

FOCUS<sup>ON</sup> THE FAMILY  
RESOURCES

# Lead Your Teen to a Lifelong Faith

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*Lead Your Teen to a Lifelong Faith*

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Based on the *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Mentoring of Teens* (Focus on the Family/Tyndale House Publishers, 2001)

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# How to Use This Book

It's great to have a teenager. In fact, while your child's teen years can be among the most challenging you'll face as a parent, they can also be the best years of your parenting life.

For one thing, raising a teenager will give new depth and fervency to your prayer life! You're likely to be reminded every day that by yourself, you're not up to the task. That's okay; it means you're just like the rest of us.

Passing the baton of faith successfully to your teen will, at the end of the process, give you a tremendous sense of victory and satisfaction. "We did it! We did it!" you'll want to shout.

Parenting your teen, especially in the area of spiritual growth, is a divine calling, a challenge that will demand the best you've got to give, and a wonderful privilege. In this book, based on the *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Mentoring of Teens* (Focus on the Family/Tyndale 2001), you'll find practical, parent-tested advice to guide you each step of the way:

- You'll see that no matter what your situation, and no matter how good a job you have or haven't done so far, you can be the effective mentor your child needs.
- You'll gain a clear understanding of the fundamental change that takes place in the parent-child relationship during the teen years, and of what that means for influencing your teen's faith.
- You'll learn that the key to mentoring your teen is a great relationship, and acquire crucial insights into building and maintaining that bond.
- You'll discover ways in which to disciple your teen, allowing you to tailor a plan to fit your family.

Mentoring your teen is a challenge, but one you face with the Lord of heaven at your side. He loves you, He loves your child, and He is committed to your success.

As He encouraged Joshua, who faced the daunting job of leading Israel into the Promised Land, so He encourages you: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

### ***Studying with a Group***

Working your way through this book with fellow parents—whether in a small group, Sunday school class, retreat, or other setting—is a great idea. You’ll be fortified by the insights and support they offer.

Want to study all the chapters in 16 weeks? Feel free! If you prefer shorter courses, try tackling the book in four segments of four weeks each.

In each session you’ll find the following:

*Startup*—An introduction to get you thinking about the topic.

*Survey*—A chance to assess where you are on the subject, and even to have a few well-deserved laughs.

*Scripture*—Biblical input to read and wrestle with.

*Strategies*—Down-to-earth suggestions for everyday mentoring.

*Steps to Take*—Ways to turn your good intentions into action.

The guide in the back of this book will help your leader make the most of your time together. That works best if you’ve read and completed each interactive chapter before the group meets. You’ll find the advice, questions, and planning tools well worth your effort.

### ***Studying on Your Own***

You don’t have to join a group to benefit from this book. You—or you and your spouse—can complete each chapter individually or in tandem, at your own pace. If you’re studying with a spouse, talk about your survey answers. Plan your action steps together. Pray together for your teen, and for the wisdom and stamina God wants to give you.

If you’re working through this book alone, remember that you aren’t *really* alone. God’s Spirit can be your teacher and counselor—and, if you like, you can enlist a friend to be a sounding board and keep you honest.

Whether you soak up these insights in a group or on your own, we encourage you to get a copy of the *Parents’ Guide to the Spiritual Mentoring of Teens*. This nearly 600-page reference book is packed with plenty of advice we couldn’t include in this one; you’ll want to have it handy to help you meet even more of the challenges of passing the baton of faith to your sometimes perplexing, always priceless teen.

PART 1

Becoming  
Your Teen's  
Spiritual  
Coach

# 1

## What Mentors Are Meant For

*startup*



Remember when your teenager was a baby?

You probably took care of that child's every need. You bathed, fed, dressed, and changed her. Later you screened her friends, signed her up for ballet lessons or basketball, and told her when to practice the flute or feed the dog. You were still in control, more or less.

Those were the good old days, right?

A lot of parents wish the adolescent years were just a continuation of the preteen process. They'd like to control everything their teen does.

As you may have noticed, few teenagers share that view.

It's only normal: As the young person's need to take on greater responsibility increases, it's vital that the "control center" begins to move from parent to offspring.



That's where mentoring comes in.

Being a mentor is like being a coach. When would-be athletes are young, a coach begins with the basics. He explains everything. He's not just on the field—he's positioning kids' feet and arms, showing them how to catch the pass or hit the ball.

When the day finally arrives for a real game, though, the coach stays on the sidelines. The players take the field. It's the same way with parents who want to be spiritual mentors.

In the early years, we may show our children how to pray, even giving them words to say and telling them to close their eyes. But eventually our kids are praying on their own. We might wish we could elbow our way into those conversations, but all we can do is make suggestions from the sidelines.

Our halftime pep talks may be delivered on a weekend or during a family vacation. Our post-game analyses may occur at bedtime or over pie at a coffee shop.

Sometimes we'll find ourselves sharing the coaching duties with others—camp counselors, youth leaders, or Sunday school teachers. But because we're the parents of our teens, we'll be their "head coaches"—their primary mentors, for better or for worse.

