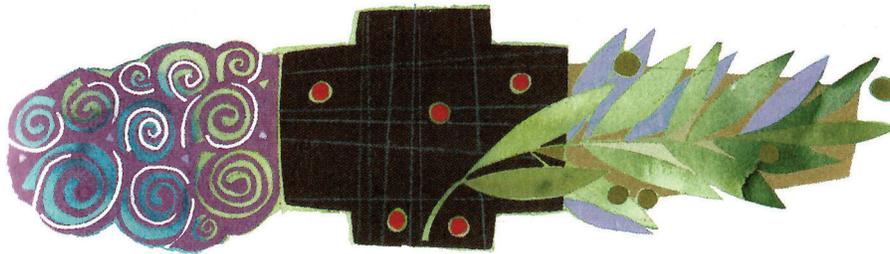


Spirit of Forgiveness

**1**

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

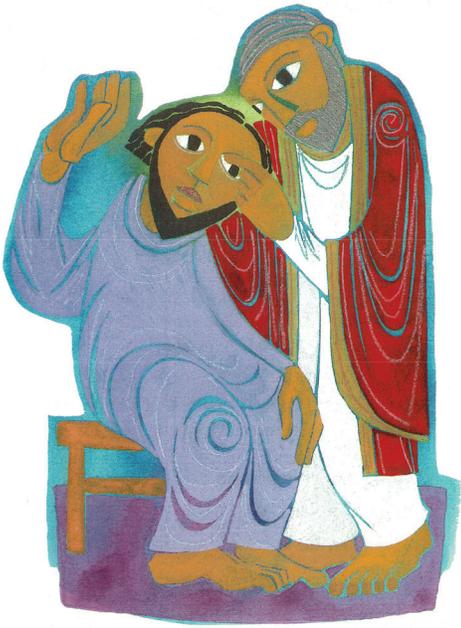
Then begin with a prayer.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: When was the last time you had to say "I'm sorry"? When was the last time you were asked to forgive someone?

Along with "please" and "thank you," "I'm sorry" is one of the first things we learn to say as children. The ability to be forgiven and to forgive others is important to relationships and families. It is important to our relationship with God as well. We believe that God is always ready to forgive us when we ask.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an opportunity for us to recognize when we have hurt others, to confess our failings to a priest, and to receive God's forgiveness. Our sins result in broken relationships, especially between us and God and our neighbors. This sacrament helps us to receive God's grace and mend these gaps, lifting a weight from us in the process. We encourage you to take advantage of this gift, both for your own benefit and to serve as an example to your child.



1

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

Mom! Sam just hit me” “She hit me first!” Does this sound at all familiar? Whether this is an argument between brother and sister or between two friends, it certainly happens often enough that you must have heard it. Maybe you have even said such things.

When someone does something mean to us, we get angry. Then we usually do two things: We blame the person who hurt us and then we try to get even, to take revenge.

It’s normal to get hurt and angry. We need to tell people when they have done something wrong so they can learn not to do it again. But when we start trying to blame others or to get revenge, we are just making a bad thing even worse.

How can we, as people of the Spirit of Jesus, make a “bad thing” good? Jesus showed us how to be healers rather than hurters. We can forgive others and we can forgive ourselves. Why? Because God forgives us.

If that sounds too simple to you, it’s not. Forgiveness can be very hard. First we have to admit we have done something we shouldn’t. Whenever we go against what Jesus teaches us, we are wrong. If we know something is wrong but we do it anyway, then we have committed a sin. A sin is when we choose to do bad instead of good. (Jesus told us that there were two Great Commandments to remember. One is to love God with our whole heart, and the second is to love other people as much as we love ourselves.)

Then, after we know we did wrong, we have to say “I’m sorry.” We need to say that to anyone we hurt.

