

DESPERATE HOUSEHOLDS

end the desperation

Desperate Advice for Desperate Parents

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Seven Priorities for the Effective Parent

The following list is provided by Dennis and Barbara Rainey

Priority 1: Prayer

This one probably does not surprise you. But before you glance at your watch and start tapping your foot, please consider carefully what we have gleaned.

Pray regularly. Bring every concern, dream, and desire about your child to God in fervent, persistent prayer. (Luke 18:1–8 contains a great parable on persistent prayer that must have been for parents of teenagers.) Two of the best times to pray with your child are on the way to school (assuming you drive him) and at bedtime—regardless of age. Now that our teenagers drive themselves to school, we use breakfast for this prayer time.

Bedtime prayers can be more personal for each child. Pray for his future mate, relationships, activities, challenges, temptations, and heart for God. Don't assume that a teenager is too big for you to kneel beside his bed and stroke his face and pray.

Pray offensively. Before and after your child hits adolescence, pray for his peer group—that he will have at least one strong Christian buddy for the teenage years. Ask God to protect your child daily from others who would be an evil influence. Also consider asking God to help you spot your child doing things right so that you can encourage him in making right choices.

Pray defensively. On more than one occasion we have sought the Lord's help in removing a friend of questionable character from a child's life. From time to time we have felt that one of our teens might be deceiving us, but we could never be absolutely certain. In those situations we have asked God to help us catch him if he's doing something wrong. God seems to feel sorry for parents who pray this prayer! Pray when God brings your child to your mind. It

may be at that very moment, your child is facing a circumstance of critical importance.

Pray with your child. It's easy for prayer to become an exclusive dialogue—you and God. Why not do what one mom, Nina, did with her teenage daughter, Natalie, and become prayer partners? Natalie's teenage years were filled with special moments in which she and her mom knelt together and prayed over Natalie's struggles and challenges.

Pray together as a couple. No spiritual discipline has protected our marriage and our family more than this daily time of communion together with God.

Priority 2: Standards

Have you and your spouse talked about dating, driving, jobs, grades, curfews, friends, and after-school activities? The list seems endless at times. We promise this: *If you don't nail down your own convictions ahead of time, your teenager and his peer group will establish their own!* If you have not agreed as a couple upon guidelines (specific boundaries and standards for your child during pre-teen and teen years), your child will soon hit you with the divide-and-conquer strategy. Children are experts on whether dad or mom is the easy touch on certain issues.

Priority 3: Involvement

We are not suggesting that you become the ultimate soccer mom. That's not bad—being there at all of your child's activities—but involvement means much more than driving the carpool and never missing a dance recital. Involvement means crawling inside your child's head and heart. Involvement is moving from the outside to the interior of an adolescent's life.

Involvement means diving into the turbulent currents caused by emotions—the child's and the parent's. Soul to soul. Heart to heart.

Priority 4: Training

The best parenting is proactive, not reactive. The reactive parent stays in a defensive posture, continually reacting to a child's mistakes. A proactive parent goes on the offensive and does what is necessary to become the child's trainer. Effective training involves at least three parts.

First, *parents need to see clearly the goal*. They need to know what they are trying to achieve in their child's life. Second, *effective training involves repetition*. A Green Beret once told me, "As Green Berets, we train to learn what to do in every conceivable circumstance—over and over and over again. Then in times of battle we know what to do. It's just second nature to us."

Finally, *training involves accountability*. One of the major mistakes parents make is giving our children too much freedom without appropriate oversight. This is especially true if a family has more than two children. We tend to over-control our firstborn child and release the younger children prematurely.

Priority 5: Community

We have become increasingly convinced and alarmed that one of the most damaging changes that has occurred in recent years is the loss of community in raising our children. We used to look out for the children of others far more than we do now.

There is a natural community that we need to do a better job of tapping into for our children's accountability. It's your church and mine. Certainly this group of folks ought to have the right perspective on the value and worth our children possess. We are in this thing together, and that should pertain especially to raising the generation that is the future of the church.

