

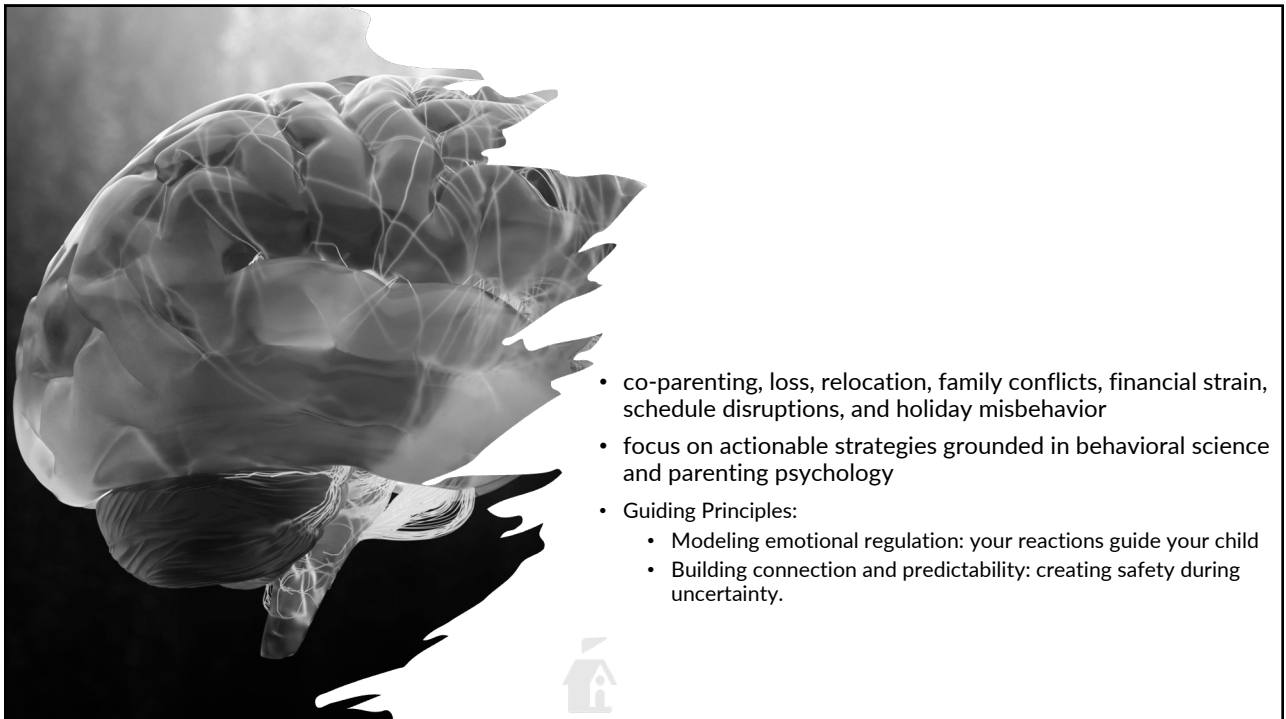
# Parenting in Times of Change

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS  
CENTER OF EXCELLENCE




*Peace*†  
*of* MIND

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- co-parenting, loss, relocation, family conflicts, financial strain, schedule disruptions, and holiday misbehavior
- focus on actionable strategies grounded in behavioral science and parenting psychology
- Guiding Principles:
  - Modeling emotional regulation: your reactions guide your child
  - Building connection and predictability: creating safety during uncertainty.

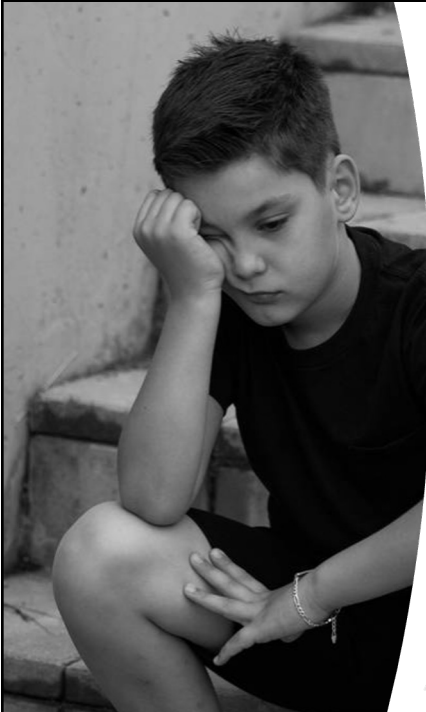
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**Co-Parenting Through Stress**

- **Scenario:** A 2nd grader becomes tearful when transitioning between homes during the holidays.
- **Strategy:**
  - Coordinate consistent routines across households.
  - Use a transitional object (e.g., a favorite toy or note).
  - Practice calm, neutral exchanges with the co-parent.
- **Behavioral Science Tip:** Highlight the impact of predictability on reducing separation anxiety.

