

Parent-Teen Relationships



Parent-Teen Relationships



Gail Daniels Hassett

Marilyn Kielbasa, Editor

Thomas Zanzig, General Editor



Saint Mary's Press™

To my mother, Alice, an excellent communicator,
and to Chuck and our once-upon-a-time teens,
Tim, Mark, and Ellen, who provided ample oppor-
tunities to practice communication skills



Contents

Introduction	7
<i>Session 1</i>	
They Don't Understand Me	18
<i>Session 2</i>	
Talking, Listening, and Agreeing to Disagree	30
<i>Session 3</i>	
Let's Really Talk	43

Nihil Obstat: Rev. William M. Becker, STD
Censor Librorum
2 May 1995

Imprimatur: †Most Rev. John G. Vlazny, DD
Bishop of Winona
2 May 1995

The nihil obstat and imprimatur are official declara-
tions that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or
moral error. No implication is contained therein that
those who have granted the nihil obstat or imprimatur
agree with the contents, opinions, or statements ex-
pressed.

The publishing team included Joellen Barak Ramer and
Mary Duerson, copy editors; Maurine R. Twait, design
consultant; Evans McCormick Creative, handout de-
signer; Lynn Dahdal, production editor and typesetter;
Proof Positive/Farrowlyne Associates, Inc., cover de-
signer; Deborah Davis, Photonica, front cover photo;
Sam Thiewes, illustrator; pre-press, printing, and bind-
ing by the graphics division of Saint Mary's Press.

The acknowledgments continue on page 58.

Copyright © 1996 by Saint Mary's Press, Christian
Brothers Publications, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona,
MN 55987-1318, www.smp.org. All rights reserved.
Permission is granted to reproduce only those materi-
als intended for distribution to the program partici-
pants. No other part of this book may be reproduced
by any means without the written permission of the
publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

Printing: 5 4 3

Year: 2004 03 02

ISBN 0-88489-349-9



Genuine recycled paper with 10% post-
consumer waste. Printed with soy-based ink.

Introduction



An Overview of This Course

Carol races into the kitchen at the end of the school day, waves a quick hello to her mother, heads for the phone, and calls her best friend. Mom overhears her daughter's conversation and remembers when Carol would rush home to share the events of the day with *her*. Mom feels a little uneasy that her close relationship with her daughter is changing as Carol gets older.

Mr. Rodriguez has been working a lot of over-time during the last six months, and the boss has asked him to come in again next Saturday. He is beginning to feel that he is not spending enough time

with his daughter, Luz. He feels out of touch with what is happening in her life.

Eric always had an easy time talking with his parents. Now he feels awkward discussing some things with them—like girls. He is also concerned because he and his parents argue a lot more than they used to. Eric would like to know how to bring up certain topics, ask questions, and express his opinions in better ways.

Scenes like the ones described above appear frequently on television screens and are echoed in real-life families. As adolescents grow toward independence, many necessary changes occur in their relationships with their parents. One of the results is that communication between the generations

changes in content, form, and frequency. For example, young people begin to question their parents' rules and values about such things as curfew, church attendance, choice of friends, and freedom to make decisions. The changing character of the parent-teen relationship also means that young people probably communicate more freely with their peers about certain topics than with their parents.

Added to all the normal changes in parent-teen relationships are the time and distance problems that are created if parents separate and the family no longer shares a home. Busy schedules also contribute to the changing dynamics of family life. Free time for parents and young people is at a premium in today's culture. Parents may work at jobs that demand extra time and energy. Young people's schedules are filled with school, athletics, cocurricular activities, church events, music lessons, and part-time jobs.

As a result of all these factors, family members may begin to feel out of touch with one another. The course *Parent-Teen Relationships* is intended to help young people explore the dynamics of family interaction and to develop skills to improve communication in all their relationships. Even though research has shown that conflict and poor communication are not severe problems in the majority of families, improved communication skills can help parents and adolescents grow in appreciation and understanding of each other. Young people involved in this course can also deepen their awareness of their parents' love and concern as gifts from God.

This course builds on the theme of relationships first introduced in session 4 of the first core course, *Growing in Wisdom, Age, and Grace*. One of the objectives of that session was to help adolescents assume greater responsibility for nurturing healthy relationships. The purpose of *Parent-Teen Relationships* is to help young people share responsibility for family communication as part of that nurturing process.

Parent-Teen Relationships is designed to be taught as three 2-hour sessions presented one a week for three consecutive weeks. Extended breaks between sessions might interrupt the flow of the course. The activities are structured with a group of about ten participants in mind. If your group has considerably more or fewer members, you may need to make minor adjustments to the session plans. This course can also be adapted to involve parents; each session plan includes specific suggestions for doing so. If you need assistance with adapting the course to

meet the specific needs of your group, consult your program coordinator.

The opening session, "They Don't Understand Me," focuses on the idea that the better people understand each other, the better they can communicate. The session begins with a test of perceptions and a discussion of how perceptions change as information becomes available. This is followed by an exercise to explore generational preferences so that the participants begin to understand that people continue to grow and change throughout life. Session 1 closes with a game that allows the young people to decide, based on the insights they gained from the earlier activities, how some common family situations might be addressed.

The starting point for session 2, "Talking, Listening, and Agreeing to Disagree," is that conflict is normal in relationships. The participants learn how to prevent conflict and develop skills for dealing with conflict when it does occur. The opening exercises in session 2 focus on listening skills as the key to good communication. The participants explore bad and good listening habits and learn the importance of two-way communication in preventing a conflict. The second half of the session examines ways to deal constructively with conflict when it cannot be avoided. The participants also discuss the rules for fighting fair and develop practical suggestions for using these rules in their relationships.

Session 3, "Let's Really Talk," deals with other aspects of good communication. At the beginning of the session, the participants explore the difficulties associated with nonverbal communication. The participants are then given a chance to privately evaluate communication in their own family and then, as a group, brainstorm solutions to communication problems that might arise in any family. Session 3 closes with an exercise in which the young people are given an opportunity to clearly articulate their thoughts on topics that are often the source of conflict between adolescents and adults. These topics are examined in light of a discussion about freedom and responsibility within family life. The results of the exercise are then presented to a group of adults for review and approval. The session closes with a prayer to celebrate the young people's developing skill at building stronger relationships through communication and their growing understanding of their parents.

Background for This Course

The Adolescent and This Course

Adolescents *want* to talk with their parents! In the book *Five Cries of Parents*, Merton and Irene Strommen write: "When 2,000 youth filled in answers to sentence stems beginning 'I wish . . .', they often responded, 'I wish I could talk to my folks about some of my problems.' The frequent response of 2,000 parents to the same sentence stem was, 'I wish I could talk with my teenager about the things troubling him'" (pp. 72–73). In an earlier book, *Five Cries of Youth*, Merton Strommen lists open communication as one of the three predictors of family unity (p. 54). The importance of good communication was also emphasized in the 1990 report from the Search Institute, *The Troubled Journey*, which named parent communication as one of the top external assets promoting positive adolescent development (p. 9).

Despite the desire of parents and teenagers for healthy communication, personal and cultural circumstances may prove to be temporary obstacles to their relationship. Some of these obstacles are discussed below.

Developmental issues. The physical changes of adolescence are obvious and well documented. "Yet even more dramatic than the physical changes are the mental changes. . . . In adolescence, one develops the ability to think on a higher level, to think in a new way" (Elkind, *All Grown Up and No Place to Go*, p. 23). Just as adolescents must become acquainted with their changing body, so they need to become comfortable with their new capacity to think. They must develop new language skills to communicate thoughts that are sometimes confusing to them and to those closest to them.

