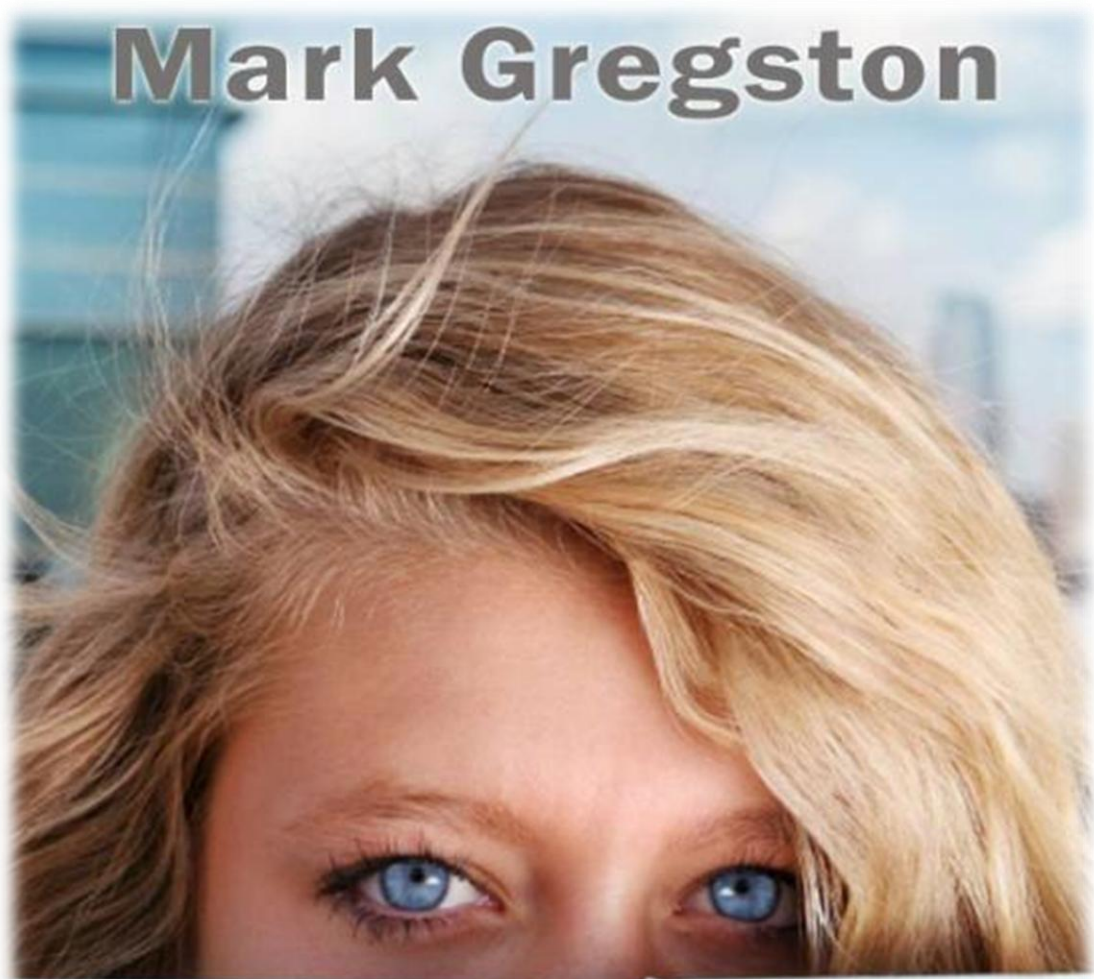


**Mark Gregston**



**SECRETS**

to effective

**Parenting**

*in the Teen Years*

# Secrets to Effective Parenting in the Teen Years

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## Introduction

There's no doubt that teens today live in a world filled with unbelievable pressures. The instability of the world around them leads them on a desperate search for significance and security...a search complicated by the confusing messages they receive from our culture.

To make matters even more difficult, the sexualization of our culture...and of their generation...is overwhelming. As a result, many of our teens are making incredibly poor choices...leading to devastating, life-altering consequences. Throw an epidemic of drug and alcohol abuse on top of that...and it's no wonder so many kids today struggle when they reach their teen years.

Then there are other complicating factors which impact the lives of thousands of teens. These include:

- Adoption
- The divorce of parents
- Growing up in a blended family
- The loss of a parent or sibling
- Crisis or trauma that throws their world out of order

Somewhere in the midst of all this, parents are trying desperately to create some kind of relationship with their child...trying to understand what is going on. This can be really tough. For many parents there are sleepless nights...difficult arguments...a lot of tears...and a deep-seated fear for their child. The energetic little boy who was so fun...the sweet little girl who used to be full of hugs...has become someone totally different.

Over the past 30 years, I have spent countless hours with teens and their parents. And what I have learned is this: There is hope. There is hope for your teen...and there is hope for your family...no matter how desperate the situation may seem.

And that hope starts with a fresh understanding. In the following pages, my desire is to help shed some light on how to approach and develop a genuine relationship with your teen. If you will take to heart the following principles and begin to apply them to how you relate to your teen, I think you will be amazed at the outcomes!

