
Dealing with teenagers

The teenage years in most families are usually filled with much turmoil. The battle that goes on between teens and their parents can be extremely intense and discouraging at times. Both parent and teen wonder to themselves, What is happening to our family? Why is there so much conflict? Will our relationship survive these final years together? Your priority must be to attempt to understand what your teen is thinking and what you can practically do to keep the conflicts to a minimum.

I. The characteristics of a teenager

- a. Teens are maturing intellectually and are beginning to think and reason through issues independent of parental guidance. The decisions they are making are new territory for them and this creates anxiety, confusion, and double-mindedness at times.
- b. They are striving for independence from you in all areas of their life (Luke 15:12,13). This is the natural maturing process at work, whereby they are seeking their own identity. They realize they are growing up.
- c. Teens are maturing physically which brings on sexual desires and the attraction for the opposite sex. These thoughts and desires are is very new for them and they struggle with how to address these issues.
- d. They are beginning to question the basis and reality of their faith. Does God really exist? Is Christianity real? Do I believe what my parents believe? These questions bring more confusion.
- e. Teens are also not as teachable as they were in earlier years because of their desire for independence from you and their desire to think for themselves. This adds further struggle to the relationship between parent and teen.
- f. Most teenagers are very impatient and self-willed. Remember the request of the prodigal son: "Give me my portion of the goods" (Luke 15:12,13). When you add all these ingredients together you have the very real possibility of an explosive relationship between you and your teen.

II. What are teens looking for from parents?

- a. They want to be treated as adults. They want you to acknowledge that they aren't "just kids" anymore.
- b. They are looking for their own independence and identity. This is why they try on a certain behavior one day and another the next. They are trying to see what works for them and what doesn't. They will even try on sinful behavior just to see if it is really as bad as everyone tells them. This is what the prodigal son did (Luke 15:13). You must verbally assure your teens that life and all its decisions are now in their power. The decisions they make; they will have to live with. This communicates that you acknowledge their independence and freedom to choose. Let them also know you are there to give your counsel if they want it.
- c. They need love, forgiveness, and your support when they fail (Luke 15:20-24). As a parent this is what you need when you fail, and so do they. If they don't find this at home they will go looking for it in the world. Jesus even acknowledged that the world loves its own (John 15:19). I assure you, the world will love and accept your teen.
- d. They are looking for a counselor, not a dictator. They bounce back and forth from desiring to be independent to questioning if they really know what to do. Then they come and ask for help. Be there to listen and gently counsel. Don't give long lectures. Give short encouragement's and ideas for them to consider, while encouraging them to make up their own minds over the issue. I call this the 30 second lecture!

III. Why do teenagers rebel?

- a. Teenagers are sinners, and they sometimes handle their confusion and desire for independence in the wrong way.
- b. Parents are sinners too. They usually forget what it was like to be a teenager. When parents don't understand what is happening to their teen, they usually take personal every attempt at independence, and the battle only increases.

IV. Errors in disciplining teenagers

- a. Resorting to the rod instead of reason (Isaiah 1:18).
- b. Using the external pressures of anger, yelling, ultimatums or manipulation (James 1:20).

- c. Withdrawing your love, friendship, or communication to force them to change (Absalom).
- d. Failing to acknowledge your fault when you have been too extreme or have exploded in anger.

V. Methods to use in disciplining

- a. Verbal reproof and reason (Proverbs 17:10) (Proverbs 15:32) (Isaiah 1:18).
- b. Loss of privileges or restriction (Jeremiah 5:25).
- c. Let the natural consequences of their actions be their discipline. Example: If they are given detention for tardiness at school, don't give them more discipline at home (Luke 15:11-21). Also see Part 3 of this series.
- d. Restitution (Luke 19:8). See also Part 3 of this series.

VI. Methods for teaching and devotions

- a. Use the same methods as described in Part 3 of this series. You must begin teaching them on a more adult level.
- b. Try The One Year Book of Family Devotions, Tyndale Pub. or Youth Walk by Walk Through the Bible.
- c. Use every spontaneous question as an opportunity to explain God's Word and His ways.
- d. Read through a few proverbs from the Living Bible at breakfast.
- e. Your example in your devotions, church attendance, attitude at home is the most important instruction you can give. They are watching what you do in comparison with what you say (1 Timothy 4:12).

