

am I contributing to this conflict?” God knows that parents may provoke many of the disagreeable traits listed above. He, therefore, warns especially fathers to examine their own hand in their children’s faults (Eph. 6:4).

Most of the teens either hinted at or explicitly affirmed their love for their parents. Most of them didn’t give the impression that their parents were failing them. Still, if the above is any indication, parents and teens could use some help.

What Can Parents Do?

Read “Age of Opportunity” by Paul Tripp (P&R, 2001). Off hand, I cannot think of a book, in any category, that has been more helpful to me than this one. One of the simplest suggestions he gives parents is to pursue their teens. “Don’t ever let them view you as being outside of their functional world” (80).

Talk to your teen about some of the issues raised here, but *don’t* announce to him that the two of you are going to “have a talk” about your relational problems. Instead, plan an intentional, quiet moment with him (Deut. 6:7), tell him that you really value your relationship and want to be more open, honest and involved. Ask for his forgiveness for your part in the distance that has developed between you. Then ask a few simple questions with the intention of NOT following up his answers with a lecture. Instead, you might hear your teen out, thank him for his openness, and pray together seeking God’s forgiveness and intervention. In the coming weeks, continue to talk and pray and rejoice as you see the Lord causing your relationship to flourish.



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PROCLAMATION

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Five things Teens Would Like Their Parents to Know ...But May Not Be Telling Them

BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

One of the social highlights of my year happened this spring. I didn’t attend a high-profile conference or speak to a group of “dignitaries.” Instead, I had the privilege of sitting on the grass surrounded by twenty high-schoolers sharing in one the most honest and sincere conversations I’ve had in some time.

I asked a few teens if they would help me write an article on some of their family struggles. Our discussion centered around several questions that could be summed up in one: “What would you like your parents to understand about you?” This conversation was not designed to be a complaint session but, rather, the questions were carefully asked and, for the most part, thoughtfully and respectfully answered. Wanting to

avoid the bandwagon effect, I asked the students to write down their answers first before we discussed them. Notwithstanding this safeguard, their answers were strikingly similar.

This article will seem rather lopsided. It is. Remember, this is just one side of what, ideally, would be a two-way conversation. But I believe if parents would take these concerns seriously, they might hear themselves reading in a younger voice, reminiscent of when they were teenagers.

What follows are five things your teens would like you to know but may not be telling you. Take these points for what they are worth, but keep in mind that they come from the real words of real teenagers who are quite likely similar to yours.



You Don't Understand Me

This may sound like a line right out of a punk-rock song but several teens lamented that their parents have “forgotten what it’s like to be teenagers.” According to one teen, her parents only know her according to her likes and dislikes (an okay way to know a restaurant menu but not a person). One especially insightful teen would like to remind her parents that she’s still trying to figure out who she is and could really use some help. Perhaps the first line of help her parents might take would be to spend some time getting to know her more intimately.

On a related note, several of the teens expressed frustration over being compared with their siblings. As important as groups are to teenagers, they still desire to be known as individuals. Many parents have defended themselves by insisting: “I treat all of my children exactly the same.” Given the reality of human complexity and diversity, this approach is probably counter-productive.

There is comfort in being known. The Psalmist rejoices that God has searched him and has known him (Psalm 139:1). In a similar way, your teenager desires to be truly known by you.

You Treat Me Like A Child

In the interest of disclosure, some of the teens admitted they kind of like playing the “kid card” when it’s convenient (as in, “Don’t expect too much of me, I’m just a kid”).

In some sense teenagers are children. Parents should not expect the same level of performance from them as they would from themselves or other adults. Several of the teens expressed anguish over the too-high expectations of their parents. Could it be that overly-ambitious parents tend to push their teens to be equally overly-ambitious? One teen is getting the

message from her folks that participation in more activities makes a better person.

Still, the reality is that teens are quickly becoming adults and they do rightly expect an increasingly more mature relationship with their parents. When this doesn’t happen, frustration and disillusionment set in. According to one frustrated teen: “My parents think I don’t have a say until I’m an adult.” My suspicion is that many of our teens have heard a variation on the phrase “Just wait till you get into the real world” one too many times. They want to remind their parents that they *do* live in the real world and really do have problems. Trivialization of this fact causes pain.

One of the great challenges of family life is succeeding in helping children develop into wise adults. The oft-quoted proverb on child-rearing (22:6) begins with the word “train.” The word implies that the relationship between the trainer and trainee will change as the latter matures.

You Don't Spend Enough Time with Me

This might be surprising. With few exceptions, teens want more independence. But they are also yearning for closeness, even with their parents. Several teens claimed to spend less than fifteen minutes a week in meaningful, personal interaction with their parents. Social commentators remind us that as connected as teens are today, they are as lonely as ever. One sixteen year old said that he and his parents only communicate at dinner and in the car. Teenagers can tell when family time is conveniently squeezed into these otherwise “unproductive” time slots.

Some families’ schedules are simply too hectic to allow for any real heart-to-heart time. One of the most foundational texts on child-rearing strongly implies that real training and growth requires

spending considerable time together (Deut. 6:7).

Seventy-five percent of the teens I talked with wished the main provider of their family worked less. A young man, whose dad works hard to provide his family with all the “stuff” of the good life, still notices how much he isn’t home. Another noted: “I don’t like it when my mom isn’t around to hang out with me.”

A few years ago at a parenting conference, I heard Paul Tripp challenge breadwinners to consider taking a demotion, trading in their new cars and homes for older, less luxurious ones and begin recapturing the hearts and calendars of their kids. Not every provider will have to respond so drastically. It might be enough to say “no” to one or two non-family obligations per week and schedule some family time instead. The burden upon breadwinners differs from one situation to another. But remember that a father’s main duty to his child is to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). It is difficult to fulfill this duty *and* pursue the American dream at the same time.

As an encouragement, one teen summed up what others may be feeling: “I don’t care about money...I love my dad more than anyone in the whole world and would like him around more.” Contrary to the impressions they sometimes give, most teens don’t want more stuff. They want you. Buck the current trend of busyness and consider ways of making yourself more available to them.

I Want to Communicate Better with You

You might be inclined to respond, “Well, then why don’t you?” A typical teen’s answer: “I’m afraid of a negative re-

sponse.” Young people want to communicate openly but many have realized that they can avoid a lecture if they just keep their discouragements and fears and sins to themselves.

Let’s make this concrete. How would you respond if your son had the courage to tell you that he recently struggled with pornography? How different would your response be if the same revelation came from a close friend? Remember, as your teens grow up, they begin to move into the position of becoming your peer.

On the other hand, teens also regret not being as open as they know they should be. They know that, despite how they are received, they owe a debt of honesty to their folks. If this is true of your teen, it might not take much on your part to facilitate the kind of honesty and openness you both desire.

I Don't Have Everything Together

The teens honestly admitted their shortcomings in their relationships with their parents. The character failures they listed will sound familiar to you: I’m disrespectful, impatient, stubborn, irresponsible and overly blunt. I have a quick-triggered tongue and a negative attitude. I regularly fail to communicate and get easily angered. I don’t know about you, but that list reminds me of someone: ME!

As a parent I don’t have everything together either. How much energy do we, like our teens, expend trying to put up a façade? One way to begin dismantling that façade is to implement James 5:16, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another...”

Regrettably, an “us-versus-them” mentality seems to exist between many parents and teens. A helpful question both “sides” should ask is, “In what way

Remember, as your teens grow up, they begin to move into the position of becoming your peer.