If you are a parent with kids about to enter the teen years, then I heartily recommend you put these principles into practice today. If you do, you just might avoid the pain and heartache that often comes with a struggling teen.

## Where To Begin

I want to take just a moment to set the stage for you as a parent—where you need to begin to think and focus. Consider your heart’s desire for your child.

It’s not to be liked...or try to bribe them into loving you by giving them things...or letting them do whatever they want...or trying to “relate” by looking the other way when they may step out of line. In fact, my experience shows that fathers spend too much time making their kids happy, and too little time helping them grow up.

Have one goal in mind in your relationship with your child. It is simply this:

*To lead your child to embrace godly thinking and godly behavior.*

Keep this your goal...mom, dad...regardless of where you are spiritually. I have never met a parent who wants their child to think in ungodly ways. And every parent I have ever met wants their teen to act in godly ways!

But moral ways or ethical issues flow from an eternal perspective. That kind of perspective doesn’t just happen. It is intentional. And it starts with you. It is helping your child live beyond themselves so they’re not so self-centered and selfish.

This is an incredibly difficult task. But the principles I outline in the following pages will help you in that process. What I have learned over the years is that you can change the thinking and behavior of your children.

You can’t change are their feelings, past decisions, and circumstances. Whatever has happened to your child is the result of bad choices...or because of something that has happened to them outside of their or your control.

And you cannot change any of those things. No matter how hard you might try...or wish...you can’t. Sadly, we always try to change things over and over and over again. But, as parents, we must let those things go and focus on what we can change...their thinking and behavior.

How do you begin to do this? This is where we will start as we outline the principles for dealing with a struggling teen.

The starting point for dealing with struggles with your teenager is understanding forgiveness. If you can grasp this definition, it can make a world of difference in how you deal with your child.

Here it is:

*Forgiveness is giving up hope that you'll ever have a better past.*

Did you let that sink in? Your past...your child's past...will never change. And your child's feelings toward things in their past won't either. If you are trying to change those feelings or attitudes, you are going down the wrong road.

I can remember my mom telling me, when I was struggling as a kid, to just change my attitude. When she would say that my immediate thought was, "Oh mom, I'm so glad you said that because now I don't feel that way." Right!

That kind of response from my mom just made me more frustrated because it said to me that she just didn't understand.

As a parent, you're not going to change any of those feelings either. Your child may say to you today, "You're the worst parent I have ever seen. You are pathetic. You are the worst mother. Why did you ever adopt me? Why did you ever do this or that? You just don't have it right. Do you know you're the biggest dorks that have ever walked this earth? Do you realize how pathetic you are mom and dad?"

The best thing to do in situations like that is just take it. Practice immediate forgiveness. Because what your child is saying and doing is not aimed at you. You are a safe place for their spewing.

These are feelings your son or daughter has created to try to find justification for their behavior and why they do the things they do. And you need to understand that

they're going to aim those feelings at people they love the most—the people they know won't leave them.

I can guarantee you this: There is no way your child would go up to his or her friends and express those feelings. If they did, they know their friends would leave them.

So, learn to forgive them in the moment...that you can't change their past and what has led up to this outburst. And realize they're going to aim their anger at you...and you're going to get beat up in the process.

Now, if you insist on trying to change those feelings...if you try and convince your son or daughter they are wrong...you will be creating a chasm between you and your child. And as long as you persist, you will never be able to establish the kind of relationship with your teen that will allow you to build the godly thinking and behavior you so deeply desire.

So, let me give you some principles to use when your child goes off on you like this.

First, try to pull the “fuse out of the firecracker.” When my children...or someone else...has come to me and said, “You are pathetic,” my simple response has been, “I know, I am.” Because it is true! And it is for you, too.

When a child makes an accusation that is neither true, nor contains any truth, learn to let it go. You can't correct the issue all the time. If you focus on their “side tracking” you'll lose focus on the main purpose of the initial conversation.

You don't have to prove yourself every time someone makes an accusation...let it go. Let them feel like you're listening, and model a new opportunity to express oneself, to not have to correct everything (pick your battles wisely).

We all have those areas of life where we mess up, and as a parent, the quicker you are able to admit that, the better. It's okay to be a little vulnerable with your child. In fact, it will help build trust, because they begin to see you as a real person who also struggles with stuff.

So, when your son or daughter begins to throw those feelings out, learn how to pull out the fuse by not arguing, but letting them go.

The second principle is the flip side to letting comments go. That flip side is to establish boundaries around you as a parent. Let me give you an example.

Not too long ago I received a call from a young man who was a disgruntled employee. He felt he could just call me and “puke on me.” It was out of order. When he started to go off on me, I told him I was getting off the phone.

He didn’t have the freedom to just call me and dump on me. And I didn’t have to answer every criticism he was throwing at me.

The same is true for you. You don’t have to answer every criticism your child throws at you. You need to set some boundaries that define your authority. Those boundaries should encourage your child to share how they are feeling, but that you are not going to allow them feel the freedom to just dump them all over you whenever they feel like it.

