

CARING NETWORK BULLETIN



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The Teen Years

Parents on the verge of the Teen years can often be intimidated by the changes that happen to their child and their relationship. They may feel powerless to influence, as the peer group becomes more important. Raising teens may be a game of chance for some people but not for the Heritage of the Lord. God has a plan and His plan includes our children. We need to work hard at ensuring they feel they are indeed part of this plan – we as parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles and ecclesias. In order to support and encourage our young people we must connect with them. Sis. Dolores Sleeper explores communication:

RAISING RESPONSIBLE TEENS

By Sis. Dolores Sleeper from San Francisco. Sis. Dolores works as a Head Counsellor at a public high school. She has an MA in counselling psychology with emphasis in Marriage, Family & Child Counselling.

The "teen" years, the time between childhood and adulthood, the period of transition between two world views, is like the sudden drop on a roller coaster ride. Thrill and fear are merged dynamically together and we step but shaken and delighted at once. Pleased to have conquered our fears and yet awed by the experience. The parent shares the rush with a bit different perspective. As parents we sometimes find ourselves snagged by our own fears. We focus on the product while our son or daughter is caught in the process. Learning to step into their shoes can go a long way to calming some of the turbulence that often accompanies this transition.

How can we step into our teen's shoes? I have spent countless hours in the company of teens and if I were to give just one piece of advice to parents it would be to listen to your teens. This sounds obvious, but I mean to listen actively, empathically, with the heart and the eyes, not just the ears. Stop what you are doing, look your teen in the eye and listen. Look at his face, her hands, his posture. Listen for her emotions in the way she speaks more than what she says. This is not your opportunity to advise, direct or correct, to share your own success stories or even failures. It is the time to seek to understand, to stay focused on the other, not ourselves. It is not about us: we are listening. Avoid advising, lecturing, and warning: these block the communication by changing the focus. When we fall into our old habits of ineffective listening, we move ourselves to centre position and now direct the conversation rather than listening to the other. Evaluative comments, whether positive or negative, also create a barrier to communication. They communicate closure rather than a desire to keep the conversation going. Soliciting additional details needs to

be handled carefully. It must be part of the seeking to understand. It cannot feel like an interrogation or the trust, which makes possible genuine communication, will be shattered.

Empathic listening is a far more powerful tool in building relationships than most of us realize. It is a way of showing our love and care, not just saying it. Teens are especially vulnerable to feelings of isolation and redundancy. They, like all of us, need to feel a sense of belonging and significance. When we take the time to actually listen to them, to put aside what we are doing and really pay attention, we communicate to them that they are valuable and important to us. Many of us have the bad habit of partially listening while we are planning our response or paying attention to something else. This communicates disregard and devalues the one who is speaking to us. This often leads to the conversation closer "you don't understand!" If we can do nothing else, let's seek to really build a relationship with our teens, by really listening when they speak and seeking to genuinely understand.

SCRIPTURAL GUIDELINES FOR GODLY SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

By Bro. Al Hussey from Niagara

Of all the decisions and social pressures that our teenagers and young adults face today, none is more difficult than the decision of whether or not to engage in sexual activity. A taboo subject among Christadelphians for so long, we can no longer avoid the reality that in the world our young people live in, an "innocent" dating relationship today is expected to involve sexual intimacy. The message from society is that drinking is dangerous, drugs are dangerous but sex is a biological need that just needs to be managed (condoms, birth control, etc.) A young man or woman cannot enter into a dating relationship with someone today without sex being expected at some point. We need to equip them with the strength of conviction that will enable them to deal with this effectively. We need to provide them with compelling Scriptural reasons to know why the Father has restricted sex to the marriage bed. Our young people are intelligent and don't deserve the standard "DON'T - because God forbids it".

The purpose of God is to fill the earth with His glory. In creation God brought together a man and a woman and they were naked and not ashamed. He commanded them to be fruitful and multiply and in this very simple context showed that the Divine role of sex was to continue the beautiful work of creation and bring forth life. With this in mind, Adam and Eve were married (Genesis 2:24-25).

Although the primary purpose of sex is to bring forth children, God has made it a beautiful act and expression of intimate mutual pleasure. A clear indication of how much

He values the family. The Father has set the pattern for human intimacy by His own establishment of the covenant with His wife Israel.

