

General Q and A about First Confession and First Holy Communion at Good Counsel

Q: Does Good Counsel offer any sacramental preparation classes for First Confession and First Holy Communion?

A: No.

Q: Is the preparation for these sacraments 100% in the hands of the child's parents?

A: Yes.

Q: How old does my child have to be to receive First Confession and First Holy Communion?

A: It depends. Because every child's development is different, some children are legitimately ready to receive these two sacraments as early as five years old (four years old would be highly unusual, but hypothetically possible), while some may not be ready until eight years old or even older. Farther below there is a list of requirements to look over to determine if your child is ready for First Confession and First Holy Communion.

Q: Is it possible for my child to begin going to regular confession but to delay First Holy Communion until a later date?

A: Absolutely. If you feel your child is ready for their first confession and you would like them to have that as a somewhat regular habit prior to receiving First Holy Communion, you are totally free to do that.

Q: Is it possible for my child to receive First Holy Communion prior to their First Confession?

A: No. Per canon law, for a child to receive First Holy Communion, they must have made their first confession beforehand.

Q: If I believe my child is ready for First Confession or for both First Confession and First Holy Communion, what is the next step?

A: Contact our parish office to set up an "interview" comprised of you, your child, and the pastor. The pastor will meet with you and your child for 20-30 minutes and ask the child questions about these two sacraments (and maybe a few other random questions about the Faith, too). If the pastor deems your child to be ready, he will hear their confession immediately following the interview. At that point, you'd be free to schedule their First Holy Communion for any Sunday Mass that you'd like at any point in the year.

Q: So there's not one particular Sunday each year when there is a large class of children making their First Communion?

A: No. Children at Good Counsel receive their First Communion throughout the year on various Sundays. When a child is ready to receive the Body of Blood of Jesus Christ, we do not want to needlessly delay them!

For a child to be ready for **FIRST CONFESSION**, they should meet the following requirements:

- **Development of conscience:** The child's conscience should be developed to the point where the parents have witnessed the child, on at least a handful of occasions, *spontaneously acknowledge* his or her own fault in doing something they knew was wrong.
 - *A practical recommendation: To help your child develop their conscience in preparation for confession, I would have them start practicing a daily examination of conscience as early as three years old – one idea is to make it part of family night prayers. You might slowly build the examination in the following way:*
 - **Age 3/4:** *thanking God for one or two things from their day*
 - **Age 4/5:**
 - *Still thanking God for two things from their day*
 - **New:** *Telling Jesus “sorry” for one thing they did wrong that day (e.g. fighting with siblings, disobedience, not sharing with a friend/sibling, etc.). Note: It is helpful to teach them to direct their apology to Jesus, trying to draw the connection between Jesus’ suffering and the child’s sin/fault. Using an image of Jesus on the cross or a crucifix during this part of the examination can be helpful.*
 - **Age 5/6:**
 - *Thanking God for **three things** from the day*
 - *Telling Jesus “sorry” for **two things** from the day*
 - *At this age, if they are showing signs of being ready for their first confession, it might be good to have them begin writing down their little daily examination of conscience in a booklet or notepad.*
 - **Age 6/7:**
 - *Thanking God for three things from the day*
 - *Telling Jesus “sorry” for two things from the day*
 - **New:** *Making one “**resolution**” for the next day... some good deed they want to do for God or someone, some bad habit they want to focus on, etc.*
 - *Obviously this is just a rough outline and has to be adapted to the development of your child.*
 - The child should have at least a rudimentary knowledge of the three primary “acts of the penitent” within the sacrament of confession, namely: 1) contrition, 2) confessing their sins, and 3) doing their penance
 - Sorrow/contrition: the child should have a basic awareness that sin hurts three parties: themselves, others, and Jesus. The child should be aware of the connection between Jesus’ suffering and their own sins.
 - *A practical recommendation: anytime your child sins, you could encourage them to go and apologize to an image of Jesus somewhere in the house – perhaps the crucifix in their room or an image of the Sacred Heart hanging somewhere. This can help them absorb the truth that sin is not an *abstract failure*, but always a *personal injury*, particularly in the hurt that it causes to Jesus.*

- Categories of sin: The child should at least know the terms “mortal sin” and “venial sin”. They don’t need an exhaustive knowledge, but they should at least know that mortal sin breaks someone’s relationship with God, while venial sin doesn’t break it, but does weaken it.
 - *Practical recommendation*: To again help your child to begin understanding sin as always personal, you might describe mortal sin as “turning your back on Jesus”, while venial sin is “turning aside from Jesus just a little bit... not looking Him in the eyes, but looking off to the side, to some distraction that we prefer to Him,” or something along those lines.
- Penance: The child should understand that penance is our effort to show God our sorrow with *deeds*, an effort to “make it up to God,” for how we’ve hurt Him.
 - An analogy you might use: If we break a neighbor’s window and we tell him we’re sorry, he might forgive us, but the window is still broken, so we have to fix it. Penance is, in a way, “fixing” what we “broke” through our sin.
- **Knowledge of the mechanics of the sacrament**: The child should be familiar with the basic mechanics of how to go to confession. Parents can help the child practice by walking through the “steps” of confession.
 - N.B. The child should have an act of contrition *fully memorized* as part of knowing the mechanics of confession well. Any of the traditional acts of contrition out there are good options.

For a child to be ready for **FIRST HOLY COMMUNION**, they should meet the following requirements:

- **Desire for the Eucharist**: the child should demonstrate at least a basic initial desire to receive Jesus in Holy Communion.
- **Knowledge of the Sacrament**:
 - The child needs to be able to clearly explain/distinguish **the difference between normal bread and wine, and the Eucharist**, and to understand that the Eucharist is *no longer bread or wine at all*, but the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.
 - The child should know the moment in the Mass when this change takes place, i.e. the **consecration**. They should be able to describe when this happens (e.g. “when the priest holds up the Host, and then the chalice, and the bells ring”, would be a good response from the child).
 - The child should know **when** Jesus established this sacrament (the Last Supper)
 - The child should know **why** only bread and wine is consecrated in the Mass, and not other food/drinks (because that is what Jesus used at the Last Supper).
 - The child should know **how long the Eucharist remains within their body** after receiving Him (10-15 minutes). The child should be taught to make the best possible use of those 10-15 minutes... that those 10-15 minutes are the most important minutes of their entire life.
 - The child should know **who** can consecrate bread and wine (priest only).