Most kids feel they have the freedom to do that. It’s very childish. They feel they can always go to mommy or daddy puking out whatever they may feel about you. At some point, you must tell them they can’t do that. If you do, you will begin to establish some internal controls on that type of behavior.

So what I am suggesting is to create a balance in your relationship with your child by setting boundaries for how they can talk to you while at the same time diffusing their comments by letting certain feelings go. If you can find that balance, you will be able to control yourself.

Here is the final principle in handling your child’s outburst against you. **DON’T EXPLODE!** When you explode, you will always damage your relationship with your son or daughter. Nothing good will ever come out of it. You have to maintain your composure—and you do that by applying the first two principles. The potential for an explosion is almost always fed by this “feeling” thing.



Remember, anger is an emotional response to not getting what you want. When anyone gets angry, including yourself, look beyond the emotion and try to determine what's "fueling" the anger. Then deal with the real issue, not just the emotional response.

I hope you understand you can't change the feelings your child has and you can't change past circumstances, but you can change the thinking and behavior of your child. And you can start to change their behavior by showing forgiveness, giving them the chance to express themselves (even when it hurts), and setting those boundaries...by saying, "We're not going to do this anymore." What you do, and how you do it, "models" the behavior you would like your child to model.

### **When Rescuing Only Makes Things Worse**

Parents are wired to protect their children. It's natural. But, parents are also wired to prepare their children. Unfortunately, our generation focuses more on protection than it does preparation; which is why teens today are so immature.

They don't grow up, because we don't let them. Even though most teens are capable of being adults intellectually and biologically, our well intended actions have a tendency to shelter, confine, control, and anesthetize our children from the hardships that are actually vital to helping them grow up. Our well intended actions or restrictions and limits don't prepare, they hinder.

For whatever reason, our generation of parents feels that discomfort and pain are not good things. So we avoid or eliminate pain at any cost. The result is we pay the price for not working through pain in our life. And our children end up paying a similar price at an early developmental stage when pain is necessary to steer and direct.

Now, the pain I'm writing about is not corporal punishment, spanking, or physical consequences. It is the pain of a child failing, the pain of inappropriate actions, and the

pain I endure as a parent, watching my child being prepared for the world in which he or she must live.

Let me give you a number of scenarios I believe can often inhibit you from preparing your child for his or her future. These are scenarios I have seen played out over and over again and normally end up hurting a child...not helping.

- Parents ignore the low performance of their child. It's not unusual for them to constantly complain about teachers. Until they finally accept the fact that their child has a low IQ or academic problem. The pain of facing the true problem has their 16 year old daughter...
- Mom and Dad keep rescuing their son every time he gets into trouble at school, saying that he's just "all boy." As a result, they postpone their son's acceptance of consequences for inappropriate behavior by allowing his childish behavior to continue far beyond a time when it is appropriate.
- Dad fears confronting a daughter who treats her mother terribly, and demanding that there be respect in his home. He's afraid she'll run away. Unfortunately, she ends up ruining all her relationships with family members and leaves anyway.
- Parents are afraid to set rules and boundaries within their home. They know that the children are going to voice their displeasure with the new policies and it will create difficult conversations.
- A father bails his child out of speeding tickets and personally pays the insurance rate hikes. Rather than grounding him from using the car, he empowers the child to continue their reckless behavior and he finally kills someone.
- Parents don't let their children handle their own money fearing they might bounce a check or misuse the funds. So the child never learns how to handle finances and

- when he or she gets married the marriage falls apart because of financial pressures caused by mismanagement.
- Mom is afraid to follow through on consequences and promises pertaining to certain behavior because she's just afraid of what it would look like to enforce the rules. She's never been strong and she is fearful of her own response to having to be "strong".
  - A mom bails a child out of jail because she doesn't want her daughter to be around "those type of people." The pain of thinking that your child is in jail or detention for a night sometimes prevents a parent from allowing a child to through the pain that is necessary to stop the type of behavior that got her there. (By the way, there is a strong chance your child will learn the lessons they need to the first time something like this happens if you remain strong...and that they will ultimately bless you for doing what was needed in their life at such a critical time).
  - Parents who are afraid to accept the fact that their child is spinning out of control for fear it might make them look bad within the community. Most kids eventually nosedive in such a case and the whole community is keenly aware of the failure.
  - Parents who never say "no."
  - Parents who do not let their children feel the full consequences of their choices, so that the child never is able to understand the proper way to live.
  - Parents who don't get help for the child who struggles socially until their child's relationships are so bad she is damaged.
  - Moms who just can't believe that their son would "ever do such a thing" so they sweep behavior under the rug...only to have it crawl to the light when the local police knock on the front door.

- Parents who won't stand up for what they believe for fear of their child's response. And then they wonder why their child doesn't stand up for what he believes in the midst of his friends.

Many times, it is parent's fear that prevents them from moving their child through a difficult time or a time of pain. When a teen makes a pretty serious blunder, it is never a good idea for parents to ignore the situation. Two wrongs never make a right. When children are wrong, parents need to do what's right.

