

Do you feel locked out  
of your teen's life and want back in?  
Are you getting blown about  
or hurt by turbulence  
in your relationship with your teen?



Want to make a difference in his  
or her life and yours?  
*Parenteering* addresses these issues and more.  
Practical keys and help from Heaven  
on parenting teens!



**A Keys to  
Parenting**  
book

# Parenting



HEAVEN'S ANSWERS  
TO QUESTIONS PARENTS ASK  
ABOUT THEIR TEENS

*A Keys to Parenting book*

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## INTRODUCTION

Through the ages, parents have shared a common bond: the great love and concern they have for their children. They want to see them learn, grow and be well cared for. They want them to be healthy, happy and successful. Yet so often, life's problems have blocked the way or made the task of parenting more difficult. Parents have had to learn how to cope with every difficulty, both inside and outside the home, from devastating losses and hardships to breakdowns in their marriages. They had to try to find solutions to each new set of problems, and survive and help their children make it. Often in their most desperate hour of need, the darkest hour, when things seemed totally impossible, when there seemed to be no solution and no way out, many looked to Heaven for help. They looked to God for answers when they had no answers. And they were not disappointed. He was there—ready, waiting, reaching out for them with His loving arms, embracing them as their own Heavenly Father, watching, protecting, always ready to answer, always ready to help.

In these difficult times in which we live, He is *still* there, He is *still* waiting. Many parents are discovering that they, too, can take their most difficult questions directly to God. They can appeal to Heaven for answers. They can find solutions, right now. It may seem pretty "way out there," almost ridiculous to some, but amazing things are happening! People are calling out to God and are discovering that He is

close at hand and always ready to answer our questions, because of His great love for us, and His desire to see us happy.

So if you feel like you're in the dark, weighed down by heavy burdens, and no one on earth seems to have any answers, don't give up! There's still hope. You, too, can get the answers to your problems straight from the halls of Heaven. Help is there. It's available and within reach. It's within your reach right now.

We offer this book as an example of some of the answers that parents—men and women just like you—received as they looked to Heaven for help in meditative moments of prayer. We have presented each parent's main concern in question form, followed by the remarkable answer each one received while quietly reflecting and waiting for an answer. They recorded whatever words, ideas or thoughts began to flow into their minds in these moments. In most of the cases in this book, the instructions came like an inner voice from God speaking to their hearts. The "I" (or "Me," when capitalized) seems in many cases to be either Jesus or God giving the person direct counsel. (You can hear from God personally too! If you would like to find out how, order *Hearing from Heaven* from the *Get Activated!* series.)

## CULTIVATING CLOSENESS



**I work and can't be with my teens much of the time. In the evening they want to watch TV or do things with their friends, or they have homework to do. I'm usually pretty busy, as well as exhausted. As a result, I feel we have drifted apart. I want to get closer to them again and spend more time with them, but how can I, and where do I begin? How do I get them to feel close and loved and special to me?**

*Editor's note: This is a difficult situation that many of us face. We who have teenage children are concerned about them, yet uncertain how to help them. One woman, in answer to these concerns, received the following guidance from God.*

### Show visible expressions of love

One of the most important things you can give your children is love—an attitude of love, an assurance of your love. This is especially true of teens. Your teens need to know that you love them. They need to feel and see your love expressed towards them.

They see it expressed in the care that you give them in providing housing and food, but they often take these things for granted. They don't see the sacrifices, or understand how you have structured your life in order to care for their physical needs. Therefore, they need to see spiritual love, emotional love, personal love. This is what will create a bond of love and trust. You ask, "How do I do this? How do I create this bond with them?"



## Fill your teens' needs by filling yours too

The first step in establishing a more loving bond with your children and helping them feel close and special, is for *you* to feel close and loved and special to *Me*. I want you to feel that way. I want you to feel My love. For you are My child, and as a father with his child, I wish to show this love to you.

I wish to show you that I love and accept you just as you are, and I want to bring you close to Me. And when you are close to Me, I will give you the acceptance, the unconditional love, the security and the reassurance that you need. Then, when you know and feel My great, all-encompassing, overwhelming, reaching-to-the-ends-of-the-universe love for you, you will have more love to give. Your children will feel it. Your spouse will feel it. Others will feel it.

## Create opportunities for closeness

Let Me give you a deeper love for your children—a love that overcomes barriers, that will not be stopped—a love that you can express, and they can experience.

A love of this type longs for expression. It longs for an opportunity. When you have this attitude of deeper love in your heart towards your children, they will see it, and opportunities for closeness will present themselves. Your children will say, "Dad, would you play this game with me?" "Mom, let me show you what I did at school today." "Mom, what do you think I should wear to this party?" "Dad, can you help me fix this?"

Look for opportunities. They may not be as you anticipate. You may have to make changes in your schedule. As your kids see and understand that you wish to be more a part of their lives, they will be

happy that you are there for them, as a friend wanting to help.

It may begin as simply as watching TV with them, but don't let it stop there. Provide opportunities for discussion. For example, go places where they like to go, and then talk with them about it. Find out what they liked about it and what their impression was. Their views may be different from your own, but don't try to push yours on them.

## **Be there when they need you**

Look at the way things are now, the time that you spend in the evenings, the time that they spend in the evenings, the time that you or they spend on the weekends. Are there more ways your lives can touch? Could adjustments be made so that they cross more often? Look at where you may have points in common, activities you can share.

Be there for them, in love. This is not a "being there" in a way that makes them think that you are looking for an opportunity to snoop, lecture them or condemn what they are doing—or to give them more rules or more instruction. It's simply being there as a friend, as a sounding board, someone they can turn to, someone who will support them.

Is there a sport your son is interested in? Is there a craft your daughter is interested in? Can you be a part of these in some way? Look at the ways your teens are reaching out, and see what interests and experiences you can share together.

