

Developing a Relationship with Your Kids – Dan Hitz

This is part-one of a three part article on developing a relationship with your child and talking with him or her about sexual purity. Next month's article will talk about repenting to your son or daughter for mistakes you have made as a parent. The following month will discuss ways to talk with your teen about sexuality.



This article will look at some ways that you can build and improve your relationship with your child. Ideally we should begin using these ideas when our children are small. However, if your child is older, it is not too late to start. Realize that it will take longer to build or repair a relationship when your child is older. Sometimes we may need some outside help like a counselor or pastor. No matter how old your son or daughter is, we can trust the Lord to guide us in our parenting.

Begin talking to them when you have nothing profound to say. This may sound pretty basic, but it is a thought that many of us miss. If we don't start talking to our kids when they are young about things like Hot Wheels cars or dolls, we won't have the relationship built up with them when they are older to talk to them about things like dating, or pornography, or sexting. We have to develop relationships with them when they are young in order to build the emotional bonds and trust that it takes to talk to parents about things that really matter. Things that require vulnerability to share.

Make your home a welcoming place for their friends to hang out. It is far easier to watch over our kids when they are at our house than when they are out at someone else's house. We need to learn the fine balance between hovering over our kids, and investing in the social activities and taking an interest in the lives of their friends. We may not have the money to provide deep dish pizza every night when their friends come over, but making some popcorn and providing some games and activities is a worthy investment in keeping our kids happy and active in our own homes. Striking up a simple conversation with their friends from time to time helps us to get to know their friends and lets their friends know that we care about them and that they can come to us if they need help.

Realize that you don't have to correct every single thinking error your son or daughter has while he or she is talking to you. Correcting every single error in your son's thinking as he talks to you about his developing world view can cause him to shut down and not share his heart with you about anything at all. Of course there are some topics that we have to address, but it is really critical to jump on every movie plot or political thought that your son has that you don't agree with? It may be better to ask teens what attracts them to a particular ideal than to try to talk them into changing their ideals right away. If you've taken the time to develop a deep relationship with your teen as he was growing up, it will be easier for you to ask questions designed to help him think his thoughts through. This may actually help him recognize areas where he needs to make corrections on his own. This is much more powerful for a teen than a parent trying to talk him into believing something that he just doesn't have the experience to interpret. Another benefit of not trying to correct every error in thinking in every conversation you ever have with your child, is that he will be much more willing to come to you if he makes a mistake knowing that he won't be lectured on what he should have done, but encouraged to find ways to resolve the problem he has created.

Allow your kids to respectfully disagree with you and hear their point of view. This is another very delicate balance, yet important skill that we need to teach our teens. Of course there are times when they have to do what we say because we are the parent; however, as they mature from the innocent young child and their critical thinking skills begin to develop they may see things from a different perspective that we have never even thought of. Sometimes, they are right and we are wrong. Are we willing to at least hear their point of view? More importantly, are we willing to admit that they may have a better idea than us? Of course, we will have the last word and sometimes we won't really know why we want things to be a certain way. We are the parent and we may have to make some unpopular decisions at times, but that will be much easier if our kids realize that we do care about their thoughts and ideas even if we don't change our minds and follow their ideas.

Correct poor choices in an empowering manner rather than shaming your son or daughter.

Of course all teens (and parents) make mistakes, and a wise parent will help a teen correct the mistake he has made in a way that equips him to do better, rather than causing him to feel like a complete failure. Public humiliation or yelling tears down personal value. Sometimes we have to calm down and overcome our own emotional reaction to a mistake our teen has made before we talk to him. We should make sure that we work with our son to help him see the problems his choice has caused, help him take ownership of his errors, and help him find a way to satisfactorily resolve the issues as best he can. Here is another learning curve of knowing how much to help our teen resolve his own problems, not helping him at all, or over helping him. This can be challenging when his problems really do affect us and the entire family, and we might need some outside help in some situations.



Grant privileges and trust in direct proportion to your teen's faithfulness and trustworthiness. It is best to grant as many privileges and practice as much trust at an age appropriate level as your son has earned through his good behavior and trustworthiness. This helps your teen to recognize that his behavior has good and/or bad consequences, and helps him have a goal to work towards. A teen who is given driver's training and his own car while he does not complete his assigned chores, and drives recklessly develops a sense of entitlement. A teen who sees that helping around the house, doing his homework, and driving safely when practicing with his parent sees that his good behavior is rewarded and is motivated to live conscientiously. If your teen has developed a pattern of bad behavior, outside help can be beneficial in working towards improved behavior that results in increased privileges.

Maybe your heart is sinking as you are reading through these ideas. Some of us have such challenging relationships with our teens that we can never imagine trying to implement these practices. If you have recognized areas where you have made mistakes as a parent, spend some time in prayer to ask the Lord to show you some specific things to apologize to your kids about. Ask the Lord to prepare your hearts prior to your talk, and then wait for the right moment. You can begin to work on your relationship with your teen again. You will have to proceed slowly and have many ups and downs, but don't give up. The fruits of your efforts will be well worth it.

Some of us may need professional help through a counselor or family therapist to work on our relationships with our kids. This is especially true if you or your teen is dealing with mental health issues like depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder. If that is you, seek help from the pastoral care department of your local church or find a good Christian therapist. Good qualified help is available.