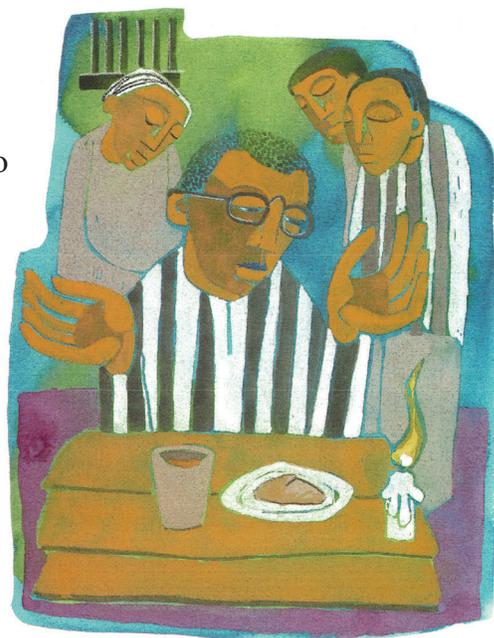
And finally, we need to make up with a person we have injured. We may need to replace a broken item or promise to never say that mean name again. We need to prove we have changed and that we won’t do the wrong thing again.

All this is worth it when we finally hear, “That’s OK. You’re forgiven.”

There is a sacrament in the Catholic Church that helps us when we sin by showing us that God is always ready to say “That’s OK. You’re forgiven.” It is called *Reconciliation*, which means “bringing together again.” There is a sacrament in the Catholic Church that helps us when we sin by showing us that God is always ready to say “That’s OK. You’re forgiven.” It is called Reconciliation, which means “bringing together again. As Catholics, we go to the sacrament of Reconciliation throughout our lives. During the celebration of this sacrament, we tell the priest our sins (confession) and that we are sorry for having sinned (contrition). He will tell us what we must do to show God we are sorry (penance). Then he gives us God’s forgiveness (absolution).

Sometimes we are the ones who need to do the forgiving. Jesus taught us about that, too. We are told to forgive those around us. Since love is the greatest commandment, how could we do anything less?

Is there someone in your life you need to forgive? Is there someone you should say “I’m sorry” to? Ask the Spirit of Jesus to give you the courage and love you need both to be forgiving and to be forgiven.



2

Now discuss the reading with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. How do you feel when you have made a mistake that hurt someone? What if you have hurt someone on purpose? How do you make up to the person you have hurt?
2. Are there any people you have a hard time forgiving? Why? What would make it possible for you to forgive them?

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page.
Then continue to read below.

2

Just for you: When we hurt others, we have to take active steps to make things right.

First we have to admit we have done something wrong. Then we have to apologize to those we hurt. Finally, we have to change our ways to avoid doing the same wrong again. If we are the ones receiving the apology, we need to risk forgiving that person. The two stories in this section both talk about how we ask for forgiveness and how we give forgiveness to others.

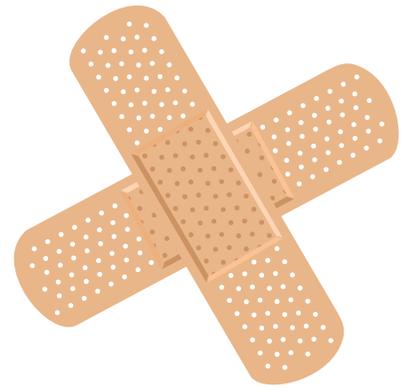
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The Sacrament of Reconciliation is the Church's celebration of God's mercy and forgiveness which helps us when we have done wrong:

- We prepare for the sacrament with an **examination of conscience**, to help us realize how we have failed.
- We **confess** our sins to a priest, and then **apologize** to God (and the rest of the Church).
- We commit to changing our ways, often with an **Act of Contrition**.
- The priest gives us a **penance** as a way to make amends for our sin.
- The priest gives us God's forgiveness through **absolution**.

If your child has received the Sacrament of Reconciliation, make sure they remember these steps and encourage them to receive the sacrament again soon.