## **Learn parental architecture**

You can be the architect of situations that pull you and your teens together—going places together

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## **A father finds the key**

Here is one father's account of finding the key to communicating with his teen:

Over the last few months we have had a breakthrough with our teen son. The key was sports. Taking an hour or so to play soccer with him each day is helping him through a difficult stage in his life. Fourteen-year-old Tim is a pretty high-powered boy and had been getting into a lot of trouble.

Shocked at how badly our once nice kids seemed to be turning out, my wife and I realized we needed to get on the ball. We decided we had to start spending more personal time, one-on-one with our teens. I focused on Tim, and my wife spent more time with our 17-year-old daughter.

Tim tended to vent his anger and frustration in aggressive competitiveness, and he was such a bad loser that he was hard to be around. In other areas he was unreliable. His chores and other things he started were left undone. We were on his case continually. At first it just seemed impossible to get through to Tim. The door to his life was locked to my wife and me. We were desperate to find the key, some small point of agreement that we could start to build on.

Tim seemed to have only one interest, and that was soccer. He wasn't on a team, and I had mixed feelings about Tim getting more involved in this sport, since he already wasn't getting along well with others. Finally, in the hope of getting closer to Tim, I decided to enter his world and play some soccer with him each day. With this small amount of communication and active involvement, to my amazement Tim quickly began to change and open up. Soon, other people were commenting how much he was changing and becoming such an

outgoing, communicative, confident, fun and pleasant teen to be around. (And frankly, I too am feeling a whole lot healthier and happier. Getting outdoors and playing an active sport can do more than burn pent-up teen energy—it can provide a release from parental frustration as well.) For sure it beats the direction Tim seemed to be heading, becoming a bored couch potato or an asocial computer addict, or fighting with someone, or figuring out what mischief to get into next.

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where they would like to go and doing things that will be fun for them.

Perhaps they would rather not do certain things with you because they feel they will be criticized by their friends for doing things with their parents. If this is the case, perhaps you could just be their chauffeur sometimes and take them and their friends on outings. That way, at least you're there. Perhaps they can invite a bunch of friends over for an evening, or to spend the night, and again, you will be there.

**The problem of communicating with the younger generation would be less complicated if parents knew a little more about what was going on. One way to find out, I have discovered, is to act as chauffeur for a group of teenagers. Keep your mouth shut, and within minutes of starting out, you will be forgotten and conversation will go on as though you were an automatic pilot. I don't know if this is considered an invasion of privacy, but it works.—*Advice from a mother of teens***

Look for ways that you can merge your lives. This may mean both sides making changes. But as you try, I will show you ways that you can connect. You can connect through having a joint project you work on together: a carpentry project, a sewing or cooking project, a pet, or a garden.

## Discover the art of listening

Listening to your kids is one of the main ways you can help them. Learn to *really* listen. When you ask, "How was school?" stop and listen to how their day went. When problems are presented to you, you don't always have to comment on the spot. Rather than pass judgment, take time to think about it, or

pray for a solution. The main thing is to be a listener; provide a listening ear, as well as love and encouragement and support.

**Some teens were asked, "How do you know when your parents aren't listening to you?" They came up with the following answers: "If they're not looking at me." "If they're reading the newspaper while I'm talking." "If they keep vacuuming or cooking and say, 'Go ahead, I can hear you.'" Then the teens were asked, "How do you know when your parents are listening to you?" Most of them said, "If they stop what they're doing when I'm talking to them."**

## Tap into heavenly guidance

When you are confronted with a problem and then pray, I will help you, and I will be there for you as *your* parent. You don't have to go to a special place, or get down on your hands and knees. Talking your problems over with Me can take place anywhere. It takes place within you, in your heart and mind, right where you are, any time of day, in any situation. Just turn your heart to Me, the One who loves you the most and who listens to your inner call for help. Anytime, any place, anywhere, I am always there to answer. I will lead, guide and instruct you, step by step. Just ask Me, and believe the answers that come into your mind are from Me.

Many situations arise with teens that require deep understanding. You can close the door on communication by harsh judgment or self-righteous condemnation, when their motives may be sincere. Ask Me about the situations which you are not sure of, and I will show you what is behind your teenager's actions.

Ask Me, and when you ask Me, then stop and wait, and let My thoughts come into your mind. When you ask Me, I will answer you. I will put thoughts and answers in your mind that will be a comfort and a help to you.

When you look at your teen, judge with My wisdom, not according to hard and fast rules and standards. One of the greatest barriers to communication with young people is harsh judgment on the part of the parents. Too often parents apply the harsh standards that *they* learned to their children. But each age is different and each time is different, and the children of each generation must test and try their wings and express themselves according to their own personalities. That doesn't mean total permissiveness with no limits, rules or responsibilities. But the key to changing bad behavior is changing the heart—not forcing your children to keep the rules.

Ask Me to reveal to you what is inside the hearts of your children, so you can look beyond appearances. It's better to address the concerns of their hearts than outward appearances. Minister to the heart, listen to the heart, love the heart.

## The ultimate safety net

Many children simply need a firm footing of love and acceptance by their parents. This foundation of love provides a cushion of protection and security around them that will help keep them from danger and bad influences, such as drugs or alcohol, or even the pain of rejection by their friends. Your love and acceptance will provide a safety net of protection at such times. If they know that you will not reject them, even for their mistakes or foolish actions, they will come to you and there will be the bond that you desire.

**We adults are used to talking, to giving orders, but when it comes to living with teens, we need to listen with both ears as well as with our hearts.**

And I, too, desire to place this bond between each parent and child, so that each child has someone whom he or she can fall back on. As *your* parent, I am always there for you. I never cast you off, even if you have made terrible mistakes or done very wrong things. I am still there for you and I still love you and support you, and I am still always willing to hold you in My arms.

