

## Getting Your Daughter (and You) Through the Teen Years

*Have you ever found your daughter does exactly the opposite of what you want her to do? Maybe she even asks you for your input/advice and then does the opposite?*

*Have you encountered eye rolling and attitude when you tell her to do something? She complies, but definitely has attitude the whole time.*

*Has the sweet, cooperative daughter who enjoyed your company and laughed at your jokes suddenly gone silent, moody, seems embarrassed by your very presence, and disappears behind a closed bedroom door as often as possible?*

Welcome to the teen years.

### Three things to remember:

1. It's all normal behavior.
2. It's not about you, so don't take it personally.
3. She doesn't understand it either.

### What's happening to your sweet little girl?

She's growing up. Making the transition from little girl to young woman. There are several things going on in her body and mind:

- Hormones are ramping up
- Her body is changing
- Her brain is revamping itself from back to front (emotions to rational)
- Her view of herself is changing and being impacted by a myriad of messages
- Self-esteem, confidence and test scores are falling
- Friendships are becoming more important *and* influencing her decisions more
- Boys are suddenly not weird and are, in fact, becoming very interesting
- She's testing the boundaries of authority to see where they are and how much push they have

- Everyone is asking her about the future—and she’s just trying to get through the day
- She’s deciding what’s she believes and thinks versus what you have taught and believe—including about faith, church and God

### **It’s hard on a mom’s heart.**

Moms (and dads) are the most impacted by the changes going on. One day she’s your sweet little girl, the next a silent, moody stranger. Then she’s your sweet little girl again. Only to switch to...you get the point. It’s a roller coaster ride.

So hold on, pray hard, and:

- Don’t take it personally (said it before, needs saying again)—keep a sense of humor, it’s not about you
- Keep reminding yourself that your goal is to help this transition go as well as it can so that she grows up to be a healthy, confident, God-loving young woman
- Remember that you are a safe place for her to test the waters and to be moody, silent, whatever because you’ll keep loving and accepting her—you are mom and moms love no matter what
- Give her space to begin learning to be independent—from the closed bedroom door to spending time with friends, she needs to transition from dependence on you to being her own person
- Make connecting as a family happen—family dinners, family night, dates, family traditions, car time (be willing to transition to more “grown up” traditions and activities)
- Ask questions, but don’t interrogate—be genuinely interested. Questions become key in helping them think for themselves and learn to figure out how to react, respond, and what to do
- Require politeness and kindness—call her out when needed with something as simple as “we don’t talk like that in this house.”
- Gather your girlfriends for moral support

- Don't be surprised when she reverts to needing you to do things for her or has an area where she struggles without you (often in situations that require her to interact with another adult)
- Don't give up or beat yourself up
- Pray hard—for her, her friendships, her romantic endeavors, her future, and for yourself

## **WARNING**

Sometimes as moms, we have a hard time transitioning, too. We have spent their whole lives to this point helping, fixing, and being needed, that's it's sometimes hard to let go and not step in. Deep breath. Send up a prayer for strength and courage. Remember our role is to help them grow into independent, healthy, confident, God-loving young women. It's important we don't hover or over protect, but coach, guide, and equip our girls to work through challenges and successes on their own.

## **Friendships**

Friends suddenly become super important—and the biggest influencer in her life and decisions. Don't be surprised if she walks away from childhood friends and chooses a new “tribe.”