## Facing the Pain

Pain will come as your child matures and starts to take on his or her own identity. It is painful watching a child mature. They will make bad choices as they strive for independence. And it is painful as a parent to watch when they make mistakes, get angry, and struggle to figure things out.

But this is a part of life that is critical if they are to be prepared for a healthy adulthood. It is a part of growing up. And for the most part, parents haven't done a very good job of allowing kids to experience and learn from mistakes as they continue to protect their teens like they did when they were small children.

Let me give you a good example. I'm all for every kid on the team getting a trophy when they're in the first few grades of their elementary years. But to give trophies to the whole team in 8<sup>th</sup> grade when they didn't win is not helping those kids prepare for what is about to hit them as they enter high school.

Why do we do that as parents? I think there are two reasons. First, as parents, we don't want to go through the pain of seeing our child not recognized, rejected, or not "feeling a part." We don't want our child to experience that rejection.

But I think there is another reason: sometimes I feel it's more about us, as parents, than I think it's about our kids. And because we as parents can't deal with that pain, our kids won't grow up prepared to handle what they will be forced to face one day.

So we need to be prepared as parents to allow our kids to go through pain. And pain will come in many forms.

Pain will come when you begin to have those difficult conversations with your child about values. It's painful as a parent when you realize your child is not on the same page as you in moral and ethical areas. Your child needs you most during these kinds of painful discussions. And if you disengage from your child during this time, who is going to help them formulate those values?

Pain will come when there is a confrontation over foolish thinking. Yours, or your child's. No parent likes to have their foolish ways or thinking exposed. And no child likes having their foolish thinking uncovered. But it doesn't mean you don't do it. Even though it is painful, you need to be willing to lovingly confront your child...and be open to their criticism of you.

Pain will come when you and your child have conflictive ideas...when you don't agree on their relationships...when you exposure their motives (or they expose yours).

There will be pain over wrongdoings or when you confront them regarding behaviors that are out of line or just wrong. And any of these discussions may get a little heated. If you can't stand the heat, I encourage you to turn down the temperature a little bit. Take a small break and then get back together to discuss things further.

By the way, I'm amazed at how fearful most parents are about anger and the expression of it. Scripture assures us that we can be angry and not sin. Anger can in fact be good as the intensity of our anger can reflect the longings of our heart for something good in the life of our child.

Pain will come when parents have to establish or re-establish the authority of the goal keepers, which are mom and dad. The goal keeper is the one who has to constantly

point toward a goal and say, “Yes...this is the way we’re headed...”or, “No, this is not the way we’re going.” Both those statements can be painful.

Pain will come when your child begins their quest for independence. Let me encourage you to be careful to not confuse this desire for independence with selfishness. As a parent you want your child to be independent when they leave home and go off to school or go out on their own. But that expression of independence isn’t always a fun experience.

At times, it may be cloaked in conversations where a child may express displeasure with being at home, or wanting to make their own decisions, or not liking the way that you operate as parents. If your teen is expressing these things know that they are usually good signs...signs you have prepared your child to leave the nest with the desire to establish their own identity. Don’t forget that your child must “leave” before they can “cleave.” A man must leave his mother. And a woman must leave her home. Just like childbirth, it’s a painful experience at the end of a lot of preparation. But it brings about something exciting you have long hoped for.

Pain will come when wrong motives, demeanor, or desires have been exposed. It will come when, as the parent, you confront, limit, or restrict your child. And it will show up when you have disagreements, arguments, or spats over issues.

While none of us enjoy these things it does come with the territory. And it does come. And when it does, you need to see it as an opportunity to guide and steer your child through rough waters...a time when the guidance and steering is needed the most. So don’t “bail out” when the going gets rough.

Here’s the principle I want you to understand as a parent of a struggling teen:

*Your teen will continue in their behavior until the pain that is a result of the behavior is greater than the pleasure derived from it.*

So, if you are going to grow your child through their pain you need to make sure you don’t so shelter your child that they are kept from experiencing pain. If you prevent

your child from experiencing the pain that is an outcome from inappropriate behavior, poor choices, and bad decisions, you just might be enabling your child to continue down that destructive path.

## Changing Your Teen's Thinking

You need to picture your child's brain as if it is a computer hard drive that has had a bunch of different programs downloaded onto it. Because it often functions just like that.

Sometimes you can put so much on a hard drive that it will overload and shut down. And so it is with your child. Your child can have so much stuff coming at him (or her) that he just ends up shutting down.

Another characteristic of a computer hard drive is that some programs don't interact with each other. They're not compatible and they end up causing confusion. Something will lock up and the computer will stop.

The "programs" your child has downloaded from the culture that surrounds him can cause tremendous confusion and internal conflict. When this happens, many teens just shut down. Their brain is frozen and they don't know which way to move.

And then you find that viruses can get into your computer and infect all the other programs. While you have no control over it, your child is going to have "viruses" that infect the other "files" in their brain. When that happens, you begin to wonder what in the world is going on with your child. The values and actions are so different from what they have been taught. But their "hard drive" is now infected.