We hope this chapter helps make it for the better.

## *survey*



1. When you hear the word "mentor," which of the following comes to mind?
  - a. An alien with a huge brain
  - b. A tin of powerful breath mints
  - c. A wise old man who keeps calling you "Grasshopper"
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. When it comes to spiritually mentoring your teen, what have you tried so far?
  - a. Nothing
  - b. Memorizing books of the Bible that start with “Q”
  - c. Showing how to multiply loaves and fishes
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Which of the following best describes your mentoring style?
  - a. Coach
  - b. Disinterested Bystander
  - c. Benevolent Despot
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Walking alongside your teen rather than controlling him would be
  - a. A tremendous relief
  - b. An abdication of my responsibility
  - c. The worst idea since Low-Carb Superglue
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. By the time you’re done with this book, you hope to
  - a. See spiritual progress in your teenager
  - b. Feel more confident in guiding your teen’s spiritual growth
  - c. Learn how to work the remote on your DVD player
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## *scripture*



1. Read Proverbs 1:8-9. Based on this passage, would you say that mentoring is a job for dads only? Why or why not?

Why do you suppose King Solomon bothered to explain why his son should listen to his parents' spiritual guidance? Why not just order the son to listen?

2. Look at Proverbs 3:1-3. What two reasons does Solomon give for following his instructions?

If mentoring your teen will bring him or her the same benefits, is it worth your effort? Why or why not?

3. Read Proverbs 4:1-6. What kind of mentor does Solomon's father, David, sound like?

How do you think two key events in David's life—standing up to Goliath and having an adulterous affair with Bathsheba—may have affected the way he mentored Solomon?

What's one positive spiritual event in your life that you could use as an example when you mentor your teen?

What's one spiritual mistake you've made that your teen could learn from?

## *strategies*

What does a mentor look like? These students recall what their “coaches” did to guide them:

- “My mother would kneel beside my bed at night and pray for me before telling me good night. It was often during the prayers that she was able to communicate her feelings or concerns to me. She also told me this often and wrote it down for me: ‘I have great worth apart from my performance because Christ gave His life for me and therefore imparted great value to me. I am deeply loved, fully pleasing, totally forgiven, accepted, and complete in Christ Jesus.’”
- “My dad always made me go to sports practices when I didn’t want to because he said I have to keep my commitments. This caused a lot of yelling, but I learned something very important about commitments.”
- “When we were little, my mom read us Bible stories either after dinner or before we went to bed. Her way of making sure we were listening was to ask us questions about the story.”

Mentoring takes many forms. But the purpose is the same: to help your child develop a solid faith of his or her own.

### *It’s All in the Timing*

As your child matures, he needs you less as a governor and more as a mentor—someone who leads by walking alongside.

Mentors major in guiding, encouraging, teaching—not controlling. The transition from governor to mentor is made by slowly letting go during the teen years, giving more and more free rein as the child proves himself trustworthy.

Instead of maintaining a viselike grip on the youngster’s life until the last possible second when he leaves

home, the wise parent shifts responsibility and choices a bit at a time, a little more each year.

Making the transition from governor to mentor requires courage—as all battles do. And timing is crucial.

The parents of 13-year-old Derek, for example, know that he's ready to take on more responsibility for his own spiritual growth. He's so zealous, in fact, that kids at school call him "Bible boy." He even started an after-school prayer meeting in a classroom. Now's the time for Derek's folks to offer him a new challenge—a missions trip during spring break, perhaps, or a backyard Bible club for neighborhood kids in the summer.

By contrast, 15-year-old Brianna has always been more interested in surfing the Web than in searching the Scriptures. Her parents are helping her find Web sites that offer devotional readings, in the hope that she'll develop the habit of spending "quiet times" with God.

It wouldn't make sense for "Bible boy" Derek's parents to hover over his devotional life, planning his next 365 readings by chapter and verse and sitting on the edge of his bed to make sure he doesn't miss one. He's past that point. Nor would it be wise for webmistress Brianna's folks to simply hope that her disinterest in Bible reading will somehow take care of itself. Demanding that Brianna muscle her way through Leviticus might foster only resentment and failure, but starting with her Internet enthusiasm just may work.

The parents of Derek and Brianna know these things because they understand that mentors must be clear-eyed observers of their kids. As Dr. James Dobson has written, "It is a wise mother or father who can let go little by little as the growing child is able to stand on his or her own. If you watch and listen carefully, the critical milestones will be obvious."<sup>1</sup>

### *The Mentor's Job Description*

To better understand what a mentor does, let's consider two fictional stories about those who led by walking alongside.

In *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien, Gandalf is mentor to Bilbo Baggins. Gandalf doesn't make Bilbo's journey for him; he imparts wisdom, practical advice, and skill so that Bilbo can complete his own quest.