Their ability to think in a new way allows young people to understand different viewpoints, not just see things as black and white. David Elkind points out that "teenagers now have the ability . . . to marshal facts and ideas and to make a case. . . . They want to know the reasons they should or should not do something. . . . Such arguments, while painful for parents, have to be seen for what they are—namely, an effort by the young person . . . to use and exercise his or her new powers of argument" (p. 32). It seems sometimes that adolescents argue just for the sake of arguing. They do

not want to upset their parents, but they need to exercise their newly discovered abilities.

In addition to new thinking skills, another factor that affects the relationship between parents and teenagers is young people's move toward independence. In an effort to accomplish this important task of adolescence, young people begin to question rules and challenge values that they previously accepted, causing parents to worry. Young people may choose to experiment with their developing verbal and mental skills by arguing about topics such as their choice of friends, styles of clothing, ways to spend leisure time, and involvement in school activities.

Cultural considerations. Changing patterns of family life frequently fail to provide an environment for healthy communication between parents and teenagers. Because of busy family schedules, the time spent discussing the happenings of life has been reduced significantly. Many conversations between parents and their children are limited to simple exchanges of facts or discussions of problem areas.

Certainly changes in family structures and parental lifestyles have contributed to the reduction of time parents have available to interact with their children. Changes in adolescent lifestyles have also added to the stress. Many parents complain about the tug-of-war between family time and the time the young person's activities require. Sports, school, lessons, and church and civic youth groups demand large amounts of time, pulling the young person out of the family.

Parents, teens, and religion. The popular cultural view is that adolescents are turned off by religion and rebel by resisting church involvement. As part of their move toward independence and their stage of faith development, young people may, in fact, begin to challenge formerly accepted religious practices and beliefs. However, the conflict over religious questions may not be as significant as either generation believes. It is true that some adolescents use matters of religion to challenge authority, but only a minority of young people fit this stereotype. The 1992 Gallup Institute report *The Religious Life of Young Americans* revealed that only 21 percent of the youth surveyed argued with their parents sometimes or often about religion (p. 34). The same survey reported that "compared to their parents, most teens (44 percent) believe they attach about the same amount of importance to religion" (p. 62).

The Gallup organization also found that most youth who attend church youth groups do so for personal reasons beyond parental mandates. Only 13 percent attend solely to please their parents (p. 32).

It is certainly true that the conflicts that develop as young people grow toward independence and appropriate new ways of thinking can become obstacles to a climate of openness. However, it is important to recognize that conflicts in life are inevitable. Family life is just one area affected by this reality. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls the family the “original cell of social life. . . . The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society” (no. 2207).

The family might be viewed as a laboratory where young people can practice their skills and then apply them to all other relationships in their life. By maintaining a sense of reverence for one another as unique creations of God, conflict can actually be a productive step in the process of maturing for young people, and in the process of letting go for parents. The communication and conflict resolution skills developed within the family are valuable to the young person as he or she builds relationships with peers and other adults.

In most areas of human development, family life provides a context for growth. It is easy to understand how and why young people need adults in their life. But it is important to keep in mind that adults also need young people. The *Catechism* acknowledges the role that adolescents play, in the paragraph that begins “Children . . . contribute to the growth in holiness of their parents” (no. 2227). In particular, adults need young people to help them as they grow through the stages of adulthood toward a more integrated and centered lifestyle.

It is also important to remember the role that young people have played in the development of nations and cultures through the ages. Without provocation from the younger generations, many advances in civilization would never have materialized and many injustices would have survived. All aspects of society and culture, including family and church, need the challenge to the status quo and the fresh insights that young people provide by consistently asking questions like why and why not.

The Theology of This Course

Faith is a relationship between the Creator and us. The Christian faith calls us to community in order to live out our faith in relationship with those who share our life. It calls us to grow together and to serve one another. The more a person can understand the needs of another, feel the concerns in another’s heart, and experience the love and caring of God through other people’s actions, the deeper the bonds that build up the community.

Communication is one of the ways that God provides for us to touch one another’s lives and nourish our relationships. Jesus’ encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus is a model for fostering growth in faith relationships. After the Resurrection, two friends were walking along the road to Emmaus when Jesus approached them. But they did not recognize him. They told him what had happened in Jerusalem. When they reached their destination, they pressed Jesus to stay with them. That evening at supper, Jesus blessed bread, broke it, and shared it with his fellow travelers. It was then that their eyes were opened, and they recognized who their companion was. (See Luke 24:13–35.)

Jesus’ actions in this story show the importance of spending time with others and the value of really listening to them. The disciples on the road to Emmaus were sharing their experiences of the week in Jerusalem. Jesus listened and helped them to see the meaning of all that had occurred.

Learning how to share experiences and thoughts and how to listen to one another is first done in the context of family life. In his Letter to the Ephesians Paul offers guidelines for a Christian relationship between parents and children. He gives specific instructions that stem from a basic obligation of respect for one another.

“Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise, “that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life on earth.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord. (6:2–4)

Successful communication between parents and teenagers must always begin with a spirit of respect for one another. When it doesn’t it is in danger of being viewed as a means of manipulation or domination. Mutual respect opens the window to true communication, which leads to understanding and finally to reverence.

This Course and Evangelization

In *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, evangelization is described as “the initial effort by the faith community as a whole to proclaim through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard or seen it, and then to invite those persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers” (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry [NFCYM], p. 3). Evangelization is also the ongoing witness of the community of believers and, as such, the basis and energizing core of all the ministries in the church.

The Horizons Program is grounded in a commitment to evangelize young people effectively. Each course reflects that commitment in both content and methodology. All the courses, even those on topics that do not appear overtly “religious,” explore the connection between the lived experience of the young person and Jesus’ proclamation of the Good News. All the courses employ strategies that actively engage the whole person, demonstrating that religious education can be not only informative but life-giving and even fun! In other words the Horizons Program tries to be “good news” not just proclaim the Good News.

Recognizing that young Christians are “home-made” Christians, the Catholic church acknowledges that families are the primary evangelizers of their children. Home is where a person learns to be Christian, learns to be Catholic, and learns what it means to be a global citizen. “The home is the natural environment for initiating a human being into solidarity and communal responsibilities” (*Catechism*, no. 2224). *Parent-Teen Relationships* is one means of offering parents support in fulfilling this role by helping young people learn to communicate effectively. *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization* speaks of the various hungers of young people, including their hunger for relationships, for healing, and for an experience of God. The development of communication skills within the family enables young people to reach out to their parents and other people in their life to express their hopes, hurts, and questions. It also enables them to be evangelizers themselves, and to share their faith with their peers and the adult church.

On Teaching This Course

A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *Parent-Teen Relationships*. The creators of Horizons developed an informative video to prepare teachers to lead any of the courses in the program. The video is accompanied by a guide that summarizes the content of the tape, offers additional tips for teaching adolescents, and invites the teacher to track her or his experience with the program.

Both the video for teachers and its companion guide are included in the resources developed for coordinators of the Horizons Program. Contact the program coordinator in your parish for further information.

Parent Involvement in the Course

Parents want and need to know what their children are learning in their religious education program. Because of the topic parents may have a particular interest in this course. Minimally, parents should be informed about the content of *Parent-Teen Relationships*. This can be accomplished through letters, outlines, and other forms of written communication. But parents can also be invited to actively participate in any or all of the sessions in *Parent-Teen Relationships*. Suggestions for ways to include parents are included at the end of each session plan.

