

HELP!

I'm a Parent Christian Parenting in the Real World



10 Interactive Programs
for Parents of Children from Ages 13 to 18

Drs. Claudio and Pamela Consuegra

HELP!

I'm a Parent

Christian Parenting
in the Real World



10 Interactive Programs
for Parents of Children from Ages 13 to 18

Drs. Claudio and Pamela Consuegra

Authors: Drs. Claudio and Pamela Consuegra
Editor: Kathy Sowards
Design: Liv Jacobson

Layout: Christal Gregerson
Project Manager: Christal Gregerson

Project Committee:
Dr. Claudio Consuegra
Dr. Pamela Consuegra
Brad Forbes
Wilma Kirk-Lee
Karen Pearson

Special thanks to the subscribers to Adventist Parenting e-newsletter for sharing your parenting challenges, concerns and ideas on what subjects would be most helpful in a parenting resource.

Additional copies available from:
AdventSource
5120 Prescott Avenue
Lincoln, NE 68506

402.486.8800
www.adventsource.org

© 2017 North American Division Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN# 978-1-62909-355-0



TABLE OF CONTENTS

MEET THE AUTHORS IV

DEDICATION PAGE V

FOREWORD VI

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE VII

1. PARENTING TEENS: CHALLENGES
AND OPPORTUNITIES..... 1

2. HAVING A MORAL COMPASS 13

3. DISCONNECTING IN ORDER TO CONNECT 23

4. TEEN MENTAL HEALTH 35

5. FROM DEPENDENCE TO INDEPENDENCE 47

6. BRAIN DEVELOPMENT AND THE
RISKY BUSINESS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE..... 57

7. TEEN SEXUALITY ISSUES 69

8. FINANCIAL PITFALLS 81

9. BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL..... 89

10. A PRODIGAL TEEN 99

A FINAL WORD FROM THE AUTHORS..... 108





MEET THE AUTHORS

Drs. Claudio and Pamela Consuegra currently serve as the Family Ministry Directors for the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The North American Division territory includes the United States, Canada, Bermuda, and the Federated Islands of Micronesia.

Claudio was born in Colombia, South America, while Pamela grew up in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia. They have been married for thirty-five years.

Claudio has served as a pastor in various conferences throughout the United States. He has also been a law-enforcement, hospital, and hospice chaplain, a marriage and family counselor, and a conference departmental director and administrator. He holds a Doctor of Ministry degree in Family Ministries from Andrews University.

Pamela has a background in Adventist education, having served as a teacher, academy principal, and Superintendent of Schools. She holds a PhD in Leadership from Andrews University.

Claudio and Pamela have a rich background in the area of family ministries having worked as a husband and wife ministry team throughout North America.

They have served in numerous conferences, hosted a live call-in family show for LifeTalk radio, and authored numerous journal articles as well as several books.

They have two adult daughters: Diana, a high school teacher, married to Andrew Huck, an aircraft mechanic; and Hadassah, a surgical resident physician, married to Gregory Anderson, who works as a speech and language pathologist.

Claudio and Pamela are passionate about building strong, healthy marriages and families for God's Kingdom. They believe strongly that this process begins in the home as parents partner with God on the most rewarding task in which they will ever participate—parenting!



DEDICATION PAGE



The third edition of this parenting series is dedicated
with love to our
daughters and their husbands,
Andrew & Diana Huck
Greggory & Hadassah Anderson



FOREWORD

This resource is the third in a parenting series and was developed as a result of hundreds of responses to surveys conducted throughout the North American Division territory. Each chapter represents a response to the felt needs of parents raising teenagers in today's world.

This resource may be utilized in a variety of ways including by individual parents in their home, a large church group, mid-week service, a Sabbath School class, a Home and School meeting, in tandem with Vacation Bible School, during Pathfinders meetings, or in a small group in your home, to name a few. Although you may view the accompanying DVD and read the selections in this book on your own, you will get the most out of this resource by working through it with at least one other parent. You will glean new ideas and thoughts as you discuss the concepts together and share your experiences, your challenges, and your successes with each other.

We encourage you to invite at least one other family to join you. Keep in mind that the principles discussed are applicable to a variety of family make-ups including single parents, blended families, foster parents, divorced couples who are co-parenting, and grandparents raising their grandchildren.

The purpose of this resource is to inspire and encourage you, as parents, on your journey to being the disciple-makers of your children. We trust you will be motivated to take up the exciting challenges and blessings of parenthood. We invite you to journey with us as we explore your God-given role of parenting your teen. Most of all, we pray that you will constantly be reminded that you are not alone. God is eager and happy to co-parent with you!

In the arms of our Heavenly Parent.

Drs. Claudio and Pamela Consuegra
Family Ministries Directors for the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

I. COMPONENTS

This parenting resource consists of three main components:

1. **Manual**—“Help, I’m a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World” Manual
2. **DVD Set**—This is a set of DVDs that contain a 30-minute segment that accompanies each of the chapters in the manual.
3. **Website**—The website is a very important component of this resource. You will find additional resources posted on each topic. You will also be able to submit any unanswered questions that you may have, sign up for an e-newsletter, and follow a parenting blog. The website will be updated on a regular basis. Therefore, it is the place to go to keep this information current and relevant. The website is: **www.helpimaparent.org**

II. WAYS THIS RESOURCE MAY BE USED

There are three ways you can use this resource:

1. **With a Group**—It is recommended that you use this resource in a group setting. Perhaps you can have a meeting in your church and invite all the parents in your congregation to join you. Or, perhaps you could invite all of your neighbors to your house to participate in this parenting enrichment program. It is a great way to meet felt needs as well as getting to know your neighbors better. You may choose to facilitate or a facilitator may be designated to lead in the group discussions and activities. You do not need to be an “expert” to lead out in this program. You only need to be open to group processes and be willing to let God lead you.
2. **As a Couple**—You may proceed at your own pace and share your ideas with your partner. If there is an opportunity, invite at least one other couple to join you in the experience. You will all benefit by having varying views, experiences, and insights.
3. **By Yourself**—Yes, it is possible to do this program by yourself. However, why not check around and invite at least one other person to join you.

III. SESSION FORMAT

1. The first session should follow this format:
 - a. Greet each participant as they arrive.
 - b. Have opening prayer as soon as all the participants have arrived.
 - c. Share a light meal or snack together.
 - d. Have participants introduce themselves and tell you a little about their family. They only need to share as they are comfortable to do so.
 - e. Distribute the manuals.

- f. Assign the participants the homework of reading over chapter one and be prepared to discuss it the next time you meet. Suggest that group members work through the activities and come prepared with any questions they may have at the next meeting. It is not expected that they will answer every discussion question, complete every activity, or understand every concept discussed. The group will work together next week; you only want them to become familiar with the material in the chapter beforehand.
- g. Announce the day and time for the next meeting where chapter one will be introduced. If you wish, you may let the group members help you decide. You want to be sure that it is a time they can all commit to. The dynamics of each group will be different so be as flexible as you can.
- h. End with prayer.
- i. You may want to check with each participant a day or so before the scheduled meeting. Remind them of the upcoming meeting.

Note: The purpose of this first get together is to get acquainted with each person, to start to build community, pass out the manuals, and give the assignment to read chapter one. You will not be discussing chapter one in this session. Rather, it is a meet and greet session.

2. Each successive session should follow the same format:

- a. Begin with prayer.
- b. Review scriptural principle.
- c. Go over the Icebreaker-Group Discussion Questions with the group.
- d. Together, watch the 30-minute companion DVD that goes with the chapter to be covered in that session.
- e. Lead out in the chapter discussion. Review each topic. Lead out in the group discussion questions and activities. The participants only need to share as they are comfortable in doing so.
- f. If participants have any questions discuss them as a group.
- g. Remember to remind the participants at every meeting to visit the companion website for additional materials and resources.
- h. Assign the next chapter for group members to read.
- i. Announce the day and time for the next session.
- j. End with prayer.

Note: If you find that you need more than one session for each chapter that is fine. You make it work for your particular group needs. If needed, you may take several weeks or sessions for each chapter.

IV. KEY SECTIONS IN MANUAL

This manual is divided into ten chapters. Each chapter addresses a topic that was identified by you, as parents, as one of your biggest parenting challenges. You will find these elements included in each chapter of the manual:

- 1. Scriptural Principle**—Each of the ten chapters is guided by a spiritual principal that opens the chapter.
- 2. Icebreaker—Group Discussion**—This is an icebreaker activity for the group. The purpose is to encourage discussion of the scriptural principal for the chapter. This section will ask you to remember, review, and reflect on what the passage teaches.
- 3. Group Activity**—This section is activity based. You will be asked to write responses to the question presented. In some cases you may do this as an entire group. In other instances you may be asked to do this individually and then share your responses with the entire group.
- 4. Group Discussion**—This section will either contain a question for the group's consideration or a statement to read and reflect on. You are to process it together with your group members.
- 5. Sidebars**—Please take time to read all of the sidebars. They each contain valuable information that adds to the information presented for each topic.
- 6. Try This at Home**—This section will challenge you to try certain activities at home. You do not have to attempt all of them at once. However, we do encourage you to select one idea and try it as you complete each chapter.
- 7. A Prayer You may Say**—This is a suggested prayer for you to say. Of course, you may say one of your own.

Above all, enjoy the parenting journey. It is our prayer that as you learn together, find answers together, pray together, encourage each other, and grow together in the task of parenting, that you will be blessed and enriched.





1. PARENTING TEENS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

“And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, ‘Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.’” (Nehemiah 4:14 (NKJV).

ICEBREAKER—GROUP DISCUSSION



1. REMEMBER

- Think back on when you were a teenager. Describe your teenage years.

2. REVIEW

- As you consider our spiritual principle for this chapter, what message do you glean from the verse?
- How can we “fight” for our sons and our daughters?

3. REFLECT

- Take a moment and reflect on the greatest challenge you faced as a teenager.
- Do you think teenagers today face even greater challenges than you did? Explain.

OVERVIEW

Teenagers face real problems on a daily basis during one of the most awkward growth stages of their lives, that is, between thirteen and eighteen years old. During this time, teens are exposed to some overwhelming external and internal struggles. Teens go through, and are expected to cope with, hormonal changes, puberty, social forces, and work and school pressures. Often teens feel overwhelmed when faced with unprecedented stresses concerning high school, college, and career decisions.

As we look at parenting teens in today’s world, we look at the good as well as at the not so good. In doing so, we will consider the greatest challenges and temptations that Satan throws at our young people, but we will also reflect on the wonderful opportunity that awaits as we take a front row seat and witness our babe in arms morph into the responsible young adult that God intends for them to be.

The purpose of this chapter is to serve as an introduction to the rest of this manual as we review the big picture of life as a teenager in today’s world. We will look at the top challenges in broad strokes and then break each one down in the successive chapters. It is our desire that the conversation in this first chapter will prime the pump to get you thinking in realistic and honest ways

about parenting teens today and will also whet your appetite to dig deeper into each of these topics as we work our way through this resource. Remember, the practical applications to dealing with each of these challenges will come later in each of the successive chapters.

HAVING A MORAL COMPASS

Your child has now reached the age when faith needs to be personalized. As parents, we no longer make every decision for our child. It is imperative that they understand the connection between the choices they make and eternity. Having an internal moral compass will help them navigate those decisions.

As Christian researcher George Barna states, “Every choice we make is ultimately a spiritual decision. No matter what the issue or challenge is that we face, our decision comes down to what we believe is right or wrong. Our perspective on such matters comes from our spiritual beliefs” (Barna, 2016, pp. 30, 31). Perhaps one of the most important roles we play as parents is to help our child develop this moral compass.

“Contrary to popular misguided cultural stereotypes and frequent parental misconceptions, the evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents” (Roberto, 2007, p. 1).

So, how does the typical young person make a decision? George Barna (2016), found that “young people are more likely to base their decisions on their feelings or upon what other people expect of them rather than depend upon the Bible as their standard for moral choices” (p. 38). This finding should be a red flag to us as parents. At a time in their life when peers play such a large influence, what is a parent to do? We will discuss this issue in greater depth and look at some practical suggestions in the chapter dedicated to this topic.

GROUP DISCUSSION



How do we teach our child to make choices based on scriptural principles rather than on their feelings or on what their peer group expects?

DISCONNECTING IN ORDER TO CONNECT

Face to face communication has suffered greatly as the use of technology increases. Our young people would rather text than talk. Getting them to turn off all technology and have a conversation seems like a punishment to them. If you take a survey, you will probably discover that the actual amount of time you spend talking with your teen pales in comparison to their screen time.

Cyber addiction is prevalent among our teens. The Internet offers undeniable benefits in developing a teen’s ability to grow with modern technology, technical ideas, knowledge and other skills. However, using the internet, particularly social networking websites, unsafely puts teenagers at very high risk for many dangers. As they spend more and more time on social media, gaming, charts, and websites, including adult sites, they can end up developing a cyber addiction. This addiction can be just as harmful as addiction to drugs or drinking alcohol.

Teenagers who spend unhealthy amounts of time on the Internet or online suffer from a condition recognized as Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD). Those who have IAD conditions may experience distress and withdrawal symptoms including obsessive thoughts, tremors, and other mental and physical problems. Cyber addiction impairs the quality of their lives. Parents should talk to their teen and agree on a list of rules that clearly say when to use the internet, which sites they should visit, and what safety measures they should follow. It is NOT an invasion of privacy to help insure the safety of your teenage child!

Is it possible that your teen is connected to their screen because they are not connecting with you, as a parent? That is a difficult question to ponder but perhaps it is one that we must ask ourselves.

GROUP DISCUSSION



1. Which do you think comes first—connecting with your teen or getting them to disconnect from their screens? Why?
2. Have you considered how much screen time you spend and how your own example may be teaching your children to do the same? What can you do to change that?
3. How do you think extensive screen time affects a teen's spiritual growth and development?

MENTAL HEALTH

We dedicated an entire chapter to this topic because we need to dispel the stigma that surrounds it. It is time to put the mental health issues that plague our teenagers out in the open and deal with them in healthy and proactive ways.

Self-esteem and body image is an issue that many of our teens struggle with today. Teenagers undergo and have to cope with numerous body changes. Some teenagers feel too fat, too skinny, too tall, or too short. Their hair is too curly or too straight and the list goes on and on. The problem with this feeling is that it affects their self-image. As a teenage boy or girl's body changes, so does their self-awareness. This is compounded as they compare themselves with the people they see on TV, in movies, and in the magazines. Teenagers who experience negative comments about their appearances, the way they talk, etc. develop poor self-esteem and body image. What image does your teen see played out in front of them every day? Take an immediate audit of what they are being exposed to on the media.

Cyberbullying is one of the latest trends and one of the most harmful to our teen's mental health, safety, and even life. Cyberbullies can be cruel as they

spew out their hate-filled messages online. Bullying is not only a very offensive behavior, but also a crime. These cyberbullies repeatedly throw out their barbs, affecting the psychology of the teen they have targeted. At the same time, it is important to recognize that such behavior is even detrimental to the bully as research reveals that they are prone to exhibit even greater violent behavior later in life. In other words, such behavior is life altering for both the bully and the bullied in terms of mental health. Is your teen prepared to respond to cyberbullies? And, perhaps the harder question to ponder would be—has your child ever been the cyberbully?

Depression symptoms in teenagers may be exhibited in various ways. Changes in sleep patterns, eating habits, declined interest in normal and healthy activities, dropping grades in school and college, and preferred isolation are all signs of depression. When teenagers exhibit any of these symptoms, parents should intervene immediately. If teenagers begin talking about their depression, then they should be allowed to express their feelings, and parents should validate their feelings by listening to them without interrupting the conversation. In addition, professional help should be sought.

Suicide is a growing health concern. It is the third-leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24, surpassed only by homicide and accidents, according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (APA, 2016). Are you aware of some of the warning signs to look for? And, do you know where to seek help should you notice any of the signs? What are the myths that surround suicide and what are the actual facts?

The chapter dedicated to the topic of mental health will explore more fully all of these important issues and will offer some warning signs we need to be aware of as well as some practical ways to Intervene when you see them in your child. Remember, when it comes to acknowledging and addressing mental health issues, you may be saving the life of your child.

GROUP DISCUSSION



1. Why do you think there is a stigma around mental health issues?
2. Are there things we can do as individuals or as a church to help break down the perceptions around this issue?

FROM DEPENDENCE TO INDEPENDENCE

As your teen grows, he or she will begin to move in a direction that makes them more independent. They will begin to rely less on you. For some parents that is difficult and for most teens it is quite tough, but it is a necessary part of becoming an adult. The question then becomes how can we as parents help our teens move in this direction? How can we guide them to become responsible and mature young adults?

Perhaps one question we need to consider is this whole notion of freedom: how much is too much? The only way that our children can mature and exhibit responsible decision-making is if we allow them the freedoms to do so. But, how do we know they are ready to move from dependence on their parents to independence? How can we be assured they are ready to take flight and spread their wings?

Cutting the umbilical cord was actually done at birth and yet, we still want to keep it attached. However, the reality is that parenting is all about helping our child become a responsible, mature, independent adult. Why, then, is it so hard?

Think back to the process of teaching your small child to ride a bicycle. It started with them riding with training wheels on. Then, when they came off, you held on to the back of their seat and gently pushed them until you were confident they could do it on their own. Then, you let go, and prayed they would not fall down. Your new rider may have been pretty wobbly. In fact, they most likely fell several times in the beginning. But, they learned from those falls and picked up their bike and tried again and again until they had it mastered. It is the same principle for teens that are moving from dependence to independence.

Guiding your teen to become independent means that you must allow them to make their own mistakes and sometimes fall. They will learn from those falls as you continue to lovingly guide, encourage, hold them up, and support them. The time is coming, however, when you may just have to let go of the bike.

GROUP DISCUSSION



1. Why is letting go of our children so hard?

2. How do we know when to let them go?

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT AND THE RISKY BUSINESS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Risk-taking can be thought of not only as experiences with potentially negative consequences, but also those leading to healthy outcomes. Risk-taking can be viewed as exploring and experiencing the world around them, which is a normal and healthy part of growing up. The challenge is that our teens often take risks that have a very high probability of negative consequences.

The adolescent brain seems wired to test the limits and take risks. While this stage of development is important in that it allows young people to explore their world and individuate as people, it also often comes with great risk to life, health, and even to their eternity. Teens overestimate their ability to identify and avoid a potentially dangerous situation. Even when they weigh the pros and cons, they might think, “I won’t get caught” or “Nothing bad will happen to me. It only happens to other people.” They are often unrealistic with the true dangers that are present.

New brain research is now shedding light on some of the reasons our young people engage in risky behaviors. Although adolescence is often characterized by increased independence and a desire for knowledge and exploration, it is also a time when brain changes can result in high-risk behaviors. The danger, as recent imaging studies in humans show, is that brain development and connectivity are not complete until the mid-twenties (Society for Neuroscience, 2007). So, at the very time in life when our children are exhibiting independent decision-making, their brain development has not yet caught up with the decisions they are making.

“Hearing their parents’ “faith stories” is one of the most important influences on the faith of children and teenagers. At the heart of the communication is the sharing of faith, values, and the care of others...The story of Jesus and our life stories are woven together as one fabric that brings forth endless variety of caring conversation” (Roberto, 2007, p. 6).

Substance abuse in the United States is a major problem affecting millions of teenagers. In fact, it is one of the top items included in any list of risky behaviors. Substance abuse includes the misuse of substances such as alcohol, previously labeled illegal drugs, including those that are now legalized, prescription drugs, and over the counter medication.

The number of states placing a question on their ballots to legalize certain drugs grows every year, and many have already passed legislation accordingly. In reality, our young people do not need to go searching for drugs. Instead, the drugs are easier to obtain and even come to them. In fact, drugs are as close to our children as the medicine cabinets in our own homes. A new phenomenon is the prevalent misuse of prescription drugs and over the counter drugs among teens. This abuse among teens now tops the list of risky behaviors regarding substance abuse. With something so readily available, how are we to help our teens resist this trendy risky behavior?

(Note: This chapter deals with substance abuse. Some of the other risky behaviors our teens engage in will be looked at in dedicated chapters in this book.)

SEXUALITY ISSUES

Many parents are uncomfortable with the idea of teen sexuality, and prefer to remain in ignorance or denial. In fact, in many cases, it was not even the parents that talked with their child about puberty, menstruation, God's gift of sex, etc. It is critically important for parents to address adolescent sexuality realistically, to recognize the temptations, and know the statistics.

As parents, we'd like to think that pre-marital sex will never be practiced by our child. Other teenagers engage in this risky behavior, but not our child. However, statistics reveal that by their 19th birthday, 7 out of 10 teens have engaged in sexual intercourse (Abma, 2010). This one statistic should cause alarm. More alarming is the fact that many young people do not consider other acts of sex (oral sex, physical petting) as sex and are practicing them feeling quite comfortable that "at least they're not having sex." We need to take heed and admit that it could indeed happen to our child and we need to take intentional steps to minimize the chances of our teen making that choice.

Dating is most likely on your teen's mind even if you are not ready for it. They are beginning to be interested in and attracted to the opposite sex. Attraction to the opposite sex is a normal part of the maturing process. But when teens are dating exclusively (going steady, going out, or "going with someone"), they are more likely to have sex earlier. We will explore some of the pitfalls of early teenage dating in the chapter dedicated to this topic.

GROUP DISCUSSION



At what age do you think is appropriate to begin exclusive dating? Explain your answer. *(Note: We will discuss this at length in the chapter on this but explore your current beliefs)*

Date rape, acquaintance rape, and sexual abuse are not something that we usually discuss with our teens but it is happening and studies reveal it to be an issue that is grossly underreported. There is a fear of being blamed for the incident and if you add to that the fact that an estimated 80% to 92% of all teen rape victims know their attackers, it is understandable why there may be a reluctance to speak up (TeenHelp, 2016). How can we, as parents, create an environment in our homes where our teens talk to us about sexual issues and feel free to report anything that's going on in their lives that they feel uncomfortable with, including sexual issues?

When was the last time that you discussed topics such as teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases with your child? Did you know that the Center for Disease Control (2016) reports that, among students in high school, 41% are sexually active? Of course, we like to think that our child is not counted in that percentage, but unless we are willing to have open and honest conversations with our teen, the chances are that we could be fooling ourselves.

In the biblical book, The Song of Solomon, the groom describes his bride as "a garden locked up, a spring shut up, a sealed fountain" (Songs 4:12). What was he

referring to? In symbolic language he's stating that she is a virgin. She has not participated in pre-marital sex and has reserved herself for the day when she will be married. At the same time, his bride counsels her friends three times to "not awaken love (referring to early dating and sex) until the right time (that is, within the context of marriage) (Songs 2:7, 3:5, 8:4). This is great advice to share with our teenage boys and girls.

GROUP DISCUSSION



What are some practical ways that we can help our young men and women remain chaste until their wedding day while the message they hear everywhere is "everybody's doing it"?

FINANCIAL PITFALLS

Credit cards offers arrive in the mail even before your teen graduates from high school. These companies court your child and are happy to offer them a credit card in their name. It is shocking to see the aggressive and senseless marketing of credit cards to teenagers who don't even have a job or steady income. And yet, the allure works. Teens easily fall in to the trap in order to have a ceaseless flow of "cash" to satisfy their desires.

Let's be honest. One of the greatest inventions was the ATM. It affords us the opportunity to go and withdraw cash and not to have to be dependent on the bank hours. However, what happens when accurate records are not kept? And, the few dollars here and there that our teens withdraw rapidly add up before they even realize it.

Teaching your teens the principles of sound financial management will benefit them for the rest of their lives. Soon, that 18-year-old will be away in college and you will not be there to offer guidance and counsel. Financial faithfulness in the small things they may have now will give way to financial responsibility for the big things later on.

"The bigger the children the bigger the issues! The parent-child relationship is changing. Rather than employing command and control, we must become an inquiring coach. While obedience is still required, we must influence with our words, giving reasons for what we say. This is the season of life when our emphasis should move to principles" (Bettis, 2016, p. 29).

BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

Teens typically focus on the here and now. They are not prone to look beyond high school and catch a glimpse into college, career, and establishing their own family. It is not too early to begin the conversations on these topics with your teen.

The teen years are important for solidifying a strong work ethic in your child. A strong work ethic may be encouraged by faithfulness to school-work, household chores, volunteering, and seeking their first job.

The choice of a college and a career is a thought that all too often evades our teen's mind. And, yet, as parents we need to keep it in the forefront. Helping them to identify the gifts that God has given them along with their passions will serve them well into the future.

Are the teen years too early to begin having conversations about a future life partner? The sooner we begin these conversations the better. There are things they need to consider before they think about a spouse. What are some of those things? Perhaps they should include having a shared spiritual background, their desire for children in the future, their education and possible careers, each person's family background, and many others.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Is it possible that we do not talk with our teen about life beyond high school because we are the ones not ready to face this reality? Explain your answer.

A PRODIGAL TEEN

It can be heartbreaking when, despite our best efforts as parents, our children choose a path that is in opposition to the values and standards we have held in our home and that we have taught them. Perhaps your teenage daughter has become pregnant, your son is sitting in jail for drunk driving, or your teen may be a runaway and you have no idea where they are at this point in time.

No doubt, the blame game sets in and you blame yourself and make lists of all the ways you failed as a parent. The truth is that this does not solve the situation and the blame and guilt only help to dig the pit of despair and helplessness even deeper.

In that chapter we will look at some positive ways we can proactively deal with situations where we have a prodigal teen.

GROUP DISCUSSION



"I sought the Lord and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears."
Psalm 34:4 (NKJV)

What are your greatest fears/concerns as it relates to parenting your teen?

1.

2.

3.

OPPORTUNITIES

When you consider the list above, it is easy to become discouraged. If we focus on the mountain of challenges it seems insurmountable. However, the good news is that parenting teens brings many wonderful opportunities too.

Perhaps one of the greatest thrills of parenting is finding out that they have stood up to peer pressure and said “no” to engaging in risky behaviors. Yes, it is a joy to watch them make responsible decisions as they grow and mature. God has given us a front row seat to witness the miracle of His creation coming into the fullness of all that He has planned for them.

He has chosen YOU to parent your child. No one can take your place. No one can do what He has called you to do. The good news is that you do not have to do it alone. He has promised to walk with you through this parenting journey. Your Heavenly Father is your parenting partner. That should give you courage!