But just as you can change or clean up your computer hard drive, and get it working properly, you *can* change the way your child thinks. And as you do, their feelings will change.

But a word of caution. Don't feel like you *have to* change the way they think right away. More often than not, it is a process. And remember a computer operating system runs off a processor.

For instance, if your child comes to you and says, "I think abortion is a good thing. Matter of fact, I think every girl that gets pregnant ought to have an abortion," do you think you are going to change that thinking right then?

I know, you feel the need to share you opinion right then and there. But remember, Scripture says that *a fool delights in sharing his own opinion*. You and I don't want our children to think something as stupid as that. But if you lay into them right at that moment, believing it's your responsibility to immediately change the way they think about abortion, you will only end up pushing them more strongly toward that position.

Your child will say some things that are calculated very carefully to try and get a reaction out of you, test you, or manipulate you. Just know that's going to happen.

If your child says something that reflects thinking you want to correct, what do you do? Let me outline three principles I think will help you.

1. Wait to be invited. Wait for the opportunity for your child to invite your opinion. Wait for them to say, "What do **you** think?" This is so much better than you jumping in immediately to share what you think...especially before your child has the opportunity to say anything. Sometimes they need to come to the realization that they need some help and guidance.

In our residential program, we get the residents on horses as part of their therapy. Once they are on the horse, I give them a little instruction and then let them go. It's not unusual for them to get out there, bounce around, feel a little bit out of control and become completely miserable before they will ask for help. But, if I will just wait for them to invite my help, it is



always more effective...and it can serve as a real breakthrough for the child.

The same is true for your child. Wait. Be patient. Let them invite your perspective and help. Moms, resist the natural temptation to tell your child what to do. If you insist on pounding on your child what they should be doing, most kids are going to tell you to just shut up...if not verbally, then in their heart.

By the way, my experience shows this is not a problem for dads as much as it is for moms. But dads are not off the hook. Too often they will just sit by and let their kids drown. Most dads think their kids ought to be able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and do it on their own...just the opposite of mom's perspective.

Somewhere between the two, there's a balance. You need to resist the tendency you have to either hound your kids...constantly telling them what they ought to do...or to be detached and disinterested.

2. Dads, take your child out once a week. Dads, if you want to change the way your teen thinks, then you need to build a good point of communication. The best way I know to do that is to take your child out once a week and just spend time with them.

Take your teen to a movie and then go out afterward to ask them what they thought about it. Let them share what they thought about the movie and what they learned from it. If you do, you will begin to build the kind of relationship that will lead to more open communication and ultimately, change the way they think.

By the way, at the end of the conversation, don't feel like now you have the opportunity to spew out your opinion. Don't just act like you are interested in how your kid is doing...trying to show you are not

selfish...so that when they finish you can tell them what you think. If you do that, you will do more damage than good. It will seem like you are washing your child's feet...but you're doing it with boiling water.

Instead, you need to ask your kid how they are doing...and then leave it at that and not say anything about yourself.

I am always amazed in our residential program how many times a kid will get up in a group meeting and share how they have never talked with their parents about their adoption...or their mom's death...or when their dad did this...or when their brother did so and so. Dads (and moms) you need to show genuine interest in your kids whenever they decide to share these thoughts with you. I have always found it is best to respond by saying something like, "How was that?" or "How did that make you feel?" or "WOW, that must have been amazing!"

Ask them questions...real questions...to show them just how interested you are in them.

3. Consider others to be more important than yourself. When you spend the time with your child as I suggest above, you need to check your heart.

- Is your purpose to fill the void in your life or is it to fill the void in their life?
- Is it to make you feel better about yourself or to make them feel better?

If we are honest, most of what we do is pretty self-centered. Pretty selfish. How will they know it's different...that what you are doing is not for yourself?

One big area is discipline. You need to check your heart and your motivation when you discipline your child. You and I should never discipline our child just because we don't like something.

Some other ways to show we are more interested in them than ourselves is to:

- Show your desire to spend time with them.
- Love them well during tough times.
- Ask questions instead of making accusations.
- Ask questions as a way of entering into meaningful discussions, hoping to teach in the process.

This last one is a biggie...and a way to demonstrate to your child just how much you love them. In fact, one slogan I have is to “Lead with a question. Leave with a question.”

For example, look for a time that is ripe to just drop a question to your kid like, “Hey let me get you to consider something. Every person is like a car. Which one do you think describes you best?”

Or tell your child you would like to get together for breakfast once a week. And when you do, be prepared with a question you want them to consider. And then whatever their answer—wherever the discussion goes—give them another question.

Come up with some questions you think would stimulate discussion. If you will do this, you’ll find your child will start asking *you* questions. You will be modeling for them how to have meaningful interaction. And, you help them learn to wonder...something so lost in a world of instant answers and immediate information.

What you are really doing is you’re teaching your child to invite somebody to come into their life...and that they are more important to you than yourself.

