

SEVEN PRIORITIES FOR AFFECTIVE PARENTS

1. Prayer - James 5:16

We cannot dictate the decisions our teenagers make. We have no ultimate control over which direction teenagers go. This causes us to cast ourselves in utter dependence upon God and His power and protection. Two great times to pray are on the way to school and before bed. Pray offensively--pray that they will have good friends and make right decisions. Pray defensively--ask God to take away wrong influences and harmful friendships. Pray intensely --there are going to be times when your teen enters a struggle that has you completely at your wit's end, or that utterly disappoints your strategy of parenting. These times of intense prayer are intended by God.

2. Standards - I Samuel 2

Have you ever had a focused conversation on what the specific boundaries and standards will be for your teenagers? If not, then it starts with the husband and wife and then happens in a family meeting. Have you and your spouse ever talked about issues like movies, music, dating, dress, driving, jobs, grades, curfews, friends, after school activities, and family time? If you do not establish this, then your teen will divide and conquer you. Your kids will not adopt the church's standards. They will adopt yours. You cannot default on this issue. They must have guidance and you are the chosen guide.

3. Involvement

Involvement means more than being at games or events...it means crawling inside your child's head and heart and knowing what is going on in there. It means getting past the exterior. You can be in the same house, the same lifetime, but be clueless about what your teenager is facing and dealing with. Begin with the assumption that you know nothing...and work from there. Connecting takes time, courage, perseverance and energy! It sometimes means even being thwarted by your teen as you try. Sometimes it means being pushed out and locked out, but still want it deep within. Involvement means not losing heart when you don't see immediate results.

4. Training

Once you crack the shell of being involved, you can begin to minister to the needs that they are facing deep within. While some of what you discover may be unsettling, it will be then you can begin to train and nurture. Training is proactive, not reactive. A proactive parent goes on the offensive and becomes the teen's trainer. Know your goal. Know what you are trying to build into your teen. Write a mission statement, have a purpose, set some guidelines.

7th - 8th grades - establishing my faith

9th - 10th grades - establishing my identity

11th - 12th grades - life decisions and issues

Effective training involves repetition and coaching, recognizing success and building upon failures. Everything you teach must be revisited repeatedly. Effective training involves accountability. Teens want freedom but must have oversight and accountability. You must inspect what you expect.

5. Community

Within the family there must be a spirit of teamwork and love for each other. Building each other through fun times and life-building activities is important. Within the church we must encourage and help each other in the struggle. Do you have good friends within your Christian life who can offer you honest feedback about what they see in your kids? You need that, and so do I. Drop your defenses and admit there are things you may not be seeing. The observations of others are not a threat but a helpful tool.

6. Direction - "Train up a child in the way he should go..."

Identity - Who am I in Christ? Each child has uniqueness and design. Interests are placed there by God. My job, as coach, is to give guidance in these areas.

Character - What is right and wrong. Establishing core values and beliefs are important. We must combat society and the world. We must teach submission to God and His Word.

Relationships - We must build into them the ability to love others. Relationships do not occur naturally, they need guidance and training. The best school in which to learn about relationships is in the University of the Family! What are your children learning about love, conflict resolution, etc., in your home?

Mission - Your child has a God-given purpose and life mission. They will be fully content and happy as they follow that. You are here to help them discover what it is.

7. Perseverance - Proverbs 22:5 - Foolishness

Winston Churchill said, "Never, never, never give in."

So often in teen years you feel as though you are losing ground. You don't see fruit from your efforts like you expected and you are tempted to give in completely and stop even trying these other six priorities. DON'T! If your boat seems to be leaking, bail with one hand and row with the other. Fight with all you've got and stay in the fight. You will get tired. You will get hurt. You will experience pain and disappointment. You will feel like you are failing. But don't quit! If you endure a broken heart, still don't lose heart. "It was by perseverance that the snail reached the ark!"
