

Teen Troubles: Tips for Fathering Teenagers

As children move through the teen years, they desire to pole-vault into independence. This, mixed with a bubbling set of hormones and an ever-expanding understanding of society, can make fathering teens one of the hardest and emotionally charged tasks for God's man.

Yet, it's critical to lean into these years versus withdrawing and not allowing the pace of life or teenage attitudes to create detachment. Here's why: This is when your children are in the red zone of identity, and it is your responsibility to bring them into the end zone of adulthood.

Unfortunately, reading between the lines of the following news reports, many teens suffer from a lack of fathers leaning in and taking their roles seriously, resulting in unintended but very real suffering. Check out these national headlines from the last couple months, along with my "between the lines" takes:

Teen charged, second sought in beating death of WWII vet, 88, in Spokane

My between-the-lines: Two young men unleashed pent-up anger to express machismo, perhaps copying what they experienced at home by their own fathers.

Teens charged after allegedly killing Australian student in Oklahoma for the 'fun of it'

My between-the-lines: Fatherlessness is creating these types of boys by the millions with multiplied billions of their social interactions, creating a titanic wave of injustice for innocent people. Emotionally unaware and socially detached, these boys cannot connect their actions with the feelings of

others.

Father and son behind bars for shooting near Purdue North Central

My between-the-lines: Sadly, the teenage son is following the example set by his drug-dealing father, learning how to execute “justice” when a deal goes wrong.

While these examples don’t paint fatherhood masterpieces, teenagers can also be wonderful, loving and even surprising young men and women who grow by leaps and bounds right in front of our eyes. Fathering a teen can be challenging but equally rewarding.

Here are a few tips I’ve used and picked up over the years from experts:

1. Understand the phases of fatherhood. As your child grows up, your fatherhood goes through phases. Recognize these phases so you can adjust your style of leadership. The phases of fatherhood are:

- Servant: infant to 3 years old
- Trainer: 3 to 12 years old
- Coach: 13 to 19 years old
- Friend: 19 and above

Notice that when your child becomes a teenager, your role should turn to being more of a coach and less of a trainer. That can be a subtle change, but as a coach you have to guide without telling. Advise without demanding. Lead without pushing. Hold them accountable with a reward system instead of enforcing boundaries with strict discipline.

2. Nurture independent responsibility–individuate. Whenever possible, empower your teenager to own responsibility and consequences so they can do things their own way and individuate themselves. Teenagers can be creative innovators,

but they have to learn by experiencing the repercussions of events.

One example I use with my boys is to point out something or answer a question with the phrase "That's what a man does" instead of "You should do ...". Helping my boys discover the role of manhood without telling them what to do gives them a tethered leash to individuate and blaze their own trail.

The freedom your teens enjoy is a result of your being responsible. Dads can't just take a day off. Dads have to make a living, provide for the family and serve others. Saying no to yourself and yes to others is the virtue of discipline and representative of the Christian life. After all, Jesus was sent to serve, not be served.

3. Be a model worth copying. Your teens are watching, evaluating and sizing you up moment by moment. In good times and bad, your teens are encoding your behavior and establishing precedent-setting DNA regarding how to handle life's curveballs. Stand strong, wait on God and swing true, and your teens will see how to hit homeruns in life. You have to be a model worth copying. This may be the most challenging tip but also the most valuable. What does that look like?

Pray about everything. Philippians 4:6 says, "Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything." Your kids will see where your strength and faith come from and follow suit. The pressure of life can result in progress in your faith, using prayer as the tool. Unfortunately, many men wilt at pressure and act out in unhealthy ways. Remember, your kids are watching.

Listen to your teens. In James 1:19, the Bible says, "Be quick to listen, slow to speak." With teenagers, this often means asking open-ended questions, because they don't always want to share what's on their hearts and minds. If we listen to our teens and assure them we heard them, they will trust and share

and feel respected—and return the favor.

Disarm conflict. Ephesians 6:4 sums up fatherhood like this: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (ESV). Conflicts can either tear you apart or lead to deeper intimacy and understanding. Disarm conflict with tempered discipline and biblical instruction. In Psalm 23, David compared God’s discipline and guidance to a “rod and staff” that provide comfort.

4. Practice my ‘flaps down’ prayer. While driving home after work, before walking in the door after a day at work, I use my “flaps down” prayer so I come home for a landing that allows me to be present and available for my family. The trap is getting caught in your own world, not theirs. Take a moment before you arrive home to pray and focus your attention on God and your family before you walk in the door. It’s a prayer “reset” to transition your mind, heart and soul to focus on the needs of your family. Set your own fatigue and issues aside to be available to shepherd the kids, help with the meal and clean-up, etc.

5. Know the Word. Speak it. Actions may speak louder than words, but speaking the Word “does not return void.” Raising teens in today’s troubled times requires that fathers know what the Bible teaches and are ready to speak the Scripture into their lives.

Kenny Luck, founder of Every Man Ministries and the men’s pastor at Saddleback Church, provides biblically oriented teaching and leadership for men and pastors seeking relevant, timely material that battle cultural, worldly concepts threatening men and God’s men. Follow Kenny and Every Man Ministries now on Facebook, Twitter (@everyMM) and YouTube.

For the original article, visit .