“Shepherding our children changes with their maturity level. Physically, they move from dependence to (Lord willing!) total independence. Similarly, the goal in discipleship is to move from command to persuasion, from discipline to discernment, from external controls to internal controls, and from parent control to Spirit control” (Bettis, 2016, p.29)

One of the often-overlooked blessings is that parenting helps us to grow and deepen our personal relationship with Jesus. Our own faith blossoms as we place our challenges at the foot of the cross and seek His wisdom to handle the parenting issues that each day brings. What an incredible opportunity as we look to our Heavenly parent to journey with us!

WRAP UP

Problems that teenagers face today are multifarious but interrelated in many cases. One problem often invites another, which leads to more problems. It is one of the times in parenting when, more than ever, we need to lean upon Jesus to give us direction. Christian parenting is vital as our children are making decisions that will guide the rest of their life. These decisions need to be made in light of a God who loves them unconditionally, died for them, and is preparing an eternal home with them in mind.

The season of the teenage years will pass all too quickly. Soon, they will be out the door and off to college and a life on their own. Embrace this season. Enjoy every moment as your child stands on the edge of adulthood.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the following statement and discuss it with your group.

“Fathers and mothers, however pressing your business, do not fail to gather your family around God’s altar. Ask for the guardianship of holy angels in your home. Remember that your dear ones are exposed to temptations” (White, *Child Guidance*, p. 520).

TRY THIS AT HOME

1. Once again, this week we encourage you to add a Bible verse to your “Parenting Bible Promise Project.” Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you and you may specifically relate it to the topic of this chapter. Write the verse out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Repeat it every time you walk by it, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don’t throw it away at the week’s end. Save it to add to the other promises in your parenting promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God.
2. Write a letter to your teen child. Do not preach to them or make a list of concerns or worries. Rather, the purpose is to let them know how much you love them and how privileged you are to be given the opportunity to parent them. Plan a special date with them, read it aloud to them, and give it to them.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Father, please give me wisdom to help my child navigate these teen years. Provide the resources when needed, give me words when I need to speak up, and give me a listening ear when I need to remain quiet. Thank you, Lord, for the awesome privilege of partnering with you along this parenting journey. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

REFERENCES

APA. (2016). American Psychological Association. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/research/action/suicide.aspx>

Abma JC et al., (2010). Teenagers in the United States: sexual activity, contraceptive use, and childbearing, National Survey of Family Growth 2006–2008, Vital and Health Statistics, 2010, Series 23, No. 30.

Barna, G. (2016). *Transforming children into spiritual champions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Bettis, C. (2016). *The disciple making parent*. Diamond Hill Publishing.

CDC: Center for Disease Control. (2016, June 10). “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance-United States, 2015.” *Surveillance Summaries* / Vol. 65 / No. 6. Atlanta, Georgia. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/2015/ss6506_updated.pdf

Roberto, J. (2007). “Best Practices in Family Faith Formation” Fall/Winter 2007. Lifelong Faith Associates. Retrieved from: http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/best_practices_in_family_faith_formation.pdf

Society for Neuroscience. (2007, November 8). Why Teens Are Such Impulsive Risk-takers. ScienceDaily. Retrieved from www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/11/071107210133.htm

TeenHelp. (2016). "Teen Date Rape" Retrieved from <https://www.teenhelp.com/sexual-abuse-trauma/teen-date-rape/>

White, E. G. (1954). *Child guidance*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



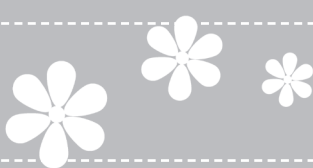
HELP! I'M A PARENT WEBSITE

Visit our parenting website to submit questions, find additional resources, follow a blog, sign up for a free parenting e-newsletter, and more: **www.HelpImAParent.org**



HELP! I'M A PARENT FACEBOOK PAGE

Like us on our Facebook page: "Help! I'm a Parent" New materials are posted on a regular basis.



2. HAVING A MORAL COMPASS

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

“...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15 (NKJV).

ICEBREAKER—GROUP DISCUSSION



1. REMEMBER

- Remember when you were a teenager. Did you ever go to church or participate in spiritual activities only because it was your parents' expectations that you do so?
- When did you make a personal decision for Jesus Christ?

2. REVIEW

- As you consider our spiritual principle for this chapter, what message do you glean from this verse?
- How do the words, “choose for yourselves” relate to parenting?

3. REFLECT

- Take a moment and reflect on teens today.
- How can we, as parents, assist them in personalizing their faith?

OVERVIEW

Your teen is now at an age where they may begin questioning faith and values. Perhaps they are asking questions like, “Why is it important? Is this the faith of my parents or is it my faith?” Our challenge as parents is to find ways to guide them through this time. How do we assist our teens through this time of reflection and questioning? How do we help them internalize their beliefs? Is this a time to teach, or preach, less and listen more?

Creating a moral compass in our teens is not something that we will accomplish once a week with church attendance. Rather, studies indicate that teens that are most likely to mature in faith are those raised in homes where faith is part of the normal ebb and flow of family life. In other words, passing the torch of spiritual beliefs and values to our children comes about through embedded practices; that is, through specific, deliberate religious activities that are firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family routines, of eating and sleeping, of cleaning and organizing, or having conversations. Faith development and internalizing spiritual values and beliefs happen on a day-to-day basis as we incorporate Jesus into every aspect of our home life and make Him the center of our family.

“Making disciples is the commission and will of Christ. It is the guiding principle, the North Star of our parenting” (Bettis, 2016, p. 273).

As we look at the challenge of helping our teens to internalize and live out their faith we will consider the following topics:

- Modeling
- Talking Faith
- Outsourcing your Teen's Spiritual Growth
- Personalizing Faith

MODELING

According to Smith and Denton (2005), “the most important social influence in shaping young people’s religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents” (p. 56). It has been said that more is “caught” than is “taught” and perhaps this has never been truer than on faith issues. Consider this statement, “Teens tend to choose faith when they live in families that ‘talk the walk’ and ‘walk the talk’” (Lyth, 2004, p. 14). In other words, your speech and your actions are both important and must both be in harmony with each other.

Have you ever asked, “Why me, Lord?” After all, you may say that you are no expert when it comes to faith development. You are not a trained theologian. Shouldn’t this be left up to the experts? Why trust parents with something that is of eternal value?

Do you often think that your teen needs a faith makeover? The truth is that any makeover that needs to happen in your family needs to begin in your own heart. If you want your child to have a personal relationship with Christ, you need to have a personal relationship with Christ. If you want Jesus to live in your teen’s heart, He must live in yours first. Our children watch us closer than they listen to us. It’s important to both walk and talk our faith!

The family is the first community of faith and the most powerful influence on the faith of our children and teenagers. Modeling faith-based behavior at home is an essential aspect of helping your teen understand their faith and learn how to live it. As we have the conversation about the moral compass in our children, perhaps the best place to start is with a mirror. It is only after looking into our own hearts that we, as parents, will be able to look within the hearts of our children.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO “WALK THE TALK AND TALK THE WALK”

1. Nurture a continued connection to the church—The parents’ role of linking the child to the church continues to be important in the teen years. Parents influence teens in what they believe and how they practice their faith by maintaining a church attendance rule even into the teen years. Choose a church that is attractive to teens. If parents choose a church that attracts teens by the sense of belonging, meaning, and competencies that it offers, parents facilitate the link between the teen and the church that is crucial for developing religious loyalty (Lyth, 2004, p. 199). Your teen should feel that it is their church and not just the church of their parents. Church should be a place to participate and not just a spectator sport. Talk with your teen about ways they would like to serve and be involved in the activities of the church and then discuss those ideas with your youth director or your pastor. If church attendance is not important to you now then it will not be important to your teen later. So, how important is it to maintain a connection to the church? Does it matter? Look at these reasons why church involvement and maintaining that connection to the faith community indeed matters: (Adapted from: Stier, G., 2015).

- Teenagers need models and mentors - In the Jewish culture it wasn't just parents that poured into the younger folks. Older men poured into younger men and older women poured into younger women (Titus 2:1-8). Of course, you, as a parent, are called to be the primary spiritual mentor of your own teenager but he/she also needs other godly adults as influencers in their life!
 - Teenagers need community - In an age of bullying, gossip, slander and hatefulness (which can destroy a teenager's self-identity), young people need other young people who can lift them up, encourage them, and challenge them in all the right ways. And, time spent in a community of like believers will strengthen our faith fortress.
 - Teenagers need mission - When Jesus challenged his most-likely teenaged disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations", he was tapping into the activist wiring of these young men. In the same way, your teenager needs to be challenged with the mission to reach their peers with the good news of Jesus in a loving and contagious way. The church community is a place where they can be equipped to share the good news of Jesus with their own peers. This opportunity of helping your teen see their mission and then equipping them to live out that mission will accelerate the discipleship process in their life in ways you could never imagine!
- "The most important social influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught them by their parents" (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 56).
- Teenagers need theology - Youth group is a place where teenagers can have spiritual beliefs and values reinforced. This should result in your teenagers knowing and owning their faith on a deeper level. Youth groups should be a place where teenagers can ask tough questions. Skilled youth leaders can take questioning teens back to God's Word as the source of authority and help them process through all of the Biblical truth you are praying they grasp, believe, and live out. Great youth groups build on the foundation that godly parents have already laid.
 - Teenagers need a safe place to confess and confide - Often teenagers who struggle with sin and temptation have nowhere to confess and confide. They feel trapped by their sins. But a healthy youth ministry can create a safe space for teenagers to open up and talk honestly about their struggles. They can rest with the knowledge that others are going through the same struggles and can pray for and encourage them.

2. Maintain daily family worship—Do not let this slide because of busyness. It is important to be consistent and to make it age appropriate. Your teenage child is old enough to help lead out and choose the activities for family worship. You must model an intentional time to have a daily connection with Jesus. And, remember, make your daily worship fun and interactive instead of making it seem as if it were another chore.

3. Participate in service activities as a family—Participating in Christian service has a powerful impact in the faith life of teens. Christian service experiences make faith real and alive for young people. These experiences foster growth in

faith and often change the lives of young people. And, participating as a family unit helps to strengthen those family bonds. It may be tempting and easier to let your child go and do a community service project with a church or school group. However, when you do it together as a family team you are modeling a caring, compassionate, and giving spirit. Engaging in service with one's family can be a powerful opportunity for growing in faith. Both children and adults are more likely to have a growing, strong faith when their family serves others together. When parent and child participate in service activities together, the child sees the parent's faith and values in action. The cross-generational bond takes place not only in the service event, but also in the retelling of the event through the years as it becomes a cherished and shared family memory.

4. Grow through family conflicts—Every family will encounter conflict among members sooner or later. It is important to use these as opportunities to grow in faith. Conflicts among those we love the most need to be solved with prayer, repentance, and forgiveness. This is another opportunity for our children to learn and grow in faith.

5. Grow through family challenges—Every family has challenges: finances, job loss, death of loved ones, illness, etc. These challenges and trials can be faced through shared faith. Your child needs to see you, as parents and heads of the household, turning to God for support, guidance, and strength.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Discuss the following questions with your group.

1. Do you agree with the statement that your child's faith is a mirror image of your faith? Explain your answer.
2. What do you see when you look in that mirror in regards to your faith?
3. What are some practical things you can do to do that would enhance that faith reflection in the mirror?

TALKING FAITH

"Listen to Moses as he shares a command of God to the children of Israel: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, The Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children.

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates' (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)...Intentional repetition of God's love and our response to that love was part of the divine strategy. This text is descriptive to a fault. The activity of sharing faith with one's children was to take place over and over: when talking casually with them, when walking with them, when getting ready for the night's rest, and when rising up in the morning. Passing on the value of God's love, care, and provision to one's children was essentially to be a full-time activity, an all-encompassing obsession" (Oliver, W. & E., 2016, p. 25).

So, when was the last time that you had a conversation with your teen that revolved around faith? In today's world, time is one of our most precious commodities. In our increasingly busy lives, we must make the best of the time that we have. The reality is that you do have time to talk about faith with your teen. You just need to take advantage of some of these slices of time. Yes, you're busy, but keep in mind that time is what you make of it. So when is the best time to discuss our faith with our children? The only reasonable answer is anytime. Here are some ideas (Adapted from Holmen, 2007):

- **Devotional time**—One of the best times to talk about faith is during your family devotional time each day. Share the high and low experiences from the day and then take time to pray for each other. With teenagers you can ask, "What's on your schedule tomorrow that I can pray for? Do any of your friends need prayer for anything?"
- **Car time**—Doesn't it often seem that the most time you spend together as a family is when you're in the car, on your way to the next thing you have to do? Try turning off the radio, unplugging all technology, and having a conversation with your child. Ask questions that require more than a one-word response. Also, take a moment to pray for the event that you're headed to or for the people with whom you will be meeting.
- **Sick time**—Another significant block of time that you have with your teen occurs when they are sick and have to stay home from school or other activities. While no one looks forward to his or her child being sick, it does provide time to have a healthy conversation. Sick time may give you a chance to watch a DVD, listen to music, or play a game together. So, why not choose an activity that will naturally lead to talking about issues of faith and life?
- **Mealttime**—Taking a moment to give God thanks and praise before eating establishes a ritual that remains with children into adulthood. In talking to God during prayer, you are also passing on a faith lesson to your teen. Just as a meal was central to the ministry of Jesus, the family meal can be a central faith

Intentional repetition of God's love and our response to that love was part of the divine strategy. This text is descriptive to a fault. The activity of sharing faith with one's children was to take place over and over: when talking casually with them, when walking with them, when getting ready for the night's rest, and when rising up in the morning. Passing on the value of God's love, care, and provision to one's children was essentially to be a full-time activity, an all-encompassing obsession" (Oliver, W. & E., 2016, p. 25).

experience for family members. It is a daily opportunity to acknowledge and discover Jesus' presence in the midst of busy family life.

- **Vacation time**—Traveling together over a long distance or just getting away on a long weekend trip can be a great time to reestablish faith-talk in your family. Tithe ten percent of your vacation time to God. Do a family service project, take some quiet time to read the bible together, and have a family devotion each day. On the final evening of your vacation, spend time in prayer and worship. This doesn't have to be elaborate - simply take some time to give thanks for the time you've spent together. Take turns sharing one thing that you were thankful for on the trip and one thing you look forward to when you get home.
- **One-on-One time**—One of the best things that you can do as a parent is to establish the ritual of one-on-one time with your teen. It can be weekly or monthly, but it needs to be built in to your life rhythm. A failure to establish this time will leave you saying later in life, "I should have done that." Spend a weekend alone with each of your children, or establish a monthly date night together. The particular activity is far less important than your commitment to spend time together with your teenager. This practice may continue into adulthood.

"Every choice we make is ultimately a spiritual decision" (Barna, 2016, p. 32).

OUTSOURCING YOUR TEEN'S SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Did you stop to consider the words of Deuteronomy six cited above? Who were they directed to? The Hebrew leaders? The Levites or priests? Or was Moses addressing all the parents? Who has the primary responsibility of developing a child's moral compass or in aiding in their spiritual development? Is it the pastor, the Sabbath School teacher, youth group leader, or perhaps the church school? No, the truth is that YOU, the parent, have the primary responsibility of discipling your child. All too often we are prone to "pass the buck." It is too easy to convince ourselves that we are not the experts. Others can do a better job than we can.

Yes, there is no denying the fact that the church and the school may assist us, as parents. In fact, we have discussed in this very chapter how important it is to maintain a positive relationship with the church, the faith community. In addition, having our children attend Seventh-day Adventist schools also reinforces the principles and values we are trying to instill in our homes. Surrounding our children with those who have like-minded values is priceless and this three-fold approach of home, church, and school helps strengthen and fortify our child's faith development. And, let us be honest, the more support, reinforcement, and help that we have in this regard, the better. The church and the school are indeed powerful tools that should be utilized to the utmost; however, this in no way minimizes the place that the home takes in our teen's spiritual growth. The home continues to be the primary source for the faith development of our children.

Have you ever considered why God planned for you, the parent to disciple your own child? Why did God give the task to you, the rookie? The pastor is the expert. Why not let this task fall on his/her shoulders? There are two key reasons for us to not "outsource" this responsibility. First, the home is the best avenue to

transmit and transfer faith values. Second, in so doing, you are growing your own faith. Nothing has such great potential to grow your own faith than when we seek to grow our children as disciples of Jesus. This transfer of faith actually transforms us into the image of Jesus as we seek to reflect Him to our children.

We have been given the highest calling and the holy task of partnering with God to grow our children into His image. There is no task that we will be called upon to do that is of greater importance. And, there is no parenting responsibility on which we should place a higher priority.

GROUP DISCUSSION



What tasks comprise the role of parenting? If you were to write a job description for a parent what would it look like? List the top 3 roles in order of importance. Explain why you listed them as you did.

1.

2.

3.

PERSONALIZING FAITH

Is your teen borrowing your faith or developing their own? As a small child your little one may have participated in daily worship with you and went with you as a family to worship in church every week. But, what happens when it becomes their choice to make? What happens when those values are tested as a young adult? How do we make sure the faith of our fathers becomes the same faith of our children?

Perhaps one of the best things you can do to help your teen personalize his/her faith is to equip them with the knowledge and tools to understand their faith and apply it in a relevant and meaningful way to their daily life. It is your responsibility to help them connect the “rules” and your expectations to faith values. “Because I said so” is not a good explanation to give when you try to explain the reasoning behind your expectations. Incorporate faith values into your expectations for your teen’s behavior and explain why choices, behavior, and public persona need to reflect and adhere to the tenets of your faith. Encourage them to make decisions from a faith-based perspective. It will only be when they internalize the “why” answers that faith becomes an individual and personal one.

Questioning is a normal part of internalizing faith. This can be a very challenging time for parents but do not despair. Asking questions means that they are moving from “borrowing” your faith to “personalizing” it for themselves. What can you do and how do you respond when the faith questioning starts.

TIPS TO DEAL WITH TEEN'S QUESTIONING FAITH VALUES

1. **Do not panic**—Rejecting the religious beliefs of your upbringing is different from simply asking questions. If you act angry or upset then your child will shut down and stop the faith conversations with you. This only means that they are thinking and reflecting on their faith and that is a positive thing.
2. **Encourage questioning**—Engage in honest communication with your teen about his/her feelings, values, morals, and faith. This can be a great opportunity to build a better relationship with your child.
3. **Listen more than you talk!**—Answering their questions may be important, however, the most important thing you can do is to listen. Listen to their heart.
4. **Love unconditionally**—Reassure your teen of your unconditional love for them. Continue to let them know that you are a safe place for them to take their concerns and questions.
5. **Pray with and for your teen**—Encourage them to take their concerns, questions, and even doubts to God in prayer. And, pray for them that God would lead and guide them during this questioning time.

“So many of the family’s faith practices happen around the family meal: having conversations, praying, reading the Bible, celebrating rituals and traditions, to name a few. The family meal is one of the few rituals that allows families to act out their concern for each other, and their need and desire to be together. The family meal is the time when family comes first, establishing, enjoying, and maintaining ties” (Roberto, 2007, p. 7).

WRAP UP

Above all else, continue to be intentional in making Jesus the center of your home. In Deuteronomy, God instructed the Jewish people to make Biblical teaching part of the rhythm of their daily lives (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). Do you talk about God at the dinner table? Do you spend time reading the Bible to and with your children? Do you pray with them? Do you have daily family worship? Do you point out the wonders of creation? Do you encourage critical thinking and genuinely listen to their views? Are you passionate about your own relationship with God?

The research clearly indicates that spiritual practices, beliefs, and values are most often passed on to our children when they are woven into the very fiber of home life. It needs to be a total immersion, a way of life. The daily round of everyday family activities must somehow be brought into the very presence of God. This involves parents praying, families eating together, conversations with your teens focusing on faith beliefs, doing service projects together as a family team, praying before meals, and engaging in daily family devotions.

Remember, the home remains the primary place where faith values are passed on to our children. Maximize the use of the short time you have them under your roof. Soon, they will pack their few belongings and head off to college. It’s important that their faith becomes a personal one now, a faith they will carry throughout their life.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the following statement and discuss it with your group.

"You want a household for God; you want your family for God. You want to take them up to the gates of the city and say, 'Here am I, Lord, and the children that Thou hast given me.' They may be men and women that have grown to manhood and womanhood, but they are your children all the same; and your educating, and your watchfulness over them have been blessed of God, till they stand as overcomers. Now you can say, 'Here am I, Lord, and the children.' "(White, Child Guidance, p. 565)

TRY THIS AT HOME

1. Once again, this week we encourage you to add a Bible verse to your "Parenting Bible Promise Project." Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you and you may specifically relate it to the topic of this chapter. Write the verse out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Repeat it every time you walk by it, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don't throw it away at the week's end. Save it to add to the other promises in your parenting promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!
2. Purchase a Bible/Prayer journal for your teen. Encourage them to write down their thoughts, reflections, and questions. Make sure they know that those questions may be brought to you for honest, open, and non-judgmental conversations.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Father, please lead and guide my child through this time of personalizing their faith. May you be real to them. Walk with them and talk with them. Help them to develop a forever friendship with you. Impress Your will upon their hearts and minds. Bless them in the decisions they make and may they always hold onto Your hand. In Jesus' name, Amen.

REFERENCES

- Barna, G. (2016). *Transforming children into spiritual champions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Bettis, C. (2016). *The disciple making parent*. Diamond Hill Publishing.
- Holmen, M. (2007). "Make Time to Talk About Faith" downloaded at: <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/spiritual-growth-for-kids/faith-at-home/make-time-to-talk-about-faith>

Lytch, C. (2004). *Choosing church - what makes a difference for teens*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.

Oliver, W. & Oliver, E. (2016). "When We Get Surprised" Silver Spring, Maryland: Adventist Review. December 2016.

Roberto, J. (2007). "Best Practices in Family Faith Formation" Fall/Winter 2007. Lifelong Faith Associates. Retrieved from: http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/best_practices_in_family_faith_formation.pdf

Smith, C. & Denton, M. (2005). *Soul searching: the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Stier, G. (2015). "Dear Parents of Teenagers, Here are 5 reasons you should keep your teens involved in youth group" Retrieved from: <http://gregstier.dare2share.org/a-letter-to-parents-about-keeping-your-teenagers-going-to-youth-group-in-spite-of-their-busyness>

White, E. G. (1954). *Child guidance*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



HELP! I'M A PARENT WEBSITE

Visit our parenting website to submit questions, find additional resources, follow a blog, sign up for a free parenting e-newsletter, and more: **www.HelpImAParent.org**



HELP! I'M A PARENT FACEBOOK PAGE

Like us on our Facebook page: "Help! I'm a Parent" New materials are posted on a regular basis.



3. DISCONNECTING IN ORDER TO CONNECT

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

“Be still and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10 (NKJV).

ICEBREAKER—GROUP DISCUSSION



1. REMEMBER

- Remember when you were a teenager. What ways did you communicate with your parents and with your peer group?

2. REVIEW

- As you consider our spiritual principle for this chapter, what message do you glean from this verse?
- How do we help our teens to “be still” with all the outside noise from technology?

3. REFLECT

- Take a moment and reflect on what communication is like between you and your teenager.
- Are there more positive or negative exchanges between you and your “emerging adult”?
- Does technology inhibit healthy communication with our children? Explain.

OVERVIEW

Have you noticed that teens today seem to have extra body parts? Those additional body parts are ear buds, cords that stream down to electronic devices, and devices with knobs and buttons attached to their hands. Yes, our children are glued to technology and it does indeed seem as if it is an extension of their body.

Conversation with teens often seems strained and impossible as they cannot hear above the sound, or we may even call it noise, coming into their ears from their iPhones or iPods. You cannot shout loud enough to be heard and the truth is that it seems your teen actually prefers the music and noise over your voice. How can you possibly compete with the music, online chatter, text messages, Snapchats, Tweets, Instagram posts, etc.?

As we look at the challenge of getting our teens to disconnect in order to connect with us, and with God, we will consider the following topics:

- Balancing the Need for Privacy with Safety Concerns
- Cyber Addiction
- Chatting in a Snapchat World
- Constructive Communication
- Connecting Around the Dinner Table

BALANCING THE NEED FOR PRIVACY WITH SAFETY CONCERNS

The desire and need for more privacy is a natural part of adolescence. At the same time, teenagers still need your support and need to be connected to the family in order to make good decisions. How can we meet their need for increased privacy while ensuring that they are safe and having appropriate online activity? Today's teens have tech-saturated lives. And although smartphones and social media offer young people unique ways to connect and share like never before, threats to online personal safety are a high risk. Online can be a scary, and dangerous, place to be. Predators stalk our children and even if we think we have put all the parental controls in place, the reality is that there are back doors to online activity our teens know better than we do.

When we give our teens the privacy they need, they become more independent, which helps build their self-confidence. At the same time, there must be a balance between knowing what your teen is doing, trusting your teen to have some private matters, and knowing when to step in. It is a fine line that parents must walk every day. Remember, you are still the parent and it is your responsibility to do your best to help keep them safe. Do not be afraid to trust your instincts.

Research indicates that parents are much more concerned about the online safety issues than teenagers. In a study concerning online privacy and safety attitudes, teens expressed high levels of confidence in their ability to self-manage. In the social context of information disclosure, teens were much more concerned with risks to their own reputation than about anything else. This, in and of itself, is great cause for alarm. Our teen's major safety concern is for their reputation and they are blind to other grave safety issues such as harassment, solicitation, sexual predators, and pornography, just to name a few. At the same time, for teens, parents often use safety and protection as just another excuse to monitor their everyday social life (YTH, 2013). They are often blind to the real dangers that are present.

"The way teens learn how to manage privacy risk online is often very different from how adults approach privacy management. In what the researchers refer to as the 'privacy paradox', teens tend to first disclose and then evaluate the consequences, while most adults think first" (Barnes, 2006, p. 9). In other words, the process is more experiential in nature for teens, and suggests that they act first and think later. When it comes to posting on social media this is extremely dangerous as the cyber footprint cannot be easily erased or removed.

