

# Q&A with Connie Rossini, author of A Spiritual Growth Plan for Your Choleric Child

I find conversations about personality so fascinating. Trying to understand people's personalities—particularly our children's—excites me. So when I found out that Connie Rossini, who blogs at Contemplative Homeschool, was publishing a book about raising a choleric child, I was very curious about it.

Although neither of our children falls into this category, I thoroughly enjoyed reading Connie's book and considering some of the concrete suggestions she has for integrating faith into your family's life.

Connie kindly agreed to answer some questions about her book, which was published May 15.



**How would you briefly explain to someone how to identify whether their child is a choleric child?**

Ask yourself two questions:

- 1) Does my child react quickly to stimuli, or does he take time to reflect before reacting?
- 2) Do his impressions last, or does he quickly put them behind him?

A choleric reacts quickly and holds onto his impressions.

**What are a choleric child's greatest challenges and strengths?**

Spiritually speaking, his greatest challenge is pride, followed by quick anger. He struggles with being compassionate. The choleric needs to feel in control of his life and agenda. When he doesn't, he gets depressed, argumentative, or violent. He often manipulates others into doing what he wants by the force of his personality. Power struggles can be a constant challenge with a choleric child.

His greatest strength is his determination, followed by his noble ideals. If he chooses worthwhile goals, he can easily succeed in reaching them. He never gives up. He loves a challenge and always tries to outdo others—especially siblings.

**✖ How has recognizing your children's different temperaments helped you in your parenting?**

Homeschoolers often try to individualize their children's education. I am now able to individualize their character studies too. Understanding my kids' temperaments helps me see what underlies their behavior, good or bad, so I can help them grow up as God intended, rather than trying to make them a miniature copy of myself. Now I am much less likely to ascribe bad motives to my children. I have more sympathy for their outlook. In some ways, learning about the temperaments is like visiting a foreign country. There are whole different ways of seeing the world that we may never have thought of before. It's really eye-opening. On a more practical level, I am finding parenting tactics that actually work!

**How has recognizing the different temperaments helped you in your own self-awareness—both as a parent and as a spouse, perhaps?**

The more I talk to other parents, the more I see how different parents are too! Not every parent is bothered by the same things that bother me. I am constantly learning more about myself and why I act the way I do. Just yesterday I was able to help my husband understand his boss, who shares my temperament. I better understand my parents and why they parent the way they do. I don't expect unrealistic things of my husband. Every relationship can be enriched through knowledge of the temperaments.

**How has that helped you in your faith journey?**

After writing *Trusting God* with St. Therese, I began to see that many of my trust issues stemmed from my strong secondary temperament, which is melancholic. I thought, if God can help me overcome my melancholic challenges in such a powerful way, why not my phlegmatic challenges too, since I am primarily phlegmatic? That's what I'm working on now. I have a constant difficulty doing my duty—especially housework. But faithfulness to that duty should form the basis of my vocation as wife and mother. If I want to be holy, I must be obedient here. That's my focus this year. I've made a few small advances, but I have a long way to go.


**I loved how you said, "St. Paul was probably a choleric-melancholic. He was determined, principled, and hard working." And then you said, "St. Therese's little way of spiritual childhood may seem too emotion-based to him, although Therese herself was probably melancholic." It's so wonderful to think how people of all different temperaments can achieve heaven. Did you find it helpful to think of the saints and their temperaments when approaching your children with their different**

## temperaments?

I think the saints who share each child's temperament can be great role models for them. They show us how each temperament can glorify God. I find I can understand a saint's spirituality much better once I understand his or her temperament. And I know that holiness is possible for each of my children, but it will look different for each.

"We are a team working together. And there is nothing a choleric likes better than to know someone is on his team! Yes, it is his team, not mine. He benefits. He aims at becoming the best he can be. And though I am a coach, he is the star player. He is in control. Only he can make the decision to change. Sometimes I make suggestions, and he rejects them. I don't insist. Instead, I ask if he can think of a better way to achieve the same end." I love this parenting approach. Is that something you try only with your choleric child or with all your children?

I do ask for input from each of my children. We meet once a week one on one to discuss temperament issues and I try to give them as much control of this area as I can. But some temperaments like to have clearer direction from those in authority. Phlegmatics like to know the rules so that they don't disrupt things. Melancholics like to know the rules because they want to live out the ideal. So those temperaments won't be as concerned with setting their own standards.

 **I enjoyed your mantra for your choleric child: "If you don't think before you speak, you'll have to think after you speak." I would think that would work well with children of all temperaments—and maybe some adults too.**

It certainly would work well for sanguines too. Introverts naturally tend to think before speaking, but we all make mistakes in this area sometimes. Extroverts need to consciously work on being more reflective.

**How did you come upon the Examen as an effective prayer to pray with children? How young were your children when you started praying it with them?**

Actually, even though I include that in my book, it's one of the areas I haven't worked on with my own kids yet. I spent 17 years as a Discalced Carmelite, so I have naturally focused on more Carmelite prayer methods with them. We started doing guided meditations as part of our homeschool curriculum in kindergarten. My older two (11 and almost 13) are just beginning to do their own meditations on Sacred Scripture. I want to give them some more practice in that before I introduce the Examen Prayer as an alternative. I would like them to be able to choose from various forms of mental prayer, but I don't want to overwhelm them with too much. (That's probably my phlegmatic temperament working, because I get overwhelmed easily. My choleric child might be able to handle it just fine.)

**You offer a number of lesson plans and concrete ideas for integrating spirituality into a child's life. Are those pieces you have used in your own family and developed over time?**

Yes, 90 percent of the suggestions in my book we have actually tried in our home. The rest I hope to do soon.

**Why did you decide to write the book? Is this the book you were looking for years ago when you first started to recognize that you were raising a choleric child?**

Absolutely! This is the book I would have loved to have 5 or 7 years ago. It would have saved me lots of frustration. I used to really worry about my choleric son. Now I'm very hopeful for his future.

**What are you hoping your readers will take from the book?**

I think the quote about being a team sums up my book. So often the choleric and his parents see each other as adversaries, when they should be partners. I want to relieve some of parents' fears and give them specific skills to overcome power struggles and to set their child on the road toward holiness. I want their choleric children to be aware of their God-given strengths and weaknesses, so that when they reach adulthood they can be the person God designed them to be.

**Is there anything else you would like to share with my readers about your book?**

This is the first in what I hope to be a four-part series. So if your readers have children of different temperaments, they can expect to receive some help soon too.

**How can my readers find the book?**

Thanks for asking! Right now my book is available on Amazon as an ebook or paperback. The paperback should be more widely available soon.