Scripture tells us a fool appears wise when he remains silent. If you will ask your child questions, let them answer, and you remain silent, you will begin to show wisdom and build the kind of relationship you want with your child. Your child wants to have this kind of relationship with you...but they won't if they feel like the only thing that matters to you is your agenda.

By the way, another way to show your child that you are more interested in them than yourself is to invite them to choose where you go for breakfast...or where you as a family might go for dinner...telling them that you want to do what they want to do.

## Disciplining Your Teen

One of the great issues in building a healthy relationship with your child...and one of the greatest destructive forces in a parent/child relationship...is the issue of discipline. The beginning of healthy discipline lies in the principles I outlined previously. Because, if you will apply those principles, you will begin to build the kind of relationship with your child that will be the basis for effective discipline.

For instance, you will be more believable in your discipline when your child sees over time that you really do care...that you really do consider them more important than yourself.

One of the first principles of discipline is to let your child know that no matter their reaction, your discipline will not change. They can be disrespectful to you...they can tell you that you are the stupidest person in the entire world...but you will discipline them all the same.

There is a tremendous freedom when you love your child enough to not be intimidated when you discipline them. This is the freedom to be honest with them and tell them that if they continue the kind of stuff they are doing, it will kill them. You can

tell them...without fear...that they will be a pathetic mess in any relationship they get involved in, for the rest of their life, if they don't change. My purpose in discipline is to keep them from getting to a place they don't really want to be. It's about them...not me.

They will know you are really not bothered by their reaction...because it really isn't about you.

Never discipline your child out of anger. I know that is easier said than done, but it is vital to keep anger from being your motivation when you discipline. Rather, let your anger be funneled into letting your child feel the consequences of their action.

As parents, we need to discipline our children in such a way that they will feel the full weight of the consequences of their actions. If we do, we will take the focus off us and our anger and put the focus on them and what is best for them.

Discipline your children for their purpose and for their relationships with others...not to satisfy your anger.

Finally, put into your mind and heart the commitment to serve, serve, serve. If that is your attitude when you discipline your child—and you don't allow yourself to be driven by retribution for their misdeed or for the need for revenge—you will truly build your relationship with your child.

That kind of discipline will blow your child's mind because that's not the style of relationship your child is used to.

## **Putting Your Knowledge to Work**

Wouldn't you love a quick fix for all the problems you have with your kids and within your home? Wouldn't it be nice to wake up one morning and everything is different? Wouldn't it be great if all the changes you'd like to see in your family could happen at the snap of a finger?

Sure you would...wouldn't we all? But unfortunately, there is no quick fix.

The first step is to get your house in order. It can still be relaxed...it can still be operated as planned chaos...but it must be in order.

Make no mistake; the plan of getting your house in order has to be strategic, deliberate, and calculated because the process of change takes time. But I have seen over and over that if parents will develop a plan, most homes will begin their movement towards a healthy environment quickly.

Let me give you some suggestions on an effective approach to developing a plan that can impact those things you desire to see changed in your home:

1. [Identify the problem areas you would like to see changed.](#) Let me ask you a question: If your child continues to do the same thing they're doing now, where will you and he or she be in 5 years? If you don't like the answer then there's got to be some change between now and then. So wouldn't today be a good day to set that in motion? What would you like to see changed? What would you like to be different?

Sit down with a pad of paper and write down what you like in your home and what you don't like. And while writing, don't let the problems you have caused to get in the way of the changes you want to see. Just because you have wronged your kids doesn't mean you can't require some changes. Because everything is constantly changing. Your child is getting older, there are new opportunities, exposure to new things, and you're becoming wiser.

You need to understand you are not bound by what you did or didn't do years earlier—or by mistakes you made in your early years that you can no longer reverse. There is a time when you should no longer have to “do time.” Its called forgiveness...giving up hope that you'll ever have a better past. And it called, “moving on.” It's time. Don't be afraid to list those things that are just wrong.

And just because you're numb to some of them doesn't mean they are no less wrong. This is the "realizing part"... of accepting that there is a problem.

2. [Set the Stage for Change](#). There's nothing wrong with sitting down with your children and sharing with them that you feel there needs to be some changes. And even if you do know what those changes should be, just say "I'm not sure what needs to change, but something needs to change".

I would also ask them what they would like to see changed in your family or your home. Whatever they say, try not to respond unless asked. Wait until they say, "Well, Mom (or Dad), what would you like to see changed in our home...in our family?" Don't answer. Tell them, "Good question...let me think about it" If you answer, you'll be giving all the answers and not allowing them to wonder about what might need to be altered or allow their "thinker" to conjure up some answers.

If changes are going to happen in your family, it's far better to implement what they would like to see changed than it is to implement what you have suggested. You can share things like, "You know guys, you're no longer kids, and I think we treat you all like kids too much," and leave it at that. "Come on, Dad. What do you mean?" "I don't know...I just think we shouldn't treat you like little kids any more". See what's happening? You're setting the stage for change.