GROUP DISCUSSION



1. How do you currently balance keeping your teen safe online with their desire for online privacy?
2. Which is more important (a) your teen's desire to have privacy (b) your responsibility to monitor and protect?

So, what is the danger? What do statistics show? Data shows that 25% of teenagers have been cyberbullied in one way or another. Even more alarming, only one out of ten teens tell their parents about the harassment they are enduring online or via their smartphones. Only one in ten tell their parents! This should tell you that the problem is grossly under-reported and therefore, much worse than we realize. That statistic alone should be enough to propel us to action. Given this worrisome statistic, it is absolutely crucial to protect your children from the harsh and potentially long-term implications of online bullying (Wood, 2016). We need to start having open and honest conversations with our teens about the dangers that are out there and we then need to act!

You may hear arguments that parental involvement of online behavior limits privacy and may be viewed by teens as snooping and a violation of their privacy, much like searching their school bag, reading their diary, or listening in on a phone call. Parents who attempt to check their children's online activity or social network sites are seen as controlling and invasive and parents who join Instagram, Facebook, or set up their own Twitter accounts may be seen as intrusive and embarrassing. Don't buy it! Do not give in to those arguments. You are the parent. Your teenager is still a minor and you are the responsible party. If I am to err, I would rather err on the side of attempting to keep my child safe. That's the reality and the danger of living out one's life online. Look at these tips below recommended for parents of teens by the United States government.

"Parental concerns are at odds with teens' confidence in managing their online safety. Parents did not report confidence in a teen's ability to manage their safety online. Almost 72% of parents were concerned about how their child manages their reputation on social media and other networks. In contrast, teens reported high levels of self-efficacy, most often relying on themselves or their peers to fix privacy breaches or maintain security" (Lykens, 2015).

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR TEEN SAFE ONLINE (USA.GOV, 2016)

1. Keep your child's profile private so that only family and people you know see photos, important dates and other information.
2. Make sure they're not posting personal details, including phone numbers, home address, the name of their school, or Social Security number.
3. Only allow them to publish photos and videos that don't jeopardize their safety or their integrity.
4. Make sure they choose a strong password that can't be guessed, and that it gets changed every three months. Let them also see that you change your password. It's important to model the same behaviors we expect from them.
5. Encourage them to never accept friend requests from people they don't know.
6. Keep an open dialogue with your children. Ask them to let you know if they've received private messages from a stranger, or from someone at school who is teasing, harassing or threatening them. Those could be signs of cyber-bullying or even a sexual predator. Let them know that they can talk to you about these

things. Teach them to speak up. Remind them that you are a safe place to go to and you care about their sense of safety.

Of course, there is no way that you can put the plan above into practice unless you actively monitor their social media presence on a regular basis. Perhaps the best way to do this is to set up weekly media meetings with your teen where you sit down with them, review their online activity and postings, and discuss the positive things you are seeing as well as things that may be cause for concern. Explain the reasoning behind any concerns as well as steps that may need to be taken immediately. Remember, these guidelines are actually recommended by the United States government. That should also be a signal that causes us to act.

CYBER ADDICTION

“Most teenagers today have never lived in a world without the internet. They are often more tech-savvy than adults and they embrace each new technology that develops. This interest in the Internet and technology can evolve into an obsession. Teenagers are known for extremes in moods and behaviors, and extreme Internet use can cause everyday living to take a back seat to online time” (Addiction Help Center, 2016). Yes, your child may develop an actual cyber addiction that becomes unhealthy and may need intervention.

A recent survey was conducted across the United States of various socioeconomic classes. It explored the technology use of teenagers. One hundred percent of the teens surveyed owned a smartphone, and most owned or regularly used a variety of devices like gaming consoles, tablets, and desktop computers. These same teens reported spending at least six hours a day on their phones. Besides time spent on their smartphones, most teens reported time in front of television sets and gaming consoles (PlayStation 4 and Wii were popular answers). Some also reported using desktop computers. On average, teens said they spent 11 hours in front of screens every day - answers ranged from two hours to 18 hours, which sounds as if it would be literally every waking moment (and maybe it is) as teens are on technological devices both in and out of school and during all hours of the day and night (Kosoff, 2016).

Yes, the use of technology is normative. Surely it would seem abnormal for your teenager to be with his/her peer group and not have a cell phone. Absence of a technological device would indeed make them stand out. However, the greater concern may not be the fact that they have one but rather the amount of time they spend using it. Have you, as a parent, taken an audit lately to determine the amount of actual daily screen time your teen has? What are some of the signs that may indicate that intervention is needed?

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF INTERNET ADDICTION IN ADOLESCENTS (ADDICTION HELP CENTER, 2016)

- Internet use seems more important than time with friends or hobbies that were previously enjoyed
- Internet use has affected the teenager’s grades in school
- Loss of sleep due to internet use
- Meeting strangers or unsafe people online

- Unhealthy eating patterns or high intake of caffeine to stay awake
- Making many friends who he or she has never actually met in person
- Experiencing anxiety when away from the internet
- Neglect of appearance or hygiene
- Missing money or increased online spending for websites, games, and other internet purchases.

TREATMENT FOR CYBER ADDICTION (ADDICTION HELP CENTER, 2016)

The most effective treatment for cyber addiction is to remove the Internet from the teenager's life. However, if this does not work in the home then professional intervention needs to be sought. Yes, this may be an actual addiction that is difficult to break. There are inpatient facilities that actually remove the teenager from both the Internet and the surroundings that allowed the addiction. Inpatient treatment is a form of intensive therapy that allows the teenager to spend an extended amount of time at a specialized facility. Inpatient facilities for Internet addiction will provide:

- Medical care
- Nutritious meals
- Counseling
- Group therapy
- Daily activities
- Education

To teens, parents often use safety and protection as an excuse to monitor their everyday social life. They see parental warnings as one of wishing to curtail their privacy instead of an attempt to protect them (YTH, 2013).

Do not underestimate this powerful and dangerous addiction. Cyber addiction is a real and serious threat to our teens. Seeking professional help, when needed, is not a sign of parental weakness or failure. Rather, it is a form of strength. Do not hesitate to seek outside help. Your child's future may be at risk.

CHATting IN A SNAPCHAT WORLD

Have you discovered that perhaps one of the easiest ways to communicate with your teen is to text them or send a tweet to them? You can even be sitting in the same room across from them and yet, they do not answer when called. But, send them a text and you suddenly have their attention. Our children are growing up in a world where the normal way of communicating seems to be via technology. Face to face conversations seem to be from a by-gone era.

In a recent survey conducted by Kosoff (2016) throughout the United States, teenagers were asked what their favorite app was. Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter topped the list.

Here's what they had to say about it:

- "It's how I communicate with most of my friends and it's fun." 15-year-old
- "Snapchat and Instagram, I love sharing photos of all of the things I do and places I go. I also like seeing what others are up to." 15-year-old

- "Snapchat because it's pretty much just texting, but with pictures of my beautiful face." 16-year-old
- "Snapchat, because it is fun to send your friends what you're doing, and where you are in a fast and easy way. I also like being able to make stories, for all of my friends to see, and I also enjoy seeing stories of my friends on it and see what they're up to." 17-year-old
- Twitter because "you can voice your opinion on anything you want to and you can somewhat interact with celebrities." 18-year-old
- "My favorite app is Twitter because I am the kind of person who needs to get out my thoughts, and Twitter may be like shouting into the void but at least I am heard and often validated by my peers." 16-year-old

Pay close attention to that last comment. Perhaps it best summarizes the feelings of our teens in regards to their love of social media..."like shouting into the void but at least I am heard and often validated by my peers." A teen's peer group occupies an important place in their world. Research indicates that, "Social media enables teens to extend and reinforce real-world peer relationships. Posting information online is a way for youth to express themselves, connect with peers, increase their popularity, and bond with friends and peers. As a result, social media and mobile technologies play key roles in reinforcing both individual friendships and peer group relationships" (YTH, 2013, p. 4).

GROUP DISCUSSION



Discuss the comment of that teen who views online conversations "like shouting into the void but at least I am heard and often validated by my peers."

- Do you think that teens are utilizing social media so extensively because they want to be heard?
- What are some practical ways that you can let your teen know that you are hearing them?
- How do we validate their feelings?

Your teen wants to feel like they are being heard. The tendency, however, for us, as parents, is to talk more than we listen. If we want to compete with technology perhaps the best place to start is to open our ears.

CONSTRUCTIVE COMMUNICATION

Think back on the last few conversations you have had with your teen. What adjectives would you use to describe those conversations? Does that descriptive word reflect positive or negative communication? Some children are more

willing to talk while others seem to only want to be connected to their screens or communicate via social media. What are some strategies that you can employ to get even the most reluctant teen to converse with you?

PRACTICAL TIPS TO START A CONVERSATION WITH A RELUCTANT TEEN (WHITE, 2016)

- 1. Keep it neutral**—Talk about a “neutral” issue. Not every conversation has to be about feelings and relationships. Read a book together and discuss the choices the characters made. Share thoughts about an issue in current news. Even if their thoughts differ from yours, be willing to explore them and accept their opinion.
- 2. Mealtimes**—Use time at the table. Family dinners encourage conversations, but let everybody share in the discussion. Think of a few questions that everyone at the table must respond to and avoid judging the replies. You may do this if you are at home or if you are eating out. And remember; maintain a no technology zone during meal times. (See more about the importance of family mealtime below).
- 3. Questions to discuss**—Refine your questions. Learn to ask gentle questions that require more than a yes-or-no answer. You might start the conversation by asking: What was your favorite thing about today? What was your biggest challenge? What are some things that we need to pray about as a family?
- 4. Car talk**—Make the most of drive time. Are you tired of being your teen’s chauffeur? Unless talking in the car disturbs your concentration as a driver, discuss topics that come up naturally. That might include the weather, places your teen would like to go if he/she could go anywhere, or the kinds of cars your teen likes. The important thing is to talk to each other. The car could also be another place where technology is not allowed.
- 5. Nighttime talk**—Use the cover of darkness. Some kids find it easier to talk at night, especially in the dark. If you go into your teen’s room at bed-time to pray, ask for a prayer request; it might lead to them opening up and sharing concerns.
- 6. Commercial talk**—If you watch any movie or television together, try commercial conversations. Watch a favorite TV show together and talk during the commercials. View a football game and talk during the halftime show. Watch the news and discuss the stories during the breaks. These short bursts of communication, conducted without having to sit face-to-face, may be just the thing for the reluctant talker.

Perhaps one of our biggest challenges as parents is that teens’ online practices appear risky to us but are normative within a peer context. They are often blind to the true dangers that lurk behind every keystroke.

Talking about “neutral” things with a teen can be challenging enough. But, what happens when you need to confront your teen about an issue? You already know that it may not be a pleasant experience. It sometimes seems easier to let it go or to ignore it. How do you deal with conflict? Are there some practical things that you can do to help assure a more positive outcome?

PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICT (WHITE, 2016)

Confrontations happen in every home and, sooner or later, it's guaranteed to happen between you and your teen. How can you communicate in a way that helps you reconnect? Here are a dozen tips for talking your way through conflict:

1. **Start strong**—Psychologists say the first three minutes of a conversation generally dictate how the rest of it will go. Begin a confrontation with a soft voice and respect for your teen, and it's likely that the confrontation will be more productive and less destructive. As one teen testifies, "My mom and I had effective communication because I was treated as an equal. Not in terms of who was in charge (that was clear) but in that I had a voice."
2. **Let your teen speak first**—Young people, when surveyed, said that if they had a chance to talk first, they were more receptive to what their parents had to say. Once teens get to speak their minds, they're usually willing to listen to the other side. It's a simple courtesy that's not hard to do and can help determine a positive outcome.
3. **Don't interrupt**—It's tempting to dive in and react to something your teen just said, but one girl described how that looks from her point of view: "My parents interrupt me and lecture/yell. Then while they're talking and I want to get a word in, I'm yelled at for interrupting. It's really unfair." If either of you tends to talk nonstop, set a timer for two or three minutes and take turns. You must respect and hear them in the same manner that you want to be respected and heard.
4. **Watch your tone of voice and body language**—Model what you want your teen to do. When parents yell or use sarcasm or point fingers, teens learn to communicate that same way and will mirror that same style. They also tend to put on their protective gear and get into "fight" position. If you find yourself getting "hot under the collar" or angry, use a quieter, calmer voice. If nothing else, your teen will have to listen harder to hear you.
5. **Explain what you expect and why**—Some teens say they just don't understand what their parents are asking them to do. Have your teen restate what you've told him. Explain the reasons behind your request or rule.
6. **Fight fair**—No name-calling. Stick to the issue at hand. Don't dredge up past failures. Avoid the words "always" and "never," and don't compare your teen with anyone else—living or dead, related or unrelated.
7. **Don't beat your teen over the head with Bible verses**—Sure, it's crucial to pass principles from God's Word on to your child. But most arguments will not end well if all you try to do is to quote scripture. Your teen won't be too receptive if you declare, "I don't care if it makes you look like a nerd! You'll wear that orange sweater to school because the Bible says to obey your parents. Besides, vanity is a sin!" There are times to explain expectations and rules from a biblical/Christian perspective. But, in the heat of battle is usually not the time to do that as your teen may not be receptive to hearing it at that moment in time.
8. **Value your teen's feelings and opinions**—You may think your teen is spending time worrying about silly things, "So, the girls said mean things

about you. Forget it. You have to get used to people doing that.” Instead of feeling like you’ve just prepared her for the real world, though, your teen will feel dismissed and misunderstood. Listen to their feelings even if they do not seem rational to you. Validate those feelings.

9. **Don’t try to control your teen’s side of the confrontation**—It doesn’t work! Let’s say your teen is “sassing” you. You could retort, “You will not talk to me like that!” Not a good move, since a state-ment like this challenges him to prove he, not you, controls his tongue. Instead, it’s more productive to say, “I’ll be happy to listen to you when you speak to me more respectfully.” Now you’re saying what you will do and that is something you can control.
10. **Keep the issues in perspective**—How important is this fight? Is it possible to work toward a win-win solution, or at least one everybody can live with? Are you choosing your battles wisely? Stand up for the values that are most important to you and to your teen’s welfare but consider flexibility on lesser matters.
11. **Take a break when necessary**—If you or your teen is getting too wound up, take a time out. It doesn’t hurt to put a conflict on the back burner until you both calm down.
12. **When talking fails, write a letter**—Writing gives you time to sort through your thoughts and express yourself carefully. It gives your teen time to respond instead of reacting defensively. While face-to-face communication is best, a notebook passed back and forth can work as a conversation starter.

Do you truly desire to close the communication gap between you and your teen? Communicating is the key to every relationship. It’s never too late to start communicating with your teen. Start with neutral issues; keep those lines open, and most importantly, keep your ears open!

CONNECTING AROUND THE DINNER TABLE

Did you know that it is possible that 30 minutes a day could change your child’s life? You’ve probably heard that having dinner together as a family is a good thing for your kids, but you may not realize that it could actually alter your child’s life for the better. Dinner is the best predictor we have of how our teen will do in school, and the less likely they are to get involved with drugs or alcohol, suffer depression, consider suicide, or become sexually active during high school (Markham, 2016).

Wow! Did you catch that? Thirty minutes a day has actually been proven to change your child’s life for the better! If you aren’t doing it then why not begin? Put it to the test. Disconnect from all screen time and connect as a family. Remember, that means you, too!

Perhaps your family is so used to sitting in front of the television eating their meal every night that the thought of disconnecting from all screens seem scary. What will you do to fill that void? Do you wonder what you will discuss at the table? Here are some ideas but remember, you must participate also.

CONVERSATION STARTERS AROUND THE DINNER TABLE

1. What was your biggest blessing today?
2. What was your biggest challenge?
3. Tell the person sitting on the right of you the thing you love the most about them.
4. If I could have a conversation with anyone in history, it would be _____, and I would want to ask them _____.
5. If you could go anywhere you wanted on vacation where would you choose, and why?

Once you get used to this as a family you will be surprised at all of the fun you have been missing. And, why not have your teens come up with some of the conversation starters. Just remember the rule is that everyone at the table must participate in responding to the question.

WRAP UP

Communicating with your teen may not be as easy as it was when they were younger, but it has never been more important. Look for those unexpected times when the doors of communication may swing open. And, if your home needs to disconnect in order to connect, do not hesitate to take the steps for that to happen. Establish boundaries around the times that technology may be used in your home. Set up zones and times where no technology of any kind is allowed.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the following statement and discuss it with your group.

“When I have felt roiled and was tempted to speak words that I would be ashamed of, I would keep silent and pass right out of the room and ask God to give me patience to teach these children. Then I could go back and talk with them...We can take such a position in this matter that we shall not provoke the children to wrath. We should speak kindly and patiently, remembering all the time how wayward we are and how we want to be treated by our heavenly Father” (White, Child Guidance, p. 254).

TRY THIS AT HOME

1. Once again, this week we encourage you to add a Bible verse to your “Parenting Bible Promise Project.” Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you and you may specifically relate it to the topic of this chapter. Write the verse out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Repeat it every time you walk by it, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don’t throw it away at the week’s end. Save it to add to the other promises in your

parenting promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!

2. Set up “No Technology Zones and Times” in your home. Be consistent with follow through.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Father, help me to connect with my teen. Open up the doors of communication. Keep my child safe from the online dangers that Satan places before them. Envelop them in Your arms of love and safety. Help me to create an atmosphere in our home where they feel they can come and talk with me. And, most of all, grant me the wisdom to know when I should speak and when I should listen. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

REFERENCES

Addiction Help Center. (2016). “Teens and Internet Addiction” Addiction Help Center. Retrieved online: <http://www.addictionhelpcenter.com/teens-and-internet-addiction/>

Barnes, S. B. (2006). “A privacy paradox: Social networking in the United States” First Monday, 11(9). Retrieved from: <http://youth.org/wp-content/uploads/Teen-Privacy-and-Safety-Online-Knowledge-Attitudes-and-Practices.pdf>

Lykens, J. (2015). “What You Need to Know About Teens and Online Privacy” Youth Tech Health. Retrieved from: <http://youth.org/what-you-need-to-know-about-teens-and-online-privacy/>

Markham, L. (2016). “Dinner: 30 Minutes to a More Connected Family” Retrieved from <http://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/family-life/dinner-connected-family>

Kossoff, M. (2016) “60 teenagers reveal what they think is cool — and what isn’t — in 2016” downloaded from: <http://www.businessinsider.com/what-teens-are-like-in-2016-2016-1/#who-did-we-talk-to-1>

USA.gov (2016). “Six Tips For Keeping Teens Safe On Social Media” Retrieved from: <https://kids.usa.gov/parents/online-safety/six-tips-for-keeping-teens-safe-on-social-media/index.shtml>

White, E. G. (1954). Child guidance. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

White, J. (2016) “How to Talk to a Reluctant Teen” Retrieved from: <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/teens/tips-for-parenting-teens/how-to-talk-to-a-reluctant-teen>

Wood, A. (2016). "3 Experts Share Teen Online Safety Tools for Parents" Safe Smart Social Team. Retrieved from: <https://safesmartsocial.com/teen-online-safety/>

YTH- Youth + Tech + Health.(2013). "Teen Privacy and Safety Online: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices" Youth Tech Health. Digital Trust Foundation. Retrieved from : <http://yth.org/wp-content/uploads/Teen-Privacy-and-Safety-Online-Knowledge-Attitudes-and-Practices.pdf>



HELP! I'M A PARENT WEBSITE

Visit our parenting website to submit questions, find additional resources, follow a blog, sign up for a free parenting e-newsletter, and more: **www.HelpImAParent.org**



HELP! I'M A PARENT FACEBOOK PAGE

Like us on our Facebook page: "Help! I'm a Parent" New materials are posted on a regular basis.



4. TEEN MENTAL HEALTH

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10 (NKJV).

ICEBREAKER—GROUP DISCUSSION



1. REMEMBER

- Remember when you were a teenager. What were some of the mental health challenges teenagers faced at that time?

2. REVIEW

- As you consider our spiritual principle for this chapter, what message do you glean from this verse?
- As our teens today deal with social isolation, depression, and an increase in suicide rates, how can we, as parents, help our teens internalize this scriptural promise?

3. REFLECT

- Take a moment and reflect on the mental health of our teenagers today.
- Why do you think the rate of depression and suicide has risen among today's teens?

OVERVIEW

There are many stigmas that surround mental health issues. It's time that we stop burying our heads in the sand and start looking at this as we do other illnesses. We do not hesitate to take our children to a physician if we suspect an ear infection, strep throat, or they have a broken bone. Yet, when it comes to their mental health we are prone to look the other way, ignore it, or pray that it will go away on its own.

The purpose of including this chapter in this manual is to understand the reality of the issues that surround the mental health of our teens, understand the warning signs to look for, and review some steps that we may take to assist our teens.

As we look at the issues that involve the mental health of our teens, we will consider the following relevant topics:

- Self-Esteem and Body Image
- Media's Impact on Mental Health
- Social Isolation
- Depression
- Suicide

SELF-ESTEEM AND BODY IMAGE

Does any of this sound familiar? “I’m too tall.” “I’m too short.” “I’m too skinny.” “If only I was shorter/taller/had curly hair/straight hair/a smaller nose/longer legs, I’d be happy.” Yes, these phrases are very common to hear in homes where teens are present.

Why are self-esteem and body image so important? Self-esteem is all about how much you feel you are worth and how much you feel other people value you. Self-esteem is important because feeling good about yourself can affect your mental health and how you behave. People with high self-esteem know themselves well. They’re realistic and find friends who appreciate them for who they are. People with high self-esteem usually feel more in control of their lives and know their own strengths and weaknesses. Body image is how you view your physical self, including whether you feel you are attractive and whether others like your looks. For many people, especially teens, body image can be closely linked to self-esteem. And, having a poor self-esteem and body image may lead to mental health issues.

One of the reasons we see self-esteem and body image issues with teens is that the bodily changes that come with puberty are colliding with the fact that a teen’s peer group has become more important to them.

Why now? Why has this seemingly become an issue overnight in our homes? Teens have two important things merging in their development. First, they struggle with their self-esteem and body image when they begin puberty because it’s a time when the body goes through many changes. Second, these bodily changes, combined with wanting to feel accepted by their peer group, means it can be tempting to compare themselves with others. The trouble with that is, not everyone grows or develops at the same time or in the same way. So, you have bodily changes that come with puberty colliding with the fact that their peer group has now become more important to them.

MEDIA’S IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Are your teens connected to some form of media both day and night? Have you considered the tremendous negative impact that technology can have on your teen’s mental health? A new study has found that teenagers who engage with social media during the night could be damaging their sleep and increasing their risk of anxiety and depression. Teenagers spoke about the pressure they felt to make themselves available 24/7 and the resulting anxiety if they did not respond immediately to texts or posts. Teens are so emotionally invested in social media that 20% of high school students admit to waking up at night and log on, just to make sure they don’t miss out (Udorie, 2016).

Perhaps the worst thing about a teenager feeling they must be connected 24/7 is the fact that they actually need more sleep than adults do, so night-time social media use is very detrimental to their physical and mental health. Research has shown that teenagers need 9.5 hours of sleep each night but on average only get 7.5 hours. Research goes on to say that “teenagers who engage with social media during the night could be damaging their sleep and increasing their risk of depression and anxiety. Preliminary analysis of the research showed overall social media use, and specifically nighttime use, was related to poorer sleep quality, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of anxiety and depression” (Weale, 2015).

GROUP DISCUSSION



1. What types of technology does your child have access to in their bedroom? List them.
2. What steps do you need to take to be assured that your child is indeed going to sleep at a specific time each night and not engaging in any conversations via social media?

The more our teens are exposed to media, the greater the chance that media may negatively impact their mental health. Teens are acutely aware of celebrities and media images as well as how their peers look and how they compare. They may start to compare themselves with other people or media images. The problem is that they fail to realize that the media images are not realistic. Media portrays “ideals” that are frequently airbrushed or altered with plastic surgery.

It's becoming more and more obvious how the pressures of social media disproportionately affect teenage girls' pressure to be perfect. They strive to look perfect, act perfect, have the perfect body, have the perfect group of friends, the perfect amount of likes on Instagram, etc.. Perfect, perfect, perfect! Media facilitates and encourages unhealthy self-images in our teens, especially in our teen girls.

(Special Note: Please read more on this issue and refer to the practical tips in the chapter entitled, “Disconnecting in Order to Connect.”)

SOCIAL ISOLATION

A certain desire for privacy is normal in your teen. However, when this becomes excessive it could indicate a more serious issue. Social isolation in teens can be a result of chance or personal choice. There may be situations that are causing your teens to choose isolation for themselves. For instance, they may feel shut out of their peer group, thus, creating a situation where they feel they have no choice.

Teens are so emotionally invested in social media that 20% of high school students will wake up at night and log on, just to make sure they don't miss out. And, the more time they spend connected, the greater the negative impact on their mental health (Udorie, 2016).

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR SOCIAL ISOLATION

- **Social phobias**—Social phobia or anxieties may keep your teen from developing friendships or attending social activities.
- **Peer group**—Peers may have created the situation of isolation by bullying or purposely excluding them.
- **Too connected**—Teenagers spend most of their time “plugged in.” Whether it's television, gaming, surfing the Internet, browsing social media, texting etc.,

the majority of their free time seems to be spent in a virtual world. The time they spend communicating virtually can take away from valuable face-to-face interactions. All of their use of technology and screen time further creates a situation of isolation.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO TAKE

- **When did it start?**—Consider when your teenager’s isolation began. Has your child always been eager to hide from social gatherings for a little time alone? It may be that your teenager is introverted by nature. Give them the opportunity to spend some time alone, and avoid forcing them into long social gatherings. Find ways to spend time with your teen one-on-one. One-on-one interaction may be much easier than time spent in large gatherings. If, however, it has been a sudden onset then something else may be going on.
- **Talk one-on one**—Talk to your teenager if you suspect that the social isolation may be due to other problems. Are they struggling in school, dealing with a bully, or facing problems with their peer group? Having an honest and open conversation may reveal a great deal about the why. Perhaps a good way to approach this is to plan a special date with your teen where you can have uninterrupted quality time to talk.
- **Limit screen time**—Being too “plugged in” will create a situation of social isolation. Limit the amount of time your teen spends on screens and have no technology zones in your home (see more about this in the chapter entitled, “Disconnecting in Order to Connect”).
- **Family time**—Try spending time in new family activities together. There are so many fun family activities to select from such as playing a board game, going for a walk together, shooting basketballs, throwing the football outside, going to a museum, planning a family vacation, etc. Remember: ask your teen for ideas as to what they would like to do as a family.
- **Seek professional help**—Know your limits! Do not hesitate to seek help from a therapist or counselor if your teenager’s mood continues or worsens after more than a few days. Teenagers suffering from depression may experience symptoms such as restlessness, sadness, negativity, or a changed appetite. Isolation may also be a symptom of depression and something much deeper.

