



# Christian Parenting for Teenagers

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Session 2:  
Guidelines for Problem Solving



# Some Aspects of the Development of the Brain During Adolescence

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- Even when an adolescent's body has reached maturity, his or her brain has not. Two regions of the adolescent's brain develop on different time tables.
- The limbic system (site of development of emotions such as anger, fear) develops rapidly.
- The prefrontal cortex (decision making and moral judgments) develops slowly and matures at a much later date.
- Adolescents feel confused because their brains are not fully hard wired yet.



## Some Aspects of the Development of the Brain During Adolescence (cont.)

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- The adolescent's brain struggles to organize and process thoughts in an attempt to make the right choices. The better you connect with the adolescent emotionally and relationally, the better equipped he will sort through the temptations and pressures of life.
- Adolescents need intimate, loving connections with their parents more than they need lectures.



# Guidelines for Problem Solving

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## 1. Affirmation

- The question is how do we convince our adolescents that we love them for who they are without approving of their wrong actions?
- Affirmation means giving them a sense of authenticity. “In your anger, do not sin.” (Eph. 4: 26) This means that we do not express our anger in a sinful way. In Romans 12: 15 is the key: “Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.” This means sharing their happiness or sadness before you deal with any resulting behavior.



# 1. Affirmation (cont.)

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- “Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” (James 1: 19) Parents are interested in the adolescents’ life events and how they make them feel. Listening attentively with a compassionate heart will make your adolescent feel that he is understood and validated as a person.
- When you respond, respond actively showing great interest in their feelings. Rejoicing with our adolescents is an important way to build a strong attachment to them.
- Your response should not be an attempt to explain why bad things happen, but sincere sharing of their sad feelings.
- Example: a 16 year old girl lost her job, how do you comfort her?
- A 17 year old boy had a car accident, how do you comfort him?



## 2. Acceptance

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- We must accept our adolescents for who they are, no matter what. “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you.” (Rom. 15: 7)
- A doctor treats the sick person without condemning him. He does not say something like this, “If you have been paying attention, you would not have hit your finger with the hammer, or had a heart attack, etc.”
- Unconditional love is an expression of acceptance modeled after the love of Christ to us.



## 2. Acceptance (cont.)

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- Example: report cards, acceptance is not tied to performance.
- Acceptance does not mean we approve of everything the adolescent does. His value as a person and his worth is not dependent on his performance.
- Express these feelings of love and acceptance by appropriate sentences of praise.



## “Train up a child in the way he should go...” (Prov. 22: 6)

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- Each adolescent must be nurtured and disciplined according to his or her uniqueness.
- The way he should go means according to his habits and interests. The training must take into account his individuality and uniqueness and inclinations.
- Standardized discipline is one of the best ways to disconnect from adolescents.





### 3. Appreciation: a sense of significance

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- Appreciation gives adolescents a sense of significance. “This is my Son whom I love, in whom I well pleased.” (Matt. 3: 17)
- The more you praise your adolescent for what he is doing right, the less you have to criticize and discipline him for doing something wrong.



### 3. Appreciation (cont.)

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- Examples of appreciation:
- “Thank you for getting your homework done on time.”
- “I appreciate it when you take your dirty dishes to the sink after we eat.”
- “I appreciate you for spending time with your little sister when you wanted to be out with your friends.”



# Troublesome teen-age problems which parents complain of

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## 1. My adolescent takes no responsibilities:

- For all the problems, there are two sides: the point of view of the parent and that of a teen-ager. Parents become alarmed when they see a change in their kid's view about responsible behavior. The adolescents are less concerned about Mom's and Dad's approval. They are more interested in pursuing their own path of self discovery.
- Moderate teen-age irresponsible behavior, in many ways, is a healthy sign.



## 1. My adolescent takes no responsibilities (cont.)

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- Parents have a responsibility to offer guidance and provide some direction to remedy blatant irresponsible behavior.
- Many times irresponsible behavior is due to inability from the parents to permit the teen-ager to be responsible.



## Examples of irresponsible behavior

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- Not doing homework, deterioration of the grades, not participating in doing chores at home, not pursuing previously assigned hobbies, skipping or coming late to church, etc...