It is very important that you present this same attitude to your children. They need to know that you will always love them no matter what they do, that nothing will ever take your love away. They must know that they can always talk to you; that even though you may not agree, you may not see eye to eye, you may even think that they've done something that is very wrong or harmful, still you are always their parent. You will always love them and they can always come to you. Even if all hell would break loose, your child would know that they will always have your love. And in this way, the children will learn about Me and My love.

**There is no better way to improve our quality time with others than to spend quality time with our own Parent, God Himself.**



## UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER



**Sometimes I think my teens live in another world. I don't know why they act the way they do. Is it because they don't like me? Why are they upset when I ask them to help around the house? I really need their help. Can't they see that?**

*Editor's note: Sometimes it's hard for us to understand what our teens are going through. As parents, we tend to look at how their behavior affects us, but we do not always realize the turmoil, the confusion, the questions that they often try to deal with on their own. The following heartcry of a young teen gives some insight into how some young people feel, which can help us understand them and learn how to relate to them.*

**Absorbed in our own tribulations and problems, we adults too often forget that youth is a jarring time, full of excruciating first experiences and full-blown tragedies. It is a pimple on the cheek which everyone will see; it is the clothes which never seem to fit a gangly body; it is the ultimate disappointment, a broken promise by a parent. It is a training ground for adulthood, a place and time to try for independence, a place and time to try and fail and succeed.—Anonymous**

### The heartcry of a young teen

Dear God, can You help me? Can anybody help me? What's happening to me? I don't understand. Everything is so difficult, and I'm so, so down. I don't understand these things going on inside of me—all these feelings I get, and so many emotions. This

pressure is too much. All these hassles!

No matter how hard I try to do my best, it's just not good enough. Sometimes I just don't know how I can please Mom any more—she expects such perfection. I really don't want to complain, but I just feel like hired help sometimes.

Does anyone care about me? I sure could use some love and appreciation instead of getting all this flak, and people always getting on my case. I know I blow it, but how can I change? I'm so confused and wrapped up in such a tangled mess. I try to please my parents and I try to please my friends, but I don't do good at either. Nothing seems to work and I always seem to mess up. I'm always botching things and getting another lecture.

I'm in a hole and I can't get out, no matter how hard I try. Besides, what's the use?—Everybody's got me so labeled anyhow. It seems like all the bad kids are the ones that get all the attention. Maybe that's the way to go. It's so hard to be good.

I really don't like just doing nothing. When I get away and blast out my music on my headphones—well, at least I can forget about everything for a few short moments that way. The only thing is, I still feel so, so empty inside. I feel so bad.

I wish I could talk to somebody about these problems, but who would ever understand? Or who's got the time? I feel so confused, like a real misfit. What's happening to me? I'm so confused. I feel so lonely. Is this growing up? All these things I feel and these changes in my body—it's freaky, and scary, too. Does anybody understand how I feel? Who can help me? Does anybody have the time?

Sometimes I want to fly away! But, really, deep inside, I want to do something with my life. It just seems so hard. I want to make a difference, I just don't know how.

I need help! I feel like I have so much inside of me, but nobody will listen. There are so many things I want to do—places to go and see, people to meet, things to experience. Isn't there somebody that can help me through all this? I feel I need someone to guide me.

I must be doing something wrong, but what is it? Who can help me? Why do I feel like this? Is it because You don't love me as much as You love others? God, I'm scared. The world is scary, and everything looks so difficult. What's gonna become of me?

*Editor's note: Having received that insight into a young teen's mind and heart, you might still be wondering what concrete steps you can take to show your teenager that you understand. What can you do to make yourself more relatable? Below is some unique yet practical advice on the issue of motivating your teens to be responsible and hardworking.*

## Getting through the barriers

We all know that in the adult world, resolving differences often requires that we go halfway to meet the other person. But when dealing with your teens, you might find you have to go nearly all the way over to their side, in the sense of giving them a great big dose of tolerance and understanding as you work to show them that you love them and care about their happiness—not what *you* think should make them happy, but the things they enjoy doing when they're on their own.

Life is a great big school of hard knocks, so it's understandable that you want your teens to get under the physical load you carry around the house or with the other children. After all, you think, before

too much longer they're going to be facing the big bad world, a place where nobody makes your bed or picks up your laundry, cooks your food or lets you sleep late once in awhile. It's true, your teens do need to learn self-discipline, as well as acquire good working habits. Having said that, though, you might find you need to heartily fill up the other side of the balance. What might that be? *Simply letting them have fun.*

Adolescence is an age of contradictions. Adolescents' bodies, minds and emotions are all growing at different rates, and you can't expect to know exactly where your teens are at when they don't even know. One thing is certain with almost all teens, though, and that is that they have a great vacuum for heavy doses of pure fun. You can supply them with a lot of opportunities to fill that vacuum, thereby sending the message that you understand their needs in this area. Once you've done that, and shown through your actions that you're eager to provide them with as much opportunity as possible to enjoy their lives while they are young, you'll find that they will be much more receptive to the other side of the scale, the hard work and helping-to-carry-the-load side. When they know that you recognize their needs and do your best to fill them, they'll be more willing to recognize your needs for helping around the house and with their brothers and sisters, or to even take over once in awhile so you can take some time off.

If this advice seems a little suspect to you, well, just try it for a month! Factor in plenty of recreational opportunities for your teens—and that means at least three times a week, if at all possible—and make sure you factor in *their* ideas of having fun and not just yours. Show them that your life doesn't revolve around laundry schedules and mealtime plans, but let the child in you come out and play.

Once they see that side of you, they'll be more sympathetic to the side that has had to grow up, and they'll be more willing to help as well.

