

Foundation of Christian Parenting – Lessons 10 & 11
High School

1. **Introduction**

As our children grow older, it becomes more challenging to maintain a close relationship with them. As parents, we must keep the lines of communication open. Even when our children leave home, we still need to maintain a close relationship so they know they can come to us for guidance and support both physically and spiritually should they need it.

2. **Adulthood**

The High School teen believes that he/she is now an adult and it is important for parents to start treating them like one. However, don't be fooled into believing there should no longer be boundaries. A parent should not stop making and enforcing rules until their child moves out of their home and is no longer being financially supported by them. During this phase in the child's life a parent should:

- Keep a spiritual focus in the home and in their child's life – If the teen has not become a Christian at this point, understanding why and studying to help them grow spiritually is important (**Ps. 119:9, Eccl. 12:1, II Tim. 3:14-17, Prov. 1:8**).
- Give a teen more responsibilities and more privileges accordingly
- Ensure adherence to the established rules in the home (**Eph. 6:1-3**)
- Teach value of self-discipline -- Be punctual, practice good study habits, etc.
- Not allow idleness – we should teach our children that God expects us to work for what we receive (**II Thes. 3:11-13**)
- Instill the value of money – Getting a summer job, having them contribute to the purchase of clothing they want, eating out, entertainment, etc. (**Prov. 13:11**)
- Instill the importance of dividing their earnings into 3 categories -- Laying aside for the Lord, savings account and spending money (**Luke 12:15**)
- Instill a sense of responsibility -- Let them do their laundry, take care of their car, participate in cooking family meals

3. **Independence (Driving)**

Driving is a symbol of emergence into the adult world and the High School teen will push for the right to drive. Getting a driver's license and having the ability to drive means that our child has officially "grown up". Driving gives our children a type of independence and freedom that they have not had up to this point. Similar to when our children start school, as parents we encounter emotions and conflicts associated with this monumental event in our child's life. It is important to stress with the teen that driving is a privilege and the privilege will be given based upon the child's acceptance of the responsibility that is associated.

Memories – Parent's think back to their early driving experiences and the possibility for reckless moments, irresponsible acts, near tragedies, overloading the car with friends, running stop signs and narrowly missing a car in the intersection. A car can also become a private, intimate place for a variety of romantic activities.

Concern -- Parents have a big concern for their children's safety. A parent has the benefit of wisdom and the realization that we have no guarantee on life. Teens have a feeling of immortality and think nothing bad can happen to them. A parent's concern is the realization that there are other drivers on

the road and defensive driving is vital at all times. Teens have a false sense of security in a car and they feel as though they are in control. Teens can be easily distracted by friends, their audio systems, and cell phones. Another concern of a parent is when their child may be the passenger in another car driven by another teen—the same risks apply.

Symbol -- Parents have anxious feelings when their teen gets their driver's license because this is another indication that their child is growing "up" and "away" from us. New independence creates uncertainty in knowing exactly where they are and what they are doing. The teen may say they are going to a friend's house and go someplace else. As parent's, this stage of our child's life brings us closer to the realization that our children will eventually leave home and live on their own apart from us.

4. **A Time for a Watchful Eye**

- Teens insist on privacy and they may even become more secretive during their high school years. They will keep the door of their room shut and may not divulge personal information to us. They may keep boxes or drawers locked in their room. Ground rules should be established related to "locks and secrets" and the fact that parent's may go through drawers or private spaces if the child is demonstrating behaviors that are concerning (**Ps. 101:7, Ps. 120:2**)
- Teens want to make their own decisions concerning clothes, classes, and leisure time. Potential conflict may arise from a disagreement about fashions, types of friends and curfews. Choose your battles, understand the motive for the choices that they are making and make reasonable compromises.
- Teens may be very defensive about their cultural choices related to music, videos, fashions, and friends. They will resent any suggestion that their choices are immature, irresponsible or that they may have given in to the peer pressure around them (**Prov. 1:10**).
- Teens tend to distance themselves from their parents and are not as eager to have parents around. They may resent a parent's involvement except at a safe distance. Parents may find it painful to acknowledge that our children are pushing toward being on their own.

5. **Trust**

If a parent and child relationship based on trust has not been developed at this point, it will be difficult to allow much freedom during the teen years. The more a parent is able to trust their child, the more a parent will be able to relax when they are out of their sight. The statement, "don't you trust me" will come up during discussions between a parent and teen. As the child demonstrates that they are honest and wanting to do what is right trust is built (**Prov. 19:1, Prov. 6:16-20, I Pet. 3:10-12**). Discuss ways in which the trust can continue during the teen years:

- Giving parents a phone call when their plans have changed
- Being home on time when a curfew is set
- Bringing friends home for parents to meet
- Continuing to be a part of the family and not isolating themselves in their room

There are two types of "extremes" that may surface in a parent during the teen years:

- **Paranoid Parent** – A parent who thinks their child is doing the worst, that they always have ulterior motives and are deceptive
- **Parent with Blinders** – A parent that allows too much freedom and thinks their child would never do anything wrong and if something wrong does happen it is not their child's fault (they were an "innocent victim" in the situation).

The world is not interested in helping parents teach Christian values to their children--pressures to be sexually active and emphasizing birth control not abstinence; pressure to take drugs, drink, and smoke surround them in all directions. Our children need for us to enforce boundaries. Pray that your teen will be able to make morally responsible and Christ honoring decisions and to have discipline and strength to do what is right.