There are several advantages to actively involving parents in the course. For one thing, because the focus of the course is the development of communication skills within families, it is appropriate that both generations be included. Also, the young people may view the learning activities in a more serious light if adults participate. Finally, it gives parents and their teenagers a chance to have fun together. The activities in the session plans are enjoyable, and the opportunity to share insights can help foster good communication.

If you decide to actively involve parents in *Parent-Teen Relationships*, consider these two options:

- Invite parents to attend all sessions. However, be sensitive to the fact that some parents may not be able to attend. Some will be occupied with other family responsibilities. Some may work or have other commitments during your meeting

time. A few may simply not care to attend. Because of these possibilities, the suggestions for parent involvement at the end of the session plans do not *require* that each young person have a parent present. No young person should be made to feel that full participation is impossible without a parent.

- Invite a small group of parents to each session as representatives of all parents. Different parents could be invited to each session, or parents could sign up for specific dates at an orientation meeting or other gathering facilitated by the teacher or program coordinator. There would still be parental presence and input during the session, but young people might feel less embarrassed by their parents' absence.

If you are interested in inviting parents to actively participate in the course, consult your program coordinator.

Preparing Yourself

In preparation for leading *Parent-Teen Relationships* it is important to prayerfully consider two elements: your experiences with communication, especially within your own family; and the family situations of the young people with whom you will be working.

Personal communication style. The best preparation for leading *Parent-Teen Relationships* is to reflect on the communication patterns in your own relationships both as an adolescent and as an adult. Spend some time before the course considering the following questions:

- What topics did you feel comfortable discussing with adults? uncomfortable?
- Which adults did you feel comfortable talking to? Why?
- How well did you and your parents communicate? What was your relationship like?
- Take a few moments to reflect on the primary relationships in your life right now. When and with whom do you feel that you are communicating well? Why?
- Do communication problems occur in your relationships? If so, what causes the problems?

Family situations of the participants. Many different types of family structures exist in today's world. Each family situation, whether traditional or not, can be nurturing, supportive, and life-giving. Each can also cause pain. In teaching the course be sure to refrain from comments that are judgmental toward nontraditional family situations, such as single-parent families, families in which the parents have divorced, blended families, or two-career families. It may be helpful for you to be aware of the types of families from which the participants come. Evaluate your own attitudes toward various family structures.

Preparing the Learning Environment

The effectiveness of a course such as *Parent-Teen Relationships* depends, in part, on the physical surroundings and community environment of the group. Young people are likely to respond more positively if the space is comfortable and the atmosphere is conducive to sharing. Here are two suggestions for developing that type of environment:

Create a good physical atmosphere. You will need a physically comfortable space with sufficient room for the participants to move around. Comfortable furniture and living-room lighting will help create a homey feeling. A flip chart or an easel with a pad of newsprint will be helpful for many of the activities. The traditional classroom arrangement is the least desirable situation. If such a room is your only option, move chairs into a circle or have the participants sit on the floor to reduce the feeling of being in a classroom. In addition, try using music, candles, icons, or other sensory devices to create a more inviting environment.

Clarify expectations. At the beginning of the course, establish among the participants an atmosphere of mutual respect. The concept of respect has many implications, and the young people must be clear about the expectations associated with it in this course. Stress the importance of listening to one another and of refraining from hurtful remarks or put-downs. When necessary remind the participants of these rules. Even a brief cruel remark can ruin the experience for a young person with an already precarious self-image.

Preparing the Material

Before each session read through the session plan and try to picture the processes happening in your group. You may need to make some adjustments based on whether parents are present, your knowledge of the participants, and the physical setting. Some of the activities will require preparation. This could range from copying a simple list onto newsprint, to creating game pieces. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these presentations are informational, but most are intended to bring closure to a part of the session so that participants might understand the connections between life and faith, between themselves and God. The session plans offer guidelines for these brief talks to help you. Spend time putting these presentations together so that they are clear and hold the attention of the participants. Where it is helpful and appropriate, do not be afraid to share parts of your own story with the young people.

Sharing Your Own Story

Parent-Teen Relationships is a course that revolves around the personal life experience of the participants. As an adult you have much to share from your own life that will be of value to the young people. Your willingness to share your experiences will enrich this course. It will also send the message that telling one's personal story in the group is okay. When you share your experiences with the young people, you show that you trust them enough to speak from your heart. And without saying it, you also invite them to do the same.

Some commonsense guidelines can help you share your story in a way that adds to the understanding of the participants but does not distract them from their own life story:

- Be brief and to the point. Remember, the young people are there to reflect on their own life story, not yours.
- Talk about your experience as a teenager without preaching or moving into the fatal "When I was your age . . ." mode.
- Share only the things that young adolescents are emotionally prepared to handle.
- Be realistic. Talk about your struggles, triumphs, and growth over the years. This will let the participants know that self-knowledge is indeed a

process and that developing good communication habits takes time and energy. Do not mislead them into thinking that adults have all the answers. It is also unfair to suggest or imply that adolescents have no answers.

- Be honest and sincere. The young people will see through you if you are not, and your effectiveness as a teacher will be diminished.

Sharing Family Stories

In a course such as this one, it is inevitable that participants will want to share personal stories about their own relationships with parents—both the negative and the positive dimensions. If their parents are not present, it may be especially tempting for the young people to report any difficulties. Resist this type of personal storytelling. Do not allow the personal sharing to degenerate into a gripe session about individual situations. It is simply not fair to parents who are not present to tell their side of the story, and they may resent the one-sided forum for airing family difficulties.

Another good reason to discourage this type of sharing is to send the message that it is *not* permissible to talk about others in their absence or to report on personal incidents or confrontations. Your stance against this type of sharing may actually encourage the participants to be more open in future gatherings. It is hoped they will come to feel that their secrets and stories are safe within the group and that such information will not become the topic of conversation in their absence.

The activities and discussions in *Parent-Teen Relationships* are designed to facilitate general sharing about parent-teen relationships and discourage personal reporting. This is done by discussing hypothetical situations and general questions. When the focus is on the young people's relationships with their own parent or parents, it is a personal reflection and is not meant to be shared with others. In group discussions, encourage the participants to speak in general terms about parent-teen relationships. Instead of saying "My mom really gets on my nerves when she . . .", suggest that the young people say something like, "One of my pet peeves about parents is when they . . ." The end of the second sentence may, in fact, be the same as the first. After all, the young people can only respond based on their personal experience. But the effect will be less caustic because of the anonymous character of their response.

Problem Families

It is quite possible that some of the young people who participate in *Parent-Teen Relationships* may be dealing with problems at home. Those who are having problems will react to some of the activities and discussions in a variety of ways. Some may act out and cause disruption. Others may withdraw emotionally and not take an active part in the session. Others will try to talk about their family problems during discussions.

For reasons noted in the section on sharing family stories, discourage any direct reporting of family problems within the sessions. However, reach out to those young people who may be hurting. If you know or suspect that someone is having difficulties, let him or her know you are available and willing to listen. A young person who is experiencing the normal parent-child difficulties of adolescence usually just needs a caring adult who is willing to listen.

However, if at any time you feel a serious family problem has surfaced, discuss it with the program coordinator to determine if a referral should be made. Remember that each family is a system or network of relationships, no matter how healthy or unhealthy those relationships may be. Each member of a family has his or her own way of coping with difficult times. If you don't have the proper training and education, trying to "help" someone from a dysfunctional family system may do more harm than good. Know how and when to refer someone for professional help.