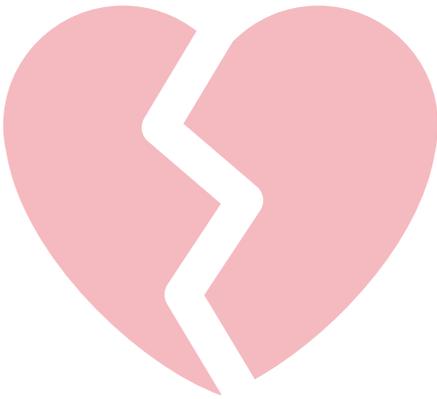
Broken Hearts



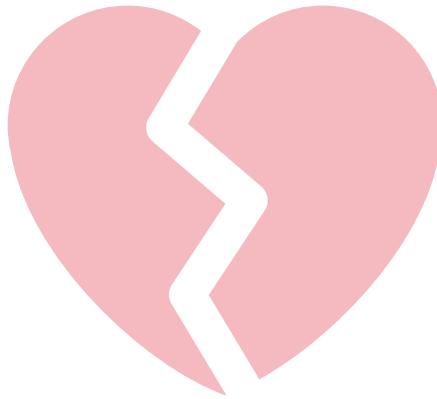
When we hurt others or others hurt us, it breaks our relationship with them. The person who was hurt may feel angry, scared, upset, or all three. Forgiveness and reconciliation are about healing our relationships to bring us back closer together.

Briefly answer the questions below by writing on the hearts.

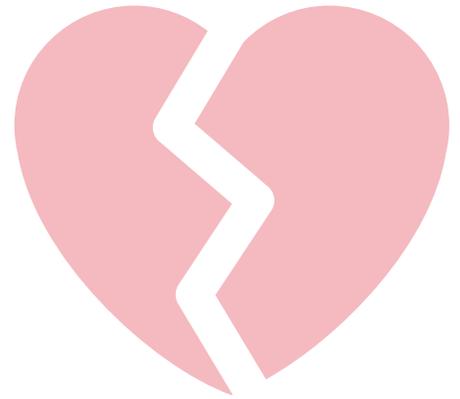
Describe a time when you hurt a family member (accidentally or on purpose):



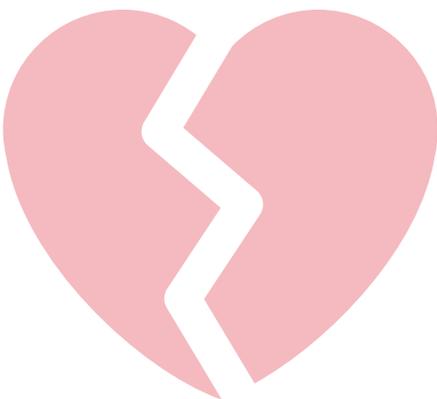
...when you hurt a friend or an acquaintance (accidentally or on purpose):



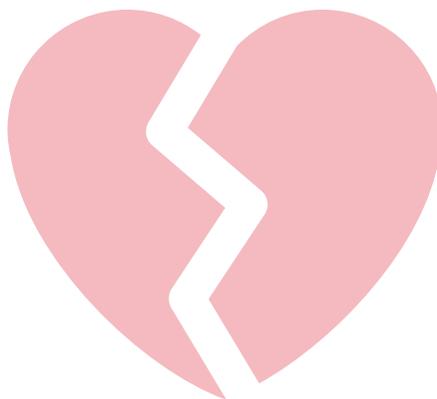
...when you hurt a stranger or someone you barely knew (accidentally or on purpose):



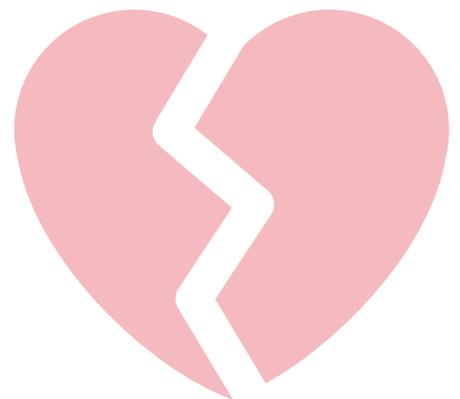
Now describe a time when you were hurt by a family member:



...when you were hurt by a friend or acquaintance:



...when you were hurt by a stranger or someone you barely knew.