# As parents, what should we do?

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- A. Do not panic, and do not punish.
  - Parents' feelings usually exaggerate the importance and degree of their children's irresponsibility. They may even think that they intentionally try to hurt their feelings. The teen-agers are simply trying to find their own identity. They think that they are treated like little kids.
  - Punishments or grounding or withholding things, thinking that you will teach your adolescent a lesson, does not work for that age.




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- B. Let your adolescent be responsible for himself: Do not hinder him from growing up by checking the details of every responsibility he has to do, for example, waking up in the morning, checking on his homework, practicing his music lessons.
- Place the responsibility on the child. He may fail few times but eventually he will take responsibility and straighten out. No one is perfect.




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C. Encourage your teen-ager: Letting your teen-ager take responsibility for himself does not mean abandoning him. Start praising any and every sign of progress. Encourage his new interests and show your approval.



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- D. Introduce some structure into your teen-ager's life. Parents may no longer interfere in the performance in their child's homework, chores, etc..., but in the same time, they must set aside certain times to do the homework. In other words, there are trade-ins; "I let you be with your friends but you should take time to do your obligations."
- Review previously imposed responsibilities and let up on some.

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- Expect occasional incidents of forgetting to turn off the lights, the T.V., to leave his room messy. Do not expect perfection.
  - Remember that you are still dealing with an adolescent and not an adult. Be tolerant, do not burden with many responsibilities. Enjoy them while you have them, with their faults as well as their virtues. This is part of being a parent.



## 2. Why is my teen-ager so full of anger?

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- The main reason for this problem is that the teen-ager is struggling for control over his own destiny. The parent is struggling to maintain the previously practiced one-sided control. The main problem is the fight for independence. He wants to know that he is no longer willing simply to follow all Mom's and Dad's desires.
- There may be frustrations because of lack of money, parental conflicts with each other including divorce, rules are not consistent between the mother and father.





## What to do?

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- A certain degree of anger is inevitable. Study the complaint, the background, in order to reach an understanding.
- Practical steps:
  - A. Attitude: If you feel resentful, this is an understandable initial feeling of anger. You are also a human being; your teen-ager is abusing you, as if he is the only important person in the world whose ideas must be obeyed.

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- B. The matter of retaliation: it is perfectly understandable to want to retaliate following initial feelings of anger. Please do not retaliate. Do not come up with threats and punishments of your own. This does not work. It may work to dispel briefly the manifestation of anger, but it only builds up resentment. The teen-ager needs time to make some decisions about himself.
  - Try to understand better the teen-age culture, for example the curfew time, etc.

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- C. Listen carefully: Although your teenager's anger will be directed to hurt your feelings or trying to bully you, but he is really crying for help. Hold back your anger, and try to find out where help is needed.
  - If you do so, you will begin to deal with your teenager's problem and your teenager will realize that you are a supportive parent. However, do not be afraid to let him know that he had hurt your feelings with his angry outbursts. But do not do it in a way to make him feel guilty, but only be honest with him.

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- D. Re-examine the rules: Let your teen-ager know that there has to be rules in the house. Perhaps some of the rules need to be examined and you are willing to work them out.



### 3. My teen-ager lies to me.

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- Lying during teen-age years takes a much greater significance because the consequences of lying have to do with cars, drugs, liquor, sex, homework, etc., things that are not so trivial.
- Why do teen-agers lie?
  - A. To avoid trouble.
  - B. To exercise their independence: evasiveness, not telling the whole truth.
  - C. Teen-agers feel that parents adhere rigidly to out of date standards.
  - D. To cover a perceived inadequacy.





