

# HAPPY TEENAGERS

## A CATHOLIC GUIDE TO FAMILY HAPPINESS & Child Rearing

The Fourth in a Series on Family Happiness

### CHAPTER SIX

## Help Your Teenager to Thrive

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HAVING a teenager in the house is very different from having a five-year-old or even a ten-year-old. The teen years bring their own challenges and problems, but they can also bring joys and rewards. Examples from the Bible, such as Joseph, David, Josiah, and Timothy show that young people can act responsibly and have a fine relationship with the Lord God our Father. (Genesis 37:2-11 tells something of the teenage Joseph, son of Jacob. He has many more adventures later in the same book.

1 Samuel 16:11-13 speaks of the young David. 2 Kings 22:3-7 tells of the teenage years of young King Josiah's reign. Acts 16:1-2 introduces us to the young Saint Timothy.) Many teenagers today prove the same point. Likely, you know some of them.

### FAMILY HAPPINESS

Yet, for some, the teen years are turbulent. Adolescents experience emotional ups and downs. Teenage boys and girls may want to be more independent, and they may resent limits placed on them by their parents. Yet, such youths are still quite inexperienced and in need of loving, patient help from their parents. Yes, the teen years can be exciting, but they can also be confusing - both for parents and for teenagers. How can youths be helped during these years?

Review Question: What challenges and what joys can the teen years bring?

Parents who follow Bible counsel and the long-established customs in the Catholic Church give their adolescent offspring the best possible opportunity to make their way successfully through those trials to responsible adulthood. A solid Catholic education is a significant aid in these turbulent years. (Sadly, I need to stress that it must be a sound traditional Catholic education and parents need to be wary that the errors of neo-modernism are not allowed to sneak into your child's Catholic curriculum.) In all lands and during all time periods, parents and teenagers who applied Bible principles together have been blessed with success. - See Psalm 119:1. (Psalm 118:1 in the Vulgate.) Our Catholic Faith is both Catholic and Apostolic. It has been practiced in every age, right back to its foundation by Our Lord on Peter and the Apostles, and in every land. It is not a 'national' faith, but a universal one. It embraces all of God's children, whether Jews or Greeks, Latins or Germans, Chinese or Amerindians, Spanish or Africans, Maori or English, Filipinos or Irish.

Review Question: In what way can parents give their adolescent offspring a fine opportunity in life?

## HONEST AND OPEN COMMUNICATION

### HELP YOUR TEENAGER TO THRIVE

The Bible says: "Designs are brought to nothing where there is no counsel [that is: 'confidential talk'], but where there are many counselors, they are established."

(Proverbs 15: 22) If counsel and confidential talk was necessary when the children were younger, it is especially vital during the teen years-when youngsters likely spend less time at home and more time with school friends or other companions. If there is no counsel and confidential talk - no honest and open communication between children and parents - teenagers can become strangers in the house. So how can the lines of communication be kept open?

Review Question: Why is confidential talk especially important during the teen years?

Both teenagers and parents must play their part in this. True, adolescents may find it more difficult to talk with their parents than they did when they were younger. Nevertheless, remember that "where there is no governor [direction], the people shall fall: but there is safety and salvation where there is much counsel. [Or 'many advisors']" (Proverbs 11:14). These words apply to all, young and old alike. Teenagers who realize this will understand that they still need skillful direction, since they are facing more-complex issues than before. They should recognize that their faith-filled and believing parents are well qualified as counselors because they are more experienced in life and have proved their loving concern over many years. Hence, at this stage in their life, wise teenagers will not turn away from their parents.

Review Question: How are teenagers encouraged to view the matter of communicating with their parents?

