parents of these kids either threw up their hands or laughed every time their child uttered another word that was bleeped during the interview. One mother said, "They are only words; it could be much worse." It could be worse and for many children it is. But I wonder why it did-



## family matters

BY ELLEN MARX

n't concern the parents that these words are often charged with hostility, anger and disrespect.

The lines between adults and children are much more casual today than when I was a kid. In some ways this is a welcome change. In the past, there was a blind obedience to adults and authority figures that left many children powerless, alone and without any rights. Some adults abused their authority and harmed children physically, emotionally and sexually. We continue to see the devastating effects of this abuse. These adults weren't deserving of respect. As I often try to explain to my kids — for both children and adults — respect is something that's earned.

The libraries and bookstores are stocked with books on parenting and positive discipline that offer lots of useful information and strategies. But I have found that the most effective parenting advice is given by Jesus in St. Matthew's Gospel: Do to others what you would have them do to you. Each time I'm arbitrating yet another argument between my kids or refereeing one more of their melees, the only words that seem to make sense to them are: "How would that make you feel if someone said that or did that to you?"

And St. Paul also offers some solid ground rules for parents who are looking for guidance in what to teach their children: "Get rid of all bitterness ... and anger, harsh words, slander and malice of every kind. In place of these, be kind to one another, compassionate, and mutually forgiving, just as God has forgiven you in Christ. Be imitators of God as his dear children. Follow the way of love, even as Christ loved you ... There was a time when you lived in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Well, then, live as children of the light."

Marx lives in Lawrenceville, N.J., with her husband and two children.

## Musical myth a strong show

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following is a home videocassette review from the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting. The videocassette is available on VHS format.

## Hercules

Buoyantly animated tale about the ancient Greek hero of the title (voice of Tate Donovan) who is kidnapped from Mt. Olympus as a baby and raised as a mere mortal until, with a little help from a wise-cracking teacher (voice of Danny De Vito), he proves himself a true hero by rescuing a damsel (voice of Susan Egan) from the fiery god of the underworld (voice of James Woods). Co-directed by John Musker and Ron Clements, the colorful adventure is a music-filled celebration of today's pop culture, but tainting the fun midway is a shamelessly blatant plug for Disney products. A few scenes of menace may frighten toddlers. The USCC classification is A-1 — general patronage. The MPAA rating is G — general audiences.

## Mass Pack boasts mass appeal with parents

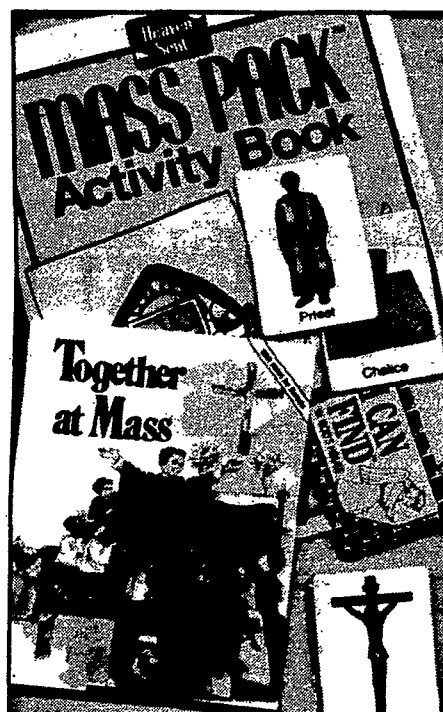
Mary Sennett acknowledged with a laugh that she could have used a "Mass Pack" a few years ago.

Back then, she was taking three small children to Mass each Sunday. During the services, she tried not only to help them to behave, but also to help them learn something about their Catholic faith. Thus she often found herself quietly explaining what was going on during the Mass.

Her children are now 14, 12 and 9, but Sennett is sharing with other parents what she learned years ago.

The parishioner of St. Mary of the Lake Parish, Skaneateles (in the Syracuse Diocese) created the Mass Pack, and began to sell it last year.

The pack, which she markets through her own mail-order company, Heaven Sent, provides children with activities and learning tools. It includes an activity book, crayons, a Mass Book to help children understand what is going on, and I Can Find, a card game that includes pictures of such items as a chalice, tabernacle and crucifix. The chil-



dren try to find those items in the church.

"It's just another good way to reinforce what's going on in church," explained Sennett, who teaches religious education at her parish.

Sennett's mail order business itself grew out of her desire to help families nurture their faith. She offers a variety of family oriented religious items, including books, jewelry and rosaries. But the Mass Pack has proven to be the biggest hit.

"Of all the products I sell, this one I've sold more than all the others," she reported. "I now have a couple of retailers who have contacted me."

She said parents seem to be searching for a way to teach their children, while also helping them behave in church.

"I realize that people really want to know ways to reach children," Sennett explained. "I think anything that helps them understand how special (Mass) is, that's great."

For information about the Mass Kit or Heaven Sent, call 1-800-934-6336.

—Lee Strong

## Kids' Answers from page 12

- |            |            |
|------------|------------|
| 1. one     | 4. four    |
| 2. seventh | 5. twelve  |
| 3. five    | 6. Numbers |

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