**A boy was in danger of being drowned while swimming in a river. Seeing a traveler on the bank, he called to him for help, but the man started to lecture him about swimming alone in dangerous places. "Rescue me now," cried the boy, "you can lecture me when I am safe!"**



**I feel that something is wrong, but my teen won't tell me what is the matter. I wish I could believe that he is being honest with me. What can I do to encourage him to come to me and tell me his problems? How do I help him know I love him no matter what, and that he can be honest with me?**

*Editor's note: This is a common concern of parents. One concerned father of teens received the following counsel when he asked for help and guidance from God.*

### **Grow together if you don't want to grow apart**

To be gradually closed off and then locked out of someone's inner life, a child or friend with whom you once enjoyed closeness and communication, can be very painful to endure. Many parents experience this as their children grow and change. There comes a gradual dividing of the ways, a parting. But it doesn't necessarily have to be a painful parting. Parents and their children can learn to grow together, rather than apart. This takes a great deal of communicating and understanding, plus give and take by the parents and their teens.

On their part, parents must continually upgrade their thinking, reevaluate their relationship and try to perceive the new emerging person that their child is becoming. Their child is changing, developing, growing before their eyes. Keeping up with the growth and change in a young person can be very challenging. It is not just a matter of physical changes and hormonal changes, but there are many other deep emotional, mental, social and spiritual

changes taking place as well. To keep in step with a teen, parents must constantly be reassessing their relationship and looking for new insight and new ways to relate to him or her, and develop a new set of expectations. To keep up with a changing young person, you have to adapt and change right along with him or her.

**Probably one of the greatest influences on our lives is our children. They influence us to do good, be good, and try to show them what's right.**

## Adjust your role as they grow

Your relationship with your teen can't remain a parent-child relationship; it has to change to a parent-friend or a friend-to-friend relationship. You must let go of your parent role somewhat if you want to get through to and communicate with your teen. Your young person must feel that you understand him or her as a person.

In the eyes of your teens, individuality and independence come to them through breaking out of the parent-child relationships they had with you. They feel they need to break out of this mold in order to grow and become independent, thinking people. Parents who want to keep the parent-child relationships as they are, who want their children to remain subject to them and their ways, will find it increasingly difficult to communicate with their growing, changing "children."

## Upgrade your approach and programs

The key to keeping up communications is to keep up to date with what is happening in the lives of your children. Be aware of their activities. Pop into

their world to see how and what they are doing. Do things with them that they like to do. Be considerate of them. Keep reevaluating and deepening your relationship with them. Keep monitoring yourself as to what you are doing with them and how often you spend time with them. How are you treating them? How are you talking to them?

Effective parenting is like a computer program which must be upgraded often to effectively meet changing and more challenging needs. Young people provide these challenges, which always put the “latest versions” to the test! So the parents who want to communicate best with their children must take the time to keep up with their needs. You can’t just remain as you are, where you are. You have to keep upgrading to keep up with them. That’s a lot of work, and it requires an investment on your part. Keep in tune, keep on top of your teens’ situation, and be familiar with what goes on in their lives. If you just don’t know, then stop and take the time to find out.

## **Build a common understanding**

Sometimes teens’ lack of communication is because something is wrong or because they’re not being honest with you. Often it is not having a lot in common anymore that keeps young people from communicating with their parents. If they think there is little in common, then they think you won’t understand them.

There are many ways to build a common understanding. For example, show an interest in the age group your child belongs to. Asking your child to help you understand his or her age group can help lay the groundwork for deeper and more personal communication. Ask sincere questions and let your



child explain why things are as they are, why his or her age group feels, acts, or dresses in a certain manner, or whatever. If your teens see your motives for asking as coming from a true desire to understand them, they will feel honored that you recognize them as unique individuals, and that you believe they can help you understand. Often in explaining something to you they come to understand it better themselves.

Avoid expressing very strong opinions at these times of building communications. If you feel you must give your opinion, then try to state it as dispassionately as possible, leaving lots of indications that the door is still open for further discussion. Avoid passing judgment or laying down laws during these times. Just focus on trying to understand your teen and communicate.

## View your teen as a "person"

Seeing you reaching out, trying to understand, and even asking them for help, makes your teens feel more mature, and that they have a special place of importance in your life. They feel good when they see that you view each of them as a "person" and respect each one as someone with insight and understanding, someone who can be called upon for help and counsel. They see you do not think of them as just your children, but more than that—as friends. Showing a young person respect is very important in laying a foundation for communication. When your teens feel you respect them, they feel they can trust you with the more difficult or personal matters or situations they face.

## Earn their confidence by being confidential

Young people gauge how you will likely react to them by how you react to others in a similar situation or with a similar problem. How they see you react tells them if it is safe or not to approach you about something. It tells them what they can do, or at least what they can't let you find out that they are doing.

**Accepting the popular perception that “teens are trouble,” that adolescence is something bad, can hinder building a good relationship with your teens. A positive attitude will encourage their openness and maturity and improve your relationship with them.**

**When young people feel good about themselves, they are less likely to be attracted to the negative side of life.**

Young people like to know that what they tell you is said in confidence—that you will not blab it around, or talk about it with others—especially those they do not want told or those they don't have the same confidence or trust in. If they entrust a bit of personal information about their life with you, they expect you to guard it and keep it in confidence. It is very important to respect their trust in you and not carelessly repeat things they have told you in confidence to others who do not need to know or be involved. It may seem like a small matter to you, but they will not see it that way.

## When to hold back on getting actively involved

When young people do share a difficulty they are going through, parents sometimes want to rush in and take control and help solve it for them. But that is usually not what they want you to do. If you are going to take action on "their business," you need to counsel with them first. Tell them what you are thinking and ask their opinion and consent before doing it.

Young people often have very definite opinions about what form your involvement and "help" takes, and want it kept within certain boundaries. In most cases, all they are looking for is someone who will listen to them, someone safe to bounce their problems off of: a sounding board. Your role is to be supportive, someone they can talk to and who can help them gauge their course of action. They don't necessarily want you to become as actively involved as you did when they were children.

