

Invade Your Teens' World Without Invading Their Space (part 2 of 3) By Michael Ross

Balancing Time for Your Teenager

Here are some suggestions to help you balance your time properly, express your love, and invade your teen's world (without invading his or her space).

Share "crazy" times. Don't let your teen take a backseat in your busy schedule. Clear your calendar on weekends and have fun. A simple change of pace is a great stress-reliever, and memories you make will last a lifetime.

Not sure what to do? The possibilities are endless.

- eat dinner in a nice restaurant
- attend a hockey game
- ride go-carts
- go to a spa

One mom made reservations at a hotel for herself and her 15-year-old daughter, then spent all day shopping and half the night watching movies, eating junk food and talking.

Take an interest in your teen's world. Think about your teenage years. What was important to you? The things that meant a lot to you — getting a good grade on your math test, finding a group of friends, making the team — are similar to the things that are important to your teen right now.

Invite them into *your* world. The teens I work with love to hear about my job and the pressures I face as an adult. They also enjoy looking at — or rather *laughing* at — my old yearbooks. Letting them into my world often sparks pretty good discussion starters about generational differences and the kinds of problems I dealt with as a teen. In turn, the teens open up about what's bugging them.

Affirm them daily. Teens need to regularly hear words of encouragement from their parents. Fourteen-year-old Melissa, who recently broke her arm, received much-needed affirmation at just the right time: "I know my parents love me because while I was having such a hard time keeping up with my schoolwork, they encouraged me. They never forced me to do homework when I wasn't feeling well but told me I could do it later. They said how proud they were that I was trying so hard."

Consider this: When teens have the courage to share something intimate, what are they looking for initially? Acceptance and affirmation. If you confess to God, what do you get? Acceptance and affirmation.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was

without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Heb. 4:15-16).

Do you want your teen to confide in you? Imitate how Christ treats us during confessional moments.

Build up his or her faith daily. “The paint is still wet, and you’re still under construction. But take a good, hard look in the mirror. God’s creating a masterpiece in you!”

I try to instill that important bit of encouragement in the teens I work with — especially when they blow it in their walk with Christ. Though most teens know God always forgives, their hearts don’t grasp just how much He is on their team. God isn’t shaking His finger at us when we blow it. Instead, He picks us up, dusts us off, encourages us to keep trying and points us onward and upward. That’s how grace works for the believer — it motivates us to keep moving. We grind to a halt when we don’t understand His grace.

Hug them often. How long has it been since you’ve wrapped your arms around your teenager and held him or her — just because? We should abundantly give hugs, kisses and tender touches. Yet too many parents pull back when their kids enter adolescence. True, you need to be more sensitive about the times when you give hugs — showing affection to your teen at the mall, for example, is probably off-limits — but make sure you give a daily dose of physical touch.

Be vulnerable. Don’t be afraid to admit your weaknesses. It’s okay to admit that your actions don’t always match your convictions. Too often, we think that by saying the words, “I blew it,” we’re somehow weaker. Actually, just the opposite is true. A teenager admires someone who has the courage to admit his or her mistakes.

Pray daily for your kids. When a situation seems hopeless with your teen, when you feel as if you’re at your wit’s end, remind yourself of a few facts:

- Prayer is powerful. It’s intimate communication with our eternal God. Imagine that! The Creator of the universe welcomes us into His presence. He is concerned about every detail of our lives — especially the pressures of parenting a teenager!
- Prayer is a gift from the Lord and the work of the Holy Spirit. It’s the key to being empowered and is the cornerstone of a healthy, dynamic Christian home.
- Prayer is the single most effective tool to reach youth. After all, God is the One who changes lives. His love for your child is far beyond your comprehension. Release your teen to our heavenly Father in prayer, and trust that He will lead your young person through the topsy-turvy teen years.