“Research shows that social media use, and specifically night-time use, was related to poorer sleep quality, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of anxiety and depression.” (Weale, 2015).

DEPRESSION

It’s natural to feel sad, down, or discouraged at times. We all have felt these human emotions. They’re reactions to the hassles and hurdles of life. We may feel sad over an argument with a friend, a breakup, or a best friend moving out of town. We might be disappointed about doing poorly on a test or discouraged if our team can’t break its losing streak. The death of someone close can lead to a specific kind of sadness or grief. But, what is depression? And, how is it different from the normal times of sadness or feeling down?

GROUP DISCUSSION



Discuss this question before reading any further. How do you distinguish between regular sadness and actual depression? List some things that identify each and then note the differences.

1. Regular Sadness:

2. Depression:

TOP THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT DEPRESSION (NEMOURS FOUNDATION, 2016)

- Depression is different from regular sadness because it lasts longer and affects more than just a person's mood; Depression affects thinking, too.
- Depression is more than occasionally feeling blue, sad, or down in the dumps.
- Depression is a strong mood involving sadness, discouragement, despair, or hopelessness that lasts for weeks, months, or even longer.
- Depression interferes with the ability to notice or enjoy the good things in life.
- Depression drains the energy, motivation, and concentration a person needs for normal activities.
- People don't always recognize when they have depression.
- Depression can get better with the right attention and care.

The above statements differentiate between regular sadness and actual depression. But, how do we know when it is time to take action with our teens? Perhaps we can manage regular times of sadness in our homes but depression needs professional intervention. What are the warning signs that indicate outside help needs to be sought?

SIGNS OF DEPRESSION IN TEENS (NEMOURS FOUNDATION, 2016)

- **Negative feelings and mood**—Teens with depression might feel unusually sad, discouraged, or defeated. They may feel hopeless, helpless, or alone. Some feel guilty, unworthy, rejected, or unloved. Depressed teens often feel angry, easily annoyed, bitter, or alienated. Any or all of these negative emotions can be part of a depressed mood if they go on for weeks or more.
- **Negative thinking**—Depressed teens get stuck in negative thinking. This can make them focus on problems and faults. It can make things seem bleaker than

they really are. Negative thinking can make them believe things will never get better, that problems are too big to solve, that nothing can fix the situation, or that nothing matters. Negative thinking can be self-critical, too. Teens may believe they are worthless and unlovable, even though that's not true. That can lead them to think about harming themselves or about ending their own life. Negative thinking can block their ability to see solutions or realize that a problem is actually temporary.

- **Low energy and motivation**—Depressed teens may feel tired, drained, or exhausted. They might move more slowly or take longer to do things. It can feel as if everything requires more effort. They may have trouble motivating themselves to do or care about anything.
- **Poor concentration**—Depression can make it hard to concentrate and focus. It might be hard to do schoolwork, pay attention in class, remember lessons, or stay focused on what others say.
- **Physical problems**—Depressed teens may have an upset stomach or loss of appetite. Some might gain or lose weight. You may notice headaches and sleeping problems when they're depressed.
- **Social withdrawing**—Depressed teens may pull away from friends and family or from activities they once enjoyed. This usually makes them feel more lonely and isolated and can make negative thinking even worse.

Because depression can affect how a teen acts, it might be misunderstood as a bad attitude. Other people may think the person isn't trying or not putting forth any effort. A negative or irritable mood can cause someone to act more argumentative, disagreeable, or angry and that alone can make the teen seem difficult to get along with or cause others, including parents, to keep their distance.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO ASSIST YOUR DEPRESSED TEEN

- Spend time in prayer and read God's promises in the Bible every day. That daily family devotional time is now more important than ever.
- Prepare healthy meals.
- Make sure they get the right amount of sleep.
- Go outside in the fresh air and sunshine together and get daily exercise.
- Make sure they take time to relax.
- Intentionally plan time to notice the good things about life, no matter how small. Perhaps the conversations at the family meal can focus on these things. Count the blessings and give thanks for them.
- Plan to spend family time with positive people.
- Seek professional medical care!

Depression can get better with the right attention and care and sometimes more easily than a person thinks. But if it's not treated, things can stay bad or even get

worse. That's why parents of depressed teens should not wait and hope it will go away on its own. Seek professional medical help immediately if you notice any of the warning signs. Don't wait for depression to just go away.

SUICIDE

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15 to 24 year-olds after accidents and homicide. It's also thought that at least 25 attempts are made for every completed teen suicide. Clearly, these statistics reveal that, we, as parents, cannot ignore the fact that this is a serious issue. It is easy to convince ourselves that this happens in other families but unless we are vigilant, it could indeed happen in our own homes. Please, trust us with this dire warning because it did happen in both of our homes as both of our younger brothers took their own lives.

The tragedy of a young person dying because of overwhelming hopelessness or frustration is devastating to family, friends, and community. Parents may be left wondering if they could have done something to prevent that young person from turning to suicide. No, we cannot blame ourselves because sometimes there is nothing we could have done if the person was intent on taking their own life. However, we can educate ourselves about the warning signs and we can take steps to intervene in order to possibly help prevent another family tragedy.

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

The American Psychological Association has given us some possible warning signs (APA, 2016). These include:

- **Talking About Dying**—any mention of dying, disappearing, jumping, shooting oneself, or other types of self-harm
- **Recent Loss**—through death, divorce, separation, broken relationship, self-confidence, self-esteem, loss of interest in friends, hobbies, activities previously enjoyed
- **Change in Personality**—sad, withdrawn, irritable, anxious, tired, indecisive, apathetic
- **Change in Behavior**—can't concentrate on school, work, routine tasks
- **Change in Sleep Patterns**—insomnia, often with early waking or oversleeping, nightmares
- **Change in Eating Habits**—loss of appetite and weight, or overeating
- **Fear of losing control**—acting erratically, harming self or others
- **Low self-esteem**—feeling worthless, shame, overwhelming guilt, self-hatred, "everyone would be better off without me"
- **No hope for the future**—believing things will never get better; that nothing will ever change

Suicide is an individual, family, and community public health crisis with more than 40,000 people dying in America each year. But there are warning signs and

studies show that 70% of people tell someone or give warning signs before taking their own life. Learn the warning signs and how to ACT to save a life. Created by Screening for Mental Health, the ACT® message is an easy to remember acronym that helps to guide us in the process of providing support to our teens..

ACT: ACKNOWLEDGE, CARE, TELL (SMH, 2016)

- **Acknowledge:** Take it seriously, and listen. If you are noticing warning signs or you hear something that sounds troubling, recognizing that something is wrong is the first step. Do not ignore the signs. Acknowledge them!
- **Care:** Take the initiative, and show and/or voice your concern. When someone is suffering, it can be difficult for them to remember there are people that care. Showing your love, care, and support will make a big difference for someone who is truly struggling.
- **Treatment:** Get professional help immediately. The best way to care for someone is to get them to an evaluation and to begin the treatment process. Support from friends and family is not enough to combat serious mental health concerns. Professional mental health treatment is necessary. You can be the important link that someone needs to get connected to treatment.

"You don't give a suicidal person morbid ideas by talking about suicide. The opposite is true. Bringing up the subject of suicide and discussing it openly is one of the most helpful things you can do" (SMH, 2016).

GROUP DISCUSSION



Review the chart with your group and discuss these three top myths regarding suicide. The information contained below is very important and a key to understanding the facts!

MYTHS AND FACTS CONCERNING SUICIDE (SMH, 2016)

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15 to 24 year-olds after accidents and homicide. It's also thought that at least 25 attempts are made for every completed teen suicide. Clearly, these statistics reveal that, we, as parents, cannot ignore the fact that this is a serious issue. It is easy to convince ourselves that this happens in other families but unless we are vigilant, it could indeed happen in our own homes. Please, trust us with this dire warning because it did happen in both of our homes as both of our younger brothers took their own lives.

Myth	Fact
Talking about suicide or asking someone if they are suicidal is risky because it might put the idea in their head.	You don't give a suicidal person morbid ideas by talking about suicide. The opposite is true. Bringing up the subject of suicide and discussing it openly is one of the most helpful things you can do.
People who talk about suicide are not actually likely to attempt suicide.	Almost everyone who dies by suicide has given some clue or warning. Do not ignore threats of suicide. Statements like "You'll be sorry when I'm dead," or "I can't see any way out" - even if said casually or as a joke may indicate serious suicidal feelings.
If a person is determined to kill themselves, there isn't much that can be done to stop them.	Studies show that even the most severely depressed person has mixed feelings about death, wavering until the very last moment between wanting to live and wanting to die. Most suicidal people do not want death; they want the pain to stop. The impulse to end it all, however overpowering, does not last forever.

It's important to try to keep the lines of communication open and express your concern, support, and love. If your teen confides in you, show that you take those concerns seriously. A fight with a friend might not seem like a big deal to you in the larger scheme of things, but for a teen it can feel immense and all consuming. It's important not to minimize or discount what your teen is going through, as this can increase his or her sense of hopelessness.

Some parents are reluctant to ask teens if they have been thinking about suicide or hurting themselves. Some fear that by asking, they will plant the idea of suicide in their teen's head.

It's always a good idea to ask, even though doing so can be difficult. Sometimes it helps to explain why you're asking. For instance, you might say: "I've noticed that you've been talking a lot about wanting to be dead. Have you been having thoughts about trying to kill yourself?" You can see from the above chart, explaining the myths regarding suicide, that asking this question will NOT increase the likelihood of it happening. On the contrary, it opens the doors to honest communication and may alert you to the need of immediate professional intervention.

Many teens who commit or attempt suicide have given some type of warning to loved ones ahead of time. Some adults feel that teens who say they are going to hurt or kill themselves are "just doing it for attention." It's important to realize that if teens are ignored when seeking attention; it may increase the chance of them harming themselves. It's important to see warning signs as serious, not as

“attention-seeking” actions to be ignored. It’s time to act immediately and not question the intent.

If you learn that your child is thinking about suicide, get help immediately. Keep in mind that your teen may or may not be willing to seek help, however, the decision to get help is yours, not theirs. Your family doctor is a great resource and can refer you to a mental health professional. You may go to the emergency room, call your local mental health association, or your county medical society. And, in an emergency, you may call the suicide hotline at (800) SUICIDE. Remember, there is only one step to take in the case of suicidal thoughts or threats: **SEEK IMMEDIATE PROFESSIONAL INTERVENTION!**

WRAP UP

There are times when some of these mental health issues are too much to handle within the walls of your home. Never be afraid to reach out and seek professional help and intervention for your teen. You should approach professional help for mental health issues as readily as you seek medical help for a toothache or an infection. We need to stop the stigma we often place on mental health issues. There is **NO SHAME** in seeking help. It is not a sign of family weakness but rather, a sign of the strength and love within your family.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the following statement and discuss it with your group.

“Educate the faculties and tastes of your dear ones; seek to preoccupy their minds, so that there shall be no place for low, debasing thoughts or indulgences. The grace of Christ is the only antidote or preventive of evil. You may choose, if you will, whether the minds of your children shall be occupied with pure, uncorrupted thoughts or with the evils that are existing everywhere—pride and forgetfulness of their Redeemer. The mind, like the body, must have pure food in order to have health and strength. Give your children something to think of that is out of and above themselves. The mind that lives in a pure, holy atmosphere will not become trifling, frivolous, vain, and selfish” (White, *Child Guidance* p. 188).

TRY THIS AT HOME

1. Once again, this week we encourage you to add a Bible verse to your “Parenting Bible Promise Project.” Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you and you may specifically relate it to the topic of this chapter. Write the verse out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Repeat it every time you walk by it, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don’t throw it away at the week’s end. Save it to add to the other promises in your parenting promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!

2. Seek out the mental health agencies within your community. Make a list. Having resources at your fingertips may be very useful to you or to a friend. Do not wait until you have need of them to make yourself aware of what is available.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Father, please help my child see that they are valued and loved. Help them to understand that You placed so much value on them that you gave Your life for them. And, You would have died had they been the only one. Impress upon their minds that You made them and love them just the way they are! Keep them healthy and safe, not only from a physical standpoint, but mentally as well. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

REFERENCES

APA. (2016). American Psychological Association. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/research/action/suicide.aspx>

Nemours Foundation. (2016). "Teens' Health." Retrieved from: <http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/depression.html#>

SMH. (2016). Screening for Mental Health. Wellesley Hills, MA.: Retrieved from <http://stopasuicide.org/>

Udorie, J. (2016) "Social media is harming the mental health of teenagers." Guardian News and Media. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/16/social-media-mental-health-teenagers-government-pshe-lessons>

Weale, S. (2015). "Teens' night-time use of social media 'risks harming mental health'" Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/sep/11/teens-social-media-night-risk-harm-mental-health-research>

White, E. G. (1954). *Child guidance*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



HELP! I'M A PARENT WEBSITE

Visit our parenting website to submit questions, find additional resources, follow a blog, sign up for a free parenting e-newsletter, and more: www.HelpImAParent.org



HELP! I'M A PARENT FACEBOOK PAGE

Like us on our Facebook page: "Help! I'm a Parent" New materials are posted on a regular basis.



5. FROM DEPENDENCE TO INDEPENDENCE

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” 1 Corinthians 13:11 (NKJV).

ICEBREAKER—GROUP DISCUSSION



1. REMEMBER

- Remember when you were a teenager. At what age and in what ways were you allowed to exhibit your independence?

2. REVIEW

- As you consider our spiritual principle for this chapter, what message do you glean from this verse?
- What does the progression from child to man look like that this verse speaks of?

3. REFLECT

- Take a moment and reflect on the transition of your teen from dependence to independence.
- What are the biggest challenges of parenting during this transition time?

OVERVIEW

The irony of being a parent is that our goal is to help our children grow into independent, mature adults. So, why is it so hard to think about letting them go? The truth is that your child is no longer a babe in arms and the time has come when you need to allow them to test their wings and make some decisions. Sooner now, rather than later, they will be off to college and out of your home. If they have not been allowed to make the small decisions while at home, when they suddenly find themselves in situations that involve big decisions they may make the wrong ones. It is better to allow them to fall and get up with minor decisions now before the bigger ones come their way.

As we consider our teens, who are morphing from dependence to independence, we will consider the following topics:

- Freedom—How Much is Too Much?
- Releasing the Car Keys
- Cutting the Umbilical Cord

FREEDOM—HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

According to recent research, freedom is actually an addiction in our teens. Yes, you read that correctly. Freedom creates an addictive high. Consider these words, “Do you know that your teen is addicted? The fact is, even if our kids have never touched an addictive substance, they’re still hooked on something with a high far greater than anything a basement lab can conjure up. This intoxicating agent is called freedom. And as it turns out, a lot of behavior that confuses and even alarms parents can be tied directly to a child’s desperate quest for the rush of freedom—and the fear of losing it. In other words, freedom is not just a big deal to kids; it’s what gets them up and going in the morning (or noon). People who use drugs or alcohol are seeking a temporary, exhilarating high, often described as the feeling of being able to do things they normally couldn’t. Our kids are getting the same rush, but in a good way. They’re experiencing the thrill of freedom, of being liberated to do things on their own, often for the first time” (Feldhahn & Rice, 2016).

“What’s going on is freedom. Freedom is cocaine to a teenager. It’s intoxicating. It’s addictive. And it is often their biggest motivator” (Feldhahn & Rice, 2016).

GROUP DISCUSSION



What are the freedoms that your teen desires? What are the areas where your teen wants the boundaries and restrictions lifted? Make a list below and discuss these with your group. Look for commonalities among the responses.

The truth is that the freedoms your teen desires seem endless, and with each one come decisions you will need to make. Here are just a few of the topics that may emerge:

- **Technology Use:** What freedoms surround this issue? Is your teen allowed to use technology at any time of the day or night? Are there time limits? Are there limits to what he/she can watch on TV, what internet sites to visit, when they can be on their cell phone, etc.?
- **Driving:** At what age will you allow them to take the car out alone? Will there be any expectations as to where they can go, who they may have in the car, and what time they are required to be home? What about texting or talking while driving?
- **Dating:** Are you going to allow your teen to date? If so, at what age will they begin dating, and with whom? What role will you play in approving dates? Where are they allowed to go?
- **Clothing:** Will you allow them to wear clothes that are trendy, even if they are questionable? Sexy clothes? What about bathing suits? Will they be a one piece, a bikini, and how small? I hope you dealt with that one before they turned 13!
- **Calling the Opposite Sex:** Are you going to let your daughter call boys or your boy call girls? If you don’t define the parameters for this issue, they will tell you: “Everybody else does it!”

- **Bedtime:** What type of curfew will you set for your teenagers? What time do they need to be in bed and what are the restrictions?
- **Physical Affection:** Will you let your teenagers decide how far to go with the opposite sex, or will you challenge them now with tough boundaries that reflect holiness and purity? Do not make assumptions. You must be willing to openly discuss this topic.
- **Friends:** Will you play a role in determining with whom your teens spend time? And, are you going to allow them to go out with their peer group? If so, what are the boundaries/rules?

Yes, the reality is that the above list could indeed go on and on. There has never been a time in your child's life when they will test the waters with so many independent decisions. Does it feel as if your teen is walking the tightrope of freedom at times? They are growing into independent young adults but it seems so easy for them to fall off of the tightrope. So, how much freedom is too much and how much is too little? How do you dole out the freedoms and help your teen make wise decisions on their own?

HELP THEM MOVE FROM FEARING PARENTS TO FEARING GOD.

God's view of our teen's actions has a far greater effect on them than we may realize. "Six in ten teens said that the fact that God might be disappointed in them was a bigger influence than even whether their parents would be disappointed. Parents of such kids can help them transition from fear of Mom and Dad to fear of God" (Feldhahn & Rice, 2016).

PRACTICAL TIPS TO GIVING YOUR TEEN FREEDOM (ADAPTED FROM FELDHAHN & RICE, 2016)

- 1. Teach them to seek God's guidance**—God's view of our teen's actions has a far greater effect on them than we may realize. Over 60% of teens said that the fact that God might be disappointed in them was a bigger influence than even whether their parents would be disappointed. Parents of such kids can help them transition from fear of Mom and Dad to fear (reverence) of God. Our children desire to please God.
- 2. Freedom is earned**—Get to know your teen. One of the most common appeals we heard from teenagers is for parents to see them as individuals and understand how they're wired. Quite simply, some teens can handle more freedom than others. Look for evidence of growing maturity in your child. How they handled recent events can provide insight. Do they lose their cell phone weekly or go over in the allotted minutes? If your teen can't turn in his math homework, is he really responsible enough to be trusted with your car? Allow them to earn freedoms as they exhibit maturity and make wise decisions. Responsibility in small matters can lead to increased freedom in larger matters.
- 3. Help teens think through decisions on their own**—It's important for teens to understand the

"As your children get older and their self-control increases, parental control should decrease. As children show responsibility, parents can allow them the freedom to make more of their own choices...Train children to make responsible decisions so they can be self-controlled and not parent controlled" (Kuzma, 2009, p. 154).

reasons for the rules so they can embrace them for themselves and not think of them as being externally imposed. In addition, since the frontal lobe of your teen's brain is underdeveloped, they need you to act as an "external frontal lobe" to help them think through consequences. Ask leading questions such as, "If you go to the mall, what does that mean for how much time you'll have to do your homework?"

4. Set Specific Expectations and Consequences—Your teen will tend to feel more settled and secure and be more honest with you if they have a clear understanding of the expectations and consequences. For example, if your child feels particularly possessive about his cell phone, establish that it is for your convenience as his parent, and if he/she doesn't answer your calls or abuses the allotted minutes, the phone will be taken away. But if they stick to the rules they can rest assured their cell phone privileges are secure. Since freedom itself is a huge incentive, you might want to help your child realize that they will have more freedom if they show maturity in handling that freedom whereas purposeful deception is the quickest way to lose it. Remember, if you do not make your expectations clear and explain the reasoning behind them, then you are missing a teaching opportunity!

GROUP DISCUSSION



One problem in Christian families today is that many parents fail to establish limits in their own lives. You need to set standards for your teen that you keep yourself. Otherwise your child may ask, "Why should I live by a standard that you ignore?" How important is it to model a behavior that has the same limits you set for your teen?

RELEASING THE CAR KEYS

How can I hand the keys over to my baby? Learning to drive and then taking the car out for the first time may indeed be among the scariest things that happen during the teenage years. There are so many pitfalls concerning driving that await them and the statistics speak for themselves.

STATISTICS ON TEENS AND DRIVING (DOSOMETHING.ORG, 2016)

1. 33% of deaths among 13 to 19-year-olds in 2010 occurred in motor vehicle crashes.
2. 16-year-olds have higher crash rates than drivers of any other age.
3. 56% of teens said they talk on the phone while driving.
4. Statistics show that 16 and 17-year-old driver death rates increase with each additional passenger.
5. Only 44% of teens said they would definitely speak up if someone were driving in a way that scared them.
6. Teen drivers with involved parents are twice as likely to wear seat belts.

7. More than 40% of teen auto deaths occur between the hours of 9 p.m. and 6 a.m.
8. Talking on a cell phone can double the likelihood of an accident as well as slowing a young driver's reaction time down to that of a 70-year-old.
9. 20 % of 16-year-old drivers have an accident within their first year of driving.
10. 56% of teenagers rely on their parents to learn how to drive.
11. Crash risk for teens increase incrementally with each mile per hour over the speed limit.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Make a list of concerns regarding releasing your car keys to your teen and allowing them to drive alone. What are your top three concerns?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The news is not all doom and gloom because according to the Center for Disease Control (2016), while motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens, these vehicle crashes are preventable, and proven strategies can improve the safety of young drivers on the road. It is the second part of that statement that should give us hope. These vehicle crashes are preventable!

According to the CDC (2016) there seem to be eight danger zones regarding driving that we need to address with our teens. It is critical that we educate ourselves about these danger zones so that we may address each of them. The eight danger zones that have been identified as the leading causes of teen crashes are as follows:

- Driver inexperience
- Driving with teen passengers
- Nighttime driving
- Not using seat belts
- Distracted driving
- Drowsy driving
- Reckless driving
- Impaired driving

The good news here is that there are some practical steps we can take to help our teens navigate around each of these eight danger zones. Being aware of these dangers and being proactive as parents may help prevent our teen from becoming another statistic.

TIPS TO DEAL WITH EACH OF THE EIGHT DANGERS OF TEENS BEHIND THE WHEEL (CDC, 2016)

1. **Driver inexperience**—Most crashes happen during the first year a teen has a license. Provide at least 30 to 50 hours of supervised driving practice over at least six months. Make sure to practice on a variety of roads, at different times of day, and in varied weather and traffic conditions. This will help your teen gain the skills he or she needs to be safe.
2. **Driving with teen passengers**—Crash risk goes up when teens drive with other teens in the car. Follow your state's teen driving law for passenger restrictions. If your state doesn't have such a rule, limit the number of teen passengers your teen can have to zero or one. Keep this rule for at least the first six months.
3. **Nighttime driving**—For all ages, fatal crashes are more likely to occur at night; but the risk is higher for teens. Make sure your teen is off the road by 9 or 10 p.m. for at least the first six months of licensed driving.
4. **Not using seat belts**—The simplest way to prevent car crash deaths is to buckle up. Require your teen to wear a seat belt on every trip. This simple step can reduce your teen's risk of dying or being badly injured in a crash by about half.
5. **Distracted driving**—Distractions increase your teen's risk of being in a crash. Don't allow activities that may take your teen's attention away from driving, such as talking on a cell phone, texting, eating, or playing with the radio.
6. **Drowsy driving**—Young drivers are at high risk for drowsy driving, which causes thousands of crashes every year. Teens are most tired and at risk when driving in the early morning or late at night. Be sure your teen is well rested before he or she gets behind the wheel.
7. **Reckless driving**—Research shows that teens lack the experience, judgment, and maturity to assess risky situations. Help your teen avoid the following unsafe behaviors.
 - Speeding: Make sure your teen knows to follow the speed limit and adjust speed to road conditions.
 - Tailgating: Remind your teen to maintain enough space behind the vehicle ahead to avoid a crash in case of a sudden stop.
8. **Impaired driving**—Even one drink will impair your teen's driving ability and increase their risk of a crash. Be a good role model: never drink and drive, and reinforce this message with your teen.

"Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens. Fortunately, teen motor vehicle crashes are preventable, and proven strategies can improve the safety of young drivers on the road" (CDC, 2016).

Talk with your teen even before they have their driver's license in hand. Make sure they are aware of these eight leading causes of crashes. It is also recommended that you develop and use a parent-teen driving agreement. Put rules in place that will help your teen stay safe. Have rules and set clear expectations around each of these eight dangers, put them in writing, and make

sure you and your teen sign it before any keys are handed over. And, ensure the consequences are clearly stated as well. The preventive steps you can put in place now may save you heartache later!

GROUP DISCUSSION



What would a parent/teen driving agreement or contract look like? It is a good idea to draw one up and have it ready before your teen has their driver's license in hand. Develop a contract using each of the eight dangers that have been listed. List the danger, the expectation, and the consequence if the rule is broken. Use the template below as a guideline. It is not expected that you will complete this in one sitting but this is to get you started.

PARENT/TEEN DRIVING CONTRACT

Top Eight Dangers	Parent Expectation	Consequence If Broken
1. Driver Inexperience		
2. Driving With Teen Passengers		
3. Nighttime Driving		
4. Not Using Seat Belts		
5. Distracted Driving		
6. Drowsy Driving		
7. Reckless Driving		
8. Impaired Driving		

Teen's Signature_____

Parents' Signature_____

CUTTING THE UMBILICAL CORD

Although the actual umbilical cord was cut at birth it seems that your child will always be daddy's girl or mommy's baby! Yes, regardless of how old our children get they will always be our babies and it is hard to cut that final piece of cord that remains attached.