In the film *Karate Kid*, Mr. Miyagi is Daniel's mentor, teaching him how to control his temper, be strong, and deal with bullies. The martial-arts master doesn't fight Daniel's battles for him; he cultivates the boy's self-discipline, preparing Daniel to face enemies on his own turf.

In the real-life story of your teen, he or she is the hero on a journey. Yours is the role of mentor.

If you aren't a perfect mentor, join the club. In fiction and in life, most mentors are flawed. Fortunately, imperfections—and your admissions of them—can make your teen more open to your guidance. And if you've learned from your mistakes, you have road-tested wisdom to offer the hero in your home.

This doesn't mean, of course, that your teen will always be eager to hear that wisdom. Even fictional mentors are often resented and their advice resisted—until the hero learns the hard way that Yoda or Mom or Dad was right.

### *The Mentor as Model*

Mentors are role models, too.

Imagine Obi-Wan Kenobi, mentor to Luke Skywalker in the original *Star Wars* movie, trying to train his aspiring Jedi knight as follows:

*Obi-Wan:* Use the Force, Luke.

*Luke:* Why?

*Obi-Wan:* Uh . . . I'm not sure. Never used it. I hear it's very effective, though.

*Luke:* But—

*Obi-Wan:* Now, about this light saber. To turn it on, you just push this button. No, that's not it. Maybe this switch over here . . .

*Luke:* Haven't you used that, either?

*Obi-Wan:* Hey, smart mouth! What do you think you are, a Jedi master? You kids today! Why, when I was your age . . .

Mentors aren't perfect, but they need to practice what they preach. In fact, they may have to practice a *lot* before they offer advice to their apprentices.

Tracy, 16, receives frequent lectures about her "bad attitude" toward the church youth group. Yet every Sunday in the car, she watches her mother stage a post-service "roast" of their pastor, the committee that chooses music, and the elders who draw up the church budget. Will Tracy change her attitude? Probably not for the better.

Being a role model may be an intimidating assignment, but it's ours nonetheless. Whether we want them to or not, our teens are watching. Regardless of our words, they'll try behavior that seems to work for us. They're telling us, in effect, "Mom and Dad, who you are and what you do speak so loudly that I can't hear what you're saying."

If that makes you feel more like a muddle than a model, there's hope.

God uses imperfect models, too.

Still, we're easier to use when we've practiced enough to know which end of the light saber is up.

### ***Mentoring: The Wave of Your Future***

Like it or not, your relationship with your young person is changing—and *must* change. You can't influence your teen in the way you did when he or she was younger.

But you *can* choose to work *with* the process and not against it. That's why the most successful parents of teenagers will:

1. Recognize the change.
2. Accept the change.
3. Plan accordingly—gradually transferring control and responsibility for choices and actions to their teens.

## *steps to take*



1. Are you acting as your teen's governor—or mentor?  
Look at each of the following pairs of statements. Circle a dot between the two statements to show where you are on the spectrum between governor and mentor.

GOVERNOR

MENTOR

- |  |       |   |
|--|-------|---|
| a. You tend to fight your teen's battles for him   | ••••• | You try to arm him with the weapons of truth and character to face his own foes |
| b. You try to control your teen's choices          | ••••• | You give her the facts she needs to make her own decisions                      |
| c. You tend to pretend that your teen hasn't grown | ••••• | You watch for milestones that show he's ready for more independence             |
| d. You only give advice about the future           | ••••• | You try to help him deal with his fears about the future                        |
| e. You tend to lecture out of frustration          | ••••• | You try to offer motivation and inspiration when she's open to it               |



## GOVERNOR

- f. You tend to deal only with crises of the moment ●●●●
- g. You pressure your teen to conform outwardly to your expectations ●●●●

## MENTOR

- You try to plant values that will be useful to him later
- You try to help her be transformed inwardly through personal interaction with God

Now mark an “X” on each line of dots to show where you’d *like* to be a month from now.

In those areas where you’d like to change, which of the following do you think might be holding you back?

- Fear that your teen might hurt himself or herself
- Not knowing what to do
- Feeling too busy
- Being too tired
- Being too impatient
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Based on your answer to the previous question, which of the following do you most need to ask God for this week?

- Courage
- Wisdom
- Time
- Energy
- Patience
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

- One part of mentoring is being a role model. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being horrified, 10 being ecstatic), circle a number to show how happy you’d be if your son or daughter imitated your habits in each of the following areas:

HANDLING ANGER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
GAMBLING	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DRIVING	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ALCOHOL USE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
SEXUAL BEHAVIOR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DRESS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
WORK HOURS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
CREDIT CARD DEBT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

3. Now ask yourself about behaviors you *want* your teen to imitate. In each of the following areas, try to name an action you've taken in the last six months. Then indicate whether your teen knows about it. (Note: If you're thinking that performing good deeds in front of others in order to win their praise is hypocritical, you're right [Matthew 6:1-6]. But the point of letting your teen see these actions is to teach him or her to follow in your footsteps.)