A few tips as you help her walk through the craziness of teen girls:

- Studies have found that girls with just one or two close friends are the happiest and least stressed
- Help her unpack the difference between “popular” and “powerful”
  - True popular people are well-liked, fun, kind
  - Pseudo popular people are just powerful—people are afraid of them because they are often unkind and mean, but people go along with them because of the power they have in the social community
  - Ask her, “Do people like her or are they afraid of her?”
  - Talk about which type of person she wants to be
- Teach her how to think and act instead of feeling and reacting
  - Help her identify her feelings

- Validate her feelings
  - Ask questions that help her explore ways to respond
- Help her identify “frenemies” – those girls who are sometimes nice and then sometimes mean, sometimes fun, but sometimes unkind
  - Give her permission to not hang out—to know that friends should be kind and you don’t have to be or stay friends with everyone
- Create boundaries for her
  - Rules about when, where, who, what, etc.
  - Know that deep down, she’s grateful to be able to save face and use you as an excuse of why she can’t do something
  - Monitor her social media and limit time on devices—let her know you are watching
- Talk through examples of when it’s important to tell an adult what’s happening
  - She needs to know it’s not her responsibility
  - Be a safe place for her to talk
  - Strategize ways to get her friend help
  - Affirm her for caring and for getting her friend help
- Create opportunities for her to hang with friends who will be a good influence like youth group and activities she’ll enjoy

Friends have so much influence on our kids. This is an important area to pray hard in. Pray for her friendships. Pray for her friends to know and love God—if they don’t, pray that they are drawn to God and see Him as real and undeniable in their lives. Ask God to remove the negative friends and influences in their lives. And pray that your daughter is a good friend to others, developing the characteristics and caring that will help her throughout her life.

## **Emotions**

There will be days when it feels like no matter what you do or say, you’re getting it wrong and she’s getting mad, crying, or pouting. Her emotions are a roller coaster ride for both of you.

It's normal. Ask any mom who has been through the teen years with their daughter.

It's not the hormones, it's her brain. The brain begins revamping itself from back to front, beginning in the basal right lobe where emotions originate before moving to the front left lobe where control and rational thinking happen. So emotions ramp up and are loud and intense. What you see is what she's feeling. She may be worried that she's crazy.

You become a safe dumping ground. She's held it together all day long. She comes home and vents (explodes?) on you. Then she's better and you're a mess.

What can you do in the middle of an emotional storm?

- Listen
- Help her identify what she's feeling—name emotions
- Be calm and empathetic
- Validate her feelings—don't try to talk her out of them or diminish them
- Don't jump to super mom fix-it-mode—our goal is to equip her to figure it out on her own and need us less and less, even though that can be hard on a mama's heart
- Ask, "Do you want help figuring this out or are you just venting?"
- Offer, "After listening to you, I have a different take, do you want to hear it?"
- Encourage, "Bummer. But definitely a challenge you can handle. I love you and believe in you."
- Don't let her live in a constant emotional storm, talking about and focusing on her emotions (or those of her friends)—encourage her to get fresh air, do something physical, figuring out what helps her cope with strong emotions
- Help her identify triggers that are emotionally hard and have a plan how to handle it ahead of time
- Offer to pray with her then follow up later and remind her that you've been praying

## Battle of the Rules

One of the biggest gifts we can give our girls is to teach them to think for themselves, to work through the challenges that come their way, and to see past themselves and care about others. One of our biggest challenges may be in how they see rules. It's a time when teens are tempted or pressured to break the rules. Their focus becomes not getting caught breaking the rules. We can teach them a new and more important focus. The risks.

How do we build their thinking in this area?

- Move past the “because I said so” when it comes to rules
- Explain the WHY behind your rules—help her understand that rules are designed to protect and that there are consequences (beyond being caught and/or punished) for breaking the rules. Help her to think things through by asking questions:
  - What are the possible risks if you do this?
  - Who could be impacted?
- Acknowledge that other parents may have a different perspective, but these are still your rules
- Negotiate when a rule is negotiable
- Listen to her point of view—don't just dismiss it; might be time for your rule to change
- Don't give up. It's hard to keep pushing, but choose the hard.
- Don't demand regardless and be unwilling to listen
- Have rules. This is important. They *want* rules.
- Be consistent in your rules. If you're not, they'll start pushing—not because they want to break rules, but because they want to know where the boundaries are in order to feel safe.
- Help them assess the risk in breaking a rule (use what they see others doing as teaching moments!)
- Talk about the risks, not what happens if she gets caught breaking the rules
- Avoid power struggles. There are some battles you can't win because they have all the control. But you can have consequences.

