

GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR TEEN

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

There are two important keys to getting the best from your teens. The first is to have a rock solid family foundation, and the second is to nurture a strong two-way connection with your kids.

The way to create a rock solid foundation is two-fold. Parental agreement on child rearing is one of them. It is said that the second most common reason for divorce is parental disharmony over child management. If you don't present a united front then kids will go for the weakest link every time. You also need to create a strong set of family values.

Examples of these values are respect, commitment, honesty, integrity, forgiveness, obedience, and loyalty. There are many more. Identifying values will, in themselves, not change your family culture unless you describe what each of those values should look like *in action*. You might say that "respect in our home means we speak kindly to one another and do not raise our voices in frustration", or, "respect means that we don't take each others' stuff without asking, and we give it back promptly", and so on. These action statements become family expectations. You then train yourselves and your kids, to live by those values.

Not only do values provide clear expectations for you and your children to live by, but they also help to create a family identity. A positive identity promotes a sense of family pride that evokes a positive sense of belonging. When people think of your family, what characteristics do they observe? Is it a strong sense of loyalty and commitment amongst family members? Is it a family that thinks of others before themselves, or maybe one that demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility for the environment?

How do you nurture a two-way connection with your teens? You will get a head start if you start from the time they are born. We know that with blended families, this is not always possible. Here are some pointers. Take your kids seriously. Value their opinions and ideas. Encourage them to dream big. Go to their games and school functions when they ask you to, or even if they don't. Tell them you are proud of them. Give them time and attention.

When teens know you are listening to them and not judging every word they say, they will feel more confident to talk to you about their feelings. You also need to be a good role model or your credibility will go straight out the window. When you make a poor judgment call regarding them, then ask for their forgiveness.

Train them on the responsibilities they will face as adults such as how to manage money. Teach them how to show respect for their girlfriend or boyfriend on dates if you allow them to pair off. Allow your teen to make mistakes in the

safety of the home. You will stimulate your teen's maturity in several ways. When you expose them to a wide range of interests they become more interesting people and others are more likely to hang out with them.

Wider knowledge helps your teen become more outwardly focused because they are more aware of where they fit in the greater scheme of things, and what others' needs are. Teens will make wiser decisions when they can tap into a wider knowledge base. Encourage leadership in them. Have high expectations of them. They will rise to your level of expectations so long as they are realistic. Give them increasing responsibilities, and encourage them to take on some challenges (under supervision). It is vital that you look for potential in your teens. Role model an active and interesting life and they will follow. They won't know what they are good at until they are exposed to a wide variety of opportunities. Support them in what **they** excel at and don't be tempted to live out your unfulfilled dreams through them.

A very important footnote is to remember that your teens need to understand they are part of your family. They do not rule the home just because they are bigger and noisier than you are. You do. Do not be their pal. They don't want to be pack leader. They really do want you to be their parents.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.