#### SHARING YOUR FAITH

An action you took:

Does your teen know about it? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

#### SHOWING HOSPITALITY

An action you took:

Does your teen know about it? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

#### FORGIVING

An action you took:

Does your teen know about it? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

## EXERCISING SELF-CONTROL

An action you took:

Does your teen know about it? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

## GIVING GENEROUSLY

An action you took:

Does your teen know about it? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

## RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF THE POOR

An action you took:

Does your teen know about it? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

## SUPPORTING MISSIONARIES

An action you took:

Does your teen know about it? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

## PRAYING

An action you took:

Does your teen know about it? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

Based on your answers, which of the following do you need to work on more?

- a. Putting your faith into action
- b. Letting your teen see you acting on your faith

4. When it comes to guiding your teenager spiritually, do you fear you have nothing to share? Maybe you're not as unqualified as you think.

What's one aspect of the Christian life that you know a *little* more about than your teen does?

What's a spiritual mistake you've made that your teen hasn't made yet?

What did you learn from it that you could pass on to your teen?

Have you made even a *tiny* bit of progress since beginning your relationship with God?

If so, what could you tell your teen about that?

# 16

## Learning to Let Go

*startup*



“If you love something, set it free.”

“Just as a butterfly must emerge from its cocoon, so our children must be released to reach adulthood.”

Birds. Butterflies. We’ve all heard those analogies about letting go of children so they can mature, spiritually and otherwise. It all sounds so simple—until we actually have to *do* it!

But that’s part of a mentor’s job.

Much as we might like to cage or cocoon our kids to protect them from the world (or themselves), the day will come when they’re on their own. The time-honored “As long as you live under my roof, you’ll follow my rules” will be an empty threat. We know, deep down, that’s the way it should be. But it’s not an easy prospect

to contemplate when you consider scenarios like these:

- Your son goes off to college, where his philosophy professor is a former preacher's kid who left the faith and now takes delight in convincing his students to do the same.
- Your daughter starts her first job, where she meets a charming, non-Christian guy who pressures her to ditch church and spend cozy weekends with him at his parents' beach cabin.
- Your son gets a roommate who keeps a marijuana stash in the closet and is only too happy to share.
- Your daughter rents an apartment with a young woman who is a very convincing spokesperson for her faith—which happens to be Buddhism.

Chances are that you won't be there to "straighten things out" when your newly liberated teen faces situations like these. Your son or daughter will have life-shaping choices to make—on his or her own.

## *survey*



1. When you think about "cutting the apron strings," what comes to mind?
  - a. The mom on *Leave It to Beaver*
  - b. "Free at last, free at last . . ."
  - c. Bungee jumping gone horribly awry
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Compared to other parents of teens, you're probably
  - a. A bit overprotective
  - b. A bit underprotective
  - c. A bit tired of comparing yourself to other parents of teens
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. When did you begin preparing your child for the day when he'll be on his own?
  - a. Just before conception
  - b. When he started kindergarten
  - c. What do you mean, "On his own"?
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. You'll know your child "owns his faith" when he
  - a. Studies Scripture by himself
  - b. Stops asking whether Adam had a belly button
  - c. Tries to sell it to you
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Spiritually speaking, when did your parents decide you were on your own?
  - a. When you went on the church-building trip to Latin America
  - b. After the incident with the firecrackers and the jar of peanut butter
  - c. What do you mean, "On my own"?
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## *scripture*



1. Read Luke 2:39-52. What evidence do you see here that Jesus was ready to be "on His own" spiritually?

Do you think Joseph and Mary were ready to let Him go? Why or why not?

How are Jesus' attitude and behavior here like those of your teen? How are they different?

If you'd been in the sandals of Joseph or Mary, would you have reacted to this incident by (a) grounding Jesus, (b) warning Him not to do it again, (c) letting Him stay in Jerusalem, or (d) something else? Why?

2. Examine 2 Kings 2:8-15. Let's say you ask your teen, "Tell me, what can I do for you—spiritually speaking—before I am taken from you?" What might be your teen's reply? What kind of preparation do you think he or she might want most?

## *strategies*

How can you prepare your child for the not-too-distant future?

Here are three ways to go about it—three “prep points” that can get teens ready to spread their wings without going down in flames:

### ***Prep Point 1: Make Sure Your Teen Owns His Faith***

Look for these five signs that your adolescent is beginning to own his faith:

1. He wants to discover more about God and what it means to belong to Him. The evidence: an interest in Bible reading, prayer, and asking questions.
2. She doesn't have to be nagged into being involved with other Christian teens.
3. Given time, he can explain *in his own words* how he became a Christian and why he wants to live like one.
4. She shows an interest in what God might want as she plans for the future.
5. His views about how biblical principles should be



applied sometimes differ from your own, or they are at least expressed in different ways.

That last point is a tough one. As parents, we need to distinguish between faith essentials and parental tastes—being sure to pass along the former and be flexible with the latter.