### FAMILY HAPPINESS

Open communication means that the parent will try hard to be available when the teenager feels the need to talk. If you are a parent, make sure that communication is open at least from your side. This may not be easy. The Bible says that there is "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." (Ecclesiastes 3:7) When your teenager feels it is a time to speak, it may be your time to keep quiet. Perhaps you have set that time aside for personal study, relaxation, or work around the house. Still, if your youngster wants to talk to you, try to adjust your plans and listen. Otherwise, he may not try again. Remember the example of Jesus. On one occasion, he had scheduled a time to relax. But when people came crowding around to hear him, he put off resting and began to teach them. (Mark 6:30-34) Most teenagers realize that their parents lead busy lives, but they need the reassurance that their parents are there for them if needed. Hence, be available and be understanding.

Review Question: What attitude will wise and loving parents have as to communicating with their teenagers?

Try to remember what it was like when you were a teenager, and do not lose your sense of humor! Parents need to enjoy being with their children. When there is free time available, how do the parents spend it? If they always want to use their free time doing things that do not include their family, their teenagers will be quick to notice. If adolescents come to the conclusion that school friends think more of them than their parents do, they are bound to have problems.

Review Question: What do parents need to avoid?

## WHAT TO COMMUNICATE

### HELP YOUR TEENAGER TO THRIVE

If parents have not already inculcated in their children an appreciation for honesty and hard work, they should by all means do so during the teen years.

(See 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:10) It is also vital for them to make sure that their children wholeheartedly believe in the importance of living a moral and clean life. (Proverbs 20:11 speaks of actions being pure and right.) A parent communicates much in these areas by way of example. Just as unbelieving husbands can be "won without the word through the conversation and conduct of their wives," so teenagers can learn right principles through the conduct of their parents. (1 Peter 3:1 says: "In like manner also let wives be subject to their husbands: that if any believe not the word, they may be won without the word, by the conversation of the wives.) Still, example on its own is never enough, since children are also exposed to many bad examples and to a flood of enticing propaganda outside the home. Caring parents, therefore, need to know their teenagers' views on what they see and hear, and this calls for meaningful conversation. - Proverbs 20:5 says: "Counsel in the heart of a man is like deep water: but a wise

man will draw it out.”

Review Question: How can appreciation for honesty, hard work, and proper conduct be impressed on children?

### **HANDY HINT**

***Be available when your teenager needs to talk***

#### **FAMILY HAPPINESS**

Let me repeat my last point, since it is of particular importance. Caring parents need to know their teenagers' views on what they see and hear, and this calls for meaningful conversation. This is particularly true when it comes to sexual matters. Parents, are you embarrassed to discuss sex with your children? Even if you are, make the effort to do so, for your young ones will surely learn about the subject from someone. If they do not learn from you, who knows what distorted information they will get? In the Bible, God our Father does not shy away from matters of a sexual nature, and neither should parents.

- Proverbs 4:1-4 says “Hear, all you children, the instruction of a father, and attend that you may know prudence. I will give you a good gift, forsake not my law. For I also was my father's son, tender and as an only son in the sight of my mother: and he taught me, and said: “Let your heart receive my words, keep my commandments, and you shall live’.” Proverbs 5:1-21 is a whole chapter given to parental advice on sexual matters. It is given to an older child. Here it is with some comments in square brackets [ ].

“My son, attend to my wisdom, and incline your ear to my prudence, that you may keep thoughts, [keep Godly thoughts in your heart,] and your lips may preserve instruction. Mind not the deceit of a [loose-living] woman. For the lips of a harlot are like a honeycomb dropping, and her throat is smoother than oil. But her end is bitter as wormwood, and sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down into death, and her steps go in as far as hell.

“They [the harlot’s feet] walk not by the path of life, her steps are wandering, and unaccountable. Now therefore, my son, hear me, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove your way far from her, and come not nigh the doors of her house. Give not your honour to strangers, [prostitutes] and your years to the cruel [who has no pity. He means the pornographer and pimp, surely.]. Do not let strangers be filled with your strength, and your labours be in another man's house, [that is spend none of your time or money on prostitution or pornography] and you mourn it at the last, when you shall have spent your flesh and your body, and say: ‘Why have I hated instruction, and my heart consented not to reproof, and have not heard the voice of them that taught me, and have not inclined my ear to masters [my teachers]? I have almost been in all evil, in the midst of the church and of the congregation. [My sins shame me in the company of those whom God has chosen.]’