Your young people may be hesitant to share serious matters with you because they are afraid that you will charge in with the cavalry, and it will be hard for them to stop you, or that they won't have any control over their situation once they let you know about it. They don't want you to charge in and embarrass them, or crowd them out of what they feel is *their* life and *their* business.

## Be a nonthreatening force for good in their lives

You can still freely express the things you are concerned about. It's just your timing and presentation that's important. Sometimes you do need to ask your teens straight out about something you are concerned about, but you should not appear to be suspicious or accusatory. There is a time for asking,

“Are you taking drugs?” And there is a time to be less direct and say, “Drugs are out there, and I know you are going to be offered them. Drugs take over and wreck a lot of kids’ lives before they see what’s happening. I hope you will say no, but if something serious does happen, let me know, let me help.”

No one likes to be alone when he or she is in trouble, especially a teen. Teens do not want to lose everything they have gained in growing up by getting too much help from their parents. You, as parents, have to be gentle when you try to help them. Seeing how respectful you are of them builds trust and respect for you. They will then see their parents as a nonthreatening force for good in their lives—stable, helpful, dependable friends.

## Communicating love and understanding

Words are not the only way to communicate your love and win your teens’ trust. There are a lot of other ways. Try to catch their eyes. Use your eyes to show them your love. Don’t give them an accusatory or hurt look which probes for guilt or wrong—but give them loving, understanding, encouraging looks. Let them hear by the tone of your voice that you do love them and you do understand. Actually, it is not *how much* you communicate with them but that you *do* communicate with them. Try to touch base with them in some way each day—via a look, a touch, an encouraging word—then build on this. It will grow! Give them the help and support they need. At this age they are very insecure and feel like they are being tossed on a troubled sea. They are looking for the lighthouse. Be their beacon!

**Hug your children often—especially your teens.  
Teens need a constant supply of encouragement.**

## They can count on you

There will be times when you will have to lay down the line and be firm with your teens as you guide and correct them, but as they grow, you will have less of a direct influence over their lives. Your role will change from their parent to their friend—not an “anything goes” friend, but one who loves them enough to be honest with them—someone they can count on, someone who is more a helping hand than a judge—someone they can lean on, rather than someone they have to avoid or hide their life from or try to get around.

Help them know they can really count on you. You build their confidence in you by being faithful in all those little things that add up in their mind to the kind of person they believe you should be. If you’ve made a mistake and flown off the handle, if you have been too extreme with them, if you have scared them off or driven them into their own world, then go to them and apologize. Explain that you want to change and you want to be different.

If you are humble and you show that you know you have weaknesses and need help in many areas too, then even if your teens don’t show it, they will have seen you put your heart on the line and trust them with a sensitive part of your life, and this will encourage them. They do need your help, they want your help, but they want it on their terms—when they want it and how they want it. Of course, sometimes when they are in trouble and you see they are in trouble, you do need to intercede. Go to them directly and explain the situation as you see it.

## Communication alternatives

If your teen doesn't respond to your efforts to communicate, perhaps he (or she) just isn't able to talk to you face to face, especially if you aren't very good at controlling your anger or emotions, and therefore they're afraid of how you might react. If this is the case, then encourage him to write you a note, or to record his thoughts on a tape recorder or dictaphone, and give you the tape to listen to. That way you can "hear" him out without him experiencing your initial reaction head-on. You have time to think things over, he has time to think things over, and you can have a discussion later in a calmer frame of mind, or answer him in a note if you like.

**One father confessed that he did not realize how dishonest he had been with his son until he learned a hard lesson. His son received a very low mark in English. In spite of scoldings and extra study, it seemed his son simply could not bring up his grade. One day the boy said to his father, "I guess when you went to school you got all A's in English."**

**"What makes you say that?" the father replied.**

**"Well, if you didn't do well," said the son, "you wouldn't scold me the way you do."**

**The way he had corrected his son was a misrepresentation of the truth. The father replied, "No, the fact is that I really had a hard time in English, especially spelling."**

**From that moment on the boy did better, freed from the impression that he was inferior and a failure. Seeing that his dad had the same problems, but succeeded, gave him hope.**

**—Anonymous**

## Guide rather than intrude

Young people are unsure of a great many things, and so sometimes they jealously protect the “garden” of their lives from intrusion. They are not sure which are the weeds and which are the good plants, but they *are* sure they do not want you stomping into their life and pulling out what *you* think are weeds. They want to make those decisions for themselves. They may like to have your guidance, but constant intrusion into their lives is not usually what they want.

**To improve communications with our teens, and to be the ones they come to rather than avoid, we need to turn our parenting volume down and our *listening* up.**

## Love despite silence

A parent should try not to be put off by silence. Keep putting your heart into talking and communicating with your teens. Give them a few signs of affection—a hug, a kiss, a touch or pat, an expression of warmth. Just let them know you are there, that you care, that it is okay, you are listening, you are watching out for them. All these help them feel more secure, even if they do not openly admit it or react as if they do. Sometimes they do not want to react or show too much weakness to you, because they know that will bring out the parent side in you and put them right back in the role of being children.

**You and your teen don't have to grow apart if you learn to grow together.**

**“Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged” (The Bible, Colossians 3:21 KJV).**

**Love, encourage, correct and reassure your young person as he or she moves towards independence.**

**Adolescence can be an emotionally stormy time, and we should try our best to not get pulled into a teen tempest. Try to stay cool under fire and look for ways to work with your teens rather than against them.**

## **Cherish your moments together**

Keep reminding yourself that your teens are growing up and may soon go their own way, so the moments you have together are precious and should be positive and memorable ones you can all look back on and cherish. Don't fight over trivial matters. It is just not important. Even if you think it is important to have an argument about something—stop! First try to love them. Show them love, even in a storm. Love never fails! You may be very upset, but they are likely worried and confused too. The Bible says, “A soft answer turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1 NKJ). What that means is that being calm never fails; love never fails.

