

Prepare Teens for Responsible Adulthood

Here are a few suggestions to help your teens become responsible adults. First, allow them to own their own problems. Don't rush to the rescue when they get into trouble.

Jane, 17, had recently gotten her driver's license. "Mom, can I take the car to school today? I need to do some shopping at the mall after school." "Sure, Jane, that will be fine, but please be careful." After school Jane invited some of her friends to go with her. Some boys came up beside them and motioned that they'd like to race. Jane, like any teenager, thought it would be fun to show off a little. So she "put her peddle to the metal" and the car shot forward. It wasn't but a minute till a police car pulled up behind them with red lights flashing. Jane pulled over. The officer asked to see her driver's license. "You were going 50 miles an hour in a 25-mile zone," he said. He began writing out a ticket. Jane was devastated. That night she said to her father, "I am very sorry. What shall I do?" Her dad said, "Jane, I am very sorry, too. You will be fined and it will be your responsibility to earn money to pay the fine."

Finally judgment day came and Jane's mother went with her for moral support. "Jane, why don't you ask the judge for time to earn the money to pay the fine?" The judge was a kind man. He set the fine at \$75 and gave her 90 days to raise the money. So Jane got jobs in the neighborhood babysitting. She was able to pay the fine when it was due. It was a hard lesson for Jane, but she took a giant step forward in adult responsibility.

Foster Cline, MD and Jim Faye in their book, *Parenting Teens with Love and Logic*, tell us that "Responsibility is caught, not taught. Responsibility isn't something that a parent passes on to a teen by lectures, threats, or intimidation. Instead, responsibility and the self-esteem that goes along with it are passed on through covert messages that allow teens to build their character on their strengths. We must give teens opportunities to make decisions — as well as mistakes." pp. 38, 39.

Teens learn responsibility by being given choices. Jack, 15, needed transportation to school for a special basketball practice. "Mom, please drive me to school this evening for a special basketball practice." "No, problem, Jack. I will gladly take you to school when you clean your room. I want your clothes picked up and your room vacuumed and everything neat and in order." Jack responded, "Mom, you are just too particular." "No problem, Jack, the choice is yours." In 10 minutes, Mom heard the vacuum cleaner start up in Jack's bedroom. Jack's mother gave him a choice. Making right choices is a big part of becoming responsible adults.

Let kids go so they can grow. Liz, age 14, has always been attracted to jewelry. She came home from school one day wearing a plain gold neck

less. Her mother said nothing for the first day. Then she invited Liz to sit down with her for a little talk. "Liz, you are a very attractive girl. You really don't need that necklace. I wear no jewelry because of what the Bible says." Then she read 1 Tim. 2:9, 10. "You are old enough to make up your mind about many things. I hope you will pray about this matter." Liz's mother dropped the subject and never said another word. In a couple of days the necklace disappeared.

Why not use your energy thinking about how you can build a positive relationship with your teens? Plan surprises for them. "Dan, how would you like to join me in building a snow board? I saw a book that details every step and I think we can do it together." Dan was delighted. So Dan and his father spent many happy hours together in the shop. The relationship they developed was a great stabilizer for Dan in his later adolescent years.

Dating. Yes, your teen will eventually want to date. This is the natural order of things — the way God created us. Keep your discussion about dating with teens matter-of-fact and friendly. All teens know about the danger of pregnancy. Discuss such questions as: "How would you pay for a physician?" "Are you ready to take on the responsibilities of a baby?"

Sexuality should be a welcome topic for discussion. Sexual values will gradually be developed as your child matures. If there is a warm and friendly relationship with you and your teens, he or she will come to you with questions and ask for advice.

Cline and Faye say, "Since there is no hard-and-fast rule about when a teen is old enough to date, our emphasis should be on the teen's decision making." *Ibid.*, p. 191. Explain to your teen that dating is God's plan for helping His children learn the nuances of the interpersonal relationships. You will learn who you will be comfortable with. This downplays the physical aspects and elevates the spiritual. "Remember, Sue, you are looking for a soul mate. Is your friend spiritual minded or is he uncomfortable talking about spiritual themes?"

Discussions like this will deepen your friendship with your teen. They will then feel free to come to you and ask questions. "Discuss with your teens who they will date, the activities they will engage in, and the hours they will keep. You might want to offer some suggestions for activities. After all, you dated once, too! These discussions can go a long way in enhancing your friendship with your teens." *Ibid.*, p. 189. Tell your teens that premarital sex short-circuits God's wonderful plan. Sex is "high voltage." It is very good, but can be dangerous and destructive outside of marriage.

"You must win their affection if you would impress religious truth upon their heart." *Child Guidance*, p. 148.