Using Journals

Keeping a journal, or simply writing an occasional journal exercise, is a good way for young people to internalize learning, record the events of their life, keep track of feelings, or explore a topic further. Like most of the courses in the Horizons Program, *Parent-Teen Relationships* offers suggestions for including an optional journal component. In some cases journal activities are designed to be included in the session; in others they are intended for use by the participants between sessions.

Though we strongly encourage you to consider using at least some of the journal activities in *Parent-Teen Relationships*, they are not an integral part of the course. In fact, some practical reasons can be given for *not* including the journal component. First, if *every* teacher of *every* course in the Horizons Program chose to include journal keeping, the young people would quickly tire of it. Second,

some people simply do not like to keep a journal. It is better to encourage journal writing as a form of personal exploration for young people than to demand it of them.

Carefully assess whether the journal option is a good one in your particular situation. Consult the program coordinator and teachers of other courses.

Parent journals. Whether or not parents are actively involved in *Parent-Teen Relationships*, consider offering them the opportunity to keep a journal of their own. The parent journal may or may not parallel the youth journal. In addition to journal suggestions for the participants, each session includes parent reflection material for journal writing. You could send these questions to them after each session or compile them all into one mailing at the beginning of the course.

If you use both journal options, encourage parents and teenagers to share at least some of their journal entries. It might prove to be an effective communication experience at home and a building block in their relationship.

Using This Course as a Retreat

Many of the courses in the Horizons Program can be recast as retreats or days of reflection. *Parent-Teen Relationships* may be suitable for adaptation as a retreat depending on the program, the timing, the leaders, the purpose, and above all, the young people themselves. If you want to consider using *Parent-Teen Relationships* as a retreat, weigh the following advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages

- A retreat that includes parents can be a powerful experience for both generations. However, if parents will be included in the retreat, a daylong format, as distinct from an overnight retreat, is less likely to conflict with other commitments that they may have. This may allow more parents to participate.
- A retreat that includes parents will give families an opportunity to maximize the fun component of the course. Having fun together is one way of helping relationships grow.
- The nature and variety of the activities used in *Parent-Teen Relationships* lend themselves to a retreat format. It is a very active course that translates well into a retreat format.

- The retreat option reduces the competition for time that may occur between the regular weekly format and other activities in which the young people are involved.
- A retreat gives the participants time to become better acquainted with one another. This is particularly valuable if the young people in your course attend different high schools.

Disadvantages

There is only one major disadvantage to doing *Parent-Teen Relationships* as a retreat, but it is significant and deserves careful consideration. Because of work schedules and other family responsibilities, it may be difficult for some parents to participate in even a daylong retreat. Other parents may simply be unwilling to attend. If this is the case in your group, consider inviting some parents as representatives of all parents. You could even invite parents who do not have children in the group.

This Course and Total Youth Ministry

Additional Youth Ministry Program Suggestions

The Horizons Program includes a manual entitled *Youth Ministry Strategies: Creative Activities to Complement the Horizons Curriculum*. It contains a variety of activities and strategies organized into thematic categories and cross-referenced according to the courses in the curriculum. It includes suggestions for shortened and extended programs, off-site events, intergenerational gatherings, parish involvement, and prayer and liturgical celebrations.

This valuable resource can enhance the young people's experience of the Horizons Program and help your parish fulfill a commitment to total youth ministry. Contact your program coordinator about the availability of the manual.

Parish Program Connections

A religious education curriculum is, ideally, just one component of a total parish youth ministry program in which all those responsible for the formation of young people work together with the entire parish to meet the holistic needs of its youth. *Parent-Teen Relationships* can be valuable preparation for connections with other youth ministry activities. You might develop these connections by doing the following:

- Encourage the young people serving in leadership positions in parish youth groups, as members of parish councils, or in peer ministry to use the communication skills they develop in this course.
- Find out if your parish offers parenting skills courses. If so, suggest that the organizers invite some of the young people in *Parent-Teen Relationships* to speak to parents. What better way to learn about communication with the younger generation than by listening directly to them and allowing them to share their insights and skills!
- If parents have not been involved in any of the sessions, have the young people develop a short retreat experience for their parents using the course themes.
- Prepare a reconciliation service for parents and young people in the parish. It could be a prayerful time for parents and their children, allowing each to say "I'm sorry" and promise to try to improve the relationship.
- Many school systems have incorporated into their curriculum courses on creative problem solving, conflict management, peacemaking, and mediation. If your local school system has implemented such programs, invite a speaker from the school system to further develop the topics covered in *Parent-Teen Relationships*. Also ask your diocesan office and local social-service agencies to suggest possible speakers.

Family Connections

If you have chosen not to include parents in any of the sessions or if some parents could not attend, it is still important to keep them informed. At a minimal level, they should be informed of the course content. This could be done in a newsletter or brochure sent at the end of the course. It could include an overview of the types of activities in the

course and some of the principles, rules, and suggestions that come from the discussions. It could also include prayers and suggestions for journal writing and family discussion.

Goals and Objectives in This Course

Why Use Goals and Objectives?

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their intended goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Horizons Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways:

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator’s manual for the Horizons Program provides the goals for the entire curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. Each course supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of Parent-Teen Relationships

Goals

The goals for this course are as follows:

- That the young people begin to understand the basics of adult development as a context for their relationship with their parent or parents
- That as the young people grow through adolescence and move toward independence, they explore the changing relationship with their parent or parents
- That the young people improve their ability to communicate and hone their conflict resolution skills

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the three course goals. The objectives of *Parent-Teen Relationships* are as follows:

Session 1: “They Don’t Understand Me”

- To help the young people understand individual life cycles and how they influence the realities of family life
- To increase their awareness of the characteristics of adult development
- To help them focus on some of their own needs

Session 2: “Talking, Listening, and Agreeing to Disagree”

- To develop the young people’s communication skills and enhance their understanding of effective and ineffective ways to communicate
- To help them understand that conflict is a normal part of living
- To help them develop some techniques for dealing with conflict

Session 3: “Let’s Really Talk”

- To explore the effectiveness of nonverbal communication
- To help the young people understand the balance between personal freedom and family responsibility
- To provide them with an opportunity to practice the skills learned during the course