Priority 6: Direction

We have found that most Christian parents desire more than anything else to raise children who will grow up to love Jesus Christ and walk with Him. With that overall objective in mind, we have searched the Scriptures to discern what biblical goals we should aim for with our children.

Identity: Every person is born with a unique, divinely imprinted identity. If we want to properly guide our children to a healthy self-identity, we must acknowledge and support the Creator’s design in three key areas: spiritual identity, emotional identity, and sexual identity. We must also communicate with them one of the most important messages they will ever receive—“You are made in the image of God. You are one valuable child.”

Character: From Genesis to Revelation, character development is a major theme of God’s work in people. And it’s one of the major assignments God gives us as parents. Character is how your child responds to authority and life’s circumstances.

Relationships: None of us was intended to make a journey through life alone. We need the strength, comfort, encouragement, resources, and power provided by God and others.

Priority 7: Perseverance

Perseverance is the parenting quality that helps you keep doing all the other important things—the praying, training, and setting standards. You will get tired. You will experience pain. The ones we are sacrificing for—our children—will sometimes say and do things that hurt us deeply. They do that because they are still children, and “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child” (Proverbs 22:15).

At times we may have to endure even a broken heart, but we must not lose hope. Galatians 6:9 tells us. “And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.”

Ten Ideas: Connecting With Your Kids

The following list is provided by Mary May Larmoyeux

1. During dinner ask everyone to share one piece of both good news and bad news from the day.
2. Have regular “Kids’ Nights to Cook.” Set up a restaurant atmosphere in your home and create some lifetime memories. Little ones will enjoy decorating the table and making special menus for the evening.
3. Visit a local bookstore with your children and ask them to help you choose a family devotional. Then work through it together.
4. If you have a sports enthusiast in your home, ask him or her to give you and your spouse regular updates about what’s going on in the world of sports—both locally and nationally.
5. Do a one-on-one activity with each child at least once a week.
6. Take turns choosing Bible verses that the entire family can memorize together. Using a special journal or notebook, ask the children to record each verse after the family has memorized it together.
7. Once a week after mealtime, draw names to see who will be in the “hot seat.” (Discard each name after it is drawn so everybody will eventually be chosen.) Family members will ask the person in the “hot seat” a question that cannot be answered “Yes” or “No.”
8. When bringing the kids to school, take turns being prayer warriors—praying for each person’s day.
9. After dinner, rotate sharing a “joke of the day.”
10. Have regular family nights doing something fun that everyone enjoys. You may want to select one of the 48 activities in Kurt and Olivia Bruner’s *Just Add Family—Easy Recipes for Faith-Filled Fun* (for ages 10 and under).

Ten Vital Lessons for Life

The following ten principles are provided by John MacArthur.

1. **Teach your children to fear their God.** Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” Fear has two aspects: Reverence for God and Fear of God’s displeasure.
2. **Teach your children to guard their minds.** Parents have the task of helping program their children’s minds with truth, kindness, faithfulness, honesty, integrity, loyalty, love, and all the other virtues that ought to shape their thinking.
3. **Teach your children to obey their parents.** Parents must teach their children obedience. This is one of the most basic and obvious responsibilities of parenthood. If we are going to raise a generation of faithful children to live righteous lives, they must begin by learning to obey their parents. And it is the parents’ solemn responsibility to teach them this.
4. **Teach your children to select their companions.** Solomon wrote, “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but he companion of fools will be destroyed” (Proverbs 13:20). If you do not help your children select, and help them learn to select for themselves, the right kind of companions, the wrong kind of companions will inevitably select them.
5. **Teach your children to control their lusts.** The wise parent will realize that all adolescents develop powerful passions that can lead them into tragedy unless they learn to control their lusts. Many lives have been utterly destroyed by a single act of adultery.
6. **Teach your children to enjoy their spouses.** Teach them to reserve their sexual passions for their spouses alone, and then teach them to be faithful in marriage.