You can tell them that "Mom can't continue to do this any more", or "I know you guys hate me, and I want things to be different", or "Guys, we have a problem, and something's gotta give", or just a statement that says, "I think I'm loosing you and I can't stand back and do nothing". This one is tough because, of course, a child will ask "What do you mean?" Don't answer, but say, "I don't know, I just feel like I'm loosing you". You are setting the stage to move to the next part. The part where you share what the problem is.

3. [Preparing Your Family for Change](#). After you have spent some time "setting the stage" (perhaps a week later), then it's time to begin to communicate the problems

you see in your home and family. Now, you don't have to dump everything at once. Start with just a couple of things.

It might be that the main issue in your home is disrespect. And your statements may be more along the line of "Son, let's get together and discuss about what we touched on last week." If he doesn't want to get together then take something away that is important to him...the car, the cell phone, computer, play station, x-box, whatever it takes to get his attention. He may yell, "That's manipulation"...and you'll say, "That's right! But I feel it's that important for us to talk. So when do you want to get some time?" And then suggest a time.

If he's still not ready don't push it yet. But if he continues to balk, take more away. The message to him needs to be that more pain will come until you and he sit down and talk. You're forcing his hand.

This may be a new stance for you. Particularly if you're a single parent. Single parenting is tough. It is usually born of loss. And that shared loss moves parent and child together. But where friendships abound, parenting becomes difficult, and "peerenting" becomes an easy way to survive. And when a single parent decides to move back into the parent role...the role of the authority...it's a difficult move, especially if that parent has just gotten remarried. But it's a necessary and important move when you have to confront issues within your home.

4. [Communicating the Change](#). At this point you need to begin to implement the changes. And the first step in that is to communicate what you want to see changed. It's when you say "Here are the changes and this is what we'd like to see different". It is a listing of things or traits that have been allowed in your family that are now no longer acceptable. It is the chance to make corrections to prior stances and thoughts. It is the opportunity to say "we were wrong" in what we've allowed. It is the starting point of altering things...and hopefully, the dawning of a new day.



5. [Implementing the Plan](#). This is the part of getting your house in order that will determine the effectiveness of what you learned from the first chapters of this book. It's now when you learn when to be strong, and when to be sensitive. It's when you learn to allow your kids to go through some temporary pain in order to learn the consequences of inappropriate behavior. It is the time when parents—whether together, separated, or divorced—should act in one accord as you implement the plan.

This is also the *crucial* time when your child will determine just how serious you are about change. And your genuineness and dedication to the process of getting your house in order. It is this time when your child will learn whether you are capable of following through on what you have said, and whether you truly believe in what you are doing.

I have come to think that establishing a Belief System is one of the best ways to communicate what you would like your home to “look” like. I will discuss this in a later chapter.

Do these five steps sound easy? In some situations, yes. In others, no.

The breaking of a horse sounds easy. The actual process is grueling, as anyone who has worked with horses would testify. It's tough because rarely will there agreement in the initial stages of implementing new ideas that will cause pain, discomfort, or uneasiness. But on the other side of all these temporary symptoms you will find deeper relationships and healthier people.

## **The Foolish, the Wise, and the Repentant**

Foolishness can be defined as the determined conviction that happiness must be gained on my own terms, without consideration or dependence on God, my family, or any one else. It is a consuming thought that “I am right” and “no one is going to tell me

what to do or has any business trying to help me.” It’s the “if everyone would just leave me alone, I can handle everything” syndrome.

It is self-centeredness at its apex, and selfishness in all its glory.

Foolishness leads to more and more pain. And unless someone is involved in the life of the fool, he will usually not “turn around” and come to his senses until he is eating out of a garbage can on some back alley.

Scripture tells us that “*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him*” (Proverbs 22:15). This doesn’t mean that you’re just supposed to beat a child until he changes. The “rod of discipline” might be in the form of car keys. It might be in the form of grounding. It might be in the form of other consequences or taking away privileges. It’s not necessarily just physical punishment.

People tell me all the time that these young people “just need their clock cleaned a couple of times” and they’d straighten up. While I think they need to feel pain and discomfort, pain doesn’t just come in the form of corporal or physical punishment.

Then they say, “Well, it worked for me, it should work for them. I mean, you train horses the same way you did 100 years ago, don’t ya?”

My answer? Yes, but my child isn’t a horse. Horses haven’t changed much in the last million years. My child has, and the world they live in is completely different than it was even 20 years ago. The culture has changed. Their opportunities have changed. Their possessions have changed. Their amount of exposure to stuff has changed. Their style, their likes and dislikes, and their interactions have changed. Getting whacked with a leather belt just doesn’t work any more.

The issue at hand...and encouragement of Scripture...is not that you need to take a rod to your child. Rather, you need to use some form of discipline with your child to get them to stop what they’re doing because they will damage their life if they continue.

So use any type of “rod of discipline” you want...but have the courage to use something. Any “rod of discipline” will create pain and discomfort in the life of your

child and move them in a new direction. And when they move on to something else you hope and pray it will be a wiser choice than the choice they have been making.

And how are they going to get input for that next choice? From you, Mom.  
From you, Dad.