Thinking back to all these examples, which is easier for you: to apologize for hurting someone else, or to forgive someone who has hurt you?

Circles of Hurt, Ripples of Sin

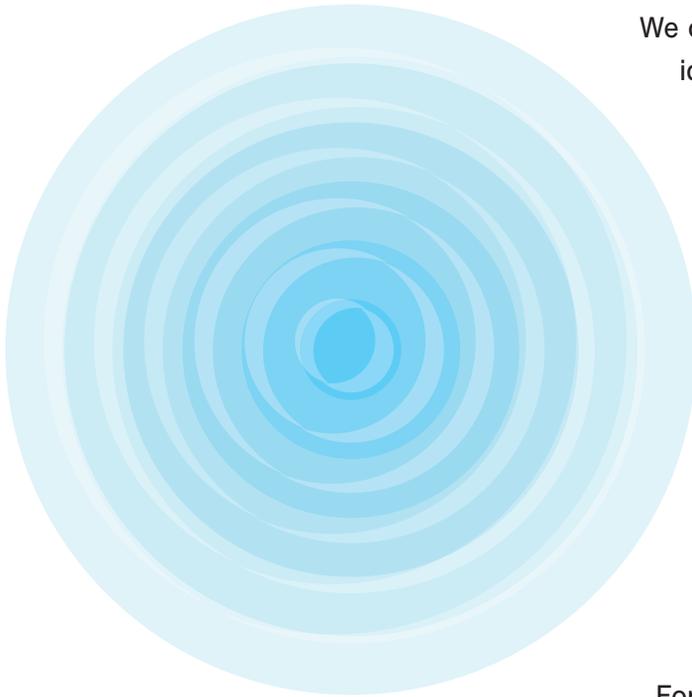
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Work on this activity together with your child. Begin by reading the text below together.

2

On the next page are three circles, one for family and friends, one for our community and one for our world. List in each circle the hurts that happen, on purpose or unintentionally. (You'll notice at the end how each one can "ripple" into the other!)

Before we can talk about forgiveness, we have to recognize the reality of sin. We all make mistakes, and when we deliberately are selfish or hurt others, these mistakes become sin.