Suggested Resources

Background Information

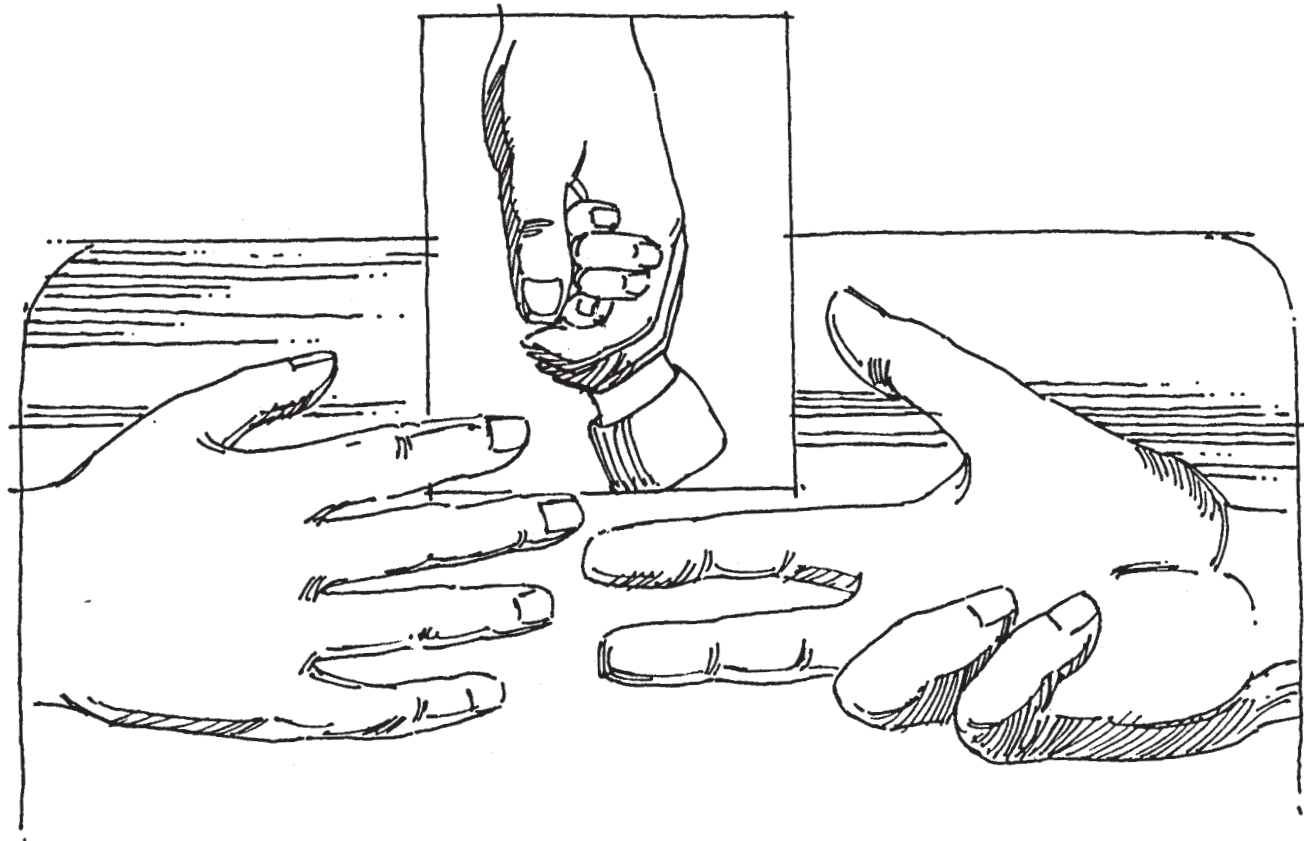
- Benson, Peter L., and the Search Institute. *The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th–12th Grade Youth*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1990. A report on the internal and external assets that adolescents need to thrive in today’s world. Includes lists of family assets as well as community assets in developing healthy adolescents.
- Elkind, David. *All Grown Up and No Place to Go: Teenagers in Crisis*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1984. Advice that helps parents cope with their teenagers in today’s society. Proposes that young people are being pushed into growing up too fast.
- Gallup, George H., Jr., and Robert Bezilla, *The Religious Life of Young Americans: A Compendium of Surveys on the Spiritual Beliefs and Practices of Teenagers and Young Adults*. Princeton, NJ: George H. Gallup International Institute, 1992. A compendium of surveys asking young people about their religious beliefs and practices. Offers interesting insights into the disparity between popular myths and reality about young people and church.
- Schmidt, Fran, and Alice Friedman. *Fighting Fair for Families*. Miami Beach, FL: Grace Contrino Abrams Peace Education Foundation, 1989. From a series of publications developed to prepare tomorrow’s peacemakers. Teaches skills to cool down, communicate, cope with problems, negotiate, and mediate.
- Strommen, Merton P. *Five Cries of Youth: Issues That Trouble Young People Today*. 2d rev. ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993. An explanation of the needs of youth and their cries of social concern, prejudice, and joy as expressed in interviews with young people.
- Strommen, Merton P., and A. Irene Strommen. *Five Cries of Parents*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985. Focuses on the stage of family life when communication may be at a low point. Offers parents a way to cope with some of the difficult moments in family life.

Communication Activities

- Larson, Mobby. *Why Can’t We Talk?* Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990. Prayers for parents and teenagers. Provides prayers from the perspective of both a young person and a parent, talking to God about their fears, hopes, and each other.
- Lynn, David. *One on One*. El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 1988. Communication starters on a wide variety of topics to be shared by young people and their parents.
- Rice, Wayne, and Mike Yaconelli, compilers. *Creative Resources for Youth Ministry*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1991. A series of books of activities designed to engage young people in active learning.
- Schultz, Thom, and Joani Schultz. *Do It! Active Learning in Youth Ministry*. Loveland, CO: Group Books, 1989. A rationale for using active learning in religious education and a process for developing active learning experiences. Includes activities that are easily adapted for either class or youth group settings.
- Sturkie, Joan, and Marsh Cassidy. *Acting It Out: 74 Short Plays for Starting Discussions with Teenagers*. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, 1990. Contains seventy-four short skits and role-plays on a wide variety of topics.

SESSION 1

They Don't Understand Me



Objectives

- To help the young people understand individual life cycles and how they influence the realities of family life
- To increase their awareness of the characteristics of adult development
- To help them focus on some of their own needs

Session Steps

- an introduction (10 minutes)
- two perception exercises (15 minutes)
- a discussion exercise on experiencing the generation gap (35 minutes)
- a break (10 minutes)
- a presentation on family life cycles (10 minutes)
- a discussion exercise on communication (30 minutes)
- a closing prayer (10 minutes)

Background for the Teacher

A common perception among adolescents is that at some point in life everyone is *grown up*. Young people often feel that adults have it all together and that they have reached some magical age at which development stopped. The first session of *Parent-Teen Relationships* challenges that myth and explores the concept of human growth as a lifelong process. Just as the teen years are a special time of change and growth, so also are many periods of adulthood. If parents and their teenagers are experiencing developmental changes at the same time, it often has a significant effect on family relationships. The primary purpose of this session is to help the participants understand their parents' experience and perspective as adults. Based on these insights, the young people will begin to explore some of the intricacies of communication. One positive outcome of this session can be an understanding that people of all ages are gifts from God. When we are open to the unique qualities of all people, regardless of their age, our life is enriched.

The session opens with participant introductions and an overview of the course. The participants then look at first impressions and perceptions—and how they change as we acquire more information. The next exercise, on experiencing the generation gap, compares the interests and attitudes of various age-groups and how they develop as people mature. When you lead this exercise, it is important to maintain within the group an attitude of respect for the opinions of each generation.

The game and discussion activity at the end of the session present various situations that occur in families with adolescents. The young people are asked to react from either their own perspective or from the perspective of their parents. This allows possible solutions to the dilemma to be addressed from both viewpoints.

In this session and throughout the entire course, encourage the participants to respect one another's opinions. After all, respect is one of the first steps in communicating well with anyone, no matter what the relationship might be.

Preparation

✓ Materials Needed

- name tags (optional)
- a mobile (optional)
- a copy of handout 1-A, "Counting Squares," for each participant
- pens or pencils
- newsprint and markers
- four copies of handout 2-A, "Lack of Communication" (at the end of session 2)
- two 24-by-60-inch pieces of poster board
- twelve 5-by-8-inch cards
- a candle and matches (optional)
- a Bible

✓ Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- For step A.* Prepare name tags if you will be using them.
- For step B.* Prepare a list of positive adjectives, as directed in session step B.
- For step C.* Draw three columns on newsprint, as directed in session step C.
- For step E.* Prepare to present the information outlined in session step E.
- For step F.* Construct a game board according to the directions in step F.
- For step F.* Prepare twelve 5-by-8-inch cards, as directed in step F.
- Determine if you wish to change this session by using one or more of the alternative approaches at the end of this session plan.