VII. How should you deal with a rebellious teenager?

- a. Stop contention before it starts. Avoid angry confrontations that only drive you further apart (Proverbs 17:14; Proverbs 20:3). Refuse to get into a shouting match with them. Remember, the wrath of man will never work the righteousness of God (James 1:20). In addition, you will say things that you will regret later. Don't say to them in anger, "I can hardly wait until you're gone."
- b. Listen to their concerns. Keep the communication lines open so you won't become isolated from each other (James 1:19).
- c. Don't give long lectures. It is better to give short encouragements or reproofs (30 second lectures). If you don't keep these short, your teens think you are trying to control them. They see your lectures as you treating them "like a baby".
- d. If there have been any conflicts between you and your teen be sure to confess any fault you have had in the past or present. Ask their forgiveness. This causes reconciliation to occur and also causes them to respect you (James 5:16; Matthew 7:5). If you refuse to reconcile and ask their forgiveness, these unreconciled issues will drive you further apart and only gives them an excuse to further rebellion. Unreconciled issues are usually a major cause of continued conflict.
- e. Remember, your teens are testing the boundaries. Be sure that you have clearly established and communicated your limits to them. Constantly re-evaluate on a regular basis to see if you are being too strict, too loose, or overprotective. Overprotection is not letting them do things only because of your fears. Overprotection will hinder their growth to maturity. Sometimes you have to let them fail. It's like not letting a baby walk when he or she is ready, only because you're afraid they'll fall.
- f. Try to say 'yes' to their requests as often as possible. Don't sweat the little stuff. There are plenty of important issues you will have to say no to.
- g. Allow them to make as many decisions as possible over their own lives. Pressure from you only causes them to rebel (Romans 14:5). Allow them to choose their own styles and tastes in clothes and hobbies when these are not in conflict with God's Word.
- h. Stay as involved with them as much as you can. Spend time with them on a one-on-one basis. This communicates that you consider them important and special. This also fosters your time together around relationship, not rules. Remember that rules without a relationship will always equal rebellion. To disciple, influence, or lead others you must be with them. This was the plan of Jesus (Mark 1:17).
- i. Praise their wise and mature decisions. This communicates your acknowledgment of their independence and growing maturity (Psalm 72:15).
- j. When your teens threaten to rebel and say they are going to do whatever they please, call their bluff. Explain to them that this is not a mature attitude, and you can be just as tough in your resolve. God can be just as stubborn as anyone (Luke 20:8; John 13:8; Psalm 18:25-26). Resist the rebellion every way you can without getting into a physical confrontation. Explain to them that the longer they rebel the more restriction they will get. If you don't call their bluff here, ultimately, you will lose total control. However, you also need to always stop during these times to re-evaluate where or if you need to release a little more freedom to them.

- k. When things calm down reconfirm your love to them. Put your arm around them or hug them. Demonstrate your love (1 John 3:18).
- l. Don't verbally compare or pit your teenagers one against another. "Why can't you be more like your brother?" This only infuriates a teen to more anger and rebellion (2 Corinthians 10:12). Children always think parents love one child more than another. This statement only confirms their suspicions and will cause additional sibling rivalry and jealousy. Remember the major mistake Jacob made in showing favoritism to Joseph (Genesis 37).
- m. Treat your teen with respect. Speak respectfully, knock before entering their room, and don't embarrass them in front of others (Matthew 7:12).
- n. Ask God for the love, patience, and endurance you need to get through this period in their lives. It will pass. In the meantime, you want your relationship to survive. Remember, anyone can love an obedient teenager that is demonstrating love and respect. The test is to love the rebellious or prodigal teen. All of us were rebellious once and our heavenly Father patiently loved and reached out to us. We must do the same.