Many struggles of adolescence occur because we parents are conflicted about our children growing up. The desire to keep them small and dependent doesn't make us bad parents; in fact, it might be a side effect of being a terrific parent. Parenting has been the greatest job ever, how could we be expected to look forward to working ourselves out of this job? How will we ever let them go?

Letting go or holding on? The key to achieving this balance is to honor your teen's growing independence by giving them freedoms in a measured way. Keep your eye out for safety issues but always with the goal of giving them increased privileges that match their growing displays of responsibility. Make sure your expectations are clear and stick to the consequences you have set in place. Your teen will demonstrate the responsibility you insist upon both to earn your trust and to gain the additional freedoms they desire.

It is important to let go of the apron strings a little at a time and allow them to make some decisions now before they are completely on their own. Yes, they will fall at times but we will be there to pick them up. Consider the dangers of allowing them zero ability to make any decisions now and what may happen when they find themselves in a college dorm all on their own? What if they have no responsible decision making skills?

Consider this powerful statement: "As your children get older and their self-control increases, parental control should decrease. As children show responsibility, parents can allow them the freedom to make more of their own choices....Train children to make responsible decisions so they can be self-controlled and not parent controlled" (Kuzma, 2009, p. 154).

GROUP DISCUSSION



What are the possible results if we do not allow our teen to make some age appropriate decisions now? What will happen when they eventually leave our homes and have not developed these skills?

WRAP UP

It may be easy to have a sense of hopelessness in the Christian community as we look at the evil and worldliness that our teens are exposed to in today's culture. It's easy to feel you have no power to change things. But that is a lie. You do have the power to change things by influencing the most important group in our country - your family. You start by determining what you believe and what standards you want to establish. The boundaries begin with you, with your choices, and with your limits. Do not be afraid to draw the boundaries to freedom!

Yes, it will take courage to set firm boundaries regarding the freedoms your teen will have and you certainly won't win any popularity contest. But your children don't need you to be one of their buddies. They need parents who are moral and spiritual leaders. They need parents who love them enough to occasionally cramp their style. Otherwise they can easily end up like King David's son, Adonijah, who

we meet in 1 Kings 1:5-6. He is spoiled, arrogant, and rebellious, and verse six shows why: His father never disciplined him (Rainey, 2016).

As we watch our cherished no-longer-little ones begin the process of flying free, what a comfort it is to entrust them to the One who made them and to know that He holds them securely in His hands.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the following statement and discuss it with your group.

“From infancy children should be trained to do those things which are appropriate for their age and ability. Parents should now encourage their children to become more independent. Serious troubles are soon to be seen upon the earth, and children should be trained in such a way as to be able to meet them” (White, Child Guidance, p. 122).

TRY THIS AT HOME

1. Once again, this week we encourage you to add a Bible verse to your “Parenting Bible Promise Project.” Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you and you may specifically relate it to the topic of this chapter. Write the verse out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Repeat it every time you walk by it, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don’t throw it away at the week’s end. Save it to add to the other promises in your parenting promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!
2. Continue to work on the Parent/Teen Driving Contract until you have one you are happy with. We have given you a start above. Remember, even if your teen does not yet have a license, it is a good idea to have this contract drawn up and ready.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Father, the time is quickly approaching when I will no longer be there to watch over my child. But, I claim your promise that You will never leave them nor forsake them (Hebrews 13:5). I commit them to Your care, dear Lord. Guide them in the decisions they make and cover them with your grace and love. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

REFERENCES

CDC- Center for Disease Control (2016). "Eight Danger Zones for Teens Behind the Wheel" Retrieved from: http://www.cdc.gov/parentsarethekey/pdf/patk2015_8dangerzones-a.pdf

CDC-Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). "Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System" National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from: http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/teen_drivers/teendrivers_factsheet.html

DoSomething.org (2016). "11 Facts about Teen Driving" Retrieved from: <https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-teen-driving>

Feldhahn, S. & Rice, L. (2016). "Freedom: The Teen Addiction." Family Life. Retrieved from: <http://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/parenting/ages-and-stages/teens/freedom-the-teen-addiction>

Kuzma, K. (2009). *Parenting boot camp*. Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

Rainey, D. (2016) "Setting Boundaries for Your Teens: Helping your children learn to live within limits" Family Life. Retrieved from: <http://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/parenting/ages-and-stages/teens/setting-boundaries-for-your-teens>

White, E. G. (1954). *Child guidance*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



HELP! I'M A PARENT WEBSITE

Visit our parenting website to submit questions, find additional resources, follow a blog, sign up for a free parenting e-newsletter, and more: www.HelpImAParent.org



HELP! I'M A PARENT FACEBOOK PAGE

Like us on our Facebook page: "Help! I'm a Parent" New materials are posted on a regular basis.



6. BRAIN DEVELOPMENT AND THE RISKY BUSINESS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV).

ICEBREAKER—GROUP DISCUSSION



1. REMEMBER

- Remember when you were a teenager. What were the risky behaviors that tempted teens then?

2. REVIEW

- As you consider our spiritual principle for this chapter, what message do you glean from this verse?
- As a parent, how can we teach our teens that their body is a temple?

3. REFLECT

- Take a moment and reflect on the risky behaviors that tempt our teens today.
- What, in your opinion poses the greatest risk?

OVERVIEW

The word “risk” is defined as the possibility that something unpleasant or unwelcome will happen as a result of a particular action. However, when we think about teens, taking risks is more complex. Parents often think of risky behaviors as underage drinking, using drugs, or early sexual involvement. However, we need to remember that risk-taking can be both negative and positive. Teens can learn and grow from taking risks. We all learn from falling down and picking ourselves up. The key, however, is to help our teens take the risks that have the potential of a positive outcome instead of ones wrought with negative consequences from the start.

What is a parent to do? We launch our children out in to the open sea and pray they have a life raft with them. We are no longer beside them to make every choice. Are there ways we can minimize the risky behaviors they engage in that have a high probability of negative consequences?

Perhaps one of the biggest hurdles to overcome is that our teens are making decisions that their brain development does not yet support. They tend to act first and think afterwards without considering all of the possible outcomes. How does this lack of development affect their choices and how can parents counteract this?

If you research risky behaviors among teens, substance abuse tops every list. While some of the initial statistics regarding substance abuse appear positive, we

need to look closer to see that there are new forms of substances being used and the most frightening thing is that these substances are easily available and within reach of every teen.

This chapter will consider the following topics:

- Teen's Brain Development
- Substance Abuse
 - Alcohol
 - Legalization of Previously Illegal Drugs
 - Prescription Drugs
 - Over the Counter Medications

TEEN'S BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

There are plenty of scientific terms and complex academic language we could use to describe the not yet fully developed brain in our teens. Instead, one author describes it in everyday, easier to understand language. "In adults, various parts of the brain work together to evaluate choices, make decisions and act accordingly in each situation. The teenage brain doesn't appear to work like this. For comparison's sake, think of the teenage brain as an entertainment center that hasn't been fully hooked up. There are loose wires, so that the speaker system isn't working with the DVD player, which in turn hasn't been formatted to work with the television yet. And to top it all off, the remote control hasn't even arrived" (Edmonds, 2016).

We may laugh as we read that humorous description, but the ramifications are serious. Risk taking seems to be something that our teens have mastered. They like to step out on the edge and flirt with danger. The truth is that this type of behavior is only exacerbated by the notion that their brains are not yet developed to make such important, sometimes life-changing or even life-ending, decisions. The part of the brain that involves decision-making is not fully developed until the mid to late twenties, and yet, adolescence is the time during which our children are faced with making these risk-taking choices (Society of Neuroscience, 2007).

Many parents do not understand why their teenagers occasionally behave in an impulsive, irrational, or dangerous way. At times, it seems like teens don't think things through or fully consider the consequences of their actions. Adolescents differ from adults in the way they behave, solve problems, and make decisions. It is somewhat comforting to realize that there is a biological explanation for this difference. Studies have shown that brains continue to mature and develop throughout childhood and adolescence and well into early adulthood. They are not physically capable of making many of the decisions that we often expect them to make.

"Scientists are researching how the developing brain responds differently to drugs of abuse such as stimulants and examining the periods during which adolescents are most vulnerable to addiction. Research shows that the teenage brain may be particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of drugs, including increased susceptibility to addiction later in life and emotional and behavioral difficulties, which could persist and become a lifelong disability" (Society for Neuroscience, 2007).

Scientists have identified a specific region of the brain called the amygdala that is responsible for immediate reactions including fear and aggressive behavior. This region develops early. However, the frontal cortex, the area of the brain that controls reasoning and helps us think before we act, develops later. This part of the brain is still changing and maturing well into adulthood (AACAP, 2016).

Young people will retain childish perspectives and reasoning unless their parents help them grow beyond such limited thinking (see Proverbs 17:21, 1 Corinthians 13:11)

It's important that parents understand this brain research on the developing teen brain and how it impacts the decisions our teenagers make. Based on their brain development adolescents are more likely to:

- act on impulse
- misread or misinterpret social cues and emotions
- get into accidents of all kinds
- get involved in fights
- engage in dangerous or risky behavior

At the same time, adolescents are less likely to:

- think before they act
- pause to consider the consequences of their actions
- change their dangerous or inappropriate behaviors

GROUP DISCUSSION



Review the lists above once more concerning brain development. What are the implications for parents here?

It's important to be clear. These brain differences don't mean that young people can't make good decisions or tell the difference between right and wrong. It also doesn't mean that they shouldn't be held responsible for their actions. However, an awareness of the developing brain can help parents understand, anticipate, and manage the behavior of adolescents. That should actually assist us and give us hope.

At the same time, there are things that we can do to fill in this developmental gap for our children. We can assist them and guide them in the thought processes that may not come naturally. By anticipating possible scenarios and things our child may face, we can have important conversations with them before the situation presents itself. What can parents do?

- help them think through things before they act
- sit down and have conversations
- anticipate possible scenarios that may present themselves
- role play these scenarios

ALCOHOL

A recent study (HG, 2016) reveals the average age at which an American girl has her first drink is 13; for a boy, it's 11. In the United States and many other countries, underage drinking is a widespread problem with often-serious consequences. Let that thought sink in! Age 13 for a girl and age 11 for boys! And, that is the “average” age.

You may be wondering why topics such as these have been included in a manual targeted at Christian parents. Surely our Christian teens are not participating in these risky behaviors. Once again, we must be proactive and understand the facts. It's easy to gloss over these statistics and think it could never happen in our homes. Surely our teen has never had a drink of alcohol! I pray that is indeed the case but remember the Biblical counsel, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” 1 Corinthians 10:12 (NKJV). We must educate ourselves and our teens concerning the facts and the dangers involved. Satan has a target drawn on the backs of our teen and he will do everything he can to make them fall victim to substance abuse. Listen attentively to what your teens tell you. We were dismayed to hear from one of our daughters about the drinking parties taking place in one of our college campuses and which evidently went unnoticed for the four years she attended. It was also clear that drinking was not just taking place on college campuses but also in high schools and academies. Listening, advising, and educating our teens is an ongoing necessity.

Young people who drink are more likely to

- be the victims of violent crime
- be involved in alcohol-related traffic accidents
- have depression and anxiety

Other risky behaviors are also linked to early drinking. Young people who start using alcohol in their teen years are more likely to:

- be involved in violent behaviors
- attempt suicide
- engage in unprotected sex or have multiple sex partners
- develop alcohol problems in later life

It's important that we return to this whole idea of the teen's brain development because that has an impact on the issues surrounding substance abuse. Consider this, “Adults drink more frequently than teens, but when teens drink they tend to drink larger quantities than adults. There is evidence to suggest that the adolescent brain responds to alcohol differently than the adult brain, perhaps helping to explain the elevated risk of binge drinking in youth. Drinking in youth is also a risk factor for later alcohol dependence” (NIH, 2016).

PRACTICAL TIPS; WHAT'S A PARENT TO DO? (ADAPTED FROM HG, 2016)

1. **Pray with and for your teen**—Pray with and for your teen every day that they will be able to withstand temptation and make wise decisions. It's important that your teen witness you taking things to the Lord in prayer. You're probably much like us in that the older our children get the more we pray for them. With each turn of the calendar comes more important life-altering decisions, so pray, pray, and then pray some more for them.

2. **Be a positive role model**—Has your child ever seen you drink alcohol? Is alcohol readily available in your home and within easy reach of teenage hands? Even if you do not drink, do you allow others to drink alcohol in your home? Being a positive role model and exhibiting the same behaviors you want your teen to mirror is one of the most powerful things you can do as a parent.
3. **Start the conversation early**—While most parents recognize the importance of discussing alcohol use with their child, they aren't always sure when to initiate this discussion. Prevention is the key word. Do not wait until you are forced to have the conversation. Instead, be proactive, initiate the conversation, and do it early.
4. **Assure your teen they can talk to you**—Set the stage early by letting your teenager know that he/she can talk to you about anything, even the tough issues like substance abuse.
5. **Listen**—Ask open-ended questions, and listen without interrupting. If we wish to keep the lines of communication open we must learn when to listen and when to speak.
6. **Share the facts**—Share the facts and the statistics regarding alcohol use with your child. They need to be educated just as you do. But don't "preach" the information to them; instead, talk about one piece at a time, converse with your child about it, ask why that bit of information is important, why they think it takes place. Helping them to think about and internalize the information is crucial. Be prepared to answer questions about the use of wine in the bible as they may bring it up.
7. **Set clear expectations and consequences**—What are your expectations? Zero tolerance regarding alcohol should be clearly stated. Do not make the mistake of assuming your child knows what those expectations are. And, what will be the consequences if your child does not adhere to the expectations you have set?
8. **Communicate your values by explaining the why**—Teens are less likely to drink when they know that parents and other important adults in their lives have strong values but it is imperative that you explain the reasons behind your values. The "whys" behind your values are important to a teen understanding and making decisions on their own. Have you taken the time to explain the value that Jesus has placed on them? Do they understand that they were bought with a price—the very life of Jesus? Their bodies are His temple and need to be honored.
9. **Control your emotions**—If you hear something that upsets you, take a few deep breaths and express your feelings in a positive way. You may need to take further action but do so in a calm and prayerful way.
10. **Know your teenager's friends**—Express an interest in getting to know them better. Getting to know these friends and their parents will help you understand your teenager's world. Are they surrounding themselves with positive peer influences or with influences that may assist them in making poor decisions? Remember, even if you do not allow alcohol in your home

there are other homes where it may be readily accessible in the refrigerator or home bar. It's important to know their peer group.

11. **It's Illegal**—Did we mention that alcohol consumption among 13 to 18-year-olds is illegal? That's right. This is also something that often evades the teenage mind. That's just one more reason to add to the list of why not to do it. Even the sale of alcoholic beverages to minors or buying alcohol for a minor are illegal.
12. **Never get in the car with anyone who has been drinking**—Make sure your teen knows they can call you anytime day or night to come and pick them up. They are never to rationalize getting in the car with anyone who has had even one drink is safe.

As with other risky behaviors, there are some proactive steps we can take to help prevent our teen from engaging in the risky behavior of alcohol use. The first step, however, is to admit that all of our teens are vulnerable. And, the sooner we face that fact the better, because only then can we move on to other action steps.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Discuss this statement by George Barna (2016, p. 95):

"One of the most underutilized resources available to parents – and which should be among most often used resources - is that of discipline. This form of instruction includes the identification of parameters and expectations, assistance in developing proper habits, situational reprimands and friendly reminders. The Bible makes it quite clear that discipline is an expression of love and that the failure or refusal to utilize discipline is tantamount to withholding love" (Proverbs 1:7, 6:23, 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 29:15, 29:17; Ephesians 6:4; Hebrews 12:8-11).

- Do you agree with that statement?
- Is withholding discipline equal to withholding love?
- Explain your thoughts below.

LEGALIZATION OF PREVIOUSLY ILLEGAL DRUGS

With every election cycle comes legislation on state ballots to legalize drugs that were previously illegal. Largely because of the legalization of marijuana for medical and recreational use in many states, the drug is more available, accessible, and socially acceptable. Already, government agencies across our country are reporting sharp increases in problems associated with adolescent marijuana use. High school seniors are using marijuana at rapidly increasing rates that have not been seen in the United States for three decades.

The average potency of today's marijuana is 244% higher (yes, you read that right) than the average potency of marijuana smoked in the 1980s. As a result, today's marijuana is more addictive and harmful, especially for adolescents who are going through the crucial stages of brain development.

This combination of a stronger drug and the fact that it is easier to access it is bad news for us, as parents. Decades of research on the negative effects of marijuana on the developing brain are yielding disturbing results. These new findings should concern parents and teenagers. Marijuana use is associated with:

- long term and permanent cognitive deficits
- lower academic achievement
- high school and college dropout rates
- serious mental health problems
- chronic, lifelong struggles with drug addiction

GROUP ACTIVITY



Stop now and take an audit of all the medications in your home: prescription and over the counter medications.

- Look at your prescription medications.
 - Where do you keep them in your home?
 - Do you have some that have expiration dates, and which need to be disposed of?
- Survey your over the counter medications.
 - How important is it that these, non-prescription medications be guarded?
 - Are they in a locked cabinet, or are they easily accessible to your children or to anyone else who may visit your home?

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Did you know that one of the most dangerous places regarding substance abuse is in your own home? We often fail to realize that some of the worst dangers regarding substance abuse are right under our own noses. This is an ever-increasing danger to our teens and one that is easily within reach. Home medicine cabinets often contain highly potent prescription drugs. The nonmedical use of these drugs poses a serious threat to the health and safety of our teens.

Prescription drug abuse is when someone takes a medication that was prescribed for someone else or when a person takes their own prescription in a way not intended by a doctor or for a different reason than intended: for instance, to get high. It is becoming one of the biggest health issue among young people because of the dangers involved, in particular the danger of abusing prescription pain medications.

GET THE FACTS (NIDA, 2016)

- After marijuana and alcohol, prescription drugs are the most commonly abused substances by Americans age 14 and older.
- Teens abuse prescription drugs for a number of reasons, such as to get high, to stop pain, or because they think it will help them with schoolwork.
- Most teens get the prescription drugs they abuse from friends and relatives, sometimes without the person ever knowing.

- Boys and girls tend to abuse some types of prescription drugs for different reasons. For example, boys are more likely to abuse prescription stimulants to get high, while girls tend to abuse them to stay alert or to lose weight.

WHAT YOU CAN DO (ADAPTED FROM PURDUE, 2015)

- **Lock up all prescription medications**—Keep medications in a safe place. When your child was a toddler, you probably kept powerful or poisonous chemicals out of reach. Take the same approach with your medications. Your kids are just as curious as teens as they were as toddlers and peer pressure can be an added driving force.
- **Be vigilant**—What kind of medications do you have in your household? Do you know how medications are stored in the homes of family members or friends where your child spends time?
- **Monitor your medications**—Always know how many pills are in your prescription bottles. Keep a written inventory to keep track.
- **Dispose of all old or unused medications properly**—Many people hold on to prescription medications even after they have expired or are no longer needed. Different drugs need to be disposed of in different ways. Check with your pharmacist about how to properly dispose of unneeded drugs.
- **Become an advocate**—Spread the word. Once you've become informed, talk to family members, neighbors, and the parents of your children's friends and encourage them to safeguard their medications. Your home is not the only home your child is ever in.
- **Spend time with your teen**—Teens who feel a close bond with a parent or other adult are less likely to want to disappoint them.
- **Get to know their friends and their friends' parents**—Make their friends and peer group your business. This is a powerful predictor of them engaging in risky behaviors.
- **Reinforce positive behaviors**—Encourage your child to be an independent thinker and praise him or her for having the courage to resist peer pressure and make wise choices.
- **Talk to and educate your teen**—Perhaps this is the most important step of all. Make sure they know the following:
 - Taking ANY prescription medication that is not prescribed to them by a doctor is drug abuse and it is dangerous.
 - Medications are powerful drugs that can be very beneficial when taken properly under a doctor's supervision, but experimenting with prescription drugs, even once, can lead to an overdose or death. Explain that these risks increase dramatically when drugs and/or alcohol are mixed.
 - Find out what they already know, what they've heard, what they've learned at school, and what their friends are saying.
 - Set clear standards and expectations around ALL types of substance abuse, including abuse of prescription medications. Family rules about drugs give kids something to fall back on when they are tempted to make poor decisions.

This type of substance abuse is happening every day. Teens excuse themselves to go to the bathroom in their friend's home, open the medicine cabinet, and help themselves to the prescription drugs they find there. So, making sure your medications are not accessible is not only for the benefit of your child but also for those who visit in your home. The same thing applies to the homes where your child visits. Talk to other parents about the dangers and monitor the homes your child visits.

OVER THE COUNTER MEDICATIONS

Another type of substance abuse happens when teens use over the counter medications in ways and in quantities that they are not intended for. A challenge for us is that these medications need no prescription and our teens may walk in any store and purchase them. Since these medications are not illegal, and are easily accessible, there seems to be an impression among teens that getting high on these is safer. However, this couldn't be further from the truth.

Over the counter or OTC drug abuse is not only common, but it's also been a trendy way for teens to get high in recent years. When taken in high doses, several of these drugs induce symptoms of a "buzz" not unlike certain illicit drugs. This can include hallucinations, euphoria, intense relaxation or heavy jolts of energy.

Cough syrup and cold medicine typically come to mind when discussing OTC drugs. There are hundreds of OTC drugs, however, and cough syrup and cold medicines only account for a portion. If you take the time to explore the medicine aisle, you'll discover many types of legal drugs, each with their own specific and intended purpose. Each of these different medicines comes with a unique set of risks as well, especially when they're used improperly to achieve a high.

This dangerous trend is quickly becoming a ritual at high school parties. A recent trend is for each teen coming to a party to bring a pocketful of medications that they have collected. All of the pills brought are put together into one container. The game is for the teens to reach in and grab a handful and take all of the pills they pull out at once. When taken as prescribed these drugs are very beneficial but when mixed with other drugs this trendy "cocktail" game can prove fatal.

Because of this abuse and trend among teens, there are some pharmacies and drug companies attempting to put preventive steps in place; however, these OTC medications are still readily accessible due to the fact that they are not illegal and require no prescription. Some of the steps you can take mirror those steps you can take to prevent prescription drug abuse. Here are the top three things you can do:

- **TALK** to your teen about OTC medicine abuse (especially cough medicine and cold medicine as they are the most common)
- **MONITOR** your medicine cabinets and your teen's activities.
- **SHARE** what you have learned with other parents in your teen's circle.

The biggest mistake that a parent can make is assuming that substance abuse is a problem that happens to someone else.

The bottom line is to talk about these issues and share your knowledge with your teen and with other parents. This cannot be a taboo subject matter. And, YES, it can be happening within the walls of your home..

WRAP UP

Parents, if you do not pay attention to anything else in this chapter, please pay attention to this statement: The biggest mistake that a parent can make is assuming that substance abuse is a problem that happens to someone else.

Admitting that your teen is at risk, understanding those risks, and communicating your concerns to your teen are perhaps the most important steps you can take to avoid losing a teen you love to substance abuse.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the following statement and discuss it with your group.

“The only sure safety for our children against every vicious practice is to seek to be admitted into the fold of Christ and to be taken under the watch care of the faithful and true Shepherd. He will save them from every evil, shield them from all dangers, if they will heed His voice. He says, “My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me.” In Christ they will find pasture, obtain strength and hope, and will not be troubled with restless longings for something to divert the mind and satisfy the heart. They have found the pearl of great price, and the mind is at peaceful rest. Their pleasures are of a pure, peaceful, elevated, heavenly character. They leave no painful reflections, no remorse. Such pleasures do not impair health or prostrate the mind, but are of a healthful nature” (White, Child Guidance, p. 467).

TRY THIS AT HOME

1. Once again, this week we encourage you to add a Bible verse to your “Parenting Bible Promise Project.” Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you and you may specifically relate it to the topic of this chapter. Write the verse out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Repeat it every time you walk by it, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don’t throw it away at the week’s end. Save it to add to the other promises in your parenting promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!
2. Go and take a look at the area in your home where you keep your prescription and over the counter medications. Is it easily accessible? Think not only about your teen, but also about other young people who may visit in your home and need to go to the bathroom. You may be enabling them to gain easy access. Do you need to find another storage area? Do you need to lock them up? Prevention is the best rule!

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Father, the dangers that are within reach of my child seem too many to count. Please place your protective arms around them. Help them stand up and say, “No” to temptations, even if they stand alone. Keep them from danger. Help them to choose their friends wisely and surround themselves with positive peer influences. I claim the blood that you shed on Calvary on their behalf. And, Lord, may my entire family be in heaven together. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

REFERENCES

- AACAP - American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychology. (2016). “Teen Brain: Behavior, Problem Solving, and Decision Making” No. 95; September 2016. Retrieved from: http://www.aacap.org/aacap/families_and_youth/facts_for_families/fff-guide/The-Teen-Brain-Behavior-Problem-Solving-and-Decision-Making-095.aspx
- Barna, G. (2016). *Transforming children into spiritual champions*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books.
- Edmonds, M. (2016). “Are teenage brains really different from adult brains?” 26 August 2008. HowStuffWorks.com. Retrieved from: <http://science.howstuffworks.com/life/inside-the-mind/human-brain/teenage-brain1.htm>
- HG - HelpGuide. (2016). “Teenage Drinking: Understanding the Dangers and Talking to Your Child” Retrieved from: <http://www.helpguide.org/harvard/the-dangers-of-teenage-drinking.htm>
- NIDA - National Institute of Drug Abuse for Teens. (2016). “Prescription Drugs” Retrieved from: <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/prescription-drugs>
- NIH - National Institute of Health. (2016). “The Teen Brain: Still Under Construction.” Retrieved from: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/the-teen-brain-still-under-construction/index.shtml>
- Purdue. (2015). “The Streets Aren’t the Only Place Kids Find Drugs” Purdue Pharma. Stamford, Connecticut. Retrieved from: <http://www.rxsafetymatters.org/wp-content/themes/rxsafetymatters/pdf/Purdue-ParentsGuide.pdf>
- Society for Neuroscience. (2007, November 8). Why Teens Are Such Impulsive Risk-takers. ScienceDaily. Retrieved from www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/11/071107210133.htm
- White, E. G. (1954). *Child guidance*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

**HELP! I'M A PARENT WEBSITE**

Visit our parenting website to submit questions, find additional resources, follow a blog, sign up for a free parenting e-newsletter, and more: www.HelpImAParent.org

**HELP! I'M A PARENT FACEBOOK PAGE**

Like us on our Facebook page: "Help! I'm a Parent" New materials are posted on a regular basis.