“Drink water out of your own cistern, and the streams of thy own well: [This is a Hebrew saying ordering the faithful to be true to their lawful spouses.]

“Let your fountains be conveyed abroad, and in the streets divide your waters. [Instead of yielding to lust, let your heart spread goodness everywhere. Sublimate your sexual libido to aid the poor in your own neighbourhood and overseas.] Keep them to yourself alone, neither let strangers be partakers with you. [Your sexual urges have a God-given purpose. Do not abuse them through fornication or adultery.] Let your vein be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. Let her be your dearest hind, and most agreeable fawn. Let her breasts inebriate you at all times. Be you delighted continually with her love. [Notice how God blesses legitimate sexual love, and notice, too, how explicit this father (Solomon?) is in telling of the delights of true marriage.] Why are you seduced, my son, by a strange woman, and are cherished in the bosom of another [who is not your spouse]? The Lord beholds the ways of man, and considers all his steps.”

Thankfully, the Bible contains clear guidance in the area of sexual conduct, and the Catholic Church has proclaimed much helpful teaching and information showing that this guidance still applies in the modern world. Why not make use of this help? For example, why not review with your son or daughter books such as “THEOLOGY OF THE BODY MADE SIMPLE,” or “THEOLOGY OF THE BODY / TEENS - STUDENT WORKBOOK” or “THEOLOGY OF THE BODY / TEENS - PARENT'S GUIDE” or “SEX, LOVE AND YOU - MAKING THE RIGHT DECISION” or “GOOD DISCIPLINE - GREAT TEENS.” Any of these Books can be found at Mother Angelica’s EWTN site on the Internet. It is

<http://www.ewtnreligiouscatalogue.com/Books/cid=526/shop.axd/Category>

or

<http://www.ewtn.com/>

Good Catholic Bookshops have many similar books outlining Pope John Paul II’s teaching on the Theology of the Body and giving sound Catholic guidelines on Sex and Morals for Catholic teenagers and other young people. These books have answers that work! You may be pleasantly surprised at the results if you share them with your own teenagers.

Review Question: Why should parents make sure to instruct their children about sexual matters, and how can they do this?

What is the most important subject that parents and children should discuss? The apostle Paul referred to it when he wrote: "And you, fathers, [and mothers,] provoke not your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and correction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4) Children need to keep learning about God our Father. In particular, they need to learn to love him, and they should want to serve him. Here, too, much can be taught by example. If adolescents see that their parents love God 'with their whole heart and with their whole soul and with their whole mind' and that this produces good fruits in their parents' lives, they may well be influenced to do the same. (Matthew 22:37 tells us Jesus' words: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind.") Similarly, if young people see that their parents have a reasonable view of material things, putting God and His Kingdom first, they will be helped to develop the same mental attitude. – In Ecclesiastes 7:12-13 the Preacher says: "Wisdom with riches is more profitable, and brings more advantage to them that see the sun. For as wisdom is a defence, so money is a defence: but learning and wisdom excel in this, that they give life to him that possesses them." In Matthew 6:31-33 Jesus Christ Our Lord says: "Be not solicitous therefore, saying, 'What shall we eat: or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed?' For after all these things do the heathens seek. For your Father knows that you have need of all these things. Seek, all of you, therefore first the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Review Question: What is a most effective way for parents to teach their children how to serve God our Father?