Arguments fail! Expectations fail. Giving orders fails. But love never fails. Try to get past your anger. Try not to be too set in your ways and too predictable in your negative reactions. Only be predictable in your love for your teens. If they are secure in your love, this will be a good foundation upon which problems can be worked out. Stay open, approachable and give them opportunities to talk to you.



## Step back! Let them breathe!

Surprise your teens by making changes—changes in your life and attitude and way of looking at things. Surprise them with all kinds of interesting differences. Young people want to be proud of their parents. They want to feel that their parents are cool, but even more than that, they are looking for something warm, supportive and understanding in you—someone who is there, right there praying for them, standing beside them—not like a blanket suffocating them, but like an umbrella protecting them.

If you are the type of parent that likes to take control, that grabs the pencil away from them to show them how you'd do it, then you must learn to let go of that desire for direct management of their lives. Step back! Let them breathe. They know what you believe. By now you have certainly told them enough times. Just turning up the volume now, yelling at them, or forcing them, or being harsh or critical or negative, or speaking as though you expect the worst, *is* the worst and will get the worst results. They may just tune you out and stop listening.

Their life is sacred. It does not belong to you; it belongs to them. And there comes a time when you have to move back and give the controls to them. Let them row their boat. Let them learn to drive the vehicle of their life. But be there to help, and encourage them as they learn. Don't be too quick to grab the controls away from them. It's too late for that. They're growing and they're going to be venturing out on their own whether you like it or not. It is hard to step out of the role of their boss, but you must. However, do not go to the opposite extreme and become so passive and detached they think you just don't care. Step back and into the role of friend, supporter, cheerleader, avid fan, admirer, the one who

believes in them, the one who loves them unconditionally even when they don't reach their expectations—or yours.

## Show positive expectations

It's unfortunate, but young people often act out your negative expectations. It's better to try to show positive expectations and hide your disappointment. Positive expectations move them toward the good and convict them when they do wrong, because they don't want to disappoint you or cause you to lose faith in them. On the other hand, if they feel your negative suspicions, accusations or assumptions, they may tend to go that way. (Simply put, it is easier to be bad if someone expects you to be bad, but it is easier to be good if someone believes in you and expects you to be good.)

## See mistakes as steppingstones

Everyone makes mistakes. Parents can't expect saints from sinners like themselves. Let your teens know that you're a sinner too, and you also have to learn from your mistakes. Young people make a lot of mistakes, and they feel bad about them, but don't rub it in. Try to help them be glad for the chance to learn such valuable lessons early in life. Look for the good that can be drawn from each situation, and help *them* look for the good. If you look for the good in everything, including them, they will see a lot of good in you.

**Love sees the good and possibilities that others do not see. This does not mean that you become blind to problems, or overly permissive, giving in to bad behavior. Just see beyond the bad. Have confidence in God's love for your teens and His ability to help them make it.**

## Let them row their boat while you cheer them on

Try to help and encourage your teens in those areas that are strengths in their lives, but don't push too hard. You might want them to have a certain education or special training; you might want them to have what you missed. But there comes a time to put aside *your* ideas and look at what your *teen* wants and is able to do. Pushing can be perceived as overriding her will and her rights. Your idea may be the best for her, it may be her area of talent, but she likes to feel it is *her* choice what talent she wants to develop, a part of her inner joy and development.

It is hard to change your teens without changing yourself. There may seem to be no way to break through to them. They know you too well as their parent and have their guard up to protect themselves from your "parenting." But when you come to them as a friend, they will not be as closed. If you approach them as someone who loves them and cares for them, as someone who sees them as a person, that is what they want. That respect, recognition, support and understanding means a lot to them. Those are the building blocks that make them more secure in their march to manhood or womanhood.

## COPING WITH INDEPENDENCE



**My teen daughter says I should just leave her alone to live her own life, but I am very concerned about where her life seems to be heading. She seems to have so little self-control. What can I do?**

### Keep being there for them and ride out the storm

Many young people have little willpower or self-control, mainly because they don't see any reason for controlling themselves. They just like to let it all hang out; they don't see why they shouldn't. They are grappling with their myriad desires, feelings, and emotions, and it almost involuntarily spills out all over them, and all over others. Some young people can handle it better than others. And some don't really see any reason for controlling themselves at all. They like to have fun, they like to be entertained, they like to be independent, they like to do their own thing. They want to be different, they don't want to conform, and they don't see what is wrong with being a little rebellious, being a little ornery.

As they come to know Me and grow in Me, they gain maturity; they gain understanding and spiritual insight. But until they do, you're just going to have to help them along the path. You're going to have to show them the way, guide them, point them in the right direction, keep steering them back on the right track. Keep doing your part, and eventually they'll come around and even start to see the wisdom in the things you say, in the advice and counsel you give. You just have to ride out the storm and keep being there to help them through this period when they

sometimes seem more like an ugly caterpillar than the beautiful butterfly they are becoming.

## Typical teenhood

Your daughter is a pretty typical teen. She loves to have fun and play around. She doesn't like hard work just yet, but what teen does? The teens who are mature and serious about life and have a connection with Me are rare. Most are inclined to be closer to the opposite end of the scale: frivolous, foolish, fun-loving, lacking in discipline, lacking self-control. Yet deep inside they do crave guidance, instruction and counsel. Their pride won't always let them receive it so gracefully, but they do know they need it. Your daughter knows she needs to be kept on the straight and narrow, and that she just can't control herself. She knows she gives in too easily to things she shouldn't.

## Discover that new person inside

You will have to ask Me for the love, understanding and compassion that you need to have with her. She is full of spunk and mischief and can get on your nerves and cause you to want to tear your hair out! But I can give you the love and grace you need. Just pray for it, ask for it, and you shall receive. I will give it to you.