# Scenario

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- A. Parents ask the teen-ager where he is going.
- B. The teen-ager lies. (lie number 1)
- C. The parents know better and confront the child.
- D. The teen-ager lies again to cover lie number 1. (Lie number 2)
- E. Punishments by the parents.
- F. Teen-ager associates punishments with being caught in a lie. (Prepare for lie number 3)





## What to do about lies?


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- 1. Look behind the lie: a parent must help the teen-ager to solve the problems which make him feel he has to lie, thereby, creating an environment that makes lying unnecessary. The lie is a signal that something else is going on. Do not ignore the signal, but do not concentrate on it to the exclusion of what's behind it. A flashing red light at a railroad crossing means a train is coming. You pay attention to the signal, but you are really on the look-out for the train. The signal your child is flashing at you through a lie is no less of a sign that there is something else to be aware of further down the track.

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- 2. Talk to your teen-ager: Is he having hard problems with his peer relationships that he is afraid to talk directly about them?
  - Is he afraid of harsh punishments?
  - Do not set a heavy confrontation scene. Listen carefully to what your teen-ager tries to tell you, "between the lines."

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- 3. Do not be punitive: A threat of punishment is the surest way of encouraging your child to frequently lie. Your task is to win your teenager's trust. You cannot do if you drive him away with criticism and punishment.

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- 4. Examine your own values: Are you too rigid in setting rules? Are you comparing the times of your growing up as a teen-ager to the present environment of your teen-ager now?

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- 5. Teen-age lying is not a federal case:
  - Help your teen-ager to realize that there is a better way.
  - Convince him that you are more interested to help him resolve the underlying problem behind the lie than you are concerned about the fact of the lie itself.
  - You may find that the next time, instead of telling you a lie, your teen-ager will open up and tell you what is on his mind.
  - Teach him that life works better when you are able to tell the truth.



# Bad grades

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- Junior High and High School are structured differently than earlier grades: different teachers, different subjects, different classrooms.
- Many social and educational demands on the adolescents to remember their classes and their classmates.
- An adolescent may be unable to cope with the new situation and for variable reasons, he brings report card with bad grades.
- Do not panic. In anger do not act in blaming the school, in blaming your adolescent, guilt feelings about yourself.



# Bad Grades – Why are they performing poorly?

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- Interests other than school performance are crowding into their lives.
- Encountering a flood of new impressions for the first time, another kind of learning process is going on that is a lot more interesting than algebra, history, English.
- Bad grades may be associated with disruptive behavior in the classroom to get attention and to win approval of classmates which he is not getting at home. (unhappy home environment)
- Adolescents rebel against unreasonable demands and expectations from parents, comparisons with other siblings, parents who try to achieve good self-esteem through the achievement of their adolescents.






## Bad Grades – Practical steps toward solution

### 1. Look for the underlying causes of the problem

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- This should replace the punishment or giving up on them, exclude learning disabilities.
- Is there friction at home in the family, is there parental dominance in the home, does your adolescent feel excluded from social life.
- Is this a result of a move of his family or friends; or a loss of a friend, is he depressed about that?



## Bad Grades – 2. Do you know your adolescent's real capabilities?

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- Be realistic based on close observation plus consultation with the school authorities, and even possible testing.
- Not all adolescents are equipped to go to college. Maybe he has artistic or musical talents, or handy with tools. Encourage your adolescent's strengths and support him in his weaker areas. Realize that your adolescent should be motivated by something that fulfills his or her inner needs for accomplishment.



## Bad Grades –

### 3. Be a partner not an adversary

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- If you do not approve a certain behavior, like a punk hair style, loud rock music, you can state your disapproval, however do not make the mistake of disapproving your child. He needs more love. Do not reject him because of his lifestyle choices. Later, he will appreciate that he had such understanding parents.



## Bad Grades –

### 4. The positive bribe

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- When you make an agreement with your adolescent to buy him a new 10 speed bike in exchange for improvement in grade point average, you are following the principle that psychologists call “operant conditioning”.
- Your incentive should be something that your adolescent values very much and within reasonable limits.
- A word of caution: Do not set a standard of performance that the adolescent cannot meet, for example straight A’s, then he will not try harder and he will give up.



## 5. Bad Grades – Taking time off

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- Working can provide an adolescent a new perspective on life. An adolescent who works for a while very often will come to realize on his own that unskilled work is not all that great. Then he will be happy to return to school and work harder.
- This does not mean approving of adolescents dropping out of school. This is only a time out, for a period, as a last resort.