- Remember they're not thinking about the future, just about the moment. They don't see the long-term effects of social media posts, not doing school work, etc.

Sometimes parents are afraid to be firm with rules because we don't want our kids to be mad at us or we want them to like us. It's important to remember our goal isn't to be liked, it's to raise confident, healthy, god-loving girls who will make good choices as they grow. Parenting isn't a popularity contest and does come with tough battles, but God can help you through each one.

They will probably still break rules. Teens tend to act on impulse without thinking and are easily swayed by peer pressure. They may not intend to break the rules, but in the moment, feel pushed into it. But giving them tools for assessing the consequences and identifying the risks, plus having rules in place, will help keep them safer.

### **And Then There are Boys**

Suddenly the boys who were thought to be weird and to be avoided are interesting and cute. It's more than giggling, crushes and "going together," a girl's interest in boys impacts how she dresses, how she sees herself, her friendships, and often becomes an area of her life that she doesn't talk about with her parents.

It's important for us to help our daughters have the tools to navigate this adventure. Tackling topics may be hard with girls who don't want to talk to their parents about boys and dating, but it's important that we help our girls:

- Identify the qualities, values and characteristics they **MUST HAVE** in a guy—challenge her to write them down and make a list
- Identify the qualities, values and characteristics they **WILL NOT tolerate** in a guy—challenge her to write them down and make a list
- What they will and won't do—not only on a date, but tackling sexting, social media like SnapChat, etc.
- Have an "escape" plan for when a date goes bad

Much of the time we focus on the risks of sex, sexting, etc. Remember this is a time when her brain is high on emotions and low on rational, future thinking. Conversations will be more impacting as we help them explore what *they want* versus what *could happen*.

Tackle “what if” topics in casual conversation when she’s open to it—traveling in the car is a great time for one-on-one conversations. Ask questions like:

- How does a girl let a boy know if she wants to go out with him?
- What if a girl is asked out by a guy she’s not interested in?
- What if a girl wants to do one thing, but her boyfriend wants her to do another?
- What if “everyone else” is doing it, but a girl doesn’t want to?

She might not dive into conversation with you, instead rolling her eyes, frustratingly saying, “Mom!” or going silent, but by asking the questions, you’re planting them in her mind to think about and that’s the goal. Getting her thinking.

We know that sex sells. Images of sexy women adorn more than just advertising for cars. But girls don’t know that. They see the images and think that’s normal and expected. We can help them understand by pointing it out, “Someone’s getting rich by putting the girl in a bikini next to the car, and that someone is not the girl.”

Compliment and affirm strengths and qualities other than beauty in your daughter and her friends. Point out examples of strengths and qualities other than beauty in other women when you have the opportunity. Help her to recognize through casual conversations that a woman is more than what she looks like or how much she weighs.

Pornography is everywhere and easily accessible to everyone. “Research shows that by fourteen, two-thirds of boys and more than a third of girls report that they’ve seen sexually explicit material.” *By fourteen*. Even if your daughter isn’t viewing porn, the guys around her may be and it impacts how they see girls and what they expect from girls. Remember they’re riding high on emotions and low on rational thinking, too, and believe that what they’re seeing is normal. They want to do in real life



what they've seen in photos, videos, etc., and are looking for girls who are willing. They pressure girls to send sexy texts and photos and push them to have oral sex or intercourse. Giving in may make her temporarily popular with the boys, but at a cost to her reputation and relationships. And some girls think that oral sex isn't really sex, choosing to go along in order to be liked and not thought weird. It can be a tough area for her to navigate because while she may not want to do something, she does want boys to like her and not think she's a child, or to be teased by others for not doing "what everyone else" is doing.

What's a mom to do to help her daughter navigate this area of her life?