### ***HANDY HINT***

***Regular Bible study is an excellent thing for the family***

### **HELP YOUR TEENAGER TO THRIVE**

A weekly family Bible study is an outstanding help in communicating spiritual values to young people. (Psalm 119:33-34 [Psalm 118: 33-34 in the Vulgate] says: "Set before me for a law the way of Your justifications, O Lord: and I will always seek after it. Give me understanding, and I will search Your law; and I will keep it with my whole heart. Proverbs 4:20-23 says: "My son, hearken to my words, and incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not depart from your eyes, keep them in the midst of your heart: For they are life to those that find them, and health to all flesh. With all watchfulness keep your heart, because life issues out from it."

Having such a study regularly is very important. (Psalm 1:1-3 says: "Blessed is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the chair of pestilence [the scoffers]. But his will is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he shall meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit, in due season. And his leaf shall not fall off: and all whatsoever he shall do shall prosper.") The study can be of the following Sunday's Mass readings, or you can use the daily Mass readings to systematically go through the entire Bible.

Parents and their children should realize that other things must be scheduled around the Sunday Mass and the scheduled Family prayer, not vice versa. Aim to have a minimum of ONE night per week when the whole family comes together for family prayer and perhaps a scripture study. Further, the right attitude is essential if the family study is to be effective. One father said: "The secret is for the conductor to foster a relaxed yet respectful atmosphere during the family study - informal but not silly. The correct balance may not always be easy to attain, and youngsters will frequently need attitude adjustment. If things do not go well once or twice, or every now and then, persevere and look ahead to the next time." This same father said that in his prayer before each study, he specifically requested help from God our Father for the right viewpoint on the part of all involved. - Psalm 119:66 says: "Teach me goodness and discipline and knowledge; for I have believed thy commandments.

Conducting the family prayer and leading the family in scripture study is the responsibility of believing parents. True, some parents may not be gifted teachers, and it may be difficult for them to find ways to make the family study interesting. Nevertheless, if you love your teenagers "in deed and truth," you will desire to help them in a humble and honest way to advance spiritually. (Saint John encourages us in 1 John 3:18 by saying: "My little children, let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed, and in truth.") They may complain from time to time, but likely they will sense your deep interest in their welfare.

Review Question: What points should be kept in mind if the time for family prayer and the family study of the Word of God is to be a success?

### ***HANDY HINT***

***Express love and appreciation for your children***

### **FAMILY HAPPINESS**

The family study is not the only occasion to communicate matters that are spiritually important. Do you

remember God our Father's command to parents? He said: "Lay up these my words in your hearts and minds, and hang them for a sign on your hands, and place them between your eyes. Teach your children that they meditate on them, when you sit in your house, and when you walk on the way, and when you lie down and rise up." (Deuteronomy 11: 18-19; see also Deuteronomy 6:6-7 which says: "these words which I command thee this day, shall be in your heart: and you shall tell them to your children, and you shall meditate upon them sitting in your house, and walking on your journey, sleeping and rising.") This does not mean that parents must constantly preach to their children. But a loving family head should always be on the lookout for opportunities to build up the spiritual outlook of his family.

Review Question: How can Deuteronomy 11:18- 19 be applied when communicating spiritual things to teenagers?

## **DISCIPLINE AND RESPECT**

### **HELP YOUR TEENAGER TO THRIVE**

Discipline is training that corrects, and it includes communication. Discipline carries the thought of correction more than of punishment - although punishment may come into the picture. Your children needed discipline when they were younger, and now that they are teenagers, they still need some form of it, perhaps even more so. Wise teenagers know that this is true.

The Bible says: "A fool laughs at the instruction of his father: but he that regards reproofs shall become prudent." (Proverbs 15:5) We learn much from this scripture. It implies that discipline will be given. A teenager cannot 'regard reproof' if it is not given. God our Father gives the responsibility for administering discipline to the parents, particularly to the father. However, the responsibility for listening to that discipline belongs to the teenager. He will learn more and make fewer mistakes if he heeds the wise discipline of his father and mother. (Proverbs 1:8 says: "My son, hear the instruction of your father, and forsake not the law of your mother.") The Bible says "Poverty and shame to the one that refuses instruction: but the one that yields to reproof, shall be glorified." - Proverbs 13:18.

