

Revolutionized Families: Parenting Through The Teen Years

Children are a gift from God; they are a reward from Him. Psalm 127:3

And, no, there is not an exception clause for the teen years. Our children are valuable at all stages of development. But, parenting them as they mature emotionally, mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually from age 13-19 can be challenging. How can we replace the angst with which we sometimes anticipate the “birth” of our teenager with the same euphoria with which we anticipated the birth of our newborn? OK, I know. Our little babies were just that: little and cute and cuddly. And, they smelled good. Our teens are still cute; but they’re as big as we are, not as cuddly (when it comes to cuddling with us parents, anyway) and sometimes they don’t smell so good.

I submit to you that the bonds of parent-child connectedness can survive the onset of puberty. How? Well, one way is by focusing on the following Six Building Blocks of a Healthy Relationship adapted from the Willing To Wait sex and relationship curriculum that I teach in area public and private middle and high schools.

It may sound unusual to use a reproductive health lesson designed to promote sexual risk avoidance in teens to promote parent-child connectedness. But, it’s not really. When we teach our teens to delay having sex until they are in a loving, committed long-term relationship like marriage, we must also teach them what it takes to build a loving, committed, long-term relationship, i.e. the six building blocks. The more I presented the information, the more I began to realize that these building blocks were essential to forming a strong, lasting relationship with my teenage children.

Communication is the expression of ideas, thoughts, feelings and information by using words, sounds, signs and behaviors. As parents, we must be effective communicators remaining mindful of both verbal (chosen words, tone of voice) and non-verbal (eye contact, body position) actions. We must also become active listeners who realize that communication is a two-way conversation.

Honesty/Trust. Although honesty and trust are two separate things, one cannot exist without the other. As parents, we must be authentic and live out our lives in front of our teens in ways that do not contradict what we tell them to do. “Do as I say, not as I do” just won’t cut it. Teens must trust that we believe what we say. And, our actions really do speak louder than our words.

Respect is that intangible feeling that is difficult to quantify but we all know when we don’t receive it from someone. Parent-child connectedness requires mutual respect. A lack of respect equates to a devaluing of one’s existence. And our teens and this developmental stage (when they are transitioning from doing **what** we tell them to do to understanding **why** we tell them to do it) are invaluable. Remember the verse? Our children are a gift.

Compromise is coming to an agreement where each side gives up something. Although the family is one unit, there will be times when it is us (parents) versus them (kids). Choose battles wisely. And although we should never compromise fundamental principles upon which our households are built like faith, education, integrity and respect, we as parents must encourage our teens to reasonably present their positions to us just as we must do for them and then consider reasonable concessions. Effective communication is essential. Believe me; their future spouses are going to love us for teaching them how to compromise.

Similar Values. A value system is a set of principles of right and wrong that are accepted by an individual or group. The setting of those guidelines within our homes is our responsibility as parents. When our children are small, they generally roll with the flow because they are totally dependent upon us for everything. But as they grow into the independent, critical thinking individuals that, yes, we nurtured them to be, we are surprised and, at times, offended when they begin to ask why said guidelines exist? Now, before you pull out the conversation ending line, “Because I said so, that’s why,” please consider this. A value is not truly accepted until one understands and chooses on his own to

believe it. As parents, we do a pretty good job at teaching our children what acceptable and unacceptable behaviors are. Now, we must teach our teens why. Their futures depend on it.

Unselfish Love is a component of unconditional love. It is showing love to someone else without giving thought to yourself, your feelings, or your own needs. Honestly, I don’t even think I entered my marriage having reached the point of unselfish love for my then husband-to-be, which by the way is not conducive to a healthy relationship. But, I knew without a doubt what unconditional love felt like when I held my baby girl and a few years later my son in my arms for the first time. I knew that this journey was no longer about me. My point of view had changed. I now lived and loved outside of myself. As we guide our teens, it is crucial that they know that unconditional love still exists for them, especially at times when they are acting their least loveable. And, no, unconditional love does not mean that there will be no disappointment, no frustration, no confusion, no conflict, or no anger. Unconditional love just guarantees that parent-child connectedness will remain in spite of it.

To **revolutionize** means to bring about a radical change, usually at the root or the source. I believe that the family is the root of society and the stability of the family can predict a society’s ills and/or virtues. My hope is that you will use these building blocks to radically strengthen your family and to build healthier relationships between you and your teens. Changing your household for the better can make a world of difference. Blessings...

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