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**Navigating Loss and Grief**

- **Scenario:** A 5th grader withdraws and refuses to participate in holiday traditions after a grandparent passes away.
- **Strategy:**
  - Allow space for grief while maintaining some traditions.
  - Use age-appropriate explanations of loss and encourage storytelling about the loved one.
  - Suggest creating a "remembrance ritual" as part of the holiday.
- **Psychological Insight:** Validate feelings and avoid forcing participation in joyful activities prematurely.

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#### Relocation and New Beginnings

- **Scenario:** A 3rd grader struggles to make friends after a family move and acts out during holiday events.
- **Strategy:**
  - Role-play social scenarios to boost confidence.
  - Join community or school events for social exposure.
  - Praise small efforts, like saying hello to a new peer.
- **Parenting Psychology Insight:** Encourage belonging by emphasizing family identity: "No matter where we live, we are a team."



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#### Handling Family Conflicts

- **Scenario:** A 6th grader overhears an argument between parents about holiday spending and expresses anger by yelling at siblings.
- **Strategy:**
  - Use "repair" conversations to model resolving conflict calmly.
  - Have private, age-appropriate discussions with the child about family stress.
  - Teach and practice calming techniques, such as deep breathing or grounding exercises.
- **Behavioral Science Tip:** Normalize disagreements as part of relationships and model healthy resolutions.



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### Managing Financial Strain

- **Scenario:** A 4th grader expresses disappointment over not receiving a coveted gift due to budget constraints.
- **Strategy:**
  - Emphasize experiences over material gifts (e.g., family game night).
  - Be transparent about limits while expressing optimism: "We're focusing on what matters most—time together."
  - Encourage gratitude by having children identify what they're thankful for daily.
- **Parenting Psychology Insight:** Gratitude practices help shift focus from scarcity to abundance.

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### Misbehavior During Holiday Gatherings

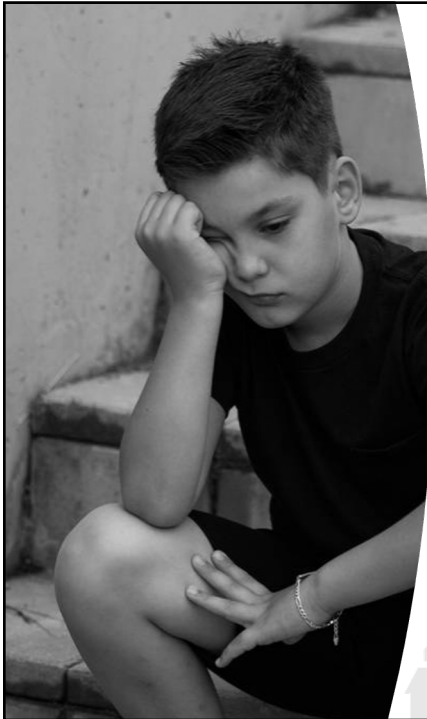
- **Scenario:** A 1st grader refuses to sit at the table or follow rules during family meals.
- **Strategy:**
  - Prepare the child in advance with clear expectations and role-play.
  - Offer incentives like a small reward for cooperation.
  - Use a quiet space for breaks if the behavior escalates.
- **Behavioral Science Tip:** Reinforce good behavior immediately and specifically, focusing on what went well.

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- **Preparing for Holiday Schedule Disruptions (Kindergarten)**
- **Scenario:** A kindergartener becomes clingy and cries when routines change, such as staying up late or visiting new places.
- **Strategy:**
  - Use visual schedules or picture charts to preview the day's activities.
  - Build in familiar routines (e.g., bedtime stories) even in new environments.
  - Practice transitions by role-playing or reading books about holiday activities.
- **Behavioral Science Tip:** Predictability reduces anxiety in younger children.

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#### **Coping with Social Challenges at Gatherings (7th Grade)**

- **Scenario:** A 7th grader isolates themselves at a family party, claiming it's "boring" and scrolling on their phone.
- **Strategy:**
  - Set expectations for limited screen time beforehand.
  - Assign the child a role to encourage engagement (e.g., helping set up games for younger cousins).
  - Acknowledge their discomfort but frame participation as a skill-building opportunity.
- **Parenting Psychology Insight:** Adolescents value autonomy, so involve them in decision-making for holiday plans.