Review Questions:

(a) What is discipline?

(b) Who is responsible for administering discipline, and who has the responsibility to ensure that it will be heeded?

### **FAMILY HAPPINESS**

When disciplining teenagers, parents need to be balanced. They should avoid being so strict that they irritate their offspring, perhaps even damaging their children's self-confidence. (Colossians 3: 21) And yet parents do not want to be so permissive that their youngsters miss out on vital training. Such permissiveness can be disastrous. Proverbs 29:17 says: "Instruct (and correct) your son, and he shall refresh you, and shall give delight to your soul." However, verse 21 says: "He that nourishes his servant delicately (pampers him) from his childhood, afterwards shall find him stubborn." Although this verse is talking about a servant, it applies with equal measure to any youngster in the household.

Review Question: What balance do parents need to aim for when administering discipline?

In truth, proper discipline is a proof of the parent's love for his child. (Hebrews 12:6, 11) If you are a parent, you know that it is difficult to maintain consistent, reasonable discipline. For the sake of peace, it may seem easier to allow an obstinate teenager to do what he wants. In the long run, however, a parent who follows this latter course will pay for it with a household that is out of control. - Proverbs 29:15; Galatians 6:9.

Review Question: Of what is discipline an evidence, and what is avoided when parents administer consistent discipline?

## **WORK AND PLAY**

In earlier times children were usually expected to help out in the home or on the farm. Today many teenagers have a lot of unsupervised spare time. To fill that time, the commercial world provides a superabundance of material to fill leisure time. Add to this the fact that the world puts very little value on Bible standards of morality, and you have a formula for potential disaster.

Hence, the judicious parent maintains the right to make final decisions about recreation. Do not forget, though, that the teenager is growing up. Each year, he or she will likely hope to be treated more like an adult. Thus, it is wise for a parent to allow more latitude in the choice of recreation as the teenager gets older-as long as those choices

reflect progress toward spiritual maturity. At times, the teenager may make unwise choices in music, associates, and so on. When this happens, it should be discussed with the teenager so that better choices will be made in the future.

Review Question: How can parents deal wisely with the matter of recreation for their teenagers?

### HELP YOUR TEENAGER TO THRIVE

How much time should be allotted for recreation? In some lands teenagers are led to believe that they are entitled to continual entertainment. Hence, an adolescent may plan his schedule so that he goes from one "good time" to the next. It is up to the parents to convey the lesson that time should also be spent on other things, such as the family, personal study, association with spiritually mature persons, Mass, other Liturgical functions, Christian Catholic youth groups and meetings like the Legion of Mary and the Saint Vincent De Paul Society, and household chores. This will keep the "pleasures of this life" from choking out God's Word.

- Remember Luke 8:11-15 where Jesus explained one of His parables. "The seed is the word of God. And they by the way side are they that hear; then the devil comes, and takes the word out of their heart, lest believing they should be saved. Now they upon the rock, are they who when they hear, receive the word with joy: and these have no roots; for they believe for a while, and in time of temptation, they fall away. And that which fell among thorns, are they who have heard, and going their way, are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit. But that on the good ground, are they who in a good and perfect heart, hearing the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience."

Review Question: How will reasonableness, in the amount of time spent in recreation protect a teenager?

King Solomon, 'the Preacher,' said: "And I have known that there was no better thing than to rejoice, and to do well in this life. For every man that eats and drinks, and sees good of his labour, this is the gift of God." (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13) but he concludes his book: "The dust returns into its earth, from whence it was, and the spirit returns to God, who gave it. "Vanity of vanities," said Ecclesiastes, 'the Preacher' "and all things are vanity"." "Let us all hear together the conclusion of the discourse. Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole business and duty of man: And for all things that are done, God will bring into judgment for every hidden and secret thing, whether it be good or evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:7-8 & 13-14)

Yes, rejoicing is part of a balanced life. But so is hard work, 'labour'. Many teenagers today do not learn the satisfaction that comes from hard work ('labour') or the feeling of self-respect that comes from tackling a problem and solving it. Some are not given the opportunity to develop a skill or trade with which to support themselves in later life. Here is a real challenge for the parent. Will you make sure that your young one has such opportunities? If you can succeed in teaching your teenager to value and even enjoy hard work, he or she will develop a healthy outlook that will bring a lifetime of benefits.