7. **Teach your children to watch their words.** Parents need to teach their children to watch their words. Speak truth. Say what edifies, not what injures others. And keep your words pure.
8. **Teach your children to pursue their work.** Teach your children the value of hard work. They're going to have to learn to work on their own initiative if they are going to be successful in life. Teach your children how to plan and work for their future needs.
9. **Teach your children to manage their money.** Proverbs 3:9-10 says, "Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the first fruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine." If you are generous with God, He will be generous with you.
10. **Teach your children to love their neighbors.** The command to love one's neighbor was a fundamental tenet of Moses' law: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:18). Teach your children to value kindness and mercy and compassion.

Ten Questions Parents Should Ask Their Children Every Year

The following list is provided by Tom Elliff.

1. Do you feel that we are getting along together?
2. What are some things you think we could do to improve our relationship?
3. Do you believe that I really care about who you are as an individual...or just how you behave? (Do you think I am concerned most about you...or how you make me appear to others?)
4. Have I ever made a promise to you that I didn't keep?
5. Do you feel that I respect you? Do you respect me?

6. Is there something you would enjoy doing together with me? What would keep us from doing this?
7. Is there some secret you are keeping from me out of fear that I would love you less?
8. What can I do to show you that I want to be more like Christ?
9. Is there something I do that embarrasses you...or annoys you?
10. How could I best express to you just how much I love you, and how honored I feel to be your parent?

Ten Ways to Build Relationships with Your Children

The following list is provided by Rob Flood.

1. **Never travel alone.** Between trips to Home Depot and Wal-Mart, it is possible to be gone hours upon hours. Sometimes the demands of life and keeping a home require these types of trips. So be sure to take someone along. The amount of teachable moments you can discover just by driving and doing errands together is unimaginable. Sometimes, it may mean the trip takes longer. That 's okay. You're developing relationships with your children...that's an investment well worth the extra time.
2. **Join in their interests.** I have spent the first 35 years of my life trying to keep from getting dirty. My oldest son loves digging, bugs, and dirt. If I want to build a relationship with him, I will occasionally have to join him in what interests him. Not only does it provide fun on his terms, but it also communicates that I'm willing to give up my own comforts to be with him.
3. **Allow them to join you in your interests.** You may enjoy watching football or playing golf. You may enjoy cooking

or decorating. Regardless of what your interests are, many children will want to “help.” I put the word help in quotes since the amount of help is normally related to the age of your child. But they are not necessarily desiring to help as much as they are interested in what interests you.

The younger you start this, the better. You may have teenagers who don't want to do these things with you. Move slowly and understand the leap it is for them, but still invite them to join you. The invitation may communicate enough...even if they are not interested in taking you up on your invitation.

4. **Rotate who “owns” dinner.** As a child, I was the youngest in our home, and I remember just how difficult it was to get a word in at the dinner table. It seemed like the older kids had more interesting things to say, and they shared it more quickly than I was able. If this is a problem in your family, consider a different family member owning dinner each night; the designated person gets to start the conversation and direct the flow of the time. The others at the table can be taught to ask questions of the “owner,” which will allow them to share even more.

Mom and Dad should take turns as well. It is a great way to teach the family to respect each other while they learn about each member of the family.

5. **Follow the “Extra 30” principle.** Spend an extra 30 minutes with a different member of the family each day. For early risers, it could be 30 minutes before the rest of the family wakes. You could keep one child up 30 minutes later on a given night (a special treat for the younger children). Maybe it's leaving the rest of the family behind and taking a walk with a specific child after dinner. Do what you can to find this type of time one on one ...you'll be amazed at how valuable everyone will think this time is.

6. **Pray as a family.** This may sound intimidating to those families not accustomed to praying out loud. However, you will be amazed at how God meets you in the moments of family prayer. Be sure to pray for the members of the family. Also, be sure to let everyone pray ... regardless of age. Our family prayed over a friend who was being deployed in the military. When we finished, he commented on being prayed for by our 2-year-old. (The prayer was somewhat incoherent, as you might imagine.) However, before he left, he said, "I've never experienced anything like that."