6. **Think on These Things**

Communication

- Talk with your teen and let them know that you assume that they will strive to make the right choices and to be their best, but also make sure they know that trust is easy to lose and difficult to regain.
- Present your rules and reasons behind them -- Discuss how restrictions may loosen as they display maturity and trustworthiness. A parent's goal is to have a teen that is self-disciplined.
- Say "I love you" -- During this phase of a teen's life, they may not say it back to you, but they will quickly notice it if you do not say it to them. If you do not approve of a certain behavior, tell them you do not love their actions or behavior, but you love them and always want what is best for them (**I Cor. 13:4**)
- Demonstrate authority -- There will be times when an issue that is being discussed comes down to authority and your teen won't understand your reasons or won't agree and you may have to "pull rank" (**Eph. 6:1-3; Rom. 13:1-3, Matt. 28:18**).

Enforcement of Rules

- Enforce the rules that you set. At times it may be painful to punish for a serious infraction. Let them know you will follow through with the enforcement. Take your parenting seriously.
- Tie spiritual applications and scriptures to the conduct or situation that has occurred
- Remind your teen that God is in charge of us ALL and that your teen will benefit from your example as much as from your training.
- Remember to make punishment fit the crime

Compromise

- Parents should allow their High School teen to create their own individualism and identity – This is an important process for the teen to go through as they mature and move toward independence. This also is an opportunity for the parent to help the teen incorporate and shape their spiritual identity.
- There may be times that the teen's taste and style is not like their parents – Allowing them to make their style choices as long as they fit within the moral values that have been taught will be important.
- Encourage them to think things through and to share their ideas and feelings – Parents should listen carefully and take these conversations seriously; this shows that you respect them and also builds trust.

Dream Alignment

As the high school teen grows in independence, their personality, talents and strengths continue to be discovered and developed as well. They begin to develop their plans and dreams for the future. Their goals and dreams may not match up to what the parents had envisioned for them. Parents need to adjust their dreams to match the truth about their child's dreams and aspirations. As parents, we:

- Desire the best – We all want the best for our children. It is important to remember that a parent’s genuine desire for their child should be to become a strong, faithful Christian that become the future role models and leaders in God’s Church.
- Desire for our children to be better than we were – Parent’s would like to see their children not make the mistakes that they made, learn from other’s lessons and have a better life.
- Compare – The world measures success by wealth, good looks, fame and power through the amount of possessions. This sends a message that money can solve any problem, cure any malaise and fulfill any dream. A parent may try to push their child toward lucrative careers. The important thing to remember is that “who” your child becomes is more important than “what” they become. As long as they have grown into young adults that display Godly characteristics and have become strong and faithful Christians the “what” is not important **(Phil. 4:8)**
- Compete – Human nature is that we want to be the best and may find ourselves “internally” competing with others in many areas. This may also be the case in raising children and making comparisons with others. A parent may find themselves competing through their child.
- Build-up oneself through our children’s accomplishments – Parents may find personal fulfillment through the success of our children.

Self-Respect

Teens are searching for the truth and for answers to life **(John 14:6)**. The parent’s challenge is to help their teen develop self-respect. Teens with the right type of self-respect also discover that the secret to finding themselves is to find satisfaction in making wise choices and in offering respect to others. It is important to instill an understanding that:

- The reasons we do what we do are more important than what we do
- We are put here to serve, not to be served **(Matt. 20:28, Rom. 15:1, Gal. 6:2)**
- What we give is more important than what we are given **(Acts 20:35)**
- Through humility we gain confidence

7. Conflict and Discipline

Problems and pressures associated with parents’ dreams for their child usually peak during High School or College. It is during this time of the teen’s life that a parent has a good idea of the direction the teen/young adult is heading. If the child has not become a Christian or does not appear to be heading in the direction that will lead them to Heaven, it is time to evaluate the home life and parenting direction that has been taken and readjust the approach. It is never too late to demonstrate, reinforce and instill Godly values in the child’s life **(Prov. 22:6)**.

Conflicts at home may arise due to:

- Identity -- The main emotional focus of High School teens is on identity. The teen is trying to figure out who they are and where they fit in (finding their niche in society).
- A parent’s internal struggles – As a parent’s dreams for their child begin to fade or change, they may go through a grieving process. A parent may push their teen harder, try to bargain or bribe them to become someone they are not, or they may become angry at the teen for the choices they have made **(Eph. 6:4)**.
- Disagreements between parents and teen – These differences and struggles may center around friends, next year’s courses, practicing, grades or differences between the parents’ and child’s goals. During these struggles, a parent should ask themselves:
 1. Do you really have your child’s best interest at heart?
 2. Whose needs am I meeting?

3. Are you affirming their talents and gifts?
4. Are you holding onto your child with clenched fists? (It's tough letting go)

Ideas on how to decrease conflict and instill discipline are:

- Affirm mature and responsible actions and offer rewards for positive behavior – making responsible choices is worthwhile. Examples of rewards would be more privileges, extending a curfew, a little more budget for an item they are desire to purchase.
- Share with your teen expressions of your love in several different ways—hugs, notes, acts and verbal
- Look for help – The teen years can be stormy and the trip to independence can be turbulent. Seek guidance from God's word, talk with other parents that have been through these stages and ask for prayers and seek their counsel (**Phil. 4:6, Prov. 12:15, James 1:5**)
- Never give up – Your teen needs your loving discipline and supervision

8. Conclusion

During this time of the High School teen's life—your High School teen needs you. As parents, you know your child better than anyone else and in addition, you want what's best for them. You can give valuable counsel for the future and guide with love. The goal is to move your child in the right direction while building a more adult relationship with your teen. Remember to keep praying and asking God for direction and help.

Questions for Thought:

1. Why is it important to establish the source of authority early in your child's life?
2. Why would it be important to begin teaching children the principles of God at an early age?
3. What is one of the most important responsibilities of a parent in raising a child?
4. What new challenges do parents face when their child reaches high school?
5. How should parents actions change as their children mature (discipline, rules, guidelines)?