Where should you draw that line with your teen? Here are five questions to ask yourself when you need to decide:

1. *Is my child's eternal destiny at stake here?* It's easy to forget, but the gospel boils down to a pretty simple statement: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

2. *Am I upset because my teen is rejecting the Bible or because I feel rejected?* Is your child really discounting Scripture or just interpreting it in a way that differs from your own?

3. *Is this issue addressed in historic statements of what's essential in the Christian faith?* If not, it may be a matter of preference.

4. *Is this worth risking our relationship?* If the issue doesn't threaten your teen's safety, consider avoiding ultimatums in order to continue having a long-term influence.

5. *Do I need to leave this in God's hands?* Keep loving and praying for your teen. Like many adolescents, she may be tearing her faith apart—in order to put it back together again in a form she can truly own.

### ***Prep Point 2: Give Kids Increasing Freedom to Make Choices***

The second thing we can do to ready kids for independence is to let them make as many decisions as possible. It's great to help teens turn their beliefs into convictions, but we must go a step further and let them start *applying* those convictions, too.

"But it's risky to let kids make choices," you might say.

And you'd be right. Our teens will never truly grow up unless we take those risks, however. The key is to minimize them.

How? Dean Merrill (*Focus on the Family* magazine, October 1996) recommends finding “safe settings” in which to use what he calls the Two Magic Words of Parenting: “You decide.”

Call it *empowerment* if you like. That's the \$50 word for letting your kids make safe but significant choices. If we want our teens to make sound decisions when they're out of the nest, they need to hear us say “You decide” as often as possible—while they're still under our wings.

### ***Prep Point 3: Give Kids Increasing Responsibility***

The third way to prepare teens for independence is to hand them more responsibility. This means taking off the spiritual training wheels and letting kids pedal the straight and narrow for themselves—even if the ride is a bit wobbly.

Joe White, in *FaithTraining* (Focus on the Family, 1994), suggests that kids take on the following responsibilities at approximately the following ages:

*Age 12*—Regular youth group attendance

*Age 13.5*—Daily quiet times

*Age 14*—Small, peer-group Bible study

*Age 15*—Lifestyle witnessing to friends

*Age 17*—Intellectual preparation (apologetics, etc.) for college

*Age 18*—Summer missionary trip or serving/giving job

No two children are alike, of course; all mature at different rates. Some young people struggle with certain tasks because of personality, disability, or emotional trauma and should not be expected to achieve as others can.

Here are five areas in which most teens can begin to take responsibility:

1. *Their relationship with God.* When children are young, some parents try to act as “middle men” in their little ones’ link with the Lord. By adolescence, if not long before, kids need to understand that their connection with God is direct.

2. *Spiritual disciplines.* Prayer, Bible reading and memorization, giving to the Lord’s work—all are activities most teens can handle.

3. *Church involvement.* Some teens can’t stand to miss a single youth-group meeting, Bible study, or retreat. Others would rather be skinned alive than darken a church door. You may want to set a minimum requirement for church attendance, but give your teen options beyond that point. For instance, let him choose to attend Sunday school *or* a small discipleship group.

4. *Living their faith.* When our children are small, we may try to help them resist temptation by hiding the cookie jar. But we won’t be able to do that when our teens leave the nest. Adolescents need to know that saying no to wrong and yes to right is up to them.

5. *Finding answers to their questions.* It feels good to be the “fount of wisdom” when our pre-teens come to us, wide-eyed and trusting, with their queries. In adolescence, however, those wide eyes tend to narrow considerably. Fortunately, teens need to practice answer-hunting anyway. Instead of playing oracle, point your child toward helpful books, pamphlets, and Web sites.

### ***Sending Strong Kids to College***

Many adolescents seize graduation as a chance to break with childhood—and religious activities are often the first to go.

Your own college-bound teen’s story will be unique. But it’s more likely to end happily if you get ready for college in the following ways:

1. *Let your teen know that your family is rooting for her.*

Things can get lonely when you're a student. Communicate your family's continuing solidarity through e-mail, phone calls, and notes.

2. *Be the kind of parent your child can run to.* Starting now, make it clear that doubts and questions won't alienate you.

3. *Prepare for the debate.* Your teen's faith will be challenged during the next few years—guaranteed. The challenges may be issued by an agnostic professor, a skeptical co-worker, or the disappointment of a broken romance. Just as political candidates stage “dry runs” with stand-in opponents to get ready for debates, you can bring up tough questions in advance and seek answers together.

4. *Make the church hunt as easy as possible.* Don't try to pick your teen's college-town church for her, but make the search simpler. Look together at Yellow Pages and newspaper church listings for the area. If possible, visit one or more congregations near the campus.

5. *Pray.* You'll probably be doing a lot of this when your teen is off on his own. You may as well start now!

## *steps to take*



1. Does your teen own his faith? On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being weakly, 10 being strongly), circle a number to show how well he's doing in each of the following areas:

He wants to discover more about God and what it means to belong to Him.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

She doesn't have to be nagged into being involved with other Christian teens.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Given time, he can explain in his own words how he became a Christian and why he wants to live like one.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

She shows an interest in what God might want as she plans for the future.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

His views about how biblical principles should be applied sometimes differ from your own, or they're at least expressed in different ways.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. On which of the following issues do you and your teen disagree?
- a. Creation and evolution
  - b. Dating non-Christians
  - c. The need to attend church
  - d. Appropriate music
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_

Regarding one of those areas of disagreement, answer the following:

Is your child's eternal destiny at stake here?