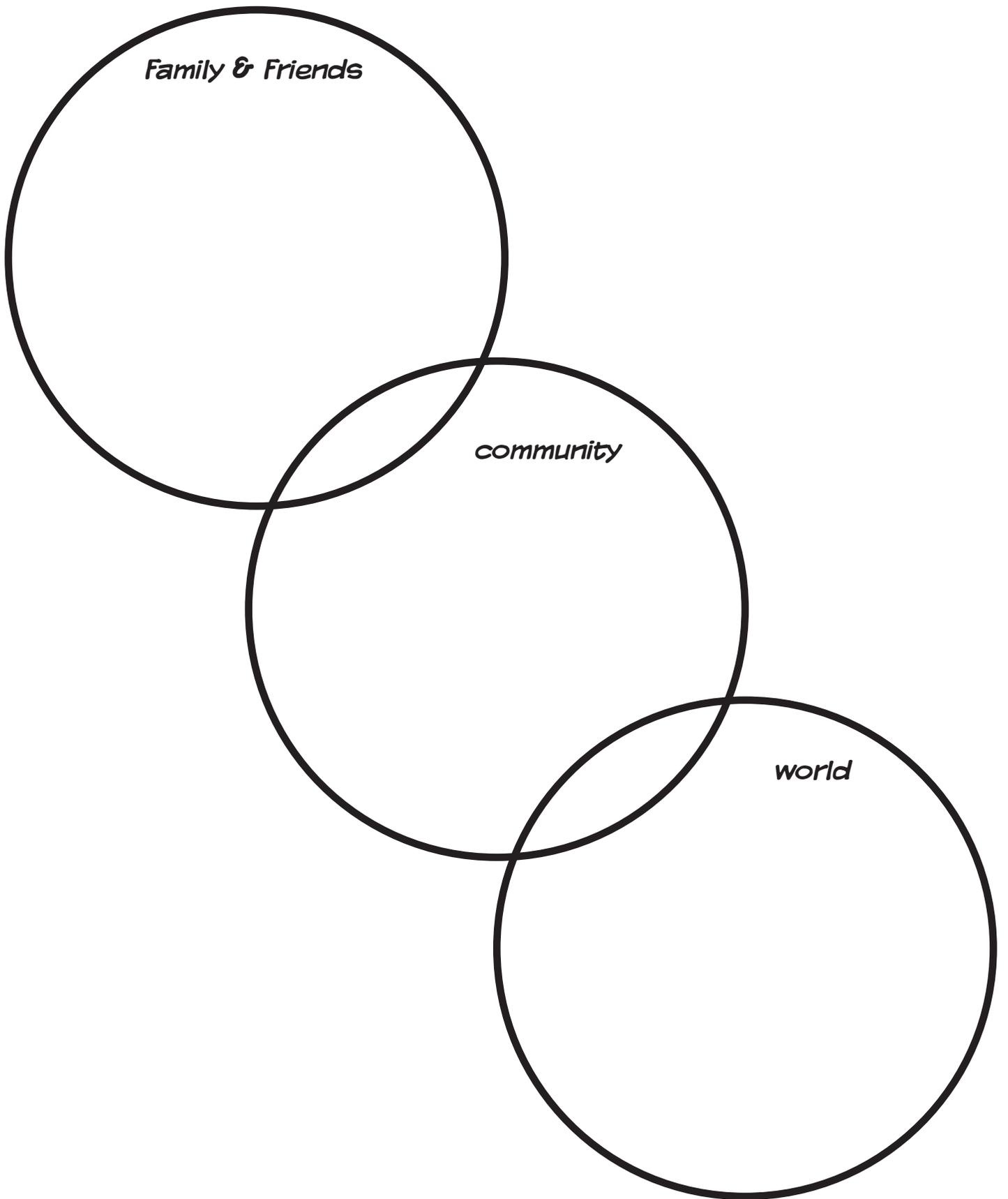


We call the time when we look at our lives to identify sinful actions an "examination of conscience." That means we examine, or look at closely, the inner voice and thoughts that tell us when we have done something wrong.

Hurtful things have a way of "rippling out" to others. We hurt someone in our family circle, and they may take their anger to work or school. Then they hurt someone there! So, just like a pebble dropped in a lake, one sin can spread out to hurt many, many other people.

It happens in the other direction as well!

For example, a government may cut funding for school breakfasts, so a particular school has to stop offering help to its children. Then a child in that school may go hungry all day because there is no food at home



Forgiveness

1

Many family-appropriate videos and movies deal with forgiveness. Find one you would like to see with your young person. (*Beauty and the Beast*, *Mighty Ducks*, *Field of Dreams*, and *Clara's Heart* are just a few.)

Also notice what your friends and family members do when they want to be forgiven. Do you have any personal rituals of reconciliation like a hug or a special phrase you say?



Closing Ritual

2

Say the closing prayer on the right together.

God of mercy,
we ask for your forgiveness.

Teach us how to forgive others.

We ask this through Jesus, in Jesus, and with Jesus,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
forever and ever. Amen.

