

In a world where nothing stays the same, teens will struggle with demanding schedules, identity crisis, changing relationships and more. Having consistent people who are praying for and investing in youth makes an impact.



How Parents Can Prepare their Adolescents FOR LIFE'S TRANSITIONS

by Dr. David Rueter

While there is nothing new under the sun, life is consistent in delivering changes. Being a parent means navigating life's changes and transitions with your children as they mature toward Christian adulthood. There is a good deal of research that suggests that it is times of transition that pose dramatic challenges to young people as they mature. Churches all too often see a decline in participation of youth as they transition from confirmation to high school and then from high school into college or a career.

The Christian home sees its own struggles during these times of transition. If our goal as parents is to see our children mature into Christian adults we need to work with them, slowly but consistently removing the scaffolding that has protected them. Times of transition are excellent opportunities for parents to help adolescents explore new horizons extending into their futures.

Here are a few ways parents can prepare themselves to help guide their adolescents through key transitions:

1. Mourn appropriately. Yes, your little one is no longer little and is now presenting you with increasingly adult situations. That's alright. This is truly normal and healthy. Yes, you can mourn your loss of their childhood, but you cannot force them back to an earlier time.
2. Be encouraging. Times of transition are nerve wracking for both you and your teen. They are as full of doubts as you are. Help to encourage them to have confidence to try new things. They can succeed in middle school, high school or college. Yes, they can find their first job, even if not right away.
3. Have a plan. The key transitions from childhood to adulthood should not come as a surprise. We can know when high school and college are coming. We may not know exactly when puberty is coming, but we can estimate and be ready. Think through your parenting style, your teen's personality, and the community that you live in as you discuss with your spouse or other key adults in your teen's life to formulate a plan with regard to managing the increasing autonomy and responsibility needed at each transition.
4. Keep listening. As your teen hits road blocks navigating transitions be present to listen to their frustrations. Listen first, advise later, perhaps only when they ask. Yes, you have wisdom to pass along, but it is only useful to them if they are ready to hear it.
5. Be the parent. Your relationship is changing. You will need to learn to treat your teen more and more like an adult, but you will not cease to be their parent. You will never be their cool friend and they do not need that from you.
6. Ask guiding questions. As you help your teen mature toward Christian adulthood, asking questions that help them reflect toward reaching appropriate conclusions will become a key tool. Rather than instructing, affirm what you see them doing well and then ask questions for aspects you think they need to reflect further upon. Make sure your questions are neither leading nor condescending. Ask questions with an honest desire to understand how they are thinking things through. This way you understand them better and they can learn to understand their own thought processes better as well.

7. Find the right balance. Each situation is different. You are different as parents from your own parents. Each of your children are different from one another. Moving a teen toward Christian adulthood is the art of seeking the balance between autonomy and responsibility that is right for him/her.
8. Be open to adjustments. You won't always get the balance right. Admit when you over played either autonomy or responsibility. Try not to place blame on your teen that is beyond their control. Make sure to continue to empower them, even if you need to pull back on the reigns for a time.
9. Celebrate milestones. Our culture lacks a clear celebration of the transition from childhood to adulthood. For each smaller marking on their road to Christian adulthood, celebrate with your teen. Reinforce both the responsibilities that are being placed on him/her as well as your confidence in their ability to master them. Your son or daughter is a child of God and is made to mature toward Christian adulthood. They are wired to succeed.
10. Keep Christ central. Faith practices in the home may change over time. Your 13-year-old will not likely be eager for bedtime stories, but that may just mean evening discussions in the catechism instead. Encouraging faith related discussions in the home can provide the foundation upon which your teen is able to understand the transition and how to keep Christ central in their lives through and beyond. ■

Discussion Questions

- In what ways is your congregation working to make the home the center of faith formation and equipping parents for that task?
- What spiritual milestones do families celebrate with the congregation? Are there milestones not being celebrated with the family of faith (i.e., congregation) that should be celebrated? How might you make that a reality?