God meets families in unique and powerful ways when they pray together. And great relationships can be sown there.

7. **Plan "nothing" time.** Consider taking a portion of the weekend, or a given night of the week, and schedule nothing. One thing we lack in our families today is unplanned time together; television combined with our busy schedules have taken that from us. Well, we can take it back! This will allow for spontaneous conversation or the selection of a board game. You could even all grab a book and just read. It may look different each time...remember, you've planned nothing. However, that nothing will add up to a great amount of something in the relationships in your home.
8. **Always speak well of them.** Harsh words can rob any relationship of its depth and closeness. A harsh word can tear apart the good done in a great number of good times. So, guard your tongue and lips against harsh words. Don't speak poorly of your children when talking with your friends, neighbors, pastor, or parents. Speak well of them at all times and keep their integrity in your mind as you do. By doing so, you practically and powerfully display just how much you value them.

9. **Stay tuned to the family frequency.** We have a saying in our home: “People are more important than things.” It’s a great saying, except for the times my actions betray its value. We all need to make it a regular practice to be willing to set aside whatever we’re doing to show that people come first.
10. **Love your spouse well.** As you pursue relationships with each member of your family, be sure everyone knows the paramount importance your spouse has above all others. As important as a wonderful relationship is your with your children, it is not the parent/child relationship that reflects the wonder of Christ’s relationship with His Church. That privilege is reserved for the husband/wife relationship. As you prioritize your marriage, your children will supernaturally benefit. So, in the midst of all your relational effort, be sure to love your spouse well.

The ABCs of Parenting Teens

The following advice is provided by Dennis Rainey

Over the years, I have found that there are three areas that need to be addressed when dealing with the vast array of issues facing adolescence. I like to call them the ABCs of parenting teens:

ACEPTANCE: Teenagers crave approval. At 13, suddenly other people’s opinions (besides mom and dad’s) become preeminent. Let me warn you, if adolescents become isolated from the family and do not feel loved or accepted, then they won’t be able to properly navigate peer pressure.

BOUNDARIES: I thought my mom and dad were much stricter than my buddies’ parents. Mom always wanted to know what time I was going to be home, where I was going,

and when I would be there. However, I am convinced today that her accountability saved me from many a sin.

Parents, your teenagers need you to be involved in their lives. Yes, they are pulling away from you, and they may act as if they don't need you, but they do. They need your inspection, your probing questions. They need boundaries, and they need to be accountable to you to stay within those boundaries. Set clear boundaries.

CHARACTER: Teens need to learn how to make wise choices and how to stand strong under pressure. During my perilous teenage years, my dad was the model and hero I needed. He taught me the importance of hard work and completing a task. But more importantly, he taught me about character. He did what was right, even when no one was looking. The mental image of his character still fuels and energizes my life today.

Okay, Rainey, I hear you asking, "How exactly do I wrap acceptance, boundaries, and character around the tough issues that my teenager is facing today?" Well, let's put a little shoe leather to these ABCs and address a few questions.

How can I help my child avoid the lure of alcohol and drugs?

This may sound harsh, but I think one of the major reasons kids drink and use drugs is that they do not feel love and acceptance at home. If they did, then they would have no need to become something other than who they are. Your enemy, when it comes to drugs and alcohol, is one word: isolation. If your child feels unloved and unaccepted by you and your family, he will be more susceptible to temptations.

Now, I would be hard pressed to biblically prove that drinking is wrong. However, drunkenness is definitely wrong. Ephesians 5:18 says, "Do not get drunk with wine for that is dissipation (excess), but be filled with the Spirit." The idea is that we are not to be controlled by anything or anyone other than God. Barbara and I are trying to train our

kids to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and not be controlled by peer pressure, alcohol, or choices that will take them in the wrong direction. We have taught them that, while drinking is not condemned in Scripture, we strongly feel they should not drink. The dangers of alcohol are too numerous to ignore. In addition, we've emphasized one fact that many parents seem to forget—drinking is illegal for anyone under 21.