🕯 Opening Teacher Prayer

Before the session begins spend a few moments in prayer. Find a quiet place and empty your mind of unnecessary distractions by placing them in the hands of the Lord for a short time. When you are ready, read the following passage:

Scripture

What is Apollos, after all, and what is Paul? Ministers through whom you became believers, just as the Lord assigned each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive wages in proportion to his labor. For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Cor. 3:5-9)

Reflection

The scriptural reading you just finished speaks of the office of God's ministers. Some plant seeds, some water, but it is God who makes everything grow. As ministers, we are one way that God brings young people to the fullness of faith.

Take a few quiet moments to think about why you accepted the invitation to become one of God's ministers. The energy and effort needed to prepare for our work sometimes allows us to lose sight of *why* we are doing it. What does God want you to accomplish? Are you aware that you are not performing this task alone?

Prayer

Close your reflection with a prayer asking God for whatever you need as you begin this course. Bring your prayer to a conclusion by saying, "I thank you, Lord, for the privilege of sharing your work. Bless my efforts to plant seeds."

Action

It may be helpful to glue a seed or a picture of one to a small card and carry it with you during the session. When you see the seed, it will remind you of your role in cultivating God's field. It will also reaffirm God's blessing on your efforts.

Procedure

A Introduction (10 minutes)

Before the session. A mobile may be a useful tool to illustrate the balance of family relationships in the introduction to the session. Mobiles are common articles, particularly in homes with infants. If you do not own one, see if you can borrow a mobile from someone. Mobiles are also simple to make. Check your local library for a craft book that includes instructions and patterns. However, a mobile is not essential to the success of this step. If you cannot find one, a simple description will do.

1. As the participants arrive welcome them by name if you already know them. If not, you may want to use name tags. Name tags would be especially helpful if parents are attending.

2. Ask the participants to introduce themselves to the rest of the group and to briefly describe themselves and their family. This description could include information such as the following:

- names of residents of the household
- ages of brothers and sisters (including step-siblings)
- kinds of pets
- favorite activities with parents and other family members
- special family customs or celebrations

Begin by including yourself in the introduction so that the young people can get to know you.

3. Introduce *Parent-Teen Relationships* by giving some background information and explaining what will be included in the course. Present the following points in your own words. If you have a mobile available, use it to illustrate your talk.

- As young children grow, they begin to establish their own identity, one that is separate from their parents. This process continues through adolescence and is one of the major causes of tension between parents and teenagers. Parents may not always be comfortable with their child's need to be independent. Young people may not understand the reasons for a parent's concerns about them.

- The natural process of growth toward independence causes changes in the balance of family life. Family relationships are like a mobile, with every member of the family being one part of the design. When a change occurs in one part of the mobile, it produces a reaction in other parts in an effort to restore equilibrium. The same is true for families.
- This course will give the participants a chance to examine some of the changes that naturally occur in families as people grow. It will also give them the opportunity to look at their own attitudes toward their family and to develop stronger communication skills. And because every family experiences struggles, part of the course deals with the skills of conflict resolution. The things the participants learn in *Parent-Teen Relationships* can enhance not only their family relationships but all their relationships.

B Exercises: It's a Question of Perceptions (15 minutes)

Before the session. On newsprint, list the following words and any other *positive* attributes you can think of: happy, patient, creative, organized, helpful, good sense of humor, easygoing, good sport, intelligent, friendly, energetic, religious, musical, talkative, artistic, athletic, healthy, full of jokes.

1. Distribute copies of handout 1-A, "Counting Squares," to the participants. Tell them they have 60 seconds to count the number of squares they see. Emphasize that each person is to do this task alone. When you are sure they understand the task, tell them to begin. At the end of the minute, solicit their answers, but do not comment on their accuracy.

2. Divide the participants into groups of three. Because it is early in the session, it is best if you assign groups rather than let the young people choose their own partners.

3. Ask the participants to share their answers with their small group and come to a group decision on the number of squares in the puzzle. Allow about 2 minutes for this then ask for their answers. When all groups have reported, reveal the correct answer and explain the process for arriving at that answer.

Note: The correct answer is thirty squares. They include one large square, sixteen individual squares, nine squares of four individual squares, and four squares of nine individual squares.

4. Display the newsprint that you prepared before the session with the list of positive qualities. Ask the participants to choose five qualities or adjectives from the list that describe themselves. They are to write these qualities on the back of the puzzle paper. Allow about 2 minutes for this task.

It may be difficult for some young people to describe themselves in positive ways. If a young person says that none of the qualities apply, encourage her or him to think of other *positive* adjectives that more accurately describe her or him. If someone in the group can only find three qualities or adjectives that apply, do not make an issue of the discrepancy, as long as each person has a positive description to share.

5. Now tell the participants to choose and write down five attributes from the list that apply to each of their partners. Allow about 3 minutes.

If the young people in this course do not know one another very well, they may complain that they cannot describe the other members of their group. Explain that we all have impressions and make certain judgments about people when we first meet them. They learned a little about one another from the introductions, and they will have a chance to become better acquainted as the course goes on. Tell them that for now, they should choose attributes based on their first impressions.

6. When the participants have completed the task, ask them to compare their lists, discussing one person at a time. (The inclusion of only positive attributes makes the activity nonthreatening.) Suggest that they choose one person and allow the other members of the group to read their attribute list for that person. Then compare those lists to the attributes the person chose for himself or herself.

7. Ask the participants to respond to the following questions:

- How accurate were the results in the first exercise?
- How long did it take to arrive at the correct answer?

- In the second exercise, how accurate were the lists? Did your list of qualities match the lists that the other people in your group came up with?
- What helped to increase the accuracy in each exercise?

8. Conclude the activity and introduce the content of the course by summing up the following points and presenting them in your own words:

- We all have perceptions, make judgments, and form impressions of one another. The difference between our impression of someone as a stranger and later our perception of that person as a friend is knowledge. Because of the introductions at the beginning of the session and the group discussions, the participants may find that they know someone better than when they arrived.
- Examples of false impressions include the following: someone might be labeled as a snob because they do not smile a lot; a person might be judged as dull because she or he is serious about schoolwork. In the same way, we may decide that a person who is a generation older cannot possibly understand what we are going through. These judgments influence communication.
- Accurate perceptions at one stage of life may not be accurate at another. For example, a young person might want more freedom and complain about being treated like a child. His or her parents may be having trouble adjusting to the fact that their child is growing up and may be capable of a greater degree of independence. That same young person may have difficulty understanding that parents simply want to protect their children from the emotional and physical harm that could result from allowing too much freedom at once.
- Close your presentation by explaining that this session further explores how perceptions influence relationships. The participants then have a chance to discuss how they think teenagers and parents should act and communicate in certain family situations.

C Discussion Exercise: Experiencing the Generation Gap (35 minutes)

This exercise is a fun way to get at some of the differences in preferences and taste that exist between parents and teenagers. Young people will enjoy this exercise and may think some of the answers for other generations are funny. They may make jokes or sing a few lines of song. As long as their joking does not become too rowdy or take up too much time, do not be concerned.

Before the session. On a large piece of newsprint, draw three columns, with the headings “Grade school,” “High school,” and “Adult.”

