

RELATIONAL BUILDING BLOCKS

Ideas for building a solid relational foundation with your teens:

GIVE YOUR TEENS LOTS OF TIME AND ATTENTION - Believe it or not, your teenager really does want your time and your attention. Their words, sighs, body language, and massive eye rolls may sometimes suggest otherwise, but study after study has proven that teenagers desire healthy relationships with their parents. Those relationships take time, trust, effort, intentionality, and a thick parental skin. Therefore, make time for a real connection. When they ask for your time, say yes. In a culture where you, as an adult, are always busy and forever distracted, you have to make quality time with your teenager a real priority, especially if you want to develop trust and health in that relationship. Make time and space for your teens, be present with them, and the intentional conversations you are hoping to have might just happen.

STEP AWAY FROM YOUR DEVICE - In a recent survey, teenagers were asked to share something they wished was different about their parents. The overwhelming answer was, "I wish my parent would put their phone down and pay more attention to me." Teenagers know when you are only giving them your partial attention. In order to give them the time and attention they deserve, you might need to take your time and attention away from your phone and focus completely on the gifts of God that are your teenager. When your teenagers feel like what you are doing on your phone or in your job is more important to you than spending quality time with them, they begin to question how much they are valued by you. Don't miss the precious few moments you have left with them before they leave home to check email or respond to text messages that don't really matter in the long run.

OFFER GRACE & FORGIVENESS - In those times when your teenager messes up, makes a poor decision, and lets you down (and they will), you must remember that you may be their only advocate. They will already feel isolated and ashamed about what they have done, and they need you more than ever. It is at this moment that your teenager needs to know that you believe in them and that they are forgivable. This doesn't mean that they won't have to face the consequences of their actions; that's not the way the world we live in works. What it does mean is that when they feel like the world is against them, they have to know that you are for them. It means that even when you are disappointed, you may need to hold back in expressing that disappointment to strengthen the relationship and help them process what they have done. It means that your teenager needs to know that you will be there for them no matter what, that they are forgivable, and that your love for them is unconditional.

DISPLAY HUMILITY & SAY, "I'M SORRY!" - Are you aware that, as a parent, you are sometimes in the wrong? It's hard to believe, but true. Your teenager needs to know that you, as their parent, aren't always right. That you, as their parent, have made mistakes and will make mistakes, That you, as their parent, sometimes need to ask for their forgiveness. And that you, as their parent, will do so when you are wrong. This is not the time or the stage of life to teach your teenager that you are the adult and are always right. Instead, take this time to teach your teen that everyone makes mistakes, that it's OK to be wrong sometimes, and that what matters most is what you do about it when it's you.

SHARE ABOUT WHAT GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIFE - As you talk to your teens, especially about church and faith, don't just interrogate them about what they are learning. Instead, get in the habit of talking about what God is doing in your life and how you are growing in your faith. If you do, you'll not only be teaching your kids about your own spiritual journey; you'll be building the relationship. You'll be letting them into your heart and inviting them into your walk with Jesus, even in those times when you don't have all the answers. Be honest and authentic, appropriately, of course, but share what's going on with you in order to help them process what's going on with them.

GRACE

HUMILITY

ATTENTION

FORGIVENESS