Is your child really ignoring the Bible or just interpreting it in a way that differs from your own?

Is this issue addressed in historic statements of what's essential in the Christian faith, or is it a matter of preference?

Is it worth risking your relationship over?

Do you need to leave this in God's hands? If not, what specific action do you need to take this week?

3. Which of the following choices would you be willing to let your teen make during the next month?
  - a. Whether to brush his teeth
  - b. Whether to drink alcohol
  - c. Whether to go to a dance
  - d. Whether to be home-schooled
  - e. Whether to join the military
  - f. Whether to attend church
  - g. Whether to stay up past 10 P.M. on school nights
  - h. Whether to watch reruns of *Will & Grace*
  
4. How does your teen's progress compare with the timetable suggested by Joe White? After each goal, circle the response that most closely matches yours.

Age 12—Regular youth group attendance

  - a. Your teen met this goal
  - b. Your teen met this goal later
  - c. Your teen hasn't met this goal
  - d. Your teen doesn't need to meet this goal
  - e. You and your teen have work to do in this area

Age 13.5—Daily quiet times

  - a. Your teen met this goal
  - b. Your teen met this goal later
  - c. Your teen hasn't met this goal
  - d. Your teen doesn't need to meet this goal
  - e. You and your teen have work to do in this area

*Age 14*—Small, peer-group Bible study

- a. Your teen met this goal
- b. Your teen met this goal later
- c. Your teen hasn't met this goal
- d. Your teen doesn't need to meet this goal
- e. You and your teen have work to do in this area

*Age 15*—Lifestyle witnessing to friends

- a. Your teen met this goal
- b. Your teen met this goal later
- c. Your teen hasn't met this goal
- d. Your teen doesn't need to meet this goal
- e. You and your teen have work to do in this area

*Age 17*—Intellectual preparation (apologetics, etc.) for college

- a. Your teen met this goal
- b. Your teen met this goal later
- c. Your teen hasn't met this goal
- d. Your teen doesn't need to meet this goal
- e. You and your teen have work to do in this area

*Age 18*—Summer missionary trip or serving/giving job

- a. Your teen met this goal
- b. Your teen met this goal later
- c. Your teen hasn't met this goal
- d. Your teen doesn't need to meet this goal
- e. You and your teen have work to do in this area

5. What will you do this week to prepare your teen for college or career independence? From the following list, choose just one step you'll actually take.

— Write a note letting him know your family is rooting for him

- \_\_\_ Tell him about doubts you had concerning Christianity when you were a teen, and let him know that such questions won't alienate you
- \_\_\_ Give him a book or video that makes a good case for the reliability of the Bible
- \_\_\_ Role play a conversation in which he explains his faith to a professor, fellow student, or co-worker
- \_\_\_ Look together at Yellow Pages or newspaper church listings for the area in which he plans to live
- \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_



# Leader's Guide

This leader's guide is designed to help you turn the rest of the book into a lively group experience in which parents learn from and support each other.

Before each meeting, have group members read and complete the corresponding chapter. You'll want to read and complete the chapter, too—and review the plan for that session.

## *The Session Plan*

We're assuming you have about 45-60 minutes to spend on each meeting. Ideally, your session time should be used for discussing and applying what group members have already learned by “doing the homework” in advance. Your meeting might look something like this:

1. *Optional Opener* (5 minutes). If your group is into fun and you have time, start with this activity.
2. *Startup* (5 minutes). Ask a couple of volunteers to share their reactions to the chapter introduction.
3. *Survey* (5 minutes). Let a few people explain one or two of their picks in this multiple-choice section.
4. *Scripture* (5-10 minutes). Volunteers can tell which question and answer were most meaningful to them.
5. *Strategies* (10-15 minutes). Discuss key points from the article that's at the heart of the chapter.
6. *Steps to Take* (15-20 minutes). Give group members time to share their responses and to pray for the success of each other's plans.

If participants won't do the homework, you'll need to change your approach. Your meeting might go as follows:

1. *Optional Opener* (5 minutes). Have fun with this if you've got the time.

2. *Scripture* (10-15 minutes). Together or in smaller groups, read the Bible passages and discuss the questions.

3. *Strategies* (10-15 minutes). Summarize the article or have participants take turns reading it aloud. Let volunteers respond to the advice.

4. *Steps to Take* (20-25 minutes). Work through this application section together, individually, or in teams; close by letting volunteers share some of their answers and plans.

Whichever approach you take, encourage group members to prepare for your times together. They'll get more from the course if they do.

### *Tips for Success*

Want to lead your group with maximum confidence? Here are some suggestions.

