

Starting a Teen Book Study Group

by: Rachel Paxton

If you're looking for a way to connect with your teenage daughter this summer, consider starting a girl's book study group with your daughter and her friends. You may think that teens would not respond well to this idea, but think again...you just might be surprised. First bounce the idea off your daughter and see what her thoughts are on the subject. If she shows any sign of interest, then brainstorm some possible book titles and/or topics. When my daughter and I started our group last summer, we had in mind to get some girls together from our church's high school youth group. So we talked about some of the books that people were reading at the time. Next my daughter started calling her friends and acquaintances to see who she could interest in the idea. Almost everyone she talked to was interested in coming and liked the idea, but many were already busy with other summer activities. We narrowed the list to around four or five who committed to reading the book and getting together to talk about it. We all gave input into which book we wanted to read, and ended up with "What's So Amazing About Grace?" a popular non-fiction book by Phillip Yancey. I broke the book down into three- to four-chapter sections, and we decided to meet Wednesday evenings for six weeks. Overall, the study went very well, and it was very rewarding. We all have fond memories of it, and it was great to spend that quality time with my daughter. If you think this is something you might be interested in doing, here are some tips I picked up along the way: Don't take it personally if everyone doesn't come every week. Everyone has busy schedules and conflicts arise. Probably only one or two girls came every single week, even my daughter missed at least one. You'll find that conversations can greatly differ depending on the mix of girls, which is good! Meet in a low-key, relaxed setting so everyone is comfortable and doesn't feel like they're in a classroom. We took blankets to sit on down to a local park and had snacks every week. Don't pressure yourself into having to "lead" the group. You're not there to teach them, but only to facilitate the conversation. I found it helpful to choose a book that included group study questions. Some books have the questions in the back. This particular book had a companion study guide that had to be purchased separately. Just let the girls talk, and ask questions if there is a big lull in the conversation. Although you might be tempted to challenge "wrong" answers, let the girls challenge each other first and see what conclusions they come to. It is rare that you'll have to intercede. Instead of challenging someone directly, ask them more questions to help them reach a another answer. On the same note as the last point, don't feel you have to give advice or have all the right answers. Most teenagers love having someone, particularly adults, listen to their thoughts and feelings. They don't expect you to know everything, they just want you to listen. You'll find that the teens come from all different family backgrounds and don't always have other people to listen to them when they need to talk. Encourage girls to come to the discussions even if they didn't do their reading for the week. You'll find that most are embarrassed if they didn't do their "homework" and don't want to show up. Encourage them to come even if they didn't read it, to encourage fellowship among the girls. Dads can have book study groups with their teenage sons and their friends too! They may need to goof around some more and maybe burn off some energy before they get down to business (some kind of outdoor activity), but teenage guys like to get together and learn from each other also. A book study group is a great way to get to know some of your teenager's friends. Encourage them to also invite people they don't know very well...people from school or work who they want to get to know better. It's a great way to make that first step towards friendship and teaches them to reach out to others.

About the Author

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