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#### Sibling Rivalry Intensified by Stress (4th Grade)

- **Scenario:** A 4th grader starts fights with a younger sibling, claiming they get more attention during holiday preparations.
- **Strategy:**
  - Carve out one-on-one time for each child, even if brief.
  - Set clear family rules about respectful communication and consequences for aggression.
  - Praise teamwork when siblings cooperate during tasks or play.
- **Behavioral Science Tip:** Reinforcing positive sibling dynamics reduces rivalry over time.

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#### Balancing Academic Responsibilities and Holiday Fun (8th Grade)

- **Scenario:** An 8th grader procrastinates on a long-term project due after winter break, leading to stress and late-night work.
- **Strategy:**
  - Help the child break the project into manageable steps with deadlines.
  - Encourage a “work first, play later” approach with short study sessions followed by holiday activities.
  - Model planning by sharing how you balance tasks and holiday commitments.
- **Parenting Psychology Insight:** Teaching time management skills fosters independence and reduces last-minute panic.

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#### Adjusting to a New Family Dynamic After Divorce (2nd Grade)

- **Scenario:** A 2nd grader refuses to talk about their time at the other parent's house and acts out when asked about it.
- **Strategy:**
  - Avoid pressing the child for details; let them share at their own pace.
  - Offer neutral statements like, "It's okay to miss the other parent while you're here."
  - Keep transitions calm and predictable, and avoid speaking negatively about the other parent.
- **Behavioral Science Tip:** Acknowledge the child's loyalty binds and provide a safe space for emotional expression.

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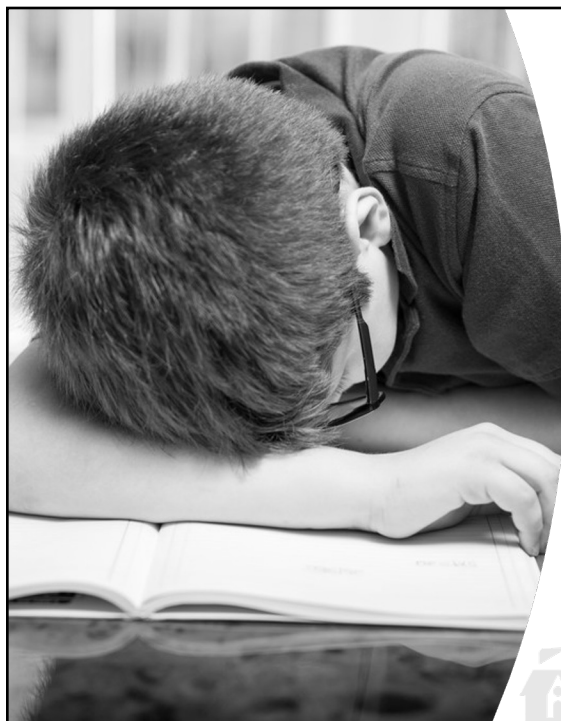


#### Handling Gift Envy (3rd Grade)

**Scenario:** A 3rd grader complains, "It's not fair! My cousin got way cooler presents than I did."

- **Strategy:**
  - Acknowledge their feelings without shaming: "I hear you. It can be hard when someone else gets something you really like."
  - Shift focus to gratitude: Encourage them to name their favorite gift or a holiday moment they enjoyed.
  - Create a meaningful tradition: Suggest making a list of things they'd like to save up for or work toward in the future.
- **Behavioral Science Tip:** Teaching gratitude and delayed gratification fosters resilience and reduces comparison-based dissatisfaction.

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### Coping with Family Expectations (5th Grade)

**Scenario:** A 5th grader complains they're "too old" for a family tradition, like wearing matching pajamas or participating in a holiday performance.

**•Strategy:**

- Validate their growing independence: "I get it—things that used to be fun can feel different now."
- Find a compromise: Let them opt for a more age-appropriate role, like helping younger siblings or picking the family activity.
- Celebrate their individuality: Praise their input and willingness to contribute in their own way.

**•Parenting Psychology Insight:** Balancing a child's desire for autonomy with family traditions helps them feel respected while staying connected.

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**Scenario:** A kindergartener throws tantrums at large gatherings, overwhelmed by noise and unfamiliar faces.

**• Strategy:**

- Provide a warm-up: Arrive early to help them adjust gradually as others arrive.
- Create a sensory-safe space: Designate a quiet corner with headphones, books, or fidget toys to help them decompress.
- Use social stories: Before the event, explain what to expect and how to handle feelings, like asking for a break.

**• Behavioral Science Tip:** Helping young children recognize and manage sensory overwhelm builds self-regulation skills over time.

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