7. TEEN SEXUALITY ISSUES

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

“A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.”
Song of Solomon 4:12 (NKJV).

ICEBREAKER—GROUP DISCUSSION



1. REMEMBER

- Remember when you were a teenager. What were the sexuality issues that permeated society then?

2. REVIEW

- As you consider our spiritual principle from the Song of Solomon for this chapter, what message do you glean from this verse?
- Discuss the concept of a young woman as “a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.”

3. REFLECT

- Take a moment and reflect on the sexual temptations facing your teen.
- Is there a difference today?

OVERVIEW

Your teen is bombarded with sexual messages daily, much of which are inaccurate, deceptive, or plain untrue. And, perhaps the most concerning of all is that almost none of that information is grounded in Biblical truth. Your teen is hearing sexual messages in almost every song they listen to, every movie and television program they watch, and on the Internet. You may already be thinking that this topic makes you uncomfortable. We want to assure you that it is perhaps one of the most important topics you can discuss with your teen.

As we look at the sexuality issues that face our teens, we will consider the following aspects:

- Early Dating
- Date Rape, Acquaintance Rape, and Sexual Abuse
- Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases
- Pornography
- “A Garden Enclosed, A Spring Shut Up, A Fountain Sealed”

EARLY DATING

It is on this topic that we are not always popular, especially among teens. It was our personal belief and practice as parents to not allow our daughters to date until after they had graduated from academy (high school) and were ready to begin college. Yes, they had plenty of friends. Groups of friends came over to our home and they were allowed to go on youth outings with a group of friends, but they were not allowed to date exclusively until after graduation from academy (high school).

Why did we have this rule? It's not that we were some old fashioned, prudish parents. Instead, we based our decision, in part, on the information regarding brain development, which we provided in the previous chapter. In addition, studies show that when teens date exclusively (going steady, going out with someone, or simply "going with someone"), they are more likely to have sex earlier (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009). Because teen dating is a reality in today's world, we need to discuss some of the statistics, implications, and dangers. It is our belief that these facts serve as further evidence to delay exclusive dating relationships in teens.

"Studies show that when teens date exclusively (going steady), they are more likely to have sex earlier" (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009).

Dating today is not what it used to be when you were courting your lover. One quarter of teen daters today have dated or "hooked up" with someone they first met online (Lenhart, Anderson, & Smith, 2015, p. 18). In addition to meeting someone on-line, they utilize social media resources to get to know and find out additional information on someone they may be attracted to because, as one high school girl explains: "You want to know everything you can about them." In other words, according to teens, social media seems to be the best way of "researching" potential partners. Teenagers are the best at mastering online research, especially if they are motivated by a romantic interest. The challenge and danger, however, is that not everyone appears to be true to their online profile and as our teens begin to rely more and more on information gleaned from the internet, they are in increasing danger.

"Dating today is not what it used to be when you were courting your lover. One quarter of teen daters today have dated or "hooked up" with someone they first met online" (Lenhart A., Anderson, M. & Smith, A. 2015, p. 18).

When it comes to actually "spending time" with a significant other, teens say texting is the top method. Asked how they spent time with their current or former boyfriend or girlfriend, teen daters reported use of the following media platforms (Lenhart, Anderson, & Smith, 2015, p. 7):

- **Text messaging**—92% of teens with romantic relationship experience have spent time text messaging with their partner at least occasionally.
- **Talking on the phone**—87% have spent time talking on the phone with their significant other.
- **Social media**—70% have spent time together posting on social media sites.
- **Instant or online messaging**—69% have spent time with their significant other using instant or online messaging apps such as Snapchat.
- **Video chat**—55% say they have spent time with their partner video chatting.
- **Messaging apps**—49% have used messaging apps to stay connected to their partner.
- **Email**—37% have used email to spend time with a significant other.
- **Talk while playing video games**—31% talk with their partner while playing video games.

The reason this matters is because online dating and developing relationships via social media can be a very dangerous game to play. Who they think they are chatting to or meeting in the chat room is very often different from who they are in person.

GROUP DISCUSSION



1. Is having “THE SEX TALK” with your child before adolescence adequate?
2. How often should you have conversations with your child regarding sexual issues?
3. What are some of the topics you should discuss?

PARENTING TIPS REGARDING DATING, SEX, AND MARRIAGE

1. **Model a God-led marriage**—We often ask parents what the best gift is that they can give their children. The answers usually include things such as providing them with a good education to making sure they have a good home. While these things are important, we believe that one of the best gifts that you can give your child is that of your good marriage. The health and safety of your marriage, and home, provides them with a good example, a sense of comfort and security, and a good goal to attain.
2. **Sexual purity**—Remind them that God’s standard for sexual purity is also a standard in your home. Talk about sex within marriage. Explain that sex is good when it is according to God’s design. Teach abstinence as the best form of safe sex, and as the ideal for a better sex life in marriage!
 - **Purity code**—Fathers, take your sons out for a special day together and mothers, take your daughters out. Talk with them about this topic. After you explain God’s design for sex, ask your child if they would like to make a commitment of purity. Using some nice stationary draw up a “purity code.” You both may sign it and keep it in a special place. It can later become a treasured family memory of a special day between father/son and mother/daughter.
3. **Be vigilant**—What your teen is doing, who they are with, what they are watching, what they are listening to IS your business. It is not an invasion of their privacy. These issues will impact their life here on earth and their eternal future. Be involved! Be aware! And, be vigilant!
4. **Draw the boundaries**—Be very clear on your dating rules and communicate them. Do not wait to draw the lines after they have already been crossed. As parents, you need to be in agreement with your spouse about the boundaries as well as the consequences.

- a. How old must they be?
- b. Are you going to allow exclusive dating?
- c. Are there restrictions on where they can go?
- d. What time do they need to be home?
- e. What will the consequences be for broken rules?

5. Talk about the hard issues—Sometimes, just talking about sex within marriage is difficult; however, the topic of sex includes so much more. Do not gloss over some of the other tough issues. This cannot be a superficial discussion that you are in a hurry to get over with. Rather, it needs to be a regularly ongoing conversation that you have with your child. Make sure that your teen knows he/she can discuss any topic with you. If you are not a source they feel they can go to, they will go elsewhere. So, make sure that their information is bathed in a Biblical perspective. Some of the additional things you should discuss include:

- a. Date Rape or Acquaintance Rape**—Make sure that your teen understands that more often than not, rape happens by someone you know. This is not OK and even if this perpetrator is a relative, it needs to be reported (see below for additional information on this issue).
- b. Sexual Harassment**—Teach your teens how to respond to harassment as well as ways they could be making inappropriate comments or actions themselves. Teach your young men how to respect and value women with their actions and comments and teach your young women how to respond to inappropriate comments. In fact, your daughter or your son needs to know how to respond if they find themselves to be a victim as well as how to prevent themselves from being accused of making inappropriate sexually harassing statements.
- c. Social Media/Internet Relationships**—Talk openly about the dangers of establishing relationships with someone you have never met on the Internet. If your teen has access to the Internet, then there is a high probability that they have already had some contact on social media with a stranger. This is a very dangerous and risky behavior. Also, look at the statistics again regarding ways that teens are developing relationships. They are doing so by way of social media platforms. What happened to face-to-face communication? Our children today are missing out on one of the best ways to communicate – nonverbal communication. Many times our nonverbal body language will betray our words and you take this all away with a mere text message. Talk about this and make sure your teen understands that true authentic relationship building still happens best when it is face to face!
- d. Pornography**—The truth is that your teen does not need to actively search for pornography. Rather, porn will find them via the Internet. How will your teen respond when they see inappropriate images, videos, or messages that pop up? Discuss how they should respond. (See more on this later in this chapter).

GROUP ACTIVITY



1. What do you think about the suggestion of a “Purity Code”?
2. What would a “Purity Code” between parent and teen look like?
3. What elements would it include?
4. At what age would you do this with your child?

Use this template to get you started. Add or delete as you see necessary. Feel free to edit it until you are comfortable with it. Then, should you decide to use it, print it out on nice stationery before your father/son or mother/daughter date.

PURITY CODE

“For you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” 1 Corinthians 6:20 (NKJV)

In honor of God, my family, and my future spouse, I commit my life to sexual purity until marriage. I will keep my body and my thoughts pure as I trust God’s perfect plan for my life.

Date _____

Teen Signature _____

Parent Signature _____

DATE RAPE, ACQUAINTANCE RAPE, AND SEXUAL ABUSE

Date rape, or acquaintance rape as it’s sometimes called, is defined as “any nonconsensual sexual activity between two or more people who know each other.” However, since we are discussing teens aged 13-18 in this book, there is no such thing as “consensual sex.”

Any sexual contact with a child this age is a form of sexual abuse, it is a crime, and it needs to be reported to law enforcement.

Is date rape or acquaintance rape a problem amongst our teenagers? Among teenage victims, date rape is the most common category of sexual assault. Take a look at these facts: (TeenHelp, 2016)

- Teenagers account for 51% of all reported sexual abuse

“Teenagers account for 51% of all reported sexual abuse” (TeenHelp, 2016).

- An estimated 80% to 92% of all teen rape victims know their attackers
- 28% of male rape victims say they were first raped by the age of 10
- 42% of female rape victims were first raped before age 18
- 86% of female rape victims know their abuser as an intimate partner, family member, or acquaintance
- 52% of male rape victims report their perpetrator was an acquaintance
- A victim of one incident of teen sexual abuse is likely to experience further sexual abuse
- Teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 are 3.5 times more likely than the general public to be victims of sexual abuse
- 69% of the incidences of teen sexual abuse occur in a residence
- 23% of all sexual offenders are under the age of 18

Some researchers believe that the statistics above do not reveal the true story because date rape and acquaintance rape is underreported. Why is this? There are several reasons for this. First, because these crimes often occur in situations where drugs and alcohol are being used, many teen victims are reluctant to report date rape due to their own illegal drug use or underage drinking at the time they were assaulted. Only about 31% of teen sexual abuse incidents are reported. Also, keep in mind that the perpetrator could also be a relative or a family friend. This also creates reluctance to report. Social stigma, fear of retribution, and the trauma of not being believed stymie reports of teen sexual abuse. Additionally, the low probability of an arrest or substantial prison sentence for the perpetrator can cause reluctance on the part of teen sexual abuse victims to report. If this is accurate, that means that the incidence of actual teen sexual assault is far higher than the statistics reveal, which should be cause for alarm for us as parents to this reality.

Teen sexual abuse occurs when a teenager is abused in a way that can be considered sexual in nature. Teenage sexual abuse most commonly occurs when an adult in a position of power takes advantage of his or her authority to coerce a teen into sexual activity. However, teen sexual abuse may also occur between teenagers, often when one wants to display power over another. Even though the victim may be a teenager, if she or he is under the age of 18, it is considered child sexual abuse when the perpetrator is an adult of at least 18 years of age.

Sexual abuse does not need to involve physical contact or sexual intercourse between the perpetrator and the victim in order for it to be considered abuse. Exposing themselves, on the part of the perpetrator, is considered sexual abuse. Additionally, voyeurism, which is basically being a “peeping tom,” is considered teen sexual abuse. Some sexual abuse perpetrators set up video recorders so that they can record and watch others. This, too, is a form of teen sexual abuse. Child pornography is also considered non-physical sexual abuse. It is important to note that degrading sexual comments can also be considered a form of teen sexual harassment, if not teen sexual abuse.

Make sure that your child knows he/she can come to you. There is often a stigma around these topics and far too many teens suffer these abuses in silence because they feel they have no safe place to go. Be that safe place!

TEEN PREGNANCY AND SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE

While we promote no dating until after high school, “purity codes,” and frequent conversations to our teens about sexual abstinence before marriage, the reality is that premarital sex is still happening and the statistics of our teens engaging in risky sexual behaviors is startling. The Center for Disease Control reveals that many young people engage in sexual risk behaviors that can result in unintended health outcomes. For example, among U.S. high school students surveyed in 2015 (CDC, 2016):

- 41% had sexual intercourse
- 30% had sexual intercourse during the previous 3 months, and, of these
- 43% did not use a condom the last time they had sex
- 21% had drunk alcohol or used drugs before their last sexual intercourse
- Only 10% of sexually experienced students have ever been tested for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)

The data goes on to reveal that sexually risky behaviors place adolescents at risk for contracting HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and unintended pregnancy:

- Young people (ages 13—24) accounted for an estimated 22% of all new HIV diagnoses in the United States in 2014
- Among young people (ages 13—24) diagnosed with HIV in 2014, 80% were gay and bisexual males
- Half of the nearly 20 million new STDs reported each year were among young people, between the ages of 15 to 24
- Nearly 250,000 babies were born to teen girls aged 15 to 19 years in 2014

Clearly, the data above indicates a problem in society today. We must have honest conversations about sex with our children. We cannot leave these important discussions to others because we are embarrassed about the topic. Consider this: you may be the only one who is not talking to them about sex!

PORNOGRAPHY

Consider this powerful statement, “Teens are walking around with an X-rated theater in their pockets - i.e. a smartphone” (Fradd, 2016). Yes, pornographic images are as close to your teen as their smart phone. But, how big is the problem? How many teens are involved in pornography?

Look at these statistics regarding pornography and teens: (Fradd, 2016)

- 9 out of 10 boys and 6 out of 10 girls are exposed to pornography online before the age of 18
- The first exposure to pornography among boys is 12 years old, on average
- 83% of boys and 57% of girls are exposed to group sex online
- 69% of boys and 55% of girls are exposed to same-sex intercourse online
- 32% of boys and 18% of girls are exposed to bestiality online

- 15% of boys and 9% of girls have seen child pornography online
- 71% of teens have done something to hide their online activity from their parents
- 28% of 16 to 17-year-olds have unintentionally been exposed to pornography online
- 20% of 16-year-olds and 30% of 17-year-olds have received a sext (a texted photo with sexual content)
- 39% of boys and 23% of girls have seen sexual bondage online

“Internet pornography addiction can develop even more easily than a drug or alcohol addiction because it engages the most sensitive sense we have, our eyes; and it’s readily available in unlimited quantities” (Weber, 2014).

“Unfortunately, many of these teens are susceptible to developing addictions or compulsions to these images. The term ‘addict’ may seem severe. Most parents will initially minimize the problem, hoping their son or daughter is simply ‘experimenting.’ Today, however, Internet pornography is the fast ramp to sex addiction. Coupled with a greater moral decay in the culture and the fact that children’s minds are still in the process of developing to maturity, addiction can happen quicker than we parents like to think” (Jackson, 2004).

STEPS TO TAKE IF YOU FIND PORN

- 1. Love the teen; hate the sin**—As you implement each of the following steps in your fight to defeat this darkness in your teen’s life, you will need to constantly remind your son or daughter that your love has not and will not change. Your teen needs to know that, though you disagree with his or her actions, your ultimate desire is to help your child defeat this addiction and be restored to a pure life. Every day, communicate to your teen that the sin is the thing you hate, not your teen.
- 2. Take inventory and destroy**—No questions, no rationalizing - whatever it is, it must go! This sounds strong, but remember, this is war. You cannot expect to defeat the enemy if the enemy still has access to your home. Of course, this purging of your home will not eliminate access to all the porn in the world. But by removing the immediate sources, you will be sending a strong message to your teen that you are prepared to take extreme measures to break the bondage in which he or she is living.
- 3. Realize that a promise isn’t enough**—When your teen has been caught in the act, his or her first response may be to quickly apologize, plead for your forgiveness, and promise to never do it again. And yet, though your teen’s desire to repent may be genuine, it may only be a matter of time before the temptation, or addiction, wins him or her over again. For a teen struggling with porn, a promise to change isn’t enough. Porn is a powerful addiction.
- 4. Get professional help for your teen**—Addiction to pornography is a strong one that needs professional help and guidance. Seek immediate professional help from someone trained in this area of addiction.

As parents, we would like to think that our child would never be tempted. But, keep in mind if your child uses the Internet, porn will find your child. All it takes

is one click and there it is! A simple Google search to help with homework can show unexpected, but very tempting results. Little by little those images gain a powerful control over our teen's minds and they can easily become addicted. "Internet pornography addiction can develop even more easily than a drug or alcohol addiction because it engages the most sensitive sense we have, our eyes; and it's readily available in unlimited quantities" (Weber, 2014). Do not be deceived in thinking your child will never fall prey. Be vigilant and take immediate action if needed.

SEXTING AND OUR TEENS

Parents, we must face the reality that our teen could be not just a victim, but also a perpetrator of porn. Previously in this manual, we discussed brain development in teenagers. Remember, a teens' decision-making skills, judgment, and ideas about privacy are still being formed. It can be hard for them to grasp the permanent consequences of their impulsive interactions.

It is true that any sort of photo, video, or message that shows someone doing or saying something embarrassing or offensive can be damaging to a reputation. But this is especially true if there's nudity, sex, or sexually suggestive content involved. This type of sharing, known as "sexting," has the potential to haunt a teen for the rest of his or her life. What is sexting? Sexting (or "sex texting") is the sending or receiving of sexually explicit or sexually suggestive images, messages, or video via a cellphone or the Internet (Hirsch, 2014). Examples of sexting include sending and/or receiving:

- nude or nearly nude photos or "selfies"
- videos that show nudity, sex acts, or simulated sex
- text messages that propose sex or refer to sex acts

There is no denying the fact that teens today communicate more via technology than in face-to-face conversations. Most of the time this involves the harmless sharing of daily mundane information. All too often, however, what gets shared is a little too personal, and your teen's reputation could be permanently harmed. Even if the image, video, or text was only meant for one person, once it's been sent or posted online, it's out of your teen's control. It can be viewed by countless numbers of people, and it could be impossible to erase from the Internet, even after your teen thinks it has been deleted. Parents, it is vital that your teen understands that messages, pictures, or videos sent via the Internet or smartphones are never truly private or anonymous. In seconds, these images can be out there for the entire world to see. It's crucial to talk to your kids about how pictures, videos, emails, and text messages that seem temporary can permanently exist in cyberspace.

Teens may argue that communicating via Snapchat does not pose these dangers. After all, seconds after one receives the message or image it disappears. Countless teens have been duped into believing this, and only later find that the image they thought would self-destruct on Snapchat has been saved via screen shot and then shared with the world. In so doing, your teen now finds that they are in the position of both a victim and a predator. They are victim due to the fact that it was shared, but they may also be legally defined as a sexual predator if the sexual image was shared or sent by them to others and/or is of them.

If a compromising image of your teen goes public or gets sent to others, your teen could be at risk of humiliation, embarrassment, and public ridicule. Even worse, it could damage your teen's self-image and possibly lead to depression, serious mental health issues, and even suicide. And, as mentioned before, don't overlook the potential for legal consequences. In some states, a teen could face felony charges for texting explicit photos and he/she may even have to register as a sex offender.

And, if those are not reasons enough, questionable behavior online can haunt a college applicant or prospective employee years later. More and more colleges and employers check online profiles looking for indications of a candidate's suitability. Media presence can be both a positive or negative influence well into their adulthood and can aid in determining their future. It is our responsibility to help them understand that the choices they make today of what to post online will impact their future.

One photo sent from their phone can easily be forwarded to the recipient's friends, posted online, or printed and distributed. Even an image sent to a boyfriend or girlfriend could lead to serious consequences if someone else sees it or it's distributed after a break-up. Intense peer pressure from friends to take or send nude pictures will pale in comparison with the public humiliation that follows when the images land on Facebook or the cellphones of hundreds of other teens and even adults. My daughter, the high school teacher, has witnessed the despair of students who have had their "private" moments only intended for a significant other, end up in the hands of teachers and principals who then have to mete out consequences to all guilty parties who sent such images and videos.

So, how can you get through to your teen? The answer is to have open conversations about personal responsibility, personal boundaries, and how to resist peer pressure. Conversations like this should be ongoing not wait until an issue arises that demands you address it. Explain to your teen clearly and often, that once an image or message is sent, its final destination and viewers are no longer in their control and they cannot be unsent. It can, and likely will, spread beyond the person who was meant to see it. Make certain they understand that any consequence you as a parent deal out to them is minimal compared to a lifetime of negative consequences that may result from the choice to post one inappropriate image.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the following statement and discuss it with your group.

"Those who have charge of God's property in the souls and bodies of the children formed in His image should erect barriers against the sensual indulgence of the age, which is ruining the physical and moral health of thousands. If many of the crimes of this time were traced to their true cause, it would be seen that they are chargeable to the ignorance of fathers and mothers who are indifferent on this subject. Health and life itself are being sacrificed to this lamentable ignorance" (White, Child Guidance, p. 115).

“A GARDEN ENCLOSED, A SPRING SHUT UP, A FOUNTAIN SEALED”

Our scriptural principle for this chapter is taken from the book of Song of Solomon. The Song of Solomon is not usually a book in the Bible we read with our teenagers; however, perhaps it should be. What does this verse mean, “A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (Song of Solomon 4:12, NKJV)?

The verse is a statement from the groom of the bride of Solomon. Later in the book, it is her brothers who wondered if she was a “wall or a door” (Solomon 8:8, 9). What are they asking her? They are using the analogy of a wall, a seal, to represent her virginity and purity before their marriage was consummated. The door, on the other hand, describes a promiscuous life before marriage. In verse 10 she categorically responds, “I am a wall.” She makes it very clear that she had not had premarital sex but rather was a virgin on her wedding night.

Many parents do not discuss any sexual matters with their teens. And if they do, they speak of it as if it were “dirty.” This is one of the biggest mistakes we can make. We need to have open and honest conversations about this. But, we need to talk about the beauty of God’s gift of sex within the context of marriage. The reality is that our teens will not only be talking about sex but they will be doing it unless we provide guidance and are willing to talk to them.

WRAP UP

It is not about having “THE TALK” with your child regarding sex. It is about having ongoing regular conversations. It is about keeping the doors of communication open and letting your teen know they can talk to you about any concerns they have regarding sexual issues.

Talking to your teen about sexuality can be frightening and at times it’s hard to have the right words to say. But never underestimate the impact of such a conversation: You are the most important influence in your teens’ decision making. Parents, it is your responsibility to communicate God’s plan for sex within the context of marriage and your family values to your teen. We must begin talking to our children about sexuality and we must do so clearly and often.

Your teen is looking to you for guidance. They are bombarded with so many inappropriate messages and images every day. Do not fool yourself into thinking that your child is immune to some of these tough issues. Satan is attacking God’s design for sex and marriage. He is confusing them about what God has planned for marriage, relationships, and sex. You have the awesome privilege and opportunity to mold their minds into God’s image and redirect their thinking to align with His plans of intimacy.

TRY THIS AT HOME

1. Once again, this week we encourage you to add a Bible verse to your “Parenting Bible Promise Project.” Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you and you may specifically relate it to the topic of this chapter. Write the verse out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Repeat it every time you walk by it, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don’t

throw it away at the week's end. Save it to add to the other promises in your parenting promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!

2. Work on your "Purity Code" for your child this week. If you are married, discuss it with your spouse and be sure you both agree on anything you include. Discuss the importance of this and plan on the timing as to when you will present this to your teen.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Father, There are so many sexual temptations that invade my child's life every day. Media bombards them through music and images. Please help my child to see that sex is a beautiful gift that You have given us but that it is to be reserved for marriage. Help me to model a healthy and God-infused marriage to my child. And, help my child to make decisions based on Your word and to remember that their body is Your temple. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

REFERENCES

Barna, G. (2007). *Revolutionary Parenting*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Habenicht, D. (2014). "The Most Important thing you Need to Know about Parenting." *Ministry Magazine*. November 2014. p. 22.

Roy, L. (2010). "Tween Rebellion." MedBlogs Retrieved from <http://www.medwonders.com/medblogs/general/tween-rebellion-1481.htm>

Sorkin, L. (2014). "Accountability is the Key to Positive Parenting." Retrieved from: <http://www.kidpointz.com/parenting-articles/elementary-school/positive-discipline/view/accountability-key/index.html>

White, Ellen G. (1954). *Child Guidance*. Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



HELP! I'M A PARENT WEBSITE

Visit our parenting website to submit questions, find additional resources, follow a blog, sign up for a free parenting e-newsletter, and more: www.HelpImAParent.org



HELP! I'M A PARENT FACEBOOK PAGE

Like us on our Facebook page: "Help! I'm a Parent" New materials are posted on a regular basis.



8. FINANCIAL PITFALLS

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

“Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance.” Isaiah 55:2 (NKJV).

ICEBREAKER—GROUP DISCUSSION



1. REMEMBER

- Remember when you were a teenager. How did you learn about financial management?

2. REVIEW

- As you consider our spiritual principle for this chapter, what message do you glean from this verse?
- How can we help our teens to stop spending for “what does not satisfy”?

3. REFLECT

- Take a moment and reflect on the financial pitfalls that are in our teens’ path today.

What are they?

OVERVIEW

One of the most important skills we can instill in teenagers before they head to the “real world” is financial wisdom. Teens must understand how much things cost, how credit works, how to budget, how to save, and possess the ability to make wise decisions about their finances. All of these are concepts that we must intentionally teach our children. We cannot assume that they will learn this in school. It is to be taught in the home.

The financial pitfalls that surround our children are plentiful. Because teens are some of the biggest spenders, they are the audience that credit card companies target. Lessons learned in the home now will produce lifelong benefits.

As we consider the financial pitfalls that trap our teens, we will consider the following topics:

- Credit Cards Come a’Callin’
- Beware of ATMs
- Financial Independence

CREDIT CARDS COME A’CALLIN’

“Parents, can you guess what the most dangerous thing is that you can do with your credit card? The answer—Give it to your teenager to use! Remember, the laws state that you are responsible for whatever they charge. Are you willing to take this risk? And, perhaps the best question to consider is if handing over your

credit card to them is teaching them to be financially independent.

