

5 Keys to Help Your Teenager Love God

Our oldest son is in the sixth grade. He's close to exiting his preteen season and fully embracing the realm of teen-hood. (This is a great opportunity for you to pray for me.)

Over the past year he's grown into a young man that loves his hair, girls and his own opinion. In fact, he's grown increasingly bold about sharing his opinion. A once relatively passive young boy who rolled with the punches, today he's more apt to let us know when he disagrees and why. It's a new world for us.

The most important opinion he will exercise over the next few years is what he believes regarding God, God's Word and God's plan for his life. You see, what his dad and I believe will increasingly take a backseat to what he believes. And this is what should happen in order for him to embrace his own faith and not simply assume ours.

But there are ways we (as parents) can hinder this work God is doing in his life:

We can hinder by telling him what he should think. He's got to be able to think for himself. That means he needs to wrestle through the problem, weigh it against God's Word and wade through his own thoughts regarding it.

We can hinder by not allowing him to disagree. Though it's so simple, the wrong move is to *not* allow him to have an opposing opinion. Forcing an agreement shuts down the conversation and closes the door on the next open conversation.

We can hinder by not validating his thought process. Some of the theories our son conjures are comical. But the danger lies in our response. The temptation is to laugh, chide or simply ignore. Fighting to find a way to validate the thought process encourages him to continue to exercise that muscle. In the

end, I want my kids to learn how to think through an argument so they can further validate what they believe. We call it apologetics—the ability to defend our faith. Even if his conclusion is wrong, that doesn't make the effort wrong.

We can hinder by not listening. The biggest culprit. I quickly communicate how much I value (or devalue) my son's faith by how much I'm willing to shut my mouth and simply listen.

Or there are ways we can help the work God is doing in his life:

We can help by creating opportunities for conversation. When spending time together, you create opportunities for open dialogue. Often our busy schedules can smother any chance we have to simply sit and chat.

We can help by showing what Scripture says. Helping our kids navigate the Bible so they can learn what God's Word has to say is one of the best skills you can teach them. But *show* them—don't just preach to them.

We can help by listening, listening, listening. My ability to shut my mouth and open my ears will go a long way toward investing in my son's relationship with Christ. Whether he is right, wrong or indifferent, I've got to simply listen to his opinion, his thoughts and his interpretations. From that, I am better equipped to guide him and pray for him.

We can help by praying over them and for them. I take my son to school every Friday morning. I enjoy that drive. Typically we listen to music of his choice and we talk. Often I pray over him as we get closer to the school. I want Keegan to hear my heart spoken to God about him. It's an opportunity to sow words of confidence, encouragement and faith into his heart. Then when he's out of the car, I take more time to pray for him. For the challenges he will face throughout the day. For the decisions he'll make. For the influence he will have.

We can help by not freaking out! This should probably be in the No. 1 slot. The last thing we should do is freak out.

My son's buddy at school is Buddhist—I can't freak out about that. He can't keep his mind off girls—I can't freak out about that. He thinks he's going to strike it rich one day because a magnetic hovercraft transportation system he's conjured in his head will set him for life—I can't freak out about that.

At 12 years old, wise decisions are not Keegan's forte. But he's learning. And I can't freak out in the meantime. It's critical that I remember who is in control, who is ordering Keegan's steps, and who cares more about Keegan's relationship with Christ than I do: God.

As parents, we have a choice as to whether we will hinder or help our kids as they grow in their faith. We can all agree that, deep down, we really just want to help. What ways have you found hinder or help your kids? Tell us on Facebook.

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