

FAITH IN YOUR TEENS

Intentionally accompanying your teenager in faith

Faith in your teens will help to inspire parents as they seek to develop Christian faith in their teenagers. With the help of local voices, it is designed to enable any Presbyterian congregation to create a safe space for conversation between parents about how they raise and walk in faith with their teens, becoming more confident disciple makers.

FORMAT

This resource will work well if run over two separate sessions of around an hour, but could also be easily used in a single session of about 75 minutes, or can be adapted to work best for your situation. An informal setting will help, perhaps parents gathering while their children attend a youth programme, a meeting after church, or even in someone's home.

This material is easy to use and can be organised and led by anyone regardless of their experience. There are introductory exercises, two video clips and some optional discussion questions to help parents have a relaxed, positive and open discussion.

The video clips feature reflections from experienced parents, a minister and a psychologist with expertise in adolescence:

CLIP 1 Engaging with your teenager

Recognising the challenges of adolescent development and considering how to keep relationship and communication strong in the teenage years.

CLIP 2 Walking with your teenager

Considering how parents can intentionally develop faith in their young people in the context of day to day family life.

PREPARATION

A few things to keep in mind as you organise and prepare:

Be hospitable

Think carefully about how you can physically create somewhere safe where parents can relax and feel comfortable discussing honestly the challenges of parenthood, with soft seating and snacks. In your invitations and introductions, be clear that it will be confidential and informal.

Be real

There are no "experts"! No parent is perfect, all make mistakes and it will take pressure off if everyone acknowledges this at the start. When advertising, be careful to recognise that parenting is challenging for everyone, and ensure those participating can be honest without feeling judged.

Be supportive

Perhaps invite a couple of parents whose children are now through their teens and can offer honest perspective and encouragement. Follow up support and pastoral care may be necessary, but the ideal will be if parents naturally support one another. It would be good to pray together, or to agree to support each other in prayer on an ongoing basis.

Be practical

Encourage discussion towards simple action steps which parents can try in their real lives: "has anyone ever tried this?"; "I might give that a go". Listen out too for their ideas of how the congregation can continue to support parents in the future.

FOLLOW UP

Resources which could be used by parents are highlighted on the Presbyterian website, www.presbyterianireland.org/resources, and PCI Family Ministry Facebook page. If you are facilitating the discussion, it would be a good idea to become aware of a few ideas so that these can be mentioned during discussion as appropriate.

An optional take-home sheet gives a few key questions on which parents can continue to reflect.

INTRODUCTION

If those present are not so well known to each other, let them introduce themselves and share who is in their family. Take about 10 minutes to get people relaxed using a couple of these questions which you feel will work best to get your group warmed up. It could also be helpful to pray before you begin and perhaps read a short passage such as Deuteronomy 6: 4-9, or Colossians 3:20-21.

- **What makes you smile most about your teenage child?**
- **What about them makes you most lose sleep?**
- **If my son / daughter ever becomes famous it will be for...**
- **What are your hopes and dreams for your teenager?**
- **What are you hoping for from this conversation?**

PART 1 Engaging with your teenager

Show clip 1 (5 minutes) then discuss some of these questions. Those in bold are suggested as particularly important, but you are best placed to know which will work best for your group. If you are using the material over one session, try to take at least 15-20 minutes.

- **What has been the biggest shock or adjustment as your child moved into their teenage years?**
- What one question would you love answered about your teenager?
- **How does it feel to hear we only need to be “good enough” parents?**
Do you ever find you place yourself under unrealistic expectations?
- What works against good communication with your teenager? **When are the best times in your weekly routine to have a focussed conversation about what is going on in their lives?**
- When is your teen most likely to open up to you about things they are struggling with?
- What puts pressure on your relationship with your teenager?
What small step might help to strengthen your relationship with them?

Remember that each family is different and parents have a variety of experiences and circumstances. Try to keep the conversation focussed and positive, not allowing anyone to dominate or offload to an unhelpful extent. The main areas to discuss are: *adjusting to the changing life stage, providing support and balance for your teenager, not allowing barriers to be built up but working intentionally at regular communication and an openly expressed loving relationship.*

PART 2 Walking with your teenager

Show clip 2 (5 minutes) then discuss some of these questions. Again, those in bold are key but you discretion to choose which will work best. If you are using the material over one session, try to take at least 25-30 minutes

- **How can you intentionally model faith e.g. personal devotion, language of grace?**
- What “faith habits” did you do at home when your children were younger?
Has that changed now they are teens? Are there any rituals that are still useful?
- What is your teenager like when it comes to attending and getting involved in church?
What are your ‘non-negotiables’ when it comes to church involvement?
- **When are the best moments in your weekly routine that give opportunities to talk about things that really matter, from a faith perspective?** Is there a time of day that works best?
- **Do you ever pray with your teenager or as a family?**
What makes that easier to do and what gets in the way?
- Are there any opportunities for your family to show your faith by serving together?
- What kind of faith do you want to see in your teenager?
What signs are there in his or her life that this kind of faith is growing there?
- **How much does it help to know as a parent that you are not alone in this?**
What do you most need from the church and youth leaders?

Though we want parents to remain the primary disciple maker of their teens, this feels very difficult for most and we must ensure that no one feels unnecessary guilt over what they do or do not do. Encourage a practical discussion to small steps forward about these key areas: *opportunities in the daily routines of family life, giving teenagers a Christian perspective on life, the value of everyday prayer for and with their teenager, and that parents are not on their own but have the whole church family to stand with them.*