Over 80% of graduating college seniors have a credit card debt before they have a job! In fact, studies reveal that more young people age 20 to 24 file for bankruptcy than graduate from college. Thus, it is vital that we teach sound financial principles to our teens before they head off to college. The credit card marketers have done such a thorough job that having a credit card is seen as a rite of passage into adulthood. American teens view themselves as adults if they have a credit card, a cell phone, and a driver's license. Sadly, none of these "accomplishments" are in any way associated with real adulthood. Teaching your teen sound financial principles and practices will help them avoid becoming a part of these alarming statistics.

Credit cards teach kids the "buy now, pay later" mentality – and that can prove addictive.

Many parents are quick to argue that getting their child a credit card is a way to teach them financial responsibility. However, financial advisor Dave Ramsey (2016) reminds us that getting a credit card for your teenager is an excellent way to teach him or her to be financially irresponsible. That's why teens are now the number-one target of credit card companies. The credit card companies know that teens are some of the biggest spenders. It's too bad that they know something that parents tend to ignore. Ramsey goes on to warn parents that, "a teen with a credit card is only slightly less dangerous than one with a loaded gun."

Nearly a third of high school students reported having a credit card of their own or one co-signed by a parent. You are not teaching your 16-year-old child to spend responsibly when you give him or her your credit card or co-sign for them to get one on their own. By giving a teenager a credit card, the parent, the one with supposed credibility, introduces a financially harmful substance and endorses its use. Parents must instead teach the teenager to just say NO, particularly to impulse buying. Teach them delayed gratification and the importance of saving for something they desire rather than handing over the credit card to buy something they want right away.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Where do you stand on this issue of teens and credit cards? Do you think that giving your teen a credit card teaches financial responsibility or financial irresponsibility? Explain your thoughts.

DANGERS OF CREDIT CARDS IN THE HANDS OF TEENS (ADAPTED FROM RAY, 2016)

1. **Devalues work**—Teens often forget that they have to earn the money to pay the balance on the card. Ideally, teens should develop an understanding of money and the value of work before obtaining a credit card.
2. **Creates debt**—Credit cards teach kids the "buy now, pay later" mentality which can prove addictive. One of the reasons why credit card companies

target younger people is because they are less likely to pay on time, racking up significant interest. If you let your teen “charge away” on your account irresponsibly, chances are when they get old enough to get their own account, that irresponsible spending won’t stop. They will quickly find themselves deep in debt, and debt is hard to free oneself of. High credit accumulation makes it difficult to get loans, budget appropriately, land certain jobs, and rent or buy a place to live.

3. Blurs the line between want and need—Credit cards can blur, or even eliminate, the line between want and need. For teens, who are often impulsive by nature, the tendency to buy things that are totally unnecessary is significantly multiplied. If a teen sees that his friends have a new electronic gadget, he may determine that he “needs” it, too. Any item that catches the eye of a teen with a credit card is fair game.

BEWARE OF ATMS

ATMs can be a blessing because you have the opportunity to go and withdraw money you need, even after bank hours. This may help you as you have unplanned emergencies or need to make a sudden unplanned trip somewhere. However, it can also have very harmful side effects. Why?

- Teens do not keep accurate financial records. They withdraw funds and don’t always record the withdrawal. Therefore, they do not have a realistic account of exactly how much they have spent and how much they have left.
- A penny here and a penny there add up! Some teens make multiple trips to the ATM in one weekend. It is not that the withdrawals are large. In fact, they are relatively small. However, those small withdrawals that happen numerous times in a weekend can add up quickly.
- The ATM is like a money tree. It spits out money on demand. Mentally this is harmful thinking. If you have it, why not use it? The concept of saving is lost with the ease of withdrawing at the ATM. And again, it’s a dangerous thing because it’s easy to lose track of how much is being withdrawn.

“A teen with a credit card is only slightly less dangerous than one with a loaded gun” (Ramsey, 2016).

So, when should your child have an ATM card? An ATM card should be considered only after your teen has demonstrated financial responsibility by setting up their own savings or checking account, keeping accurate records, having and keeping a budget, and has shown he/she can use the debit card in a way that shows accountability.

Oh, and one other very important reminder—In the same way that we discourage giving a teen your credit card, do not make the mistake of being their personal ATM. Do not hand them money whenever they ask for it. That is teaching them that they do not have to work for what they want. Is that what you want them to learn?

GROUP DISCUSSION



Discuss this statement: A typical mistake that parents make is expecting children to make the leap from a childhood piggy bank to managing a credit card.

1. Do you agree with that? Explain your answer.
2. Make a list of some financial principles that parents need to intentionally teach their children?

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

You do your child a great disservice when you don't teach them how to be financially independent and then send them off to college where they will be forced to learn by trial and error. Don't rely on the school or anyone else to teach your children the essential financial lessons they need in life. This is your responsibility as a parent.

Reality is that even if you earn millions of dollars a year, if you don't know how to balance the debits and credits, you'll end up broke. Sometimes those with the most money have the greatest amount to lose. Where do you start and how can you be intentional about teaching your child to be responsible with his/her finances and resources?

A big mistake that parents typically make is expecting their child to make the leap from a childhood piggy bank to managing a credit card!

12 STEPS TO TEACHING FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

1. **Practicing good stewardship is God's plan**—Teach your child that everything we have has been given to us by God. We need to be good stewards of all of His gifts and we need to make decisions that would bring honor to Him. Remember that when teaching financial responsibility and budgeting we need to teach them to continue the practice of tithing and free will offerings.
2. **Model wise financial principles**—Watch your own spending habits. Avoid, “do as I say, not as I do.” Do you purchase whatever you want? Are you quick to pull out your credit card? Do you have a family budget? Do you return tithe and give offerings for the church? Your teen is watching and learning from you!
3. **Use life examples to discuss money**—Parents should look for opportunities to discuss money sense with their teens. Using real life to highlight possible lessons speaks more clearly to teens than a parental lecture. For example, if teens never know that parents must budget and sacrifice to manage the household, they will never learn how to make financial choices. While parents should not burden their teens with money worries, discussing money and financial decisions will prepare them for their future. For example:

- a. Make them part of the conversation about how much the basic package for cable television costs versus paying for the premium channels. Explain to them how you evaluate and balance the pros and cons and the costs before making a decision.
- b. When you receive a credit card offer in the mail, show it to your teen and discuss the pros and cons of credit cards. Let them see you throwing away these offers that fill our mailboxes on a regular basis.
- c. When you make a big purchase, such as a car or a home, explain the loan process and show how much everything costs. Be sure to discuss how much the added interest is to the original purchase price.

4. Encourage teens to work—Talk to your teen about applying for a part time job! In the real world, you must work to pay off your debts. Teach them the importance of having a strong work ethic. Help them develop a resume, apply for a job, and practice job interview skills.

5. Boost your teen's financial IQ—A typical mistake parents make is expecting children to make the leap from a childhood piggy bank to managing a credit card. Educate your teen regarding financial principles, setting up a budget, saving, dangers of credit, etc. Talk to them and answer their questions about financial principles. Don't expect them to know these on their own. You must be intentional about teaching them to have sound financial judgement.

6. Teach budgeting—All sound financial plans start with a workable budget. The fact that your teen most likely has a small amount of money to manage is a benefit, as any mistakes made will have minimal impact but will teach lifelong financial lessons. Review your teen's income sources, such as allowances, monetary gifts, or a part time job, as well as expenses, including spending money and savings. Have your child subtract the expenses from the income and discuss the results. If there is a surplus, can your child save more for something he or she really wants? And if there is a deficit, discuss ways of cutting expenses. Budgeting can be done on paper, on a computer spreadsheet, or use one of the many online tools available.

7. Long-term goal setting—It's important for our teens to have goals in life. Those goals should include financial goals. They can set aside money, a little at a time, to reach those goals. Goal setting also teaches delayed gratification and helps prevent those impulse purchases that our teens are tempted to make.

8. Set up a savings account in their name—Take your child to the bank and set up a savings and/or checking account in their name. Teach them the importance of saving and depositing all money earned, gifts received, etc. in their bank account and of keeping accurate records.

9. Learn debit before credit—After your child has shown financial responsibility in their checking and/or savings account, you may want to reward that responsible behavior and graduate them to a debit card. Perhaps this is the best alternative to credit cards. Teach your child how to use a debit card before they ever have a credit card. In today's society, the generally accepted age for a youth to begin carrying a card in their wallet is during high school - and that card should be a debit card. The use of a debit card will help them to learn the essentials of how to manage the money they have in the bank. In a sense, the use of a debit card teaches greater responsibility than using a credit card. Just

keep in mind, when you set up their account, to be certain to put a limit on it so that a minimum balance must be kept in the bank. By doing this they will be prevented from using the card unless adequate funds are available. The ATM will not dispense any more money than is available in the account, but they should not get to the point where they have depleted the account completely.

- 10. Interest adds up**—Teens need to be educated on how credit cards work and of the added interest for unpaid balances before the time comes for them to actually get a card. The implications of interest added each month to unpaid balances can be difficult for them to grasp. Teach them that if they don't pay the balance in full each month to their credit card, they incur a total cost far above the price they thought they were paying for an item. Remind them that if you only make minimum payments, the interest adds up, and what they end up paying for an item can quickly skyrocket. Also, remind them that just making the minimum payment will not cancel that debt for a long time to come. Credit card statements are now required to provide information about how long it would take and how much it would cost if only the minimum payment is made.
- 11. Plan ahead for college expenses**—A recent survey (Allstate, 2015) revealed a major disconnect between how parents and teens view paying for college. Surprising findings reveal that nearly half (48 percent) of teens think their parents will help pay for college. However, only 16 percent of parents report that they plan to pay for their child's post-secondary education. Planning ahead, and making informed decisions about whether the student's future earnings will support student debt repayment, will help avoid financial pitfalls. Talk with your teen now about his/her expectations for college expenses versus the reality. How will college be funded? (Scholarships, grants, loans, work, parent's contribution, etc.) Make sure they have a realistic picture and are not making false assumptions.
- 12. Teach giving**—Teach your teen the joy of giving and of the importance of incorporating charitable giving into their budget. Money isn't just about serving their own needs and wants. They will be blessed to see they have made a difference in the life of another person.

Teaching these principles will help your teen avoid the financial pitfalls and have financial freedom. An adult who was inculcated with the right money management skills in childhood has a better chance at avoiding poverty and escaping the grind of financial pressure. It is a gift that keeps on giving throughout their life.

GROUP DISCUSSION



It has been reported that financial issues are at the top of things that cause conflict in marriages and it is even listed among the top reasons for which couples divorce. How could teaching your teen to avoid the financial pitfalls now impact their marriage later on? Why would having these skills matter in marriage?

WRAP UP

When it comes to teaching kids about money, there is no doubt that it is one of the skills that can help them live better lives, enjoy greater freedom, exercise more control over how they spend their time, and afford a degree of comfort and security that otherwise may not exist. Passing on the knowledge of sound financial principles to your child is one of the best gifts you could give them.

As parents, you play a key role in shaping your child's values and attitudes about money management. Talk to your teen regularly about money so they develop good habits by the time they are in college and need to make these financial decisions on their own.

Teaching your teen sound financial principles will have life-long implications. The little lessons learned now will carry them through college, funding their first car, the purchase of their first home, etc. Avoiding the financial pitfalls now as a young person will help assure financial responsibility in adulthood.

When it comes to teaching kids about money, there is no doubt that it is one of the skills that can help them live better lives, enjoy greater freedom, exercise more control over how they spend their time, and afford a degree of comfort and security that otherwise may not exist. Passing on the knowledge of sound financial principles to your child is one of the best gifts you could give them.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the following statement and discuss it with your group.

"Let every youth and every child be taught, not merely to solve imaginary problems, but to keep an accurate account of his own income and outgoes. Let him learn the right use of money by using it. Whether supplied by their parents or by their own earnings, let boys and girls learn to select and purchase their own clothing, their books, and other necessities; and by keeping an account of their expenses, they will learn, as they could learn in no other way, the value and the use of money" (White, Child Guidance, p. 136).

TRY THIS AT HOME

1. Once again, this week we encourage you to add a Bible verse to your "Parenting Bible Promise Project." Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you and you may specifically relate it to the topic of this chapter. Write the verse out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Repeat it every time you walk by it, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don't throw it away at the week's end. Save it to add to the other promises in your parenting promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!

2. This may be a good time to take your teen to the bank and help them set up their own savings account. Also, you may want to sit down with them and help them set up a basic budget.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Father, practicing sound financial principles is about being a good steward. Everything that I have is because You have given it to me. Help me to be a good role model to my child and faithfully manage the gifts that you have blessed me with. Help me to remember that everything I have is a gift from You and help me to make good financial decisions. Give me the wisdom to teach my child the joy of giving. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

REFERENCES

- Allstate. (2015) "Teens and Personal Finance Survey."
Retrieved from <https://www.juniorachievement.org/documents/20009/20652/2015+Teens+and+Personal+Finance+Survey>
- Ramsey, D. (2016). "The Truth about Teens and Credit Cards."
Retrieved from <http://www.daveramsey.com/blog/the-truth-about-teens-and-credit-cards>
- Ray, L. (2016). "Disadvantages of Teenagers Having Credit Cards" The Nest.
Retrieved from: <http://budgeting.thenest.com/disadvantages-teenagers-having-credit-cards-26918.html>
- White, E. G. (1954). *Child guidance*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



HELP! I'M A PARENT WEBSITE

Visit our parenting website to submit questions, find additional resources, follow a blog, sign up for a free parenting e-newsletter, and more: **www.HelpImAParent.org**



HELP! I'M A PARENT FACEBOOK PAGE

Like us on our Facebook page: "Help! I'm a Parent"
New materials are posted on a regular basis.



9. BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NKJV).

ICEBREAKER—GROUP DISCUSSION



1. REMEMBER

- Remember when you were a teenager. How did you prepare for life beyond high school?

2. REVIEW

- As you consider our spiritual principle for this chapter, what message do you glean from this verse?
- How do we teach our teens to seek the future that God has already planned for them?

3. REFLECT

- Take a moment and reflect on your teen.
- What are they currently doing to prepare for their future?

OVERVIEW

Teenagers tend to deal with the present. They often don't look to see beyond the moment. As parents it is important to teach them that the decisions they make now will impact their life tomorrow. And, the groundwork they lay now will make a difference in their future.

Even though they may not want to admit it, part of their reluctance to talk about the future may be due to some real fears they have. The fears are typically centered on two issues.

- Losing the support of parents and family as they become more independent
- Taking on the responsibilities of adulthood

Assuring your teen of your unconditional love, talking through some of these issues, and laying plans for their future will help alleviate these fears. As we seek to prepare our teenager for life beyond high school, we will consider the following topics:

- Fear of the Future is Normal
- Teaching a Strong Work Ethic
- Career and College Choices
- Too Early to Consider a Life Partner?

As we lead our teen to consider life beyond the doors of our home, perhaps the best gift we can give them is to help them consider God's will for their life. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NKJV)

FEAR OF THE FUTURE IS NORMAL

In many ways it seems to be a contradiction to say that teens are somewhat fearful of the future. After all, isn't it independence that they want and desire? Studies report that 66% of teens are afraid of the future or life after graduation (PRWeb, 2016). They may not want to admit it but there is indeed an element of fear that is present.

"Studies report that 66% of teens are afraid of the future or life after graduation" (PRWeb, 2016).

It is important to assure your teen that it is not uncommon to fear the unknown. Even as adults we often feel anxiety over tomorrow. Imagine if you were a teen and your whole life ahead seemed to be a question mark. We can be excited about the future and yet fearful at the same time.

TIPS TO HELP TEENS DEAL WITH FEARS ABOUT THE FUTURE (ADAPTED FROM CYH, 2016)

- Listen to their worries, and treat their fears seriously. Don't make fun of them or treat them as unimportant, as this will stop them from telling you about them.
- Be available to give them information. Help them research things like career options, college choices, scholarships, etc. so that they can make wise decisions. Having the information gives one a sense of security.
- Help them gain confidence in their ability to make informed decisions.
- Encourage them when you witness them thinking for themselves and making wise decisions.
- Try not to always fix things for them or make all the decisions for them, but rather to listen and help them learn to think through the options and solve problems for themselves.
- While it may be normal for your teen to have some anxiety about the future, if you think that your teen's anxieties are becoming so unreal or so strong that they are interfering with daily life, then it may be necessary to set up an appointment with a counselor.

You can help your teen by honoring their fears and steering them on a positive path. Listen to them. Give them the opportunity to talk about their fears and assure them it is ok to feel anxiety but that you are there to help them. The things they are fearful about will help direct your conversations. Assure them that together you will discuss one thing at a time. You will be there to discuss concerns with them and to offer guidance when needed. Most important, remind them of the scripture verse for this lesson. God has a plan for them and He will work out the details as long as they trust in Him.

TEACHING A STRONG WORK ETHIC

As you prepare your teen for life beyond high school one of the best character traits that you can help instill is that of a strong work ethic. All too often we begin teaching this after our child has a job when, in reality, it should begin with the application and interview process. It actually starts before the job is even secured.

Your teen's first job can be a great teaching opportunity for them to learn the value of hard work and to show responsibility. However, they are still in school so you need to set appropriate boundaries. It's a good idea to agree ahead of time on clear guidelines to measure whether the number of work hours is appropriate in your child's life. Falling grades or missed commitments might be the indicator that something has to go from a teen's schedule. Part time during the school year may be appropriate, or perhaps you will need to allow for summer work only. Be clear as to what your guidelines are before the job hunting begins.

TEACHING WORK ETHIC BEGINS WITH THE APPLICATION AND INTERVIEW (JONES, 2016)

The first step toward employment, of course, is learning how to apply and interview for a job. Consider these tips to help your teen navigate the hiring process.

- Prescreen the boss. Visit the business. Watch and listen. How does management treat the employees? How do employees speak to each other? What values are represented? Teach your child to do their homework when considering possible work places.
- Teach the application basics. Let your teen know that neatness on an application is critical: It tells an employer that the applicant cares about his/her work. Teach your teen to use teachers, coaches, or youth leaders for references, not family and friends.
- Teach interview skills. Help your teen make a good impression with the five S's: stand, see (eye contact), smile, shake hands, and say the name of the interviewer. Your teen also needs to know the rules of the interview: Be on time. Don't bring friends or family. Have an adult approve your outfit. Turn off your phone. Speak clearly.
- Role-play. Prepare your teen with a practice interview. Ask: "Why do you want to work here? What are your strengths? What have you learned from other jobs, chores, or volunteering you've done?"

TEACHING INTERVIEW SKILLS: (JONES, 2016)

1. The five S's: stand, see (eye contact), smile, shake hands, and say the name of the interviewer.
2. Rules of the interview: Be on time. Don't bring friends or family. Have an adult approve your outfit. Turn off your phone. Speak clearly.

Many of the traits necessary for workplace success should begin in early childhood and be consistently reinforced during the teen years, including respect for authority, willingness to serve and work with others, and diligence in meeting responsibilities. Household chores are a great preparation tool.

TIPS TO TEACH YOUR TEEN AFTER THE JOB HAS BEEN SECURED (JONES, 2016)

- Dress appropriately. Be clean and modest in your attire.
- Review the employee handbook. Take personal responsibility for your quality of work and personal interactions.
- Be punctual and dependable. Tardiness and truancy are unacceptable.

- Be teachable. Pay attention and listen carefully. Think before you speak.
- Be honest and ethical. Never cheat your boss out of time or money.
- Follow instructions. Do as you're trained to do.
- Take initiative. Always look to see what needs to be done.
- Be courteous and respectful. Demonstrate good manners with customers, co-workers and management.
- Leave a good impression. The contacts you make on this job may be the very people you need to write a reference for college or a recommendation for the next job.

Workplace attitude will help define your teen's work ethic. In many ways, attitude is to be valued above actual skills. With the right attitude you show you are willing to work hard and learn any needed skills. A positive work attitude is priceless to employers.

You may not like to admit it but your own personal attitudes about work may have rubbed off on your teen. Do your children hear you complain about your job or boss? Do your actions show them that work is only a means to an end? Or, is it an opportunity to serve God and represent Him with the gifts He's given you? Parents can model a great example by following Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men." Remember, when it comes to our children, more is caught than is taught! Check your own worth ethic in the mirror to be sure it is the same you want reflected in your teen.

"Daily in my practice I see parents who have made the mistake of not taking the time and attention to teach their children to be workers and achievers. These kids have learned to settle for less rather than to face and challenge adversity, to become whiners rather than creative problem solvers, and to blame others for perceived slights and lack of success" (Peters, 2016).

GROUP DISCUSSION



Dr. Ruth Peters (2016) said,

"Daily in my practice I see parents who have made the mistake of not taking the time and attention to teach their children to be workers and achievers. These kids have learned to settle for less rather than to face and challenge adversity, to become whiners rather than creative problem solvers, and to blame others for perceived slights and lack of success"

Do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

CAREER AND COLLEGE CHOICES

They are still a baby! Yes, I know that your child is not yet out of the door for college, however, it is never too soon to begin to have those conversations and exploring options. Doing so will help alleviate stresses and anxiety as the time approaches. And, trust us, the day when they pack that suitcase and move in to their first apartment or in to the college dorm is just around the corner.

While they need to be focused on academic success, they also need to start praying about and exploring options for their future career.

PRACTICAL TIPS TO HELP YOUR TEEN WITH CAREER PLANNING

- 1. Pray with and for them**—Lead your teen to take his/her fears and concerns for the future to God in prayer. Remember our scriptural principle for this chapter? “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NKJV) God has a plan for them. Lead them to take these choices and decisions to Him in prayer and to seek His will.
- 2. Explore interests**—What excites your teen? What are they passionate about? Many high schoolers don't yet know what they want to do. Search for free online interest inventories and have your child take one. It will help to identify their top interests. The most rewarding careers are the ones that involve our passions.
- 3. Identify God-given gifts**—Helping your teen understand and think about what gifts God has given them is the first step in exploring careers. It's important to have conversations about this because if interests are matched with gifts that creates the best scenario for success.
- 4. Identify possible careers**—Once you've helped your teen identify interests and abilities, you can begin to explore possible careers that put those interests and talents to use. High School guidance counselors have tools that they use to link interests and skills with careers. Help your child make these contacts with individuals who may have the tools to assist them in this process.
- 5. Do your research**—After identifying possible occupations, you'll want to learn more about them. Talking directly to workers who are already in these fields can help you get information about what they do. Some schools have business liaisons or coordinators who help put students in touch with employers. These networking efforts are so valuable because they help your child to further solidify potential career choices. It may even be possible to shadow them on the job to see what their daily work is like.
- 6. Experience/Internships** - If job shadowing gives you a taste of what an occupation is like, imagine how helpful getting experience could be. Students can begin getting career-related experiences in high school through internships or temporary employment. Make sure your teen understands that school takes priority over other pursuits. It's a good idea to get experience while they are in high school but not at the expense of academic success. For now, school is their full-time job.
- 7. Clubs/Activities**—Your teen will also find numerous activities in high school that may spark a career interest. Examples include yearbook committee, science club, and debate team. By joining groups that involve community service and leadership opportunities, such as student government or honor societies, they can hone work-related skills or interests.

8. Encourage leadership opportunities—Teach your child that engaging in leadership opportunities will have great benefits - whether in extracurricular activities, at church, in the community, at school, or at a part-time job. Leadership helps develop skills in your child that will benefit them in their future careers and engaging in a leadership role shows future colleges that they are willing to commit time and energy to something they care about.

COLLEGE CHOICE

Once your child has identified possible career choices, they can then focus on college options. This decision can create a great deal of stress so it's important to guide your teen into making an informed decision and not one based on social pressure from classmates. Here are some things you will want to discuss with your child.

- **Spiritual climate**—How important is it to your family that your child attends a Christian college? This is an important consideration that will help guide your child's future in more areas than career choice. For example, being on a Christian campus will help in the probability that they will chose a life partner that has the same spiritual beliefs that they do. Therefore, do not minimize the importance of this factor.
- **Majors**—Does the college offer a degree in the chosen field? If your student knows what they want to study in college, this is a key factor.
- **Housing options**—What are the housing options on and off campus?
- **Distance/Location**—Does your child want to stay close to home, or are they willing to go far away? How does your child feel about schools located in big cities, the suburbs, or sparsely populated rural areas? And consider the climate; if you're in Florida, for example, would your child enjoy winters in Michigan?
- **Size**—Some Christian colleges have thousands of students. Some only have a few hundred. Do you prefer a smaller college campus or is that even a factor?
- **Admissions requirements**—Colleges vary greatly in their requirements for admission; some are very selective, taking only the top students, while others are more open and thus easier to get in. What are the steps you need to take in order to meet application requirements?
- **Cost, scholarships, and financial aid**—Parents are often most concerned about this factor. But keep in mind that families rarely pay a college's full "sticker price." Financial aid from the government, private sources, and the college may all be available. After your student has applied to colleges, your family will receive a financial-aid package from each school. This will give you a better idea of the financing options that are available.

While we do not want to put undue pressure on our teens, it is important that we begin to guide and direct their thinking about God's plan for their life. You may begin at an early age by helping to nurture the gifts and talents you see that God has given them. And, as they begin to get closer to their high school graduation, you will transition to career and college choices.

TOO EARLY TO CONSIDER A LIFE PARTNER?

We will be the first to acknowledge that ages 13-18 is far too young to be setting a wedding date. Remember, we do not recommend dating until after they finish high school. However, it is not too young to begin having important conversations with your teen and having them consider what plans God may have for them as it relates to a lifetime partner.

Do not place undue pressure on them to marry or date exclusively. Remember, the key principle here is to help them discover God's plan for their life. What if God's plan for them may be to remain single? It's not easy to live in a society where you are "expected" to have a significant other and they are constantly being bombarded by advertisements and media telling them they need to have someone in their life so they can become more "complete". We need to remind them every day that they ARE complete, if they are following God's will for their life. The words of the classic hymn, "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus" are ones we should repeat to our children:

*"Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of Earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace."*

If we remind them to turn their eyes and attention upon Jesus, then it will help them put things in the proper perspective. Far too many young people have made poor relationship decisions because they felt pressure from family, friends, and society to settle for a life partner when they were too immature to do so. We should instead be teaching them that God's timing is perfect and if it is God's will for them to marry then He will give them the desires of their heart (Psalms 37:4).