- If your group is like most, you often run out of time before you run out of discussion questions and activities. What to do? Simply choose the exercises and questions you think will be most meaningful to your group and concentrate on those. Try starting with the bare essentials—discussing the “Strategies” section and applying the principles through the final “Steps to Take” activities. Add more as your schedule allows.
- Invite discussion, but don't be surprised if some group members are reluctant to share personal information. It's hard to admit one's mistakes as a parent—or to talk about painful childhood experiences. If people want to reflect silently on a probing question, encourage them to do so.
- It's a good idea to have a few extra copies of the book on hand, so that visitors (and those who forgot their books) can take part.
- If you don't have an answer to every parenting question, join the club! It's okay to say, “I don't know.” Ask group members to share wisdom from their experience. Refer people to the *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Mentoring of Teens* (Focus on the Family/Tyndale, 2001), on which this book is based. Encourage those who face especially difficult parenting situations to consult your pastor or a counselor.
- Have a good time! Parenting may be serious business, but most of your group members probably would appreciate a light touch as they learn. Let your group be a place where parents can enjoy each other and gain perspective on their teen mentoring challenges.
- Pray. Pray for your group members during the week. Urge them to pray for each other. Ask God to help each person become the loving, effective parent he or she was meant to be.

Ready to have a lasting, positive impact on the parents and teens represented in your group? May God bless you as you lead!

## PART 1: BECOMING YOUR TEEN'S SPIRITUAL COACH

### *Session 1*

## What Mentors Are Meant For

### *1. Optional Opener*

If time allows and your group is open to having a little fun, try the following activity. Bring 30 sheets of paper.

Form three teams. Team 1 chooses its most experienced maker of paper airplanes to be its “mentor”; Team 2 does the same. But Team 3 picks its *least* experienced plane maker.

Team 1 must take instructions from its mentor as it tries to make 10 flyable planes. Team 3 does the same. Team 2 can only watch as its mentor makes all the planes himself or herself. Only mentors are allowed to speak.

When two minutes are up, see which team has the most airworthy planes. Then ask:

**Which mentor do you think taught his or her team the most? Why?**

**What does this tell you about mentoring?**

### *2. Startup*

To encourage brief discussion of the chapter introduction, ask:

**When it comes to guiding their teenagers spiritually, do you think most parents are like coaches, or are they still trying to play the game for their kids? Or are they ignoring the issue completely?**

If group members haven't read the “Startup” and “Survey” sections, don't take the time to do so now. Instead, go directly to the “Scripture” section.

### *3. Survey*

If group members have completed this multiple-choice feature on their own, they may have a few answers—humorous or serious—to share. Let a few volunteers do so. Then ask:

**What do you *really* hope will be different in your house as a result of this course?**

#### 4. *Scripture*

If your group is large, form pairs or teams to discuss the answers participants came up with during the week. Then regather the whole group and let spokespersons summarize the teams' findings. For groups who haven't done the homework, allow more time to read and discuss the Bible passages in the book.

Whether or not people have prepared, you might find it useful to ask these follow-up questions:

**King Solomon is known as the wisest man in the world. Do you suppose his son saw him that way? Why or why not?**

**When it came to spiritual mentoring, what resources did Solomon have available to him that you don't have? How about vice versa?**

#### 5. *Strategies*

Groups who haven't read the advice article will need time to become familiar with its content. You can summarize it, read it aloud, let volunteers take turns reading it, or have everyone read it silently.

Once people are up to speed, try asking questions like these:

**Do you welcome the change from governor to mentor, or dread it? Why?**

**Is your teen more like Brianna or Derek? How should that affect the way you mentor him or her?**

**What fictional mentor are you most like? Which one would you *like* to resemble? Why?**

#### 6. *Steps to Take*

To make the application as personal as possible, and to give everyone a chance to talk, form pairs or teams if your group has more than four members. If participants have worked through this section on their own, spend as much time as you can letting them share their responses. Otherwise, have people work through selected questions (we'd suggest numbers 1, 3, and 4) now.

If time allows, follow up with questions like these:

**Do you feel ready to follow through on any of the suggestions in this chapter?**

**If so, which one needs to be your top priority?**

**If not, what would help you feel more ready?**

To close, encourage pairs or teams to pray for the success of group members' plans. If possible, be available after the meeting to hear participants' concerns, and to refer to a pastor or counselor any who are seriously struggling with their teens.

### 5. *Strategies*

Groups who haven't read the advice article will need time to become familiar with its content. You can summarize it, read it aloud, let volunteers take turns reading it, or have everyone read it silently.

Once people are up to speed, try asking questions like these:

**What did you think of Amanda's story? If you were her parents, what might you have done differently?**

**Which of the "Seven Habits of Highly Relentless Parents" seems most crucial to you?**

**What's one you've tried to practice and from which you've seen positive results?**

### 6. *Steps to Take*

To make the application as personal as possible, and to give everyone a chance to talk, form pairs or teams if your group has more than four members. If participants have worked through this section on their own, spend as much time as you can letting them share their responses. If people haven't prepared, have them work through selected exercises (we'd suggest numbers 1, 2, and 7) now.