1. It's important to let her know that you want her to enjoy romance and sex. It's easy to come down hard with rules and telling her what not to do. She can see it as you not wanting her to have fun. Knowing you want her to enjoy, that it is a special act that bonds a man and woman in love, is the foundation for helping her build boundaries.
2. Empower her to identify what she wants and then stick to it. You may need to often remind her that it's okay to say no, because the world around her isn't.
3. Be a safe place for her to come and talk, ask questions, no judgment, no over reacting. (You may need to call a girlfriend afterwards!) Ask questions that help her think things through. Carefully let her know what you think. "Can I offer a suggestion?"
4. As Christians, our relationship with God and His Word impacts how we view sex and relationships. Help your daughter understand that God created sex and *wants* a man and woman to enjoy sex, but in the confines of marriage—not to deny fun, but to protect. Talk about the benefits of doing things God's ways. Remind your daughter that God loves her and wants more for her than anyone else—even more than you do, if that's possible.

When she crosses a line, disappoints you and even herself, help her know that it's not the end of the road or the only way to do things for now on. Choices have consequences, but they don't need to define us.

We can forgive ourselves and start new. Even better, God forgives and gives us courage and strength to start new. It might seem awkward or weird to her but encourage your daughter to pray about this area of her life. Talk to God about it. She may not because it seems too weird to talk to God about sex and boys, but it plants the idea in her thinking that God cares about every area of our lives and wants something really special for us.

Pray hard in this area. Not just for the right boundaries but pray about every person she'll date AND especially for the one with whom she'll share her life. Begin praying for him now and for his relationship with God, asking Him to prepare, protect and grow him into the man for your daughter.

### **What about God?**

As our daughters journey through learning to question and make their own decisions, one important area they will eventually tackle is God, church and faith. What do they believe? Why do they believe it? How does God fit into their lives? Does He fit? What about church?

Some studies say that 80% of young people leave the church when they are able to make the decision themselves. Barna research shows that young people want to impact the world around them and don't see the church as a place where that can happen. It also found that young adults/teens don't see the church as relevant to their daily lives.

They're watching. Realizing that adults aren't perfect. They begin recognizing that people sometimes act one way in church and another outside the church. Or profess to believe in God but treat people with little grace or love. Church and sermons may become "boring." And if they don't have friends in church or who go to church, they may not want to be there either.

It's a decision we want them to make. Really. Choosing to believe God and have a relationship with Him because *they* want to and not just because we've told them to or forced them to go to church. (Yes, make them go to church with the family. Let that be a rule for living in your home. Even if they don't want to be there, they are hearing God's

Word. Give them space to be mad or whatever.) As parents, our role is to help our children grow their own relationship with God.

How do we do that?

- Have our own personal relationship with God. Make time with Him priority. Live the example. Talk about God like He's real and involved. Share God moments with them.
- Pray for them AND with them. Let them hear you praying for them, their friends, their world. Be the person they know they can come to and ask for prayers for whatever is happening.
- Help them learn how to have one-on-one time with God. Provide tools. When you discover something that's helping you, share that with them—don't force, just say, "Wow, I started journaling and it's really changed up things for me in my prayer life." Share what you do and then let it go.
- Pray together as a family—even if it's just as meals. Not just a blessing for the food but let them hear you praying for "real" things.
- Go to church together as a family.
- Encourage/help them get involved where they can use their gifts/passions to make a real difference.
- When needed, talk honestly about struggles and things your kids may see in church, but don't talk negatively or be critical about people, pastors, leaders, etc., in front of the kids. They're listening even from the backseat of the car on the way home from church.
- Make God real. Help them see Him throughout the day. Talk about Him and His characteristics. Don't threaten them with God or, like with Santa, the notion that He's making a list and keeping it twice. Help them see God as a God who has rules in order to help us live the best lives, who forgives and doesn't shame or beat us up, who loves us, and has an amazing plan for our lives.