

PARENT FOCUS: HAVING REAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT REAL ISSUES

"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." James 1:19

Sooner or later, your teenager is going to approach you with something hard. A confession, a question, or a difficult situation they don't know how to handle. In that moment, before you say a single word, your face and your tone are already communicating. Teenagers can read responses fast. Whether they keep bringing us the big stuff usually comes down to what they see in us the first time they try. A parent who stays calm and leans in keeps the door open, and that's the goal.

But before you can lead your teenager through a hard conversation, you have to get your own heart ready. So this page is for you first.

SIT WITH THIS:

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Ephesians 4:29-32

Paul is writing about how we talk to one another, and it lands right in the middle of our homes. Notice he doesn't just tell us to stop the harsh words. He tells us what to put in their place: talk that builds up, words that fit the moment, kindness, tenderness, forgiveness. That's a high bar, especially when your teenager says something that shocks you or breaks your heart. The natural response is often bitterness, or anger, or a raised voice. But Paul roots all of it in something that came first: "as God in Christ forgave you." We can be gentle with our kids because God has been gentle with us. We can take in the hard news without exploding because Jesus took on far worse on our behalf. The calm we're after exists because of what God has done in us and for us.

TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO REFLECT:

Set aside some time this week, even just twenty minutes, to look back and look ahead. You can do it all at once or in a few small pieces.

- **When your teenager tells you something hard, what's your honest first reaction, on the inside and on the outside?**
- **Is there a topic you've been avoiding with your teen because you're afraid of how it might go?**
- **Think back to your own teenage years. Was there something you couldn't tell your parents, and why?**
- **What would it look like this month to be a safer place for your teenager to bring the hard stuff?**

Go easy on yourself here. None of us get this perfectly right, and you don't have to. The goal isn't to have all the answers before your teenager walks in the door. It's to be the kind of parent they aren't afraid to walk toward.

BRINGING IT HOME

READ THIS FIRST:

Here's the part most of us get wrong: we treat hard conversations like a problem to solve or a point to win. So the second our teenager cracks the door open, we jump in with a lecture, a fix, or the thing we've been dying to say, and just like that, the door shuts. Your job in those minutes may not be what you initially think. You're trying to be a person your teenager wants to keep talking to. So, pick one question below, prepare yourself to actually want to hear the answer, then hold your reaction long enough to let them finish.

TRY STARTING HERE:

These aren't a script. Pick and adapt the questions below that best fit your student and let the conversation go from there

- What's something going on in your world right now that you don't think I really get?
- Is there anything you've wanted to talk to me about but weren't sure how I'd react?
- When something big happens in your life, who do you usually tell first? Why them?
- What's a topic everyone your age is talking about that adults seem clueless about?
- If you told me something really hard, what would you most need from me in that moment?

If the conversation is flowing well, try this one: **"Is there anything you think I overreact about?"** It takes guts to ask, but their answer will show you where the door is open and where it's stuck. Whatever they say, remember the three most powerful words you've got: "Tell me more."

TRY THIS TOGETHER:

This week, go first. Pick a story from your own teenage years, a time you messed up, got something wrong, or were scared to tell your parents, and tell it to your teenager. Tell it straight, without tacking a lesson onto the end. Just let them hear that you were once right where they are, and that you made it through. When a parent is willing to be the one who opens up first, it quietly tells a teenager the water's safe. You're not fishing for a confession in return. You're showing them, before they ever have to bring you something hard, that this is a home where the hard stuff can be said out loud and be received with grace, patience, love, and understanding.

LEAVE THEM WITH THIS:

You don't have to have every answer, and you don't have to fix everything they bring you. Your teenager mostly needs to know they're loved no matter what walks through the door with them. That's the same way God loves us. He knows everything about us, even our worst, and He came close anyway. Because of Jesus, you can be that kind of steady presence for your child, always pointing them back to the One who loves them most.