If time allows, follow up with questions like these:

**What's one thing this discussion has helped you appreciate about the relationship you have with your teenager?**

**What gives you the most hope that things can get even better?**

**How can we keep encouraging you not to give up on your teen?**

## *Session 16*

### **Learning to Let Go**

#### *1. Optional Opener*

If time allows and your group is open to having a little fun, try the following activity. You'll need a rope that's at least 10 feet long, plus two volunteers.

Warn your volunteers in advance to dress for a tug-of-war. If possible, stage it outside on grass or sand. Divide the group in half, with each volunteer representing half the group. Tell everyone that at some point during the contest you'll be yelling, "Let go!" When that happens, the opponents must release the rope immediately. Anyone who falls down loses the game for his or her side.

Start the tug-of-war, making sure both participants are really pulling. Then say, “Let go!” Chances are that the players will be caught off balance, even if no one actually falls.

Then ask:

**How did knowing you would have to let go affect your pulling?**

**How is raising a teenager like a tug-of-war?**

**Is it better to “let go” of a teenager all at once, or a little at a time? Why?**

**When you think about having to “let go” of your teen someday, how do you feel?**

## 2. *Startup*

To encourage brief discussion of the chapter introduction, ask:

**Which of these scenarios strikes the most fear into your heart? Why?**

**Do you think your teen would be ready to handle these situations today?**

**Why or why not?**

If group members haven't read the “Startup” and “Survey” sections, don't take the time to do so now. Instead, go directly to the “Scripture” section.

## 3. *Survey*

If group members have completed this multiple-choice feature on their own, they may have a few answers—humorous or serious—to share. Let a few volunteers do so. Then ask:

**Who seems more eager to cut the apron strings at your house—you or your teen?**

**On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 highest), how confident are you that your teen will be spiritually ready for “independence day” when the time comes?**

**Why?**

## 4. *Scripture*

If your group is large, form pairs or teams to discuss the answers participants came up with during the week. Then regather the whole group and let spokespersons summarize the teams' findings. For groups who haven't done the homework, allow more time to read and discuss the Bible passages in the book.

Whether or not people have prepared, you might find it useful to ask these follow-up questions:

Jesus and Elisha both had a strong sense of purpose, a belief that God had a job for them to do. How would that belief help a young person who's on the verge of adulthood?

How can a parent help a teen develop such a sense of spiritual purpose?

### *5. Strategies*

Groups who haven't read the advice article will need time to become familiar with its content. You can summarize it, read it aloud, let volunteers take turns reading it, or have everyone read it silently.

Once people are up to speed, try asking questions like these:

After reading this article, do you feel you've been giving your teen too much freedom, too little, or about the right amount?

Was there anything about your own experience as a young adult that reinforces what was said here? If so, what was it?

If you could add one "Prep Point" of your own, what would it be?

### *6. Steps to Take*

To make the application as personal as possible, and to give everyone a chance to talk, form pairs or teams if your group has more than four members. If participants have worked through this section on their own, spend as much time as you can letting them share their responses. If people haven't prepared, have them work through selected exercises (we'd suggest numbers 1, 4, and 5) now.

If time allows, follow up with questions like these:

During the next six months, where do you want to concentrate your efforts in preparing your teen for "letting go"?

What three things do you most want to remember from this course?

How can we keep in touch to encourage each other?

Consider participants' suggestions on how to stay in contact. Ideas might include exchanging phone numbers and e-mail addresses if you haven't already done so, meeting again in a couple of months for an update, or organizing a prayer chain.

To close, have pairs or teams pray for each other. If possible, be available after the meeting to hear participants' concerns and to thank them for contributing to the success of your group.

# Notes

## *Chapter 1*

1. James C. Dobson, *Home with a Heart* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1996), p. 154.

## *Chapter 4*

1. From the “Walk Away” Web site sponsored by the Institute for First Amendment Studies.

## *Chapter 7*

1. James C. Dobson, *Complete Marriage and Family Home Reference Guide* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2000), p. 226.

## *Chapter 8*

1. Based on Joe White, *What Kids Wish Parents Knew About Parenting* (Sisters, Oreg.: Questar, 1988), pp. 176-78.

## *Chapter 10*

1. “Teenagers and Their Relationships,” Barna Research Group, July 8, 1998.
2. Ibid.

## *Chapter 11*

1. Newton Minow, *How Vast the Wasteland Now?* (New York: Gannett Foundation Media Center, 1991) ([www.KSU.edu/humec/kulaw.htm](http://www.KSU.edu/humec/kulaw.htm)).

## *Chapter 12*

1. Dr. Allen Johnson, “Mom, I Want a Tattoo,” *Christian Parenting Today*, July/August 1998 ([www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com)).

## *Chapter 14*

1. Adapted from Manfred Koehler, “Window to the World,” *Single-Parent Family* ([www.family.org](http://www.family.org)).