Review Question: With what should recreation be balanced in a teenager's life?

## FROM TEENAGER TO ADULT

### FAMILY HAPPINESS

Even when you have problems with your teenager, the scripture still holds true: "Love never fails." (1 Corinthians 13:8 says: "Charity '*agape*' never falls away") Never cease to show the love that you undoubtedly feel. Ask yourself, 'Do I compliment each child on his successes in handling problems or overcoming obstacles? Do I seize opportunities to express my love and appreciation for my children, before those opportunities pass?' Although at times there may be misunderstandings, if teenagers feel assured of your love for them, they are more likely to return that love.

Review Question: How can parents encourage their teenagers?

Of course, as children grow to adulthood, they will eventually make very weighty decisions for themselves. In some cases parents may not like those decisions. What if their child decides not to continue serving the Lord God our Father? What if they abandon the practice of their faith? This can occur.

Even some of the Angels, the Lord God our Father's most perfect spiritual creatures, rejected his counsel and proved rebellious. God gave them the gift of Free Will.

Jude 1:6 alludes to this when it says: "The angels who kept not their principality, but forsook their own habitation, he has reserved under darkness in everlasting chains, unto the judgment of the great day." "Their principality" is explained as the state in which they were first created, their original dignity. These rebel angels are known to us as 'devils'.

The Bible is full of references to the ever-present reality of sin – the result of the abuse of God's great gift of Free Will. The Bible is full of examples of these sins, from the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve to the murder-sin of Cain, to the sins of Cain's descendants, to the sin of "the sons of God" mentioned in Genesis 6:2, to the . . . but I won't bore with a further list as nearly everyone in the Bible is listed as a sinner at some point in the narrative. ("The sons of

God", by the way are probably the descendants of Seth and Enosh and are here called sons of God from their religion and piety: whereas the ungodly race of Cain, who by their carnal affections lay groveling upon the earth, are called the children of men. The unhappy consequence of the former marrying with the latter, ought to be a warning to Christians to be very circumspect in their marriages; and not to suffer themselves to be determined in their choice by their carnal passion, to the prejudice of virtue or religion.)

Children are not computers, which can be programmed to act the way we want. They are creatures with free will, responsible before God our Father for the decisions they make. Still, Proverbs 22:6 holds true as a general rule: "It is a proverb: A young man according to his way, even when he is old he will not depart from it." That is: 'Train up a boy according to the way for him.'

Review Question: What Scriptural principle holds true as a general rule in bringing up children, but what should be borne in mind?

#### HELP YOUR TEENAGER TO THRIVE

So then, show your children plenty of love. Do your best to follow Bible principles in raising them. Try your best to be outstandingly loyal Catholics. Set a fine example of godly conduct. Thus you will give your children the best opportunity to grow up to be responsible, God-fearing adults. This is the finest way for parents to show gratitude to God our Father for the privilege of parenthood.

Review Question: What is the finest way for parents to show gratitude to God our Father for the privilege of parenthood?

#### HOW CAN THESE BIBLE PRINCIPLES HELP . . .

##### PARENTS TO RAISE THEIR TEENAGERS?

Communication is needed.

Wise Counsel and Deliberation add to life's happiness.

- Proverbs 15:22.

We should regularly consider God's Word.

- Psalm 1:1-3.

A shrewd person listens to discipline.

- Proverbs 15:5.

Both work and play have their place.

- Ecclesiastes 3:12-13.