Continuing Formation

Catechesis for the sacrament of penance must continue throughout one's life in order to develop a fully mature conscience.

Participation in the sacrament at frequent and regular opportunities contributes to one's overall growth in discipleship and maturity.

The parish has a responsibility to provide the necessary support and information to parents to enable them to fulfill their role as primary educators of their children. Parish leadership should provide ample opportunities for lifelong faith formation.

The community of faith has a responsibility for modeling acts of mercy and forgiveness both within its confines, and in the world beyond.

"After receiving pardon for sin, the penitent praises the mercy of God and gives him thanks…The penitent continues the conversion thus begun and expresses it by a life renewed according to the Gospel and more and more steeped in the love of God…."

Order of Penance #20

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE
(for young children)

When I make choices, do I sometimes forget to think first about what God wants me to do?

Have I done what God wants?

Have I used God's or Jesus' name in a bad way?

Do I celebrate Mass on Sunday?

Have I disobeyed the grownups who take care of me?

Have I given my body the good food and sleep it needs?

Have I hurt someone by what I have said or done?

Have I taken something that is not mine without asking?

Have I always told the truth?

Have I been fair to others - - especially those who are different than I am?

Have I refused to help people who are in need?

Am I kind to my brothers and sisters?

Do I forgive the people who hurt me?

SOME SCRIPTURE FOR FAMILIES TO SHARE:

Luke 19: 1-10
John 20: 19-23
Luke 15: 11-32
Luke 15: 1-10

DIOCESE OF St Augustine

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

FIRST RECONCILIATION PREPARATION

Office of Christian Formation

(January 2026)

What is the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

The sacrament of reconciliation is an experience of the gift of God's boundless mercy that frees us from our sins and also challenges us to have the same kind of compassion and forgiveness for those who sin against us.

In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and in the *Rite of Penance* we read that the sacrament is a liturgical action. It is the Church's opportunity to celebrate the presence of God in those areas of our lives needing conversion and forgiveness.

Formation for the Sacrament

Formation for the celebration of first reconciliation involves the cooperative efforts of parents, pastors, catechists and children. It is a time when a person is able to encounter a loving and merciful God.

The focus of any formation must be on developing and growing a strong mature conscience. Because people grow in different ways and the awareness of sin becomes evident at different times in different people, the time of sacramental celebration should be based on personal readiness.

The candidate should be prepared in such a way that the ritual celebration is a joyful celebration, more than a memorized experience.

"Catechesis for children prior to their first reception of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation must always respect their natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances."

National Directory for Catechesis
Chapter 5, section 36, heading B2

Preparation for the Sacrament

Every child who has reached the age of reason (around seven) must be given adequate basic catechesis for the celebration of reconciliation so that participation in the sacrament may be a free response of faith. No adequately prepared child may be denied the sacrament.

On the other hand, no obligation to approach the sacrament may be imposed on the child, other than that which binds all Catholics, namely the consciousness of personal, serious sin.

While catechesis for the sacrament of reconciliation is to precede first Eucharist, the principle of individual readiness for the celebration of the sacrament must be respected.

The decision concerning readiness of a particular child rests with the parent and child along with the assistance of the parish pastor and catechetical leadership.

Readiness of the individual child includes:

1. The ability of the child to distinguish between right and wrong
2. The awareness of the need for forgiveness and trust in Jesus' forgiving love.
3. The ability to express sorrow.
4. The ability of the child to describe wrong-doing in his or her own words.
5. The ability to ask for forgiveness.

Some basic needs of a child who is developing and growing with a mature conscience

THE CHILD:

...has a need for love and security
...needs to experience forgiveness
...needs to understand that there are differences in:
- what is dangerous
- what is improper
- what is annoying to others
- what is evil

...needs a God who is **not** a police officer
...needs a true understanding of sin
(Sin is real but do not dwell on it because fear is a poor educator!)
...needs a true understanding of the Law, "**LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**"
...needs to see the Christian life lived.
...needs to see his/her parents forgiving and accepting others
...needs to learn to make choices and experience the consequences of these choices
...needs to learn to reflect on him/herself

The Celebration

There are a variety of ways the sacrament may be celebrated. In all cases, parents as well as children are encouraged to enter fully into the celebration.

One way of preparing for the sacrament is for the family to participate in an examination of conscience together. The ideal would be to have the whole family receive the sacrament together as well.

"*Parents above all others are obliged to form their children in the faith and practice of Christian life by word and example.*"

Canon 774.2