Remember the research regarding brain development that was discussed in a previous chapter? The choice of a life partner is one of the most important decisions your child will ever make and we make a terrible mistake by pushing them to make these decisions when they do not yet have the reasoning ability to make the best decision. There are, however, some important things that we should be focused on teaching our young people as they mature and prepare to head out of the door and on to college.

TIPS FOR PARENTS ON TEACHING OUR TEEN REGARDING A POSSIBLE FUTURE SPOUSE

- 1. Seek God's will**—This is one of the most important decisions they will ever make. As with all things, teach them to pray and seek God's will regarding this.
- 2. Seek God's timing**—Teach patience! Philippians 4:6-7 tells us: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." This is a verse that we should plant in our child's heart.
- 3. Be the right person first**—This is an old saying but it's still so very true. We must be the right person in order to attract the right person. It is important for teens to focus on being healthy in all areas of their life first: spiritually, emotionally, physically, financially, etc. All of these will impact future

relationships and health in these areas will maximize the possibility for a lifetime of happiness.

4. Sex is God's gift within the confines of marriage—We should have open and honest conversations with our teen about the gift of sex that God has given us. It is not something that we should be afraid to discuss. Trust us; your teen already has their own ideas about sex. So it's best if they have conversations that explain sex clearly from a Biblical perspective. And, as we have said before, if you aren't having conversations with them about this topic you are probably the only one who is not (see more about this in chapter 7).

The most important thing we can teach our child to do is to let God be in charge of all of their relationships. If God's will is for them to be married, then I believe He wants them to have the best marriage possible. They deserve someone who will appreciate them for who God made them to be, encourage them to grow spiritually, embrace all that God has for them, and cherish them as a precious gift from their Heavenly Father. They should be taught to seek God's will, be patient, and never settle for less than He has in store for them.

GROUP ACTIVITY



When was the last time you had a conversation with your child that focused on their future? Plan a date with your child this week and ask him/her these questions. Feel free to add your own questions to this list.

1. Where do you want to be in five years?
2. What career do you see yourself in?
3. Do you ever think about a life partner? What are some things you need to consider in choosing one?
4. What role will God play in your future decisions?
5. Add your own question here...

WRAP UP

As your teenager looks beyond high school to life ahead of them, they may have fears about their future. Talking through some of the issues they fear will help give them a sense of security. Having a plan can be very empowering. So, start early! Your teen is not too young to start having these conversations about their future.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the following statement and discuss it with your group.

“From the earliest years it is necessary to weave into the character principles of stern integrity, that the youth may reach the highest standard of manhood and womanhood. They should ever keep the fact before their eyes that they have been bought with a price and should glorify God in their bodies and spirits, which are His. The youth should seriously consider what shall be their purpose and lifework, and lay the foundation in such a way that their habits shall be free from all taint of corruption. If they would stand in a position where they shall influence others, they must be self-reliant” (White, Child Guidance, p. 157)

TRY THIS AT HOME

1. Once again, this week we encourage you to add a Bible verse to your “Parenting Bible Promise Project.” Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you and you may specifically relate it to the topic of this chapter. Write the verse out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Repeat it every time you walk by it, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don’t throw it away at the week’s end. Save it to add to the other promises in your parenting promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!
2. Plan quality time with your teen this week to do the Parent/Teen activity suggested above. Remember to feel free to personalize this.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Father, my child is at a time in life when they are faced with so many choices and decisions. These decisions are not minor ones. They will help define their future and perhaps even their eternal destiny. Lord, please grant them wisdom. Before they were born, You had plans for them. Help them to seek Your will for their life. Help them to see that You desire for them to live a life filled with happiness. Open doors for them that they need to step through and in the same manner, close doors that may harbor danger. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

REFERENCES

CYH – Child and Youth Help. (2016). "Fears and phobias - older children and teenagers" Retrieved from: <http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=141&id=2295>

Jones, J. (2016). "Work Ethic for Teens" Focus on the Family. Retrieved from: <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/teens/work-ethic-for-teens>

Peters, R. (2016) "7 Strategies to Build a Strong Work Ethic in Your Kid" LightSource. Retrieved from: <http://www.lightsource.com/devotionals/live-it/7-strategies-to-build-a-strong-work-ethic-in-your-kids-11675921.html>

PRWeb. (2016). "66% of Teenagers are Afraid of Life After Graduation per Latest StageofLife.com Teen Trends Report" Retrieved from:

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/teens-and-fear/2013/prweb10785755.htm>

White, E. G. (1954). *Child guidance*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



HELP! I'M A PARENT WEBSITE

Visit our parenting website to submit questions, find additional resources, follow a blog, sign up for a free parenting e-newsletter, and more: www.HelpImAParent.org



HELP! I'M A PARENT FACEBOOK PAGE

Like us on our Facebook page: "Help! I'm a Parent" New materials are posted on a regular basis.



10. A PRODIGAL TEEN

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.” Luke 15:20 (NKJV).

ICEBREAKER—GROUP DISCUSSION



1. REMEMBER

- Remember when you were a teenager. Did you ever turn your back on something your parents tried to instill in you?

2. REVIEW

- As you consider our spiritual principle for this chapter, what message do you glean from this verse?
- Describe the father in the story of the prodigal son.

3. REFLECT

- Take a moment and reflect on ways a parent can keep the door open, even after their prodigal son/daughter has walked out.

OVERVIEW

Most of us have read the story of the prodigal son since we were little. It is a beautiful bedtime story of a son's homecoming. But, have we stopped to consider it from the perspective of the father? Perhaps we have been so focused on the sins and actions of the wayward son that we have failed to see the father. Our eyes have been so quick to see the pig-pens, the loose living, and the poor choice of friends that we have lost sight of the father.

Walk with the father as he paces the floors day after day. Listen as he pleads and pours out his heart to the Lord to protect his son and keep him from evil. Watch with him as he strains his eyes to look across the fields for a glimpse of his son returning home. And run with him as he sprints to embrace his son coming home again. What are the parenting lessons that we may learn from this faithful father?

The reality is that there will be times when our children make decisions that break our heart and go against everything we have tried to instill in them. As we consider our prodigal teens we will look at the following topics:

- Lessons from a Prodigal Son
- Breaking a Parent's Heart
- Forgiveness is the Gospel-Glue
- Keeping the Door Open

LESSONS FROM A PRODIGAL SON

"The core meaning of the word prodigal is 'waste'. The famous prodigal son from Jesus' parable in Luke 15: 11-32 not only wasted the material possessions of his inheritance and much of his life, but he also did much worse. He wasted, through rebellion and foolishness, his precious relationship with his father" (Rainey, 2016). The father's heart was broken as was the relationship between him and his son. So much more than an inheritance was lost.

If you do a Google search, you will discover that there are many paintings that depict the parable of the prodigal son. It is interesting to see how the different artists depict the same story.

"While it is true that God will not force the will, yet through our intercessions that claim the blood of Christ, His spirit can overrule the forces of darkness and control events in such a way that the ones we are praying for will be helped to decide for right" (Morneau, 2001, p. 61).

GROUP ACTIVITY



Do a Google images search to find all of the paintings that depict the parable of the Prodigal Son. Notice the various elements of the story that each artist highlights. Which artist do you prefer, what is the name of the painting, and why is it your favorite?

1. Artist:

2. Name of painting:

3. Why did you choose this as your favorite painting?

It is also interesting to search for poems that retell the story. There are many, however, this particular poem is our personal favorite. Try reading this aloud without getting tongue-tied!

"Final Fixing of the Foolish Fugitive" (Taylor, n.d.)

*Feeling footloose, fancy-free and frisky,
this feather-brained fellow finagled his fond father into forking over his fortune.
Forthwith, he fled for foreign fields and frittered his farthings
feasting fabulously with fair-weather friends.
Finally, fleeced by those folly filled fellows and facing famine,
he found himself a feed flinger in a filthy farm lot.
He fain would have filled his frame with foraged food from fodder fragments.
"Foey!"*

*My father's flunkies fare far fancier," the frazzled fugitive fumed feverishly,
frankly facing fact.*

Frustrated from failure and filled with forebodings, he fled for his family.

Falling at his father's feet, he floundered forlornly.

"Father, I have flunked and fruitlessly forfeited further family favors . . ."

*But the faithful father, forestalling further flinching,
frantically flagged his flunkies to fetch forth the finest fatling and fix a feast.*

*But the fugitive's fault finding frater, faithfully farming his father's fields for
free,*

frowned at this fickle forgiveness of former falderal.

His fury flashed, but fussing was futile.

*His foresighted father figured, "Such filial fidelity is fine, but what forbids fervent
festivities? The fugitive is found! Unfurl the flags!*

*With fanfare flaring, let fun, frolic and frivolity flow freely,
former failures forgotten and folly forsaken.*

Forgiveness forms a firm foundation for future fortitude."

Were you able to read that all the way through without stumbling? Sometimes we need to look at the same old stories in new ways in order to see things that we may have missed all these years. While most of the story focuses on the actions of the prodigal, the verses that paint the picture of the father are perhaps the most precious.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY



- Read the story of the "Prodigal Son" again in any version of the Bible you chose, or perhaps in several different versions and translations (Luke 15).
- Look at the story through the eyes of the father.
- Underline or highlight each verse in the parable that has to do with the father.
- Make a list of all the parenting lessons you can find in the story.

Let's consider some of the implications this parable may have for parents. There are many lessons but here are the ones that stand out to us. Feel free to add any other lessons you may glean from the story.

1. Letting go—The father in the story knew it was time to let go. His son had made his decision and even though it broke the father's heart, the decision was his son's to make. As much as we do not like to focus on it, the time is coming when our son/daughter will make their own decisions. Yes, we will always be there to offer our guidance, encouragement, and support. But ultimately they will soon be out on their own and we will need to allow them to make their own decisions.

2. We are that prodigal son/daughter—It may be easy to see your child as a prodigal but have you ever considered the fact that you are also a prodigal? Acknowledge your own status as a “prodigal son.” It may be easy to become so wrapped up in this story that we forget each of us has also been a prodigal son or daughter. We have made mistakes and we have done things that have saddened our Father God. But He has never stopped loving us. Rather, He anticipated our homecoming and made preparations so that, like the father in the parable, He could welcome us home with all the best.

Solomon commented, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child” (Proverbs 22:15). That means every child has a bent toward foolishness, and in some children the foolishness sprouts and blooms into prodigal behavior.

3. Forgive—Extend forgiveness to your child in the same way that God has forgiven you!

4. Never stop praying—Never give up and never stop praying for your child. Your goal for your child is eternity and God is able

BREAKING A PARENT’S HEART

We always ask the question, “Why? Why do they do it?” While this list is not exhaustive, it gives some of the top reasons our teens go astray: (Adapted from Rainey, 2016).

- **Selfishness**—We are all self-centered by nature, but selfishness becomes an art form in the prodigal’s life. Teens are sometimes focused on what they want and they fail to see the long-term negative effects of their choices. Their underdeveloped brain adds to this.
- **Desire for control**—This issue is often linked to selfishness. During adolescence, young people naturally seek greater control over their lives. Selfishly, they may ask for much more control than they can handle. They want to exhibit their independence but they are not mature enough to handle it.
- **Parent/Teen relationship**—This is one we may not wish to admit. However, another factor behind prodigal behavior can be a poor relationship between one or both parents and the child. If, for whatever reason, the parents are not securely tethered to the child and are not relationally filling the child’s emotional tank, the child will seek replenishment from peers, who may be running on empty themselves. And, that leads us to the next issue.
- **Influence of peer group**—The values of these peers may be extremely hostile to what mom and dad believe, and the war for the child’s heart is on. Being surrounded by a negative peer group only aids in them making poor choices themselves.
- **Unknown**—Sometimes, however, there just seems to be no single identifiable cause for a child’s rebellion. And whether or not we can point to a particular reason, we can trust the Bible’s insight. Solomon commented, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child” (Proverbs 22:15). That means every child has a bent toward foolishness, and in some children the foolishness sprouts and blooms into prodigal behavior. In other words, we may not always be able to have the answers to our questions.

Our children will not always make the decisions that we would wish. The truth is that many times they will break your heart. But our love for them is not based on what they do or do not do. It is unconditional. So, what can we do when our parent hearts are breaking?

- **Build a unified front with your spouse**—If married, you need to be on the same page as your spouse regarding your child. You cannot be divided, so have conversations privately with each other before you talk with your teen. Also, don't forget to work on your marriage relationship. It's easy to let our children occupy 100% of our attention. Make sure you don't spend all your time together talking about the prodigal. Remember, the best gift you can give your child is a good marriage so remember to nurture your relationship with your spouse.
- **Assure your teen of your love**—Even when your child breaks your heart, you can still assure them of your love. You cannot tell them too often that they are a gift from God, that you are privileged to be their parent, and that you love them.
- **Explore the pain**—It's important that we calmly explain to our child the reason our heart is breaking. We cannot assume they know. Be clear and be specific but communicate with love.
- **Know the difference between helping and enabling**—We need to always be there to help our child but sometimes we enable irresponsible behavior. There is a difference between helping them and enabling them. Stop covering for your child and let them face the consequences of his/her actions. Parenting a prodigal often means practicing tough love.
- **Explain relationship between choices/consequences**—This book deals with parents of children ages 13 to 18. That means that you are still responsible for their discipline. If you clearly defined consequences and did so prior to them making the wrong choices, then be sure to follow through. Your teen must understand that any consequences are the direct results of the choices they made. Clearly explain this relationship between behavior and consequences.
- **Keep the door open**—Let your child know that even when they leave for college the door back home will remain open. Even if they turn to leave they need to know they can come back again. Too many young people never come home because they feel there is no home to return to. We need to remind them of this over and over again while they are still under our roof to hear it. (More about this later)
- **Seek help**—You must not attempt to deal with a prodigal alone. You need prayer and emotional support. You need spiritual wisdom. You need the prayers of leaders in your congregation. You may need to seek professional counseling as well. If your child is dangerously out of control or has run away, you may need to call the police. Don't let shame, pride, fear, or anything else keep you

Perhaps one of the greatest lessons in the parable of the prodigal son is the need to forgive our children. "If we are to keep our hearts connected to our children and keep their hearts connected to ours, we are going to need to forgive one another...Love and forgiveness are the gospel-glue that holds a family together" (Bettis, 2016, p. 119).

from getting help. “Where there is no guidance, the people fall, but in the abundance of counselors there is victory” (Proverbs 11:14).

GROUP DISCUSSION



- Do you think there may be times when we need to practice “tough love”?
- Can you think of a situation when your child gets to be an adult that you may have to tell them that they are not welcome?
- Is there a difference between telling your child that they are not welcome in your home and telling them that their behavior is not welcome in your home?
- Does making that difference clear matter?

FORGIVENESS IS THE GOSPEL-GLUE

Perhaps one of the greatest lessons in this parable is the need of parents to forgive their children. “If we are to keep our hearts connected to our children and keep their hearts connected to ours, we are going to need to forgive one another...Love and forgiveness are the gospel-glue that holds a family together” (Bettis, 2016, p. 119).

This may seem contrary to our human nature. They messed up! They are the ones that broke our hearts. Don’t we have a right to feel betrayed and angry? Scripture reminds us: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32) The truth is that healing our broken hearts starts with forgiving.

“God puts us into families to learn the grace of forgiveness. Some of our family’s sweetest times of fellowship have come after acknowledging our sin and humbly asking for forgiveness” (Bettis, 2016, p. 126). Our children need to hear us asking for forgiveness when needed and they need to witness us extending the gift of forgiveness to them and others who have hurt us. Forgiveness heals broken relationships.

We can all come up with a long list of skills we teach our children over their lifetime but sometimes we forget that forgiveness needs to be a skill that tops the list. “God forbid that we teach them how to drive but not how to forgive” (Bettis, 2016, p. 122).

The prodigal son in the story must have witnessed his father extending forgiveness within the family countless times. He knew he could trust that his dad’s arms would be open to him. He took the risk to come home again because that picture of a forgiving parent was already ingrained in his memory. If your teen has the knowledge that you are a forgiving parent, they may be more inclined to confess their sins, ask for forgiveness, and come home again.

The knowledge that our children can pursue forgiveness and reconciliation from us also makes them more inclined to restore the broken relationship with Jesus Christ.

Teaching our child to forgive as well as to seek forgiveness is our responsibility as parents and it is a great gift to give them. We can all come up with a long list of skills we teach our children over their lifetime but sometimes we forget that forgiveness needs to top that list. "God forbid that we teach them how to drive but not how to forgive" (Bettis, 2016, p. 122). Make sure that you are teaching your children the grace of forgiveness!!

GROUP DISCUSSION



How do we teach our children the "grace of forgiveness?" List specific ways.

KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN

Remember the father in our Bible story? Do you think he let one day go by without hoping and praying it would be the day when his son returned? Do you think that when his son walked out that day that the father closed the door behind him? No, we can see that father, day by day, keeping watch on the path that led to his front door. And, that door was always open!

How many of you are waiting for a child to return to you and your home, back to a relationship that may have been severed long ago? You think back over the long months and years. It's lost time that cannot be regained. Yet you haven't lost hope. You wait for a letter, an e-mail, a call, the doorbell to ring, or to hear footsteps on the path to your house. You pray that someday it will happen and you never give up. A day doesn't go by that you don't think about your child.

This parable shows the deep love of a father for his lost son. Can you hear him praying for his son every night? I can imagine him praying each day for his son's return, requesting God to guard him from harm, asking God to help the son and watch over him, even when the son's behavior didn't honor God.

From a very early age, that father must have instilled in his son his unconditional love. Yes, that son knew he could go home again. He knew that his father loved him and he knew the door never closed behind him. It is important NOW to remind your teenage son/daughter that the door will never be locked. NOW is the time to plant the seeds for them to know and remember that they can come home again.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Consider this statement:

"The ultimate role of parenting is to get out of the role of parenting."

Do you agree with this? If your child is a prodigal should you get out of the role of parenting? Explain your thoughts.

WRAP UP

Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from this parable is to never give up on your child. Never stop praying for them. And, as much as you love them, God loves them even more. Consider these encouraging words, “While it is true that God will not force the will, yet through our intercessions that claim the blood of Christ, His spirit can overrule the forces of darkness and control events in such a way that the ones we are praying for will be helped to decide for right” (Morneau, 2001, p. 61).

The truth is that God loves our children even more than we do and He longs to save them. We can trust Him with their care.

GROUP DISCUSSION



Read the following statement and discuss it with your group.

“Parents, use every spiritual sinew and muscle in the effort to save your little flock. The powers of hell will unite for its destruction, but God will lift up for you a standard against the enemy. Pray much more than you do” (White, Child Guidance, p. 478).

TRY THIS AT HOME

1. Once again, this week we encourage you to add a Bible verse to your “Parenting Bible Promise Project.” Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you and you may specifically relate it to the topic of this chapter. Write the verse out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home throughout this week. Repeat it every time you walk by it, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don’t throw it away at the week’s end. Save it to add to the other promises in your parenting promise box as these are valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God!
2. Read the entire story of the prodigal son in the Bible this week. Make a list of all the parenting principles you learn from it. You may use the template above.
3. Do a Google image search for all of the paintings that depict the parable of the Prodigal Son. Notice the different aspects of the story that the various artists highlight. Compare and contrast them and select your favorite one.

A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Father, my child may not always make the decisions that I would for them. And, they may not always follow Your plan for their life. But, I know that You love them unconditionally and I know that You shed Your blood for them. Help me to reflect Your love to them. Help me to let them know they can always come home. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

REFERENCES

Bettis, C. (2016). *The disciple making parent* Diamond Publishing.

Morneau, R. (2001). *The Incredible Power of Prayer*. Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Rainey, D. (2016). "Loving the Prodigal Child" *Family Life*. Retrieved from: <http://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/parenting/challenges/anger-and-rebellion/loving-the-prodigal-child>

Taylor, W.O. (n.d.). "Final Fixing of the Foolish Fugitive" *Nurturing Faith*. Retrieved from: <https://baptiststoday.org/fable-fashioner-found/>

White, E. G. (1954). *Child guidance*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



HELP! I'M A PARENT WEBSITE

Visit our parenting website to submit questions, find additional resources, follow a blog, sign up for a free parenting e-newsletter, and more: www.HelpImAParent.org



HELP! I'M A PARENT FACEBOOK PAGE

Like us on our Facebook page: "Help! I'm a Parent" New materials are posted on a regular basis.

A FINAL WORD FROM THE AUTHORS

We have come to the end of this guide but certainly not to an end of your parenting journey. It has been our desire that this series of parenting guides would grow with your child and would travel with you on your parenting journey. Each book has been written to address the challenges expressed by parents who have children of the corresponding age.

In the first edition of this three-part series, “Help! I’m a Parent: Christian parenting in the Real World,” we concentrated on parenting children from birth to seven years of age, the foundational ages in the life of a child. In the second edition we focused on parenting children through the pre-teen transitional years, ages eight to twelve.

We conducted a third survey in North America and parents, again, told us what they needed to know to guide their children through the teenage years - ages 13 to 18. This is the book that you now hold in your hands.

If you don’t have the first two installments of this series, you may obtain them at www.adventsource.org. Remember that you can also receive daily encouragement as a parent by visiting our Facebook page and group: “Help, I’m a Parent.” We also post additional resources and information on our website, www.helpimaparent.org. Visit it regularly to continue to receive up to date research, information, and resources.

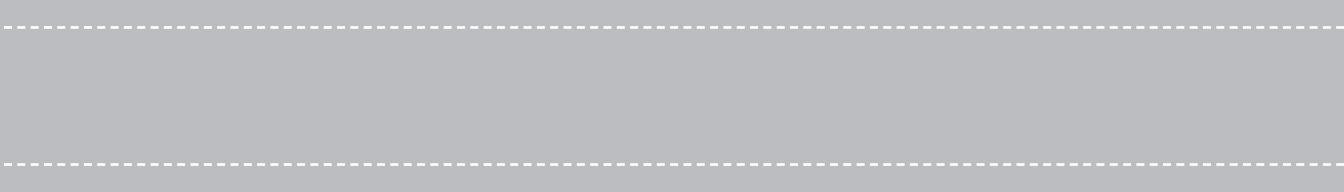
Parenting is a great adventure and a wonderful journey. What a joy and privilege we have been given, to be God’s stewards of our children’s lives! At the same time, what an awesome responsibility! We can have the assurance that we’re not alone in this lifelong task. God is with us and walks beside us, all along the way. Commit yourself and your children to Him, and remember that “the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6, NET)

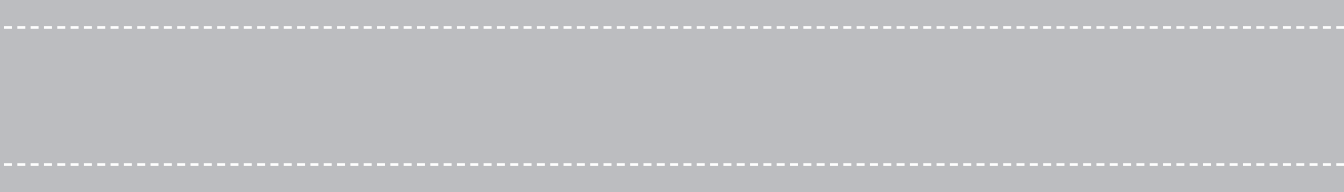
May God continue to bless you and guide you until He completes His work of shaping you and your children into full disciples of Jesus Christ.

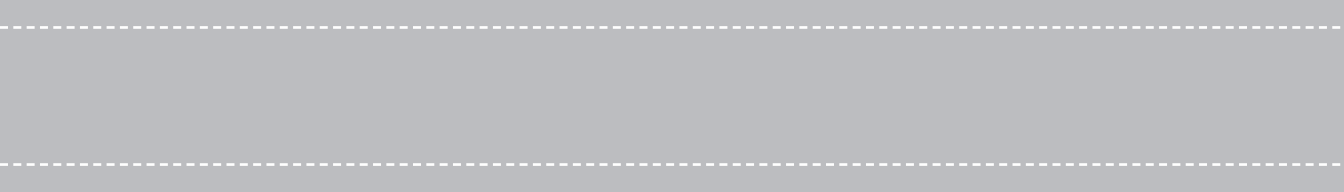
Yours because of Him,

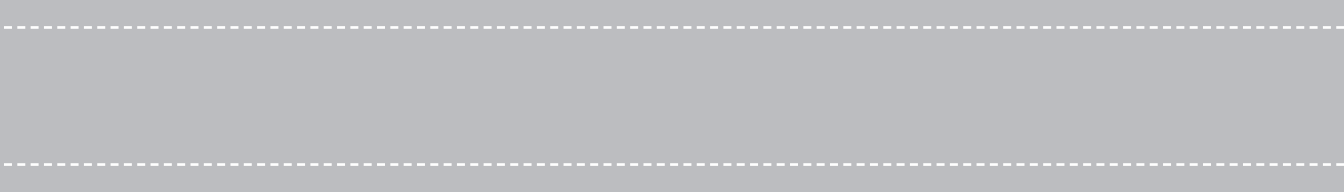
Drs. Claudio and Pamela Consuegra











In a national survey of the state of families in America, parents reportedly believe that raising children today is more complicated than it used to be. Along with that, most perceived that the quality of American family life was declining. In addition, 55% of the parents surveyed expressed a concern that they were not doing a very good job of parenting.

In essence, the study concluded that, “for today’s mothers and fathers, there is no clear map that charts the path for nurturing the next generation of adults.”

We bring you good news. There is a map! The map that charts the path of parenting for us is the Word of God. Scripture’s principles for parenting are timeless.

Help! I’m a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World will inspire and encourage parents, grandparents, and caregivers on your journey as disciple-makers of your children. It addresses common challenges experienced by parents of children from ages 13 to 18. Topics include disconnecting in order to connect, teen mental health, fostering independence, and more. This resource is ideal for use individually, as a couple, or in a group meeting in the home, church, or at a local church school.

Journey with authors Claudio and Pamela Consuegra as they explore the God-given role of parenting. You will be motivated to take up this exciting challenge and experience the blessings of parenthood.

» For more parenting resources visit www.HelpImAParent.org.



Adventist *Family* Ministries
NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

AdventSource

ISBN: 978-1-62909-355-0



9 781629 093550