

Bridging the Gap: Be Creative With Your Teen

It seems like just yesterday you couldn't pry your children off you with a crowbar. Everywhere you went, anything you were doing, they wanted to be along for the ride. Now they're hitting their teen years and, suddenly, hanging out with mom and dad ranks on the fun scale somewhere between typing a term paper on e-coli bacteria and cleaning out the rain gutters.

It's tough not to feel hurt when little Johnny or Suzie now sigh and roll their eyes at the very idea of engaging in a game of monopoly when, just two years ago, they would've sold their interest in Park Place just to keep the match going for another hour. Here are five things you can do to cope and maybe even reclaim some lost real estate with your kids when it seems they don't want to be with you.

1. Don't take it personally. Easier said than done but still, this is one of those "try and remember yourself at 13" moments. Looking back, the teen years are typically marked by a certain level of first time self-awareness and consequently, selfishness. While you shouldn't put up with insensitivity and rudeness, neither should you take it too hard when a trip to the mall with friends sounds better to your child than a day at the ballgame.

2. Don't live on their level emotionally. This relates back to number one on our list, "Don't take it personally." When our children brush off our attention or seem disinterested in our company, it's easy to feel rejected and to lash out with loud pronouncements about "the way it's going to be in our house." Or even more raw, "Well fine then, why don't you just go waste more time on Facebook! It's obviously more important than me!" Even if you feel that way, don't blurt that out to your child. That kind of anger isn't likely to lead to

anything productive in your relationship and most certainly will cause the divide between you to widen.

3. Stick to common ground experiences that can bridge the gap. One of the great quotes from the classic comedy, "City Slickers" comes when Daniel Stern's character, Phil, reminisces, "When I was about 18 and my dad and I couldn't communicate about anything at all, we could still talk about baseball." What pleasures, hobbies, or passions have you and your child shared that might constitute common ground? Pursue them with your child and while you may not have deep, soulful, conversations about all that's going on in their lives during the teen years, those shared experiences will provide a bridge of communication both now and later.

4. Try taking on the Galactic Overlord for once. Right? Seriously though, if your teen has a passion for video games or something else squarely outside of your experience, give it a try with them. Sometimes, connecting with your kids means entering their world. From a faith perspective, this DOESN'T include becoming the permissive parent who tacitly endorses that which is immoral for the sake of appearing "cool". You never want to secure your child's friendship at the cost of their respect for you as their parent.

5. Plan regular opportunities that take you both away from familiar distractions and allow you to be one-on-one. This can be touchy when it comes to insisting that your teen participates. But, when you put together a weekend in the mountains or at the beach, or anywhere but where you live, that doesn't include anyone but family, you open up opportunities to connect with your child that aren't usually available in everyday life. Removing peer pressure and the need to fit in allows your teen to breathe a little easier and let down long enough to let you in.

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