

How to Relate to Your Adult Children and Pass On Your Faith - Part 2

Jane, remember, I expect you to be home by 10:30.” “Oh, Mom, I am not 14 years old anymore. I am 19 and I am very capable of taking care of myself. I should be home around 11:00.” This illustrates a difficult transition for parents. Failure to adjust our parenting styles as children grow older is a cause of much estrangement between parents and their adult children. There is no rule book to go by, and there are many variables. Children mature at different rates. Some are very dependable and use good judgment at 16 years of age, others are still acting like earlites at 20. It takes much prayer and sensitivity to adjust to children’s changing developmental needs. If you want a warm, close relationship with your adult children, you must avoid paternalistic behavior like a plague. Give them time to grow up and trust them.

When do children become adults? Well, at 16 they can get a driver’s license; at 18 they can vote. But chronological age is not the best indicator. It is emotional maturity — good judgment, self-control that really count.

The Dating Age: This is the real test of parenting skills. First, expect teens to want to date. This is normal. My mother believed in the “popcorn gospel.” I had two older teenage sisters. Often my mother would say, “Why don’t you invite your friends over for popcorn tonight?” Her philosophy was “keep them together and provide a good time.” On Saturday night at our house there would be singing, games, and laughter. There were four of us siblings and we all loved Mother dearly. It was this love and respect for our Mother that bound us to her and to the church.

At this age, it is so important for parents to use reflective listening. This means reflecting back the feelings of the child. “Paul, you seem to be a bit depressed the last few days.” Occasionally, talk about your ups and downs in your dating years. Encourage your children to pray about their social relationships.

When your son or daughter turn 14, don’t talk to them as if they were 10 years of age. Remember the axiom: “You cannot antagonize and influence at the same time.” Anger blocks reason in both parents and children. No one can think rationally when he or she is angry. The Apostle Paul gave us some good counsel: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4, NIV).

What can we do to help our children to stay close to Christ and become loyal Seventh-day Adventists?

1. “Nurture intentional family spirituality.” Bailey Gillespie, *Keeping the Faith*, p. 9.

2. Conduct regular family devotions and make them short and interesting..

3. Be sure your children understand the gospel and help each one to develop a personal relationship with Christ.

4. Make Sabbath a happy day, and this takes some planning.

5. Set the right example before your children and listen to them.

6. Demonstrate a happy, Christian marriage.

7. Provide a Christian education. I know it is expensive, but it is the best investment you’ll ever make.

8. Talk often as a family about God, especially around the dinner table. Share stories about your own spiritual journey.

9. Have fun as a family.

10. Stand firm on your standards. Explain them and talk about them as a family.

God said of Abraham, “‘I know him, that he will command his children . . . after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.’ (Parents) should patiently instruct their children, kindly and untiringly . . . how to live in order to please God.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 140, 143. We have responsibilities even after they have established their own homes. But this takes a great deal of tact and sensitivity.

Home Atmosphere: “Above all things else, let parents surround their children with an atmosphere of cheerfulness, courtesy, and love. A home where love dwells, and where it is expressed in looks, in words, and in acts, is a place where angels delight to manifest their presence.” *Child Guidance*, p. 146.

How can we relate to adult children and pass on our faith? Well, it all begins when they are children at home. Much alienation from parents and the church come as a hang-over from problems when they were teens. So, “smile, parents. . . Let the sunshine from a loving, grateful heart light up the countenance. . . Adapt yourselves to the children’s needs.” Again, note the words: “You must win their affection if you would impress religious truth upon their heart.” *Ibid*, p. 148.

When children marry and establish homes of their own, avoid telling your children how to rear their children. You may ask questions but don’t intrude or side with grandchildren. Encourage a sense of humor. This helps to build relationships. Then, keep in touch. The telephone and e-mail are marvelous communication tools.

Finally, don’t carry guilt about your children who have left the church. Bathe them with prayer. Be patient. Remember, there are no perfect parents or perfect children. I claim a great promise: “I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save” (Isa. 49:25, NIV). Remember to develop and maintain cordial, affectionate relationships with your adult children. Then claim the promise.