1. Divide the young people into three groups and ask each group to appoint a spokesperson. Draw their attention to the newsprint you prepared before the session. Assign each group one of the columns. Explain that for this exercise, they are to imagine that they represent that age-group.

2. Explain that you will ask a number of questions. Each group should discuss the questions and decide on the answer that the group members think would be typical of their assigned age-group. The spokesperson should announce the group’s decision. Enter it under the appropriate heading on the newsprint. Make sure that all three groups report their answers before going on to the next question.

Use the following questions as examples, but feel free to add your own:

- What is the main reason your age-group wants money?
- What kind of music does your age-group like?
- Why does your age-group think school is important?
- What magazine does your age-group prefer to buy?
- Name one of the most popular TV shows for your age-group.
- What kind of movie does your age-group like most?
- What kinds of restaurants does your age-group like best?
- Why does your age-group go to church on Sunday?

3. After all the answers have been reported and recorded, lead the group in a discussion of the following questions:

- Did any differences or similarities in the group responses surprise you? If so, choose an example and try to explain the reason for the similarity or difference.
- Did your group disagree on what would be a typical answer for the age-group you represent?
- Do we tend to unfairly stereotype each age-group?
- What are the reasons for the differences among people in general?
- Is there a generation gap? If so, can it be avoided or lessened?

D Break (10 minutes)

During the break. Announce that the next session will include a short skit and that you need four volunteers to read a simple script. The roles include two friends (a boy and a girl), the girl’s father, and her stepmother. Give each volunteer a copy of handout 2–A, “Lack of Communication” (located at the end of session 2), to read over before the next session. They should decide at this time who will take each role.

You might ask the volunteers to come 15 minutes early to the next session so they can run through the skit once.

E Presentation: Growing Through Life (10 minutes)

Before the session. Prepare a talk based on the points outlined below.

1. When you are ready to begin the presentation, make the following comments in your own words:

- Just as adolescents are going through many changes, so are their parents. Young people may not be as aware of the changes that happen to adults. They may think that when a person reaches adulthood, she or he stops growing and changing. But all human beings continually face growth and change. The changes may be more pronounced for adolescents, but they are no less significant for adults.

- Physically, adolescents are growing taller and stronger. They also grow intellectually and are able to think in new ways. Their sexual development is progressing rapidly.
- Parents may be at the peak of their career development, with all the responsibilities and rewards that entails. Parents may also be dealing with midlife issues that cause them to reflect more seriously on their life and the people in it. Their tastes may change. They may have some regrets about their “lost youth.”
- Areas of responsibility change as people grow. As the generation “in the middle,” parents often carry responsibilities for both the younger and older generations. In addition to their children, parents may have to care for their own ill or aging parents. Young people are also called upon to accept increasing amounts of responsibility. This may include things like added household chores or child care for younger siblings. In addition, adolescents are in the process of developing a sense of responsibility for their own life and future. Sometimes parents may wistfully envy the apparent freedom of their children. Young people may feel pressured by increasing responsibility and resent their parents for adding to that pressure. Both generations must deal with the changing obligations that accompany their stage in life. Neither parents nor teenagers have an easy time of it.
- Adolescence is an age of dreaming of what may be—and the possibilities can look overwhelming. Young people may be thinking seriously about what the future holds for them. But the future can also be a cause of anxiety for many adults. Parents may be concerned about their job situation or evaluating their career choice. Concerns about future economic needs and the prospect of retirement may be an issue, particularly for older parents.
- Decision-making skills can be another area of conflict and concern. As young people grow up, they want and need to make more decisions about their own life. Some parents begin to feel a loss of control over what happens to their child. They may become overly critical of their son’s or daughter’s choices of friends, activities, clothing, and so forth.

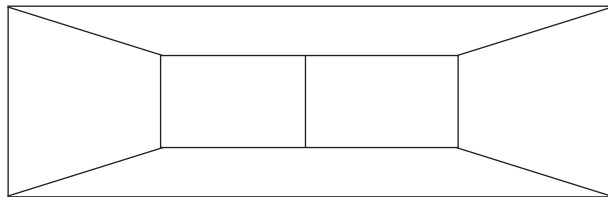
- Faith and religion are issues for both generations. Adolescents are beginning to re-examine their own beliefs and come to some decisions about the meaning that religious practices have for them. Parents may be dealing with faith questions of their own, and they may become more concerned about passing on faith to their children. The adolescent years can be a valuable time for communication about faith and religion.

2. Summarize the presentation by noting that these are just some of the differences that parents and teenagers encounter as they grow together through the stages of life. It is by no means a complete overview, but if adults and adolescents try to understand what is happening in one another's life, communication will improve and their relationship will be stronger.

F Discussion Exercise: Should-Never-Always (30 minutes)

Before the session. Prepare a game board as follows:

- Tape two 24-by-30-inch pieces of poster board together, end to end, along the 24-inch sides. The completed board should measure 24-by-60 inches. Divide the surface area into six sections, like the example given below:



- Label each section with one of the following sentence starters:
 - Parents should . . .
 - Young people should . . .
 - Parents never . . .
 - Young people never . . .
 - Parents always . . .
 - Young people always . . .

- Write or type each of the following situations on a separate 5-by-8-inch card:
 1. Family dinnertime is 5:30 p.m. Everyone is present but Matt, who is seventeen. The car squeals into the driveway twenty minutes late.
 2. Katrina's curfew is 10:00 p.m. on school nights and 11:30 p.m. for special events on weekends. Her parents feel these times are reasonable for a ninth grader. This Friday night Katrina wants to stay out until 1:00 a.m. She says all her friends can stay out that late.
 3. Anna shares a bedroom with her younger sister. She would like to have some quiet time alone in the room. But every time she tries, her sister barges in.
 4. Juan thinks Mass is boring. Every Sunday his parents insist he attend church and brunch with the family. He just wants to sleep in.
 5. Sally has been invited to a party. She bought a new dress with money she saved from baby-sitting. Her mother thinks the dress is too revealing and grown-up for a fourteen-year-old.
 6. Jerry lied to his parents last Saturday. He said he was going to a movie, but he gave his parents the wrong title. Jerry and his friends went to an X-rated movie. A neighbor saw Jerry going into the theater and told his mom and dad.
 7. Maria has some real questions about her faith. She does not believe she wants to remain a Catholic. In fact, she doesn't even know if she still believes in God.
 8. Tony's mother has been called to help take care of his sick grandfather. Tony is busy with all kinds of activities after school. But now his parents expect him to change his schedule to take care of his younger brother and sister.
 9. Sophia's family is very active in their local parish. Sophia has become friends with a girl who is a member of a different faith. She wants to start attending her friend's church.
 10. Dad wants to clean up the yard on Saturday. On Friday night he tells Jamaal and Tamara that he expects them to help. They both have made plans for the day.
 11. After getting tired of asking Todd to clean up the mess in his room, his mother decides to do it herself. She accidentally discovers what she thinks may be marijuana.
 12. Reuben has a part-time job. His parents insist that he save a percentage of every paycheck. They even demand to see the savings deposit slip. He feels he should be able to spend his money as he wishes.

1. Begin by explaining the process in general terms. Tell the participants that they will have an opportunity to look at common family situations from the viewpoint of both parents and teenagers. After hearing each story, they will have a chance to suggest ways that the situation could be handled and how good communication skills can generate solutions that are acceptable to everyone involved.

