

Visits and Text Messages

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Often in the evening, when the house has quieted down before everyone goes off to bed, the older children come into the living room. One of them will have a backache and another will have sore feet. Another might have something on his mind that he wants to talk about. Now that the little ones are asleep, we parents have a moment to listen and massage sore backs. Sometimes our children talk about school, sometimes we parents tell stories about our own childhood. Other times, we pause to discuss matters of faith. In these discussions, we parents have also learned from our own children and rejoiced that they want to visit about faith. We all join in an evening prayer and bless each other with the gospel. This gives strength and joy to teens and adults alike.

Time to listen and speak

Discussions with older children are very important. I've often wished that we parents could find the time amid the everyday hustle to talk with and listen to our maturing children. Teens are all different. Some are easy to talk with, and they tell us openly when something is on their mind; with others, you have to ask the right question at the right time. As a parent, I've tried to create opportunities where one-on-one conversation will feel natural, but with a large family at home, it is sometimes difficult. At times, when it's felt impossible to start a conversation any other way, I've sent a text message to my child upstairs. Sometimes it's easier to write about hard things than to say them face-to-face.

Life with teenagers also requires us to keep up with the times in technology and other areas. The world has changed a lot since we were confirmation age. Our own children find it hard to comprehend that the only phone in our childhood homes was attached to the wall. Home computers were rudimentary, and didn't have the same importance that they do now. Back then, youth exchanged letters frequently; we called each other about only the most important things, and even then, we spoke quickly. There is a danger for parents of getting stuck in the past and not understanding how much the world has changed in just a few decades. We need open minds and frequent discussions.

Should we upload photos to the Internet?

As it has for our children, a new world has also opened up for me. I've had no choice but to learn to use a computer so that I would know what my children were doing with their time when they used it. One example is a social networking site that includes uploading photos. It became an important point for one of our children when he started middle school. He asked for permission to upload his own photos to the site. My husband and I thought about it and gave permission, on the condition that we could check his page weekly. When we did read through his page and those of other youth from believing homes, we were upset and even shocked. The writing style was sometimes vulgar, and swear words were common on many pages; some photos were provocative and obviously posed. But some pages were beautifully composed and in all ways fitting for believers to read and view. For example, within a few days of when our oldest was registered for confirmation camp, a group had already formed on the site for students attending that camp.

My husband and I discussed the dangers associated with the social network site with our own children and with other parents. Some parents had no idea that their teens had posted pictures online. After many

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discussions, we confirmed with our children that it was better to take down their own pictures and pages completely from the site. It felt good to see that the answer became clear to our children and not just us.

Good music and good friends

For many youth, music is an important interest, pastime, and source of strength. Our family has had many talks about what music is appropriate and good. The older children had sometimes been worried about some of their believing school friends for whom the matter has become unclear. Smartphones and mp3 players make downloading music from the Internet very easy, and our young have told us how close the danger is to begin listening to worldly music. I've been happy to see how the difficult moments of their teen years are made easier by singing and playing songs of Zion. In recent years, we have especially learned and enjoyed the newer songs of Zion. They are beautiful moments, when our children's friends have gathered in our home to sing. They melodiously sing their hearts' thoughts and feelings, through the songs' words.

Friends are important to youth. As a parent, I feel at ease, safe, and relaxed when my own children's friends share the same healthy understanding of right and wrong. If some wrong behaviors start to be acceptable in the group—for example, underage smoking—it's difficult for anyone in the group to hold their ground and refrain. They have many times discussed makeup and how it is not suitable for a believer, as well as what styles of dress are appropriate. It would be good for youth and their parents to also know each other, and be on the same page with such matters. Some parents may be too worn out by their children's struggles, or may simply not know how their children are doing. These parents, especially, need encouragement in the work of raising their children. For myself, it has been a great help and comfort to be able to openly speak with other believing parents about concerns affecting our youth.

Youth is a joyful time

Discussions with youth can often focus on problems and difficulties in life. Nevertheless, it's important for us to also talk about plans for the future, about dreams, joys, and life's happy fun things. Young people have a positive picture of the future. They want to study and, in time, begin work. They also have hopes for a spouse and their own family. As parents, our hope and prayer is that we have been able to support and strengthen our children correctly as they grow.