

Role Models for Your Teen

by: Rachel Paxton

By the time your children reach their teens, there is only a limited amount of time left to influence them and get them started in life in the right direction. The teen years are a critical time for role models in your children's lives. Often you will find teens have a hard time talking to their parents. This isn't always the case, but even in the closest families, teens often feel more comfortable talking to another trusted adult about some of the things going on in their lives. Of course you would prefer your teen would go to an adult when they need to talk something important out, instead of relying on their friends who may not have the insight an older, more experienced adult would have. Obviously you have no real control over who your teen goes to for advice, but there are a number of ways you can steer your teen in the right direction. The best chance your teen has for interacting with other adults is in extracurricular activities. There are all kinds of activities your teen can be involved with, here are some that come to mind: church youth group, scouts, sports, music, school clubs, community service, just to name a few. Personally I don't encourage parents to involve their teens in so many activities that it leads to burnout for both the parents and the teen, but carefully selected activities led by good and capable leaders will enrich your teen's life in a way few things can, and will increase the likelihood that your teen will establish a relationship with one of the group leaders. One word of caution, however. Talk to your teen about their activities and get a feel for yourself the effectiveness of the group leader. Not to say that they have to excel in every way, but just make sure that they are a good role model, and not a negative influence in your teen's life. There is the potential of bad leaders in any activity, including in a church setting, and it is the parents' responsibility to make sure their teen is in a positive atmosphere, influenced by mature leaders. Involvement in group activities is especially great for teens of single parents. Teens who don't have regular contact with mature adults of both sexes often have a hard time later in normal adult relationships. Being exposed to "normal" at this age very much increases the teen's chances of growing into a well-adjusted adult. I have seen this often with boys who are raised by their moms with not much influence or negative influence from their dads. Placed into group settings, with responsible adult male leaders, these teen boys have much less difficulty transitioning into adulthood. It also takes a lot of the pressure off the often overworked mothers. From my own experience, I have found that often other adults can help my teen in ways that I can't, mostly due to big differences in our personalities. I am more of a quiet introspective thinker, and my daughter is very outgoing, and has a lot of potential leadership qualities that are hard for me to help her develop because I do not possess those qualities myself. Knowing how important it is to help her develop her natural abilities at this impressionable age, I make sure there are other adults in her life who can help influence her in ways I can't. My daughter and I are very close, but there are just a lot of things that I can't help her with, so I encourage her in developing relationships with adults who do have those abilities. My daughter and I both respect our different abilities. It is very easy to be critical of people who are not like us, and parents and teens very easily fall into this trap. The best thing to do is be honest about your own abilities, and of the abilities of your teen, and do whatever is necessary to find outside influences for your teen. The more you can help your teen develop their abilities now, the less they will have to do on their own later (often, the hard way). And don't forget, you are a role model too. Get involved in the lives of your teen's friends, or volunteer to help in a group activity in some way, even if only occasionally. There are teens out there who really need to hear what you have to say.

About the Author

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