In contrast to foolishness, I would define wisdom as the application of principles of right living gained through observation, reflection, and experience. What my child watches, what they think about, and what they do will give them the opportunity to gain wisdom to make better choices and healthier decisions.

Here comes a set of questions that might bite a little. What does your child observe? What do they think about? What has been their experience? And where do you fit into their gaining of wisdom?

While they will not like you when you begin to get your house in order, they will love you for your stand—and willingness to stand up to them for something better. And the momentary pain that change creates is a small price to pay for the greater reward of helping a child mature and gain wisdom by not allowing childish behavior to continue...behavior that only keeps your home “out of order.”

This temporary discomfort will hopefully move your child to repentance and change. By the way, I define repentance as the recognition of false images and beliefs related to meeting their personal needs and the forsaking of those images and beliefs for a commitment and dependence on God, your family and others.

Most parents want change within their family, but don't know what to do. Or they want change within but do nothing out of a fear of how their child will respond. As a result, their child controls their home, determines the atmosphere in which everyone lives, and thwarts any attempt to have some type of order. And, more times than not, parents get numb to their child's behavior and retreat from the relationship, which only allows their child to continue on their path of destruction. They don't even realize the

level of depravity their child has moved to and silently watch their child deteriorate, beginning other behaviors of coping that have even worse consequences.

## A Final Word

There are two things that last in this world. They are the Word of God and relationships. Both are eternal.

Only through relationship will you be able to communicate a better way of living, a different way of life, and the gospel of Christ to your child. But to do that means involvement in some way. And that involvement means you're going to rub shoulders with your child.

We have talked in this booklet about the need for you to become involved in your child's life, not for your sake or your benefit, but for their sake.

I believe relationships are eternal. One part of relationship is "eternity past." The "eternity past" for your child is the picture you have in your mind of your child when they were at the cutest stage as a little boy or girl. What I want you to remember is the teen you may be struggling with today is exactly the same child. Yes, other things have entered into his or her life and have caused some problems but that child is still the same child.

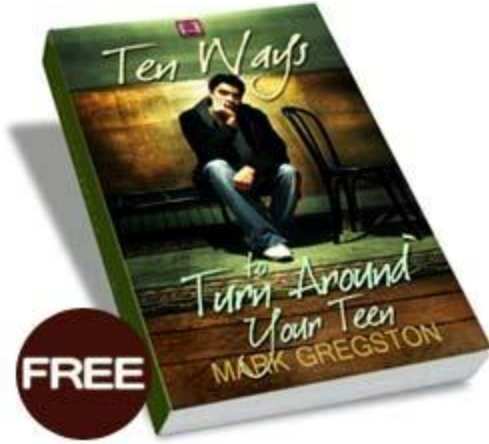
And that same child was created as a handiwork of God...and is still the handiwork of God, created for a purpose and for a reason. His thumbprint—given years ago—is the same thumbprint on their new life now. Just because you can't see it, doesn't mean it's not there. That purpose and reason have not changed and are your child's "eternity past."

The other perspective is one of "eternity future." This perspective lives life understanding that one day you will give your daughter away in marriage...you will release your son into the world. One day you will die and leave a legacy of some sort...and, as a believer, you will spend eternity with your child.

When you have this perspective, being the bad guy right now is not such a big thing. It's so much easier to get through the tough times when you know there's a significant future for your child.

Commit today to build your relationship with your child. Take the focus off yourself and put it on them. Build a bridge of communication, take time to get to know your kids, listen carefully to them, respect their opinions and do all you can to keep anger out of your discipline. Maintain the perspective of eternity past and eternity future...and then, look forward to that day when you will live with your child for eternity.

## Other Helpful Resources from Mark



To download the free e-book, *Ten Ways to Turn Around Your Teen* visit:  
[www.HeartlightMinistries.org/e-book](http://www.HeartlightMinistries.org/e-book)

For more books, CD's and DVD's of Mark Gregston's teaching, visit:  
[www.HeartlightResources.com](http://www.HeartlightResources.com)

If you would like more information about the Heartlight Residential Program for teens, log on to: [www.HeartlightMinistries.org](http://www.HeartlightMinistries.org) or call 903-668-2173

To inquire about Mark Gregston's speaking engagements or to schedule a seminar in your area, contact us at: [www.MarkGregston.com](http://www.MarkGregston.com)

To listen to or learn more about our radio programs and where you can tune in in your area: [www.ParentingTodaysTeens.org](http://www.ParentingTodaysTeens.org).

Mark's Blog: [www.heartlightministries.org/blogs/markgregston](http://www.heartlightministries.org/blogs/markgregston)

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Mark's Email: [markgregston@heartlightministries.org](mailto:markgregston@heartlightministries.org)

Turbulence Ahead Tour: [www.turbulenceahead.org](http://www.turbulenceahead.org)

Family Crisis Conferences: [www.familycrisisconference.com](http://www.familycrisisconference.com)

Family Crisis Coaching: [www.familycrisiscoaching.com](http://www.familycrisiscoaching.com)