When our children were moving into their teenage years, Barbara and I tried to help them win by role playing what they would do when offered alcohol. How could they respond when getting into a car where everyone had been drinking? We role played such situations with the kids and talked about choices. We provided healthy boundaries for keeping them accountable.

Finally, I believe that the best way a parent can prepare their children to face the temptation of alcohol is through modeling standards and character. One night I asked Barbara, “What would you say is the number one way parents can help their kids deal with alcohol.” She responded, “Well, I think parents need to realize their compromises are multiplied out in the lives of their children.” It’s a challenging thought isn’t it—Our compromises being multiplied out into the lives of our children . . . and grandchildren . . . and great-grandchildren.

What can I do when my child is spending time with the wrong crowd?

I’ve had some personal experience with this challenge, and it’s tough. As it says in 1 Corinthians 15:33 (NIV), “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’”

Realizing that we can’t totally control who our children choose as friends, we have attempted, first, to build into them the mindset of influencing others for good rather than allowing others to influence them for bad. Only when our kids have character and are known for their convictions, can they be missionaries reaching out to others.

Next, we've tried to help them think through the consequences of their choices in this area. One of our children wrote an older sibling, "I think I have been spending some time with the wrong people because I have not been having my quiet time and haven't been spending time in the Word like I used to."

The older sibling shared the note with me. After praying, I put my arm around the child and said, "I think you're spending time with some wrong people. ..." And then I reasoned with the child about the effect those friends were having. And I worked hard to keep our discussion out of the emotional arena. (No one is going to make a rational conclusion in the midst of an emotional barrage of words.)

There's one more thing you can do as a parent: Make an effort to reach out to the friends of your children who may need help. In one situation, I put my arm around one of our teens' friends and said, "There are those at school who say that you are a troublemaker and that you are getting into stuff you shouldn't be getting into." Then I sort of grinned and said, "You know what? I think God wants to use you in a powerful way to influence others for good."

Some kids may just need a mom or dad to say, "I really believe in you." The very kid you view as a threat may be a ministry opportunity that God has placed in your path.

How do you establish curfews?

Your teenager should be accountable to you for where he is going and when he is to be home. He may make you feel you're the only parent who is establishing boundaries in this area, but so what?

One of my daughters asked me, "What's the deal, Dad? You are asking me all these questions." I responded, "Sweetheart, I just want to know what is going on in your life..." That's my responsibility as a parent.

Problems arise in this area when clear boundaries have not been established. Teenagers need to know exactly what is

expected of them. We have found that it is important to write down curfews and agree upon penalties for not meeting them. And be absolutely clear about what will happen if he misses the curfew. If you waffle once, know that you are dealing with a teenager who is looking for any flaw, any crack in the argument, any way he can press you to the limits.

Our oldest daughter, Ashley, once missed a curfew by a few minutes. I looked her and her date in the eye and said, “You were not on time. This is going to cost you.”

Ashley said, “But Dad, we were home...we were out on the driveway.” And I replied, “You were not in the house by 10 p.m., and when I say the curfew is at 10 p.m., that does not mean 10:05. The issue, Ashley, is that I am giving you freedom. I need you to show me that you can be trusted with more freedom in the future by respecting our limits and by not pressing them to the edge.”

Barbara and I agreed that, as a penalty, they would not be able to go out for two weeks. That definitely caught the attention of our other kids! They knew we were serious about boundaries.

As teens turn 16, 17, 18, there should be fewer lectures and more interaction over the choices they make in the difficult areas of adolescence. Once I had a talk with a 16-year-old son who was playing a particular computer game that I did not think was very beneficial to his character. After our discussion, I let him make the choice. He erased the game. It made my day!

Finally, remember to put your arm around your son or daughter when they make good choices. Say, “I am so proud of the right choices you are making. You are really growing up to become a courageous person—one of godly character.”