2. Display the game board and the cards on the floor in the middle of the group. Call attention to the six sections of the game board and note how they are labeled. Tell the participants that each card contains a situation that families may face at one time or another. Then place the cards facedown beside the board.

Explain the process for the discussion in the following way, using your own words:

- A volunteer will be asked to read the top card. The task is to complete one of the sentence starters on the board, based on how she or he thinks a parent or teenager should act or react in the situation described on the card.
- The volunteer must decide whether he or she wants to speak from the perspective of a parent or a young person and choose the appropriate section on the board. He or she is to place the situation card, faceup, in that section of the board and complete the sentence starter. For example, when Matt arrives home late for dinner, the volunteer's decision might be to place the card in the "Parents should . . ." segment and complete the sentence as follows: "Parents should not get too angry at Matt because he might have a good reason for being late."
- After the first volunteer has spoken, anyone in the group can move the card to another segment and complete a different sentence starter. For example, the next person might move the card to the "Young people should . . ." segment and explain that "Young people should always call home to let the family know if they are going to be late."
- Everyone in the group can move the card to another segment of the board and express their own opinion. Discussion continues until everyone who wants to speak has had a chance to do so or until the leader calls time. Then another volunteer is chosen to draw the next card and follow the same procedure.

Choose the first volunteer and begin. Continue following the process until you use all the cards or run out of time. Be sure to save time for situations 4, 7, and 9, which deal with faith and religion.

3. Close this discussion activity with comments like the following:

- The participants have had a chance to look at a variety of common situations from the perspective of both parents and teenagers. No one perspective is complete, nor is any one viewpoint entirely right or wrong. One key to communicating well with anyone is to try to understand where the other person is coming from. This means listening carefully and being respectful of the other person's needs and wishes. It also means caring enough about the other person to put aside selfishness in order to help the relationship grow.

Notes on leading this discussion. During this activity, the participants will probably want to discuss the reasons for their statements and tell stories from their own experience. But as the leader you must keep the process moving along. You can help to keep the young people focused on the situation by asking questions such as the following:

- What should the parent (young person) have said in this situation?
- Is there something that the parent (young person) needs to understand in this situation?
- How could this situation be avoided in the future?

Also, if most of the opinions are from only one generation's perspective, take on the role of devil's advocate. Move the situation card to the opposite age-group and balance the discussion by giving that group's viewpoint.

G Closing Prayer: The People in My Life (10 minutes)

1. Gather the group in an appropriate setting for prayer. Ask the participants to sit in a circle as a sign of unity with one another. Invite them to quiet themselves for a few moments before prayer begins. If you have a candle, light it and place it in the middle of the group.

2. Note that in this session they have looked at the differences and similarities between parents and teenagers. The more people communicate, the more they learn about one another. And the more people understand and appreciate one another, the easier it is to communicate.

3. Introduce the Scripture reading by explaining that Saint Paul, in his letter to the people of Corinth, tells Christians what makes growth in understanding possible. Then read 1 Cor. 13:1–13 slowly, carefully, and deliberately. After the reading comment that it is love that makes all relationships grow. Good communication is one of the keys to unlocking the love that comes from so many different people in our life.

4. Explain that you will now read an adaptation of the same Scripture reading, but you will leave out the word *love*. Whenever you do so, they are to think of one person in their life who shows that particular quality of love. Tell them to silently substitute this person's name for the word *love* in the passage.

When you are sure they understand, begin reading the passage below. Allow sufficient time in between phrases for the participants to think about the people who reflect the qualities of love for them.

- These are the people in my life who are examples of true Christian love:
 - _____ is patient and kind.
 - _____ is not jealous or conceited or snobbish.
 - _____ is not rude or selfish or irritable.
 - _____ does not keep a record of wrongs.
 - _____ is not happy with evil, but is always happy with good.
 - _____ never gives up.
 - _____ has faith, hope, and patience that never fails.

There are in the end three things that last: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love. [Adapted from 1 Cor. 13:7–13]

Alternative Approaches

After reading through the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to add a step to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then these alternative approaches:

For step B. A quick and nonthreatening way to divide participants into small groups is simply to write each name on a piece of paper, put all the names into a bag, and randomly draw the appropriate number of names.

For step E. Step E can also be done as a brainstorming exercise in small groups or with the full group. Ask for the participants' input regarding the growth and change that takes place in adolescence and in adulthood. Follow the topic areas discussed in the presentation: physical changes, concerns about the future, changing areas of responsibility, decision making, faith, and religion. Feel free to add others.

For step G. The reflection on the reading from First Corinthians can also be done as a written exercise. Make up your own handout with the adapted reading. Allow enough blank space so that the participants can write the names of people they know who demonstrate the qualities of love to them.

For step G. If you have time, consider including an element of personal sharing. Beginning with yourself, complete a prayer sentence starter such as one of the following:

- The person who has taught me the most about love is . . . I thank God for that person.
- I thank God for my parents (or mom or dad) because . . .

After a few seconds of silence, invite others to do the same. Because this is the first session of the course, it is likely that not everyone will want to share their prayer. Respect their wishes.



Journal Options

Within the Session

The reflection on the passage from First Corinthians in the closing prayer service could be done as a journal-writing exercise.

Between Sessions

Ask the participants to spend some time before the next session considering the following sentence starters and writing their thoughts in their journal. Encourage them to share their responses with their parents.

- Something that I realize now about my parent(s) is . . .
- The changes in my life that I would most like to talk about with one of my parents are . . .
- The one thing I would like to say to one of my parents is . . .

Parent Journal

If you have decided to offer parents ideas for reflection, journal writing, or discussion, distribute or send the following statements to them. Encourage them to share their responses with their son or daughter in an effort to improve communication.

- The most important thing that I would like to understand about my son or daughter's life right now is . . .
- One thing that I would like my son or daughter to understand about my life right now is . . .
- One thing that I would like to tell my son or daughter is . . .

Parent Involvement in the Session

All three sessions of *Parent-Teen Relationships* are designed with a group of young people in mind. However, you have the option of including parents as participants in any or all of the sessions (with the understanding that not every youth participant must have a parent present). If you include parents in session 1, adapt the session in the following manner:

For steps A and B. Mix parents in with youth. If the group is too large to complete the activities in the allotted time, form the participants into small groups.

For step C. Parents should be divided so that they are mixed among the three generation groups evenly. The rules about respecting other people's preferences for music and movies apply to parents as well as teenagers.

For step E. Invite parents to participate along with the young people. Parents as well as teenagers may respond to the situation cards from either perspective.

Closing Prayer and Evaluation

Complete the evaluation on the next page before doing the closing prayer.



Closing Teacher Prayer

Creator God, I pray that some of the seeds planted today, with your blessing, will bear fruit. I thank you for your gift of love in our life and pray that these young people will grow ever more aware of that love. Amen.



 **Evaluation**

After the session, take a few quiet moments for reflection and prayer. Think about the following questions and write your thoughts in the spaces provided, for future reference:

1. How well did the session meet the objective of helping young people understand different issues in people's life cycles?

Did not meet objective ↔ Met objective completely
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comments:

2. How well did the session meet the objective of helping the participants focus on their own needs as adolescents?

Did not meet objective ↔ Met objective completely
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comments:

3. Complete the following sentences:

I was disappointed . . .

I was surprised . . .

One thing about the session that I would like to remember in prayer is . . .

A young person in the course that I will remember in prayer is . . .

COUNTING SQUARES

Count the number of squares you see. You must do this task alone. You have sixty seconds.