And while you are praying, ask Me to help you see her in a new way, to take away your preconceived ideas and fixed opinions, and to help you see her heart. Learn to bypass her outward appearance, her actions, her words, and to look on her heart. Once you see her heart, you'll meet a whole new person.

**Teens have many fears. Knowing that you know they are being hit with crazy thoughts is a comfort to them, because they don't feel so odd or isolated.**

**Young people may be overly-demanding or intentionally annoying just to get your attention. Try not to overreact, but instead focus on trying to get them to understand the situation and why you are not able to meet their demands at the time. Appeal to them for their much needed help and cooperation.**

**Thrill-seeking teens like to shock or worry their parents by their wild actions. Sometimes they feel they don't belong, so are seeking more attention from you or their peers. Love them for who they are, and let them know they don't need dramatic extremes to get your attention.**



**I always thought that working with young people was my calling in life, but now I am not so sure. This new bunch—and a few individuals in particular—make me feel like just giving up and quitting. What can I do?**

*Editor's note: Although the person asking this question is not a parent of a teen, because she works with teens, God's answer to her is easy for parents to relate to and apply.*

### Perseverance pays

I know how hard it is to work with young people, and the burdens and frustrations you feel. They can drive you up the wall at times! But keep trying to reach them and relate to them. Try to get on their level and be one with them. If you can develop a link, a connection, then you can start getting through to them and making some real progress.

Frustration is the price you have to pay when you work with young people. That's just the way it sometimes is; that's just a fact of life.

Your knowledge and experience comes from years of ups and downs, successes and failures, and quite a few trying situations, whereas these teens are just starting out. Keeping that in mind will help you to have patience. Also, try not to compare this group with other teens you have worked with; some kids are slow at wanting to grow up, others are quicker. You can't let yourself get overly frustrated about these things.

## Let them break the mold

As young people grow up, they generally need more freedom to make their own choices without someone trying to fit them into a certain mold. Some people just don't and won't fit into the mold you try to put them into! You've got your mold, you've got your idea about how they should be or act, but you can't expect even your children to be that way, to be just like you and totally conform to your ideals.

You may need to start changing your perspective. You may need to change the way you look at these young people, and start looking for things that you admire about them—for how well they do in spite of the pressures and difficulties they face.

## Be willing to get your hands dirty

Don't give up! Just get in there and don't worry about getting your hands dirty. It is a bit like gardening—you can't really be a gardener unless you are willing to get your hands dirty. Plants aren't going to thrive or grow if all the gardener is willing to do is just watch them and water them. Sometimes plants need re-potting because their roots are getting too long and numerous for the pot they're in, or the soil they are in needs to be changed because it has lost its nutrients or is getting moldy.

So it is with growing young people—they may need some personal attention from someone who isn't afraid to get right in there and help them find solutions to their problems. Sometimes they get tangled up and just can't help themselves, and they need the help of the gardener. Watch out for them like the gardener watches out for the warning signs—leaves turning yellow or getting spotted or drying up, soil getting moldy or plants drooping from insuffi-



cient water. There are shade plants, and there are sun plants; there are plants that need a lot of water, and there are others that hardly need any. There are plants that need much care and have to be misted daily. Then there are cacti that hardly need any care.

Your part is to just be a faithful, loving, caring gardener—to keep your eye on those plants and do what you can to help tend and care for them. The gardener learns what he can do, and does what he can to help the plants. And like any gardener, you can only give it your best, then you must leave the rest up to Me.

**Learn to see as God sees**

I overlook the faults and imperfections. I see the heart. I know the heart of each one. I have the ability to see way down into the center of the soul and see the beauty. I do not look for the imperfections; I do not look for the flesh but the spirit. I have created each soul, each spirit. Each one is of Me; each one is My work, the work of My hands. Therefore should I not know each one intimately? Should I not know the very center of each heart and every fiber of each one's being?

But *you* cannot always see that inner hidden beauty. You cannot know exactly what is within another. That is what you have to take by faith. What I know by fact, what I see as fact—the beauty that I see—that you must take by faith. Granted, there may be rubble piled on top. There are imperfections and there are things that need improving. But if you look with the eyes of faith and believe, you will see beyond outward appearance, outward actions or outward speech and begin to see as I see.

## RESOLVING CRISES



**I am separated, and my teen daughter lives with me. She is quite bitter about the breakup of our marriage and is becoming more and more short-tempered and disrespectful towards me. We just don't seem to be able to get along. I don't know what to do. I want to talk to her, but what can I say?**

*Editor's note: The answer that the mother asking this question received from Heaven can be applied not only to the specific circumstances outlined above, but also to other situations where a teen is bitter against his or her parents for some reason, or when there has been a serious breakdown in communication between the parents and the teen.*

### Love loves the unlovely

Show her unconditional love. Show care and compassion, and love her in spite of her unlovely moments and unloving attitudes towards you.

I, Jesus, care for you, and I will bring you through these troubled waters. I will help you to see things in a different perspective. You look at what seems to be disrespect and rejection, but in spite of all her willfulness, she still needs to know you care and are there for her when she needs you—not just when it's convenient for you, but even when it costs you the most to give your time and attention. When she sees you sacrificing for her time and again, her heart will see that you really do care and you are not just doing it because you are “stuck with her.”

## Meet on neutral ground

Try going out and doing things together on neutral ground. Try doing things where you can just be friends, and avoid situations where there is a big struggle with each of you trying to be in control.

## Start afresh

Sit down and open your heart to her to break the ice. Tell her, "Let's start over in our relationship. It is my responsibility to provide for you the best I can, and to care for you. But part of caring for you is helping to steer you away from things I think will harm you. I want to make it as easy for you as I can, but it's a two-way street. We need to be able to get along and be more of a help and support to each other. I need you. I need your companionship. I need your help. I know you need me too. So if we can both learn to give a bit to each other, to meet each other halfway and be concerned about the welfare of the other, then we'll both be happier.

