

# HELPING PEOPLE PRAY

## Becoming Quiet to Pray

Teach your children to get ready for prayer.

I can't settle my mind down—there's so much to do!" "How do I quiet the children to pray? They're so active!"



It's difficult to stop a busy day and to calm active children (and distracted adults). Nevertheless, you can learn to prepare for prayer.

God knows better than anyone that you need help. In the Liturgy of the Hours we pray, *Open my lips, O God, and my tongue will announce your praise.* Prayers start with asking, *God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me.* Use these words or your own, but ask for God's help.

### Set the tone.

Children will sense how you feel about prayer and sacred time. When you are approaching prayer, your posture and voice can communicate that you are entering a special time and activity.

Try this with your children. Slowly count down to zero. (Start with as high a number as you need!) Then breathe only 3 times per minute. (Remind children that athletes and singers must master

breathing.) Look at a clock or watch with a second hand. Inhale for 5 seconds; hold for 5 seconds; exhale for 5 seconds; hold for 5 seconds—20 seconds a breath, 3 times a minute. In years of leading others through these steps, I haven't found anyone whose mind could wander while breathing this way. In 3 minutes you can be calm and focused.

### Create a physical space.

Try to make a designated place for your prayer time. Some people specify a quiet room in their homes. Others find a corner, chair, or spot with a special picture or statue. If space is tight, you can turn a chair in a different direction or place a pillow, small rug, or beach towel on the floor. It's best if this space or object is used only for prayer—and if all family members respect it.

### Make a comfortable place to meet with God.

Encourage your children to be creative. A fifth grader prays in an old chair in the attic. Another uses her beanbag chair under the dining room table. Some children use the empty bunk bed of a college-age sibling. A man who travels a lot keeps his "ratty brown blanket" in the car trunk.

When you make a comfortable place for prayer, you and your children are more likely to spend quality time with God every day. Try it and see what happens!

**Sister Marlene Halpin, O.P.**, is a nationally recognized speaker and author on the topics of prayer and spirituality. Her many books include the popular *189 Ways to Contact God* for Loyola Press.