Codes of Behaviour

Teacher Background

Family Expectations
Accepted codes of behaviour have always been established within every culture and society for the purpose of maintaining social order and the roles and safety of individuals and groups within society. Laws are established and their explicit and implicit expectations reinforce each group’s codes of behaviour. Family structures within a society play a very significant role in reinforcing and perpetuating codes of behaviour. Elders within families teach and model expected ways of being and behaving to the next generation.

Over the centuries, families have had different levels of influence on the enactment of social codes of behaviour. Family expectations in group-oriented societies and cultures of the past and present are still very strong. For example, in the first-century Mediterranean world, people were highly influenced by the group and family they were not individualistic—rather, they were dyadic. Group-oriented people internalize and make their own what others say, do and think about them, because they believe it is necessary to live out the expectations of others. For group-orientated people, the most elementary unit of social analysis is not the individual person but the dyad, a person in relation with and connected to at least one other social unit—in particular—the family. Such people were, and still are, constantly shown that they exist solely and only because of the group in which they live. It is reinforced with them that without that group they would cease to be. In essence, a dyadic personality is one that needs another person constantly to know who they are and what they are to do. Adult parents in such societies know the accepted codes of behaviour and understand the rights and duties of specific roles and statuses within that society. Parents constantly socialize their children to these under the rubric of ‘discipline’. Societal honour or shame impacts profoundly on families. If a family is shamed by one of its members, the consequences are severe and sometimes life-threatening. If a family is honoured, they are bestowed with respect and esteem and as a consequence, physical rewards. If parents do not have expectations and discipline, they are considered to be bad parents.

In today’s developed nations, individualism is a prevailing philosophy. Societies still use laws and explicit and implicit expectations to reinforce accepted codes of behaviour. However, because the individual is frequently considered more important than the group, much of the thinking about behaviour is physiological not social. Individual rights, freedom of choice and individual differences are of paramount importance. Individuals often feel freer in such a society compared to a fully group-orientated society. This is because there are diverse codes of behaviour that meet their needs and are acceptable as long as they are within the bounds of law. Alternatively, some individuals become confused by the plethora of choice and codes of behaviour. Parents and elders in individualistic societies sometimes struggle to set explicit and implicit codes of behaviour. They are challenged by the changing nature and morality of their world and their existing moral and religious beliefs and their sense of the common good. Despite this parents generally establish explicit and implicit expectations for their children’s behaviour.

School Expectations
Schools are societal institutions that uphold codes of behaviour that reflect their culture, society and families. Schools establish codes of behaviour and expectations that are both explicit and implicit. Schools use a variety of processes and policies to communicate and reinforce codes of behaviour in the schools and these include: system guidelines, a school’s mission/vision statement, behaviour management policies and class behaviour charters.

In Christian schools, Gospel values underpin a variety of processes and policies and are used to communicate and reinforce codes of behaviour. Goals and expectations of learning also incorporate Christian values. Here is a list of some Christian values that are often incorporated: respect for the
tradition, dignity, justice, community, quality learning, collaboration, tolerance, subsidiary, stewardship, inclusion, option for the poor, compassion and concern for the common good. Many Christian beliefs also underpin the codes of behaviour of Christian schools. Christian schools would see it as their mission to give witness to the gospel and integrate faith, life and culture. The following is a list of some of beliefs that can underpin Christian school’s codes of behaviour: parents/guardians are the first teachers; the importance of the family; each person is created in the image and likeness of God; everyone is special and unique; Jesus is a role model for all; the community is of vital importance; and future foci should be hope-filled.

Laws
Every society has its laws and legal system to uphold accepted codes of behaviour for the people in that time and context. Legal systems and the judiciary are employed to hear and deal with legal cases involving individuals or groups who break the law. The legal system has a clear legal constitution, policies and processes that maintain justice and order in that land. All laws in democratic societies reflect the tradition, beliefs and values of the people in that time and place. Laws can be changed to suit changing times and contexts. This largely involves a mandate from the majority of the people, debate in the houses of government, voting and the drafting and redrafting of legislation. Many of the accepted codes of behaviour, legal systems and policies and processes reflect religious and Church moral law handed down over the centuries.

From a Church perspective, the moral law is the work of Divine Wisdom. This wisdom is Biblical and outlines God’s prescribed ways of being and acting for human beings who wish to live a moral life. It also warns of the ways of evil, which turns people away from God and a moral life. Law is a rule of conduct enacted by competent authority for the sake of the common good. The moral law presupposes the rational order, established among people for their good and the good of creation and the Creator. There are different expressions of the moral law and all of them are interrelated: eternal law, natural law; revealed law (for Christians comprising the Old Law and the New Law, or Law of the Gospel); and finally, civil and ecclesiastical laws. Eternal law is the source of all law that comes from God. Natural moral law and its principal precepts are expressed in the Decalogue. It expresses the dignity of people and determines the basis for each person’s fundamental rights and duties. The application of the natural law can vary greatly according to place, time and context. However, even in the diversity of culture, the natural law remains as a rule the one that binds people among themselves. The natural law provides moral foundation for building community and is a necessary basis for civil law.

For Christians, the Old Law is the Law of Moses, which revealed God to Israel. The moral precepts of the Old Law are summed up in the Ten Commandments or The Decalogue. According to Christian tradition, the Old Law is holy, spiritual and good, yet still imperfect. Although it shows what must be done, it does not of itself give the strength or the grace of the Spirit to fulfil it. Christians see the Old Law as preparation for the Gospel and the emanating New Law or the Law of the Gospel.

The New Law, or the Law of the Gospel, is the work of Christ and is expressed particularly in the Beatitudes and uses the sacraments of the Church to communicate grace. It is also the work of the Holy Spirit and given to the faithful through faith in Christ. The New Law orients believers towards the kingdom of God. The New Law or the Law of the Gospel puts into practice the teachings of Jesus and is summed up in the Golden Rule, “Whatever you wish that people would do to you, do so to them; this is the law and the prophets” (Matt 7:12, Luke 6:31). The New Law or the entire Law of the Gospel is contained in the New Commandment of Jesus, to love one another as he has loved us (John 15:12, 13:34). CCC1975-1986