"Thus says the LORD God to Jerusalem...you grew up...arrived at full maidenhood; your breasts were formed...behold you were at the age for love...I plighted my troth to you (pledged fidelity) and entered into a covenant with you, says the LORD God and you became mine." (Ezekiel 16:1, 7-8)

When we enter into sexual intimacy we are making a covenant with our partner and the Divine context is marriage. God's commitment to His bride was that He would pledge fidelity – BE FAITHFUL. To underscore this Godly context for intimacy, the Apostle Paul speaks plainly to us. "To the unmarried...I say...if they cannot exercise self control they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion." (1 Cor. 7:8-9)

God's guidance through Paul is to preserve this most intimate of acts for the one to whom you are willing to covenant yourself. And having followed the Heavenly pattern in marriage you pledge fidelity to the lover that will share with you all sweetness life – intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and physically.

Jesus' love for his bride – the Church, is expressed in similarly intimate terms. The passion and the ecstasy of the Song of Solomon reveal the depth of love Jesus has for us and the depth of love we can share with our spouse. BUT there is one condition – faithful commitment for life. Such complete relationships in Christ reflect the glory of our God and give honour to His intent to fill the earth with that glory.

Casual sexual partners do not honour God! They debase one of His most beautiful gifts. Let's embrace the Wisdom of God and reject the foolishness of the world, for we have been shown a "better way".

Caring Network Resources

- **Christadelphian Care-Line**, 1 866 823-1039 toll-free
- Caring Network Website, **www.caringnetwork.ca** under Scriptural Wisdom & Practical Help For Surviving Troubled Times - Young People

Excerpt from Scriptural Wisdom and Practical Help for These Troubled Times – Young People

"Teenagers appear to be unique as well in that they determine what is true on the basis of what they experience in relationships of various kinds. Thus at least three things become vital in encouraging youth in their faith: 1) the ongoing, active and empathetic support of parents; 2) a warm and relational ecclesia in which the young people feel active and needed; and 3) a significant relationship with another adult figure for whom faith is important and meaningful in everyday life. It is remarkable to note the time,

energy and expense that young people will invest in relationships. It behooves the ecclesia and the family to make the most of this tendency in the young people, and to encourage right relationships, and to be involved in those relationships chosen by the youth. Ensuring that a "youthful" adult (able to relate well and understand the concerns of the young) is both available and accessible to the CYC members for guidance and consultation goes a long way in assisting them to establish good and biblically based friendships. Such a "leader" must be available, accepting of the youth and their concerns as expressed, sincere in faith and in interest in the young, free to express vulnerability and failure, and sensitive to their needs and situations."

Other Resources

- The UK Care Group Website, www.chcg.org.uk
Conference 2002 Report on Experience and Expectations - The Voice of our Young People available

CYC

CYC is the one ecclesial event that is targeted at our young people and yet, does it have something for everyone? Is it possible that we are targeting our CYC events to only the athletic, or only the studious? Not that there is anything wrong with either of these, but do we have some who are musical or gifted writers or talented in arts or computer geniuses? Do all these different individuals have a way they feel they can contribute and be of value?

We may feel we have a healthy CYC group in general but is there anyone on the fringe at all? Anyone who feels they are not good enough, or their family does not have the same status as other families within our community. Is there someone who has difficulty making friends? Are we going out of our way to draw this person in, to get to know them and meet them on their terms?

Off To University

For many young people this time of year can be extremely exciting and stressful. It's off to a year of university or college. University can demand much of a student in time and energy and commitment, and the new environment provides many a temptation. How can we support our young people when they go on to this next stage in life?

- ❖ Parents can contact the ecclesia in the area to alert them of the student.
- ❖ Ecclesias can provide the student with phone lists of ecclesial members and offers of transportation to ecclesial events.
- ❖ Families can have the student over for meals.
- ❖ The teen years can be a time of insecurity even though they don't necessarily show it. We must be willing to make the effort and show interest.

REQUEST – YOUR INPUT! Please send us your suggestions for topics to be covered, useful resources you have come across, or comments about what we have written. Contact Sis. Jennifer Daniel, jenniferdaniel@telus.net, or 4 Foxwood Court, Port Moody, BC v3h 4w7, or 604 469-239