

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: I used to have a wonderful little girl. She was loving, obedient and fun to be around. Now, at 13, she is angry, rebellious and moody. What happened?

ANSWER: Adolescence! I assume the hormones have kicked in. Prepare to spend much more time on your knees. The Jr. High years are challenging. It helps to educate yourself about this transition. Let me offer 5 areas of challenge to both the parents and the adolescent:

1. **Identity: "Who am I?"** They experiment with different looks, attitudes, and ways of reacting. They are emotional yoyos. They fantasize about being actors, musicians, athletes, even super-heroes! They obsess about how they look and what they can and can't do. They fear the future. They have tremendous ambivalence and questions about sexuality. Almost moment-by-moment, life is tragedy, comedy or just plain "boring".

2. **Independence. "I want to do it myself!"** Jr. High adolescents are feeling the ambivalence of independence—fear and excitement. They want the security and benefits of childhood with the privileges of adulthood. Independence often surfaces as some form of defiance falling somewhere along the continuum from passive to aggressive. Anger often provides the "emotional energy" needed for independence. (See the other *Jack's Corner* article in this newsletter.)

3. **Intimacy: "I want to be close."** Relationships with peers are all-important to Jr. High adolescents. It is the reason most Jr. High kids bother with school. Often, school is only tolerated because it is an opportunity to socialize. "Hanging out" is life for most adolescents. Sexuality is explored through flirting, movies, music, conversations with peers, and physical exploration of their own and others' bodies. Acceptance with peers is paramount.

4. **Inspiration. "I want to do something!"** Jr. High adolescents long for transcendence...something supernatural. They try to find inspiration in music, movies, fantasies, heroes, peer group acceptance, drugs, social altruism, and God. They are beginning to think in existential ways.

5. **Investment. "Where can I give?"** Jr. High adolescents are looking for a cause...a place to invest their energies, and they have significant energy to invest! If they are not provided with positive places to invest themselves, negative places will do.

Parents often experience adolescence as the most difficult time in parenting. What can you do?

1. Identity. The latest research has shown that teens desperately desire the affirmation and approval of their parents. The latest polls still indicate that parents are fundamentally the most important determiner of a teen's self-image. Pour your heart into knowing and shaping your daughter's soul. God will shape you in the process.

2. Independence. Know your daughter well and begin to give responsibility and privilege. If you don't, she will find many ways to make you pay...at the expense of your long-term relationship with her.

3. Intimacy. Model godly intimacy in your marriage and in your relationship with your daughter. Talk about the false messages that the world is sending about intimacy. Make YOUR godly intimacy so attractive that it will be irresistible to your daughter.

4. Inspiration. Create opportunities for your daughter to experience transcendence (God). Show her how inspired YOU are by God. Provide chances for service and giving. Watch for inspirational movies, T.V., and stories to share with your daughter. Expose her to careers and accomplishments that demand sacrifice.

5. Investment. Model godly investment of YOUR time, talents, and treasures. "No one can serve two masters" (Mt. 6:24). Let your daughter see your great joy, commitment, and steadfastness. Find areas in life where she can succeed.

As you can see, how your teenager sees YOU handling these struggles will influence how she will. Pray for her (and with her). Know her world. Respect her opinions, values and concerns; never belittle them. Be available. Affirm. The most frequent complaints I hear from Jr. High teens are: "My parents are hypocrites." "My parents don't understand me." "My parents yell too much." And, "My parent aren't there for me." Challenging isn't it?

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