"I'll try to be more what you need, and be more concerned about what makes you happy. I'll try to accommodate your wishes the best I can. But not everything is going to be all rosy. Life is full of difficult situations and challenges. Not all goes the way we like. You know that. We need to learn to take what is good, and keep going in spite of the hardships and misunderstandings. Neither of us can have it all our own way. We are in a partnership.

"You may think it's all my fault that life is the way it is now, but that's not really so. I did make many mistakes, for which I'm truly sorry. I know I could have done things better and been a better parent to you. But hey, I've still got a lot to learn too. We're both still learning and growing. You've got to

put up with me, and I'll put up with you. And I'll do more than that. I'll care for you, as I truly do love you and care what happens to you. I want the best for you. I want you to grow up knowing that I love you a lot.

"I'm sorry I haven't always been here to talk things out with you like I should have been. I'm sorry you're hurting and wishing things were different, but this is the challenge that we are faced with. This is what we have to overcome as a team. In spite of our difficulties and misunderstandings, we can overcome and have a happier, better life if we want to and are willing to work at it.

"I know I don't always see things from your perspective, but please give me a chance. Please try to see that I love you no matter what. I want you to feel free to open up and let me know what you're feeling. And if you feel I'm getting a bit too intense and need to lighten up, then just write me a note or something. Let me know the way you're feeling."

## Listen even when it hurts

And then take the time to fully hear her out, in spite of the way she expresses herself and the hurtful way she comes across. If you will take the time to get to know what is on her heart and mind, you will understand her concerns. In spite of her attitude, deep down inside she really does care what you think. She wants you to love her, and she wants to be able to count on you. Be willing to share a life with her—not resenting her or the circumstances, but rather keep giving and giving—even if it hurts. Enjoy living life together as a family, loving each other and looking out for each other's well-being.

## Enjoy life together

Do not carry the unnecessary weight of trying to *win* your child's love. Love, and you will be loved in return. Give, and it will be given to you. Learn to enjoy life more together, and life will become more enjoyable. Find joy together by setting aside time to be together—have special times to laugh and let your hair down and show that you do love each other and enjoy each other's company.

You need each other; don't be afraid to let each other know that. It will help strengthen your relationship and bring you through the rough times. Encourage her and let her know how special she is to you, that you like her company and enjoy being with her. Surprise her from time to time with fun treats and tokens of your love that show that you think about her and want to make her happy. You're not trying to win her love with presents, but just showing her little signs of your love.

## Every effort will pay off in the end

It's a fight at times, raising young people. It is a struggle to maintain a standard and try to keep them going the way you think they should go. Still, every effort and consideration, each wise decision you make, will pay off in the end. You can't see the big picture clearly yet, but know that you never lose by loving, by believing, by being there, by being honest, by caring, by correcting, by encouraging, by being a true parent to them.

## See each teen as a diamond in the rough

I have placed in your hands someone very special, someone whose full potential is sometimes hidden by all her childish ways. But she is a diamond in the rough, a treasure buried deep—which love and careful work will reveal in time.

Kids are the future; the future is what you make kids to be. So *be* what you want them to become. *Live* the way you want them to live, *care* like you want them to care for others. And most of all, translate for them My love in physical, visible, tangible ways. Not one bit of genuine love will return void. You will have accomplished the purpose for which I have placed you there, by giving My love to that one that I have put in your care. And I will show you love in return.

## Take heart!

Don't worry about tomorrow, for I will supply all that you need. I will help you carry the burdens and problems of life that weigh you down, the things that trouble and concern you. You know I care, for I have given you a precious child so that you can see and feel and know how I care for you. You're Mine, and I won't let you go. No matter how bad you feel you are, you are never beyond My ability to help you make it through. The future will be yours, for your children are a very important part of your future.

## CLOSING COMMENTS

Living takes a whole lot of love and grace, and parents of teenagers usually need a more than average supply to meet all the demands placed on them. Sooner or later most parents discover that they just do not have the strength or the love they need. By the end of the day, they often feel they have little left in their batteries. Where can a weary parent retreat to find a quick charge, or a full recharge—or a whole new battery if needed?

That's where God comes in. He's the One who built us and gave us life and being. He's the source of all life and love and power, a stream of strength and inspiration that never runs dry. The secret of truly powerful parenting is to learn how to unplug from our own failing power packs and plug directly into God's power supply.

Plug into the power of God right now! His power is always on. Stop, get quiet, relax, take a deep breath, clear your mind. Set aside your cares and concerns for a moment. Now turn your antenna up to God. Direct your thoughts and prayers to Him, your own great and eternal Parent. Ask Jesus for His help, His light, His life to fill your heart and mind and being. Let Him take you in His arms and reassure you of His unfailing love and care.

Would you like to have a direct, personal link with God that provides very real answers to life's problems? He offers you this and much, much more! It all begins with receiving His Son, Jesus Christ, into



your heart.

Jesus came for love, lived in love, and died for love—and now He wants to be a part of your life. He will give you His love, peace and joy, and be your closest friend and companion. He loves you so much that He suffered for your sins and died in your place, so that you could have eternal life. All He asks is that you receive Him as your Savior.

The choice is yours. Jesus' love is all-powerful, but He won't force His way into your life. He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20 NKJ). He gently knocks at the door of your heart, and stands there meekly, lovingly, patiently, waiting for you to open up and ask Him in.

If you haven't yet received Jesus, you can right now by praying a simple prayer like the following:

*Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for me. Please forgive me for all the wrongs I've done, and give me eternal life. I open the door to my heart and invite You to come in. Amen.*

If you sincerely prayed to receive Jesus, you can be assured that He heard and answered. "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12 NKJ). Congratulations! You've taken your first step into a wonderful new life of love that will never end!

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