Parenting Troubled Teens – an Introduction through the book Teens in Turmoil


Parenting is difficult, even when the family is fortunate to have a wealth of resources at their disposal. Each of us come with some relationship limitations, blind spots, and traps. Part of the work of maturing is working through and overcoming these things in the midst of our lives and relationships. This means that those around us get the joy of experiencing us when we are not at our best. And that may result in some distortions in their lives as well.

We may be part of the cause of other people’s brokenness, without necessarily being to blame. And regardless, at some point each person has to take responsibility for their own thoughts, words and actions, in so far as they are able.

Taking responsibility as parents: As parents, we need to take responsibility for our words and actions which with which we relate to our kids. We need to honestly assess: “Have I spoken or acted in anger?” “Have I been selfish in my parenting?” “Have I tried to make my child over in my image rather than nurture the image of God in her/him?” “Have I spoiled, neglected, disciplined too harshly or not enough?”

Once we ask these questions, when we see our own responsibility, and guilt, then we name it and ask forgiveness from those we have hurt. We make amends if there is something that can be repaired.

This process accomplishes several things. 1) it humbles us to the place where we are able to admit our mistakes and moves us from the pretension that we have ‘gotten it right’; 2) it moves toward restored and reconciled relationship by seeking to bridge the separations that mistakes of the past have created; 3) it models for others how they too can practice this kind of bold honesty with self and others.

We need to understand that God has already forgiven us, before we asked for it, and even before we were aware of our own failure or sin. God’s presence in the world through Jesus is the ultimate demonstration of God’s steadfast love and faithfulness. Will we still experience consequences of our sin? Yes. Does this mean that God does not love and care for us? No. Nothing you have done, are doing, or may do in the future can lessen God’s love and concern for you. What these sins do is to build up barriers in us that limit our ability to experience the love that God has toward us.

“Behavior is a metaphor, a way teens have of acting out the real problem. The real problem is the teenager’s attitude toward herself, toward others, and toward life. However a teen is acting out, beneath the surface of the actions and attitudes lurk the teen’s self-doubt, self-disrespect, and self-hatred, providing the rationale for behavior that is self-sabotaging (and self-destructive).” (Maxym, 17) [Emphasis and parenthesis mine]

COMMON BEHAVIOR-ATTITUDES OF TEENS IN TURMOIL (Teens in Turmoil, Maxym, 19)

1. They don’t like themselves.
2. They feel like failures
3. They are demoralized and react with an I-don’t-care attitude toward school as well as others
4. They are frightened and resentful
5. They are self-absorbed, self-centered, and self-indulgent
6. They lie
7. They manipulate
8. They test limits
9. They are struggling with profound existential questions
10. They are sabotaging themselves, their future, and their family.
11. They are self-destructive.
If kids grow up expecting mom or dad to bail them out and rescue them every time, then when they have to take responsibility for themselves life becomes overwhelming.

“You cannot expect your life, your family’s life, your teen’s life to change without really changing yourself.” (Maxym, 59)

**EXERCISE: Letting go of what you hate most**

In your journal, let out what you have been keeping inside. Say it. Finally. Write down the five things you hate most about the way your son or daughter is living these days. Review the list of behaviors-attitudes above if that would be helpful. Is it her language? Is it the way he dresses? Is it the secrecy? The intimidation? The lies? Drugs? His girlfriend? The depression?

This is the time for you to stop the rationalizing and excusing altogether. What do you hate most? Write it down and consider hanging this piece of paper on your mirror. It will remind you that you do not have to accept language, behavior, or attitudes that are loathsome to you. *You also have the right to a life.*

**EXERCISE: Getting rid of your guilt**


Do you ever wonder why you spend so much energy feeling guilty, even protecting your guild as though it were your most prized possession?

It is easier to cleanse your soul of guilt than you may have thought. You can leave your guilt behind, not only because at least some of it is imagined, but also because feeling guilty will only sap your energy, suffocate your love, and help you waste your life.

Write all the reasons you feel guilty for what your child is doing now. Keep the list with you for a short time – thirty seconds to a few days. Share it with someone you trust if that makes sense for you. Then get rid of it. Flush it down the toilet, throw it in the fire. Toss it into the ocean. Allow it to be released from your being. (Maxim & York, p62)

**PART II Learning from other families** shares a series of family stories

**PART III Finding your own solutions** returns to guiding you toward reclaiming your life

**PART IV Resources and programs** is for those parents who have decided that their teen needs more help than they as a family can provide

**EXERCISE: Observing your family from a safe distance**

We are often better at seeing the reality of other people’s lives, so this exercise lets you step back from your story and gain some perspective. 1) First write in the first person about an encounter with your troubled teen. 2) Next, take a walk or in some other way give yourself some space from what you have written. 3) Now rewrite it in the third person, as though it were happening to someone else. 4) When you read this new version, what do you see? How do you think about this “other family” and their situation? Write out your thoughts and talk with someone about what you notice. Ask what they see or hear?
RESOURCE LIST:

REFERRAL LIST

Collin Count

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Dallas County

READING LIST

Raising Cain

Boundaries – (for mother’s self protection