VIII. Will teens rebel even after you have loved, trained, and disciplined them correctly?

- a. YES. The children of Israel were loved, nurtured, and disciplined correctly by God and they still rebelled: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me" (Isaiah 1:2). Their rebellion was the result of their self-will and sinful nature. This is also why some teens from godly homes rebel too.
- b. Isn't there a guarantee in Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it?" This verse must be taken in the context of the rest of the Scripture, which also teaches the free will of man. Your children are not robots. God won't force them to be robots, they must choose to follow Christ themselves. The entire book of Proverbs encourages young people to heed the instruction of their father and to choose what is right. Scripture also acknowledges that some will refuse to do this (Proverbs 10:1,8,17; Proverbs 13:1; Proverbs 17:21). Note the responsibility that is placed on the children in these verses, not the parents. Proverbs 22:6 has been greatly misinterpreted even as another passage in the New Testament, Acts 16:31. The promise to the jailer was not that if he believed, then his whole family would automatically be saved too. The promise was that his whole family could be saved in the same manner that he was, through faith. Peter taught the same: "The promise is to you and your children, and to all who are afar off" (Acts 2:38,39).
- c. The kings of Israel reveal a multitude of examples which reveal the individual choice of children contrary to their parent's lifestyle. It's interesting that the children of many ungodly kings chose to follow the Lord, and many of the children of godly ones rejected Him. Examples: The ungodly King Amon had a godly son, King Josiah (2 Chronicles 33:21-34:2). The ungodly King Ahaz had a godly son, King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 28:1-4; 29:1,2). The opposite is also true. The godly King Jotham produced the ungodly King Ahaz (2 Chronicles 27:1-28:4). Godly King Hezekiah brought forth the ungodly Manasseh (2 Chronicles 29-33). However, godly kings also raised godly sons (Uzziah & Jotham) (2 Chronicles 26,27), and ungodly kings raised ungodly sons (Jehoram & Ahaziah) (2 Chronicles 21,22). What do these examples teach you? It reveals that the example, training, and influence of the parent are important, but in the end, the children must choose for themselves whether or not they will follow the Lord. The Scripture acknowledges this concept of personal decision-making on the part of children. In Ezekiel 18:4-14 the Scripture assumes that the godly will bear ungodly children. The bottom line here is do your best and then commit your children to the Lord. Pray for them continually and trust God to work in their lives as He has in yours.
- d. The bottom line: Why does Jesus even tell the story of the Prodigal Son if this doesn't happen? The story reveals a rebellious child is a very common occurrence that even happened in Jesus day. Jesus only used stories that all could relate to and understand.

IX. How do you let your teens go?

- a. Recognize this is the biblical goal of your parenting. You must let them go. It's the oldest principle in the book. Children are meant to leave the home and ultimately cleave to their spouse (Genesis 2:24). Your job is to prepare them to leave. If you refuse to prepare and allow them to mature and ultimately leave, you're fighting against God's plan.
- b. Verbalize to your teens your intention is to gradually give them more and more freedom and responsibility as they grow older each year. You must repeat this statement over and over, especially when they are striving for more freedom on a daily basis. This at least satisfies them intellectually that

they won't be a child forever. Then set up practical goals for them to take on each year. Ask them to show you they have the maturity to handle the increased freedom. Have them wash their own clothes, take care of the family car, get their own checking account. Ask them to regularly check in with you for accountability.

- c. Recognize that you're not called to be the lord of their lives, God is. They have not been given to you so they could live out your unfulfilled desires or expectations. Don't set goals for them and then try to manipulate them to fulfill your will. You must help them discern their gifts, talents, and abilities. Help your teens to see what they're good at and encourage them in that direction. Enable them to see where they can make a difference in this world (1 Timothy 4:14-15).
- d. Be supportive of their decisions, remembering it's their life. If they make bad choices this is part of the learning process. The Prodigal Son had to learn for himself that he had made the wrong decision. He also realized by himself that he was unsatisfied. No one came and told him these things (Luke 15:14-17). When he came to the understanding of what he had done, he then made the correct decision to return home (Luke 15:18,19). This is the maturing process.
- e. When they ask for advice, always give it with the postscript, "But, this is your decision" (Romans 14:5). Whether or not they take the advice is their choice. Remind them they have to live with their choices, so make good ones.
- f. When your teens want you to make the decision for them, refuse. Explain to them that if you did decide for them, you would only be hindering them.
- g. Give them the decision-making tools and then step back and pray for them. Explain to them how you make decisions using the wisdom of the Word of God.
- h. Don't bail them out of the consequences of their bad decisions. Again, the father didn't say to the Prodigal Son, "Here, I will replace your lost inheritance." The natural consequences are one of God's best tools to teach and mature your teenager. Don't take this tool out of God's hand. Remember how the natural consequences of losing all, worked on the Prodigal Son and started the process of his return (Luke 15:14).
- i. Be loving and gracious when your teenager or young adult comes home after failure of any kind. Don't say, "I told you so!" or "I hope you learned your lesson!" Make sure love is the first thing they sense. You can discuss the issues later. Concentrate on what they have learned from the failure, rather than condemning them for their foolish decision (Luke 6:37; Ephesians 4:32).

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