

FEEDING THE MOUTH THAT BITES YOU

A Complete Guide to Parenting Adolescents and Launching Them
Into the World

STUDY GUIDE

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Too often parents feel like they have to “go it alone.” My hope is that this study guide will promote group support and communication between different parents. It is designed for use by individuals or for group study. Each chapter is divided into the key concepts followed by questions that are designed to promote discussion as well as increase compliance with the recommended steps to completing Planned Emancipation.

I hope it will be useful for you and the community of parents that support you.

SECTION ONE
MODERN ADOLESCENTS IN A CONFUSED WORLD

Chapter One: Introduction

*“There are times when parenting seems nothing more than
feeding the mouth that bites you .”*

— Peter De Vries

Key Concepts:

This chapter provides an introduction to the central concepts in *Feeding The Mouth That Bites You*.

Feeding The Mouth That Bites You outlines a clear path through this confusion and gives parents confidence that they’re “doing it right.”

Our major problem in parenting adolescents is a failure to progressively grant them more and more autonomy as they get older.

Questions To Consider:

How confident do you feel when it comes to parenting adolescents?

Do you know some parents of teenagers that seem to be “doing it right?” What are they doing or not doing?

How do you know they don’t just have good kids?

Chapter Two: The Problem of Modern Adolescence

“Adolescence is a social construct, created by an urban-industrial society that keeps its young at home far past puberty .”

—Sarah Beth Durst

Key Concepts:

The way we all think about “the teenage years” is very new. Our shared understanding of “what teenagers are like” is just a little over one hundred years old.

The human stage of development called “childhood” comes to its natural end around the age of twelve or thirteen.

Today, we are three or four generations removed from a normal, cultural memory that tells us the proper time when childhood should come to its natural end and when adulthood truly begins.

As a culture, we started seeing and identifying the teenage years as a separate group when they started giving us problems. Adolescence became a “stormy” period when we changed how we treated them in our families and communities.

The problem parents of teenagers face is that we live in a culture that currently has no universally accepted means of transitioning children into adulthood.

Questions To Consider:

When was the word “teenager” first used in the way we currently understand it?

What does this fact say about how we understand “traditional” approaches to parenting teenagers?

When does the developmental stage called “childhood” come to it’s natural end?

Teenagers are best understood as _____ in training.

What does this review of the history of adolescence tell us about why so many adults today report that they don’t “feel grown up?”

Chapter Three: Making Sense Of Adolescent Behavior

“My mother refused to let me fail. So I insisted.”

- Walker Percy, The Second Coming

Key Concepts:

Although adolescent behavior can be better understood by knowing their primary needs, teenagers often struggle to articulate what they need and why they are so upset.

Adolescents undergo numerous physical, cognitive and social changes that signal the end of childhood and the onset of adult maturation.

Adolescent’s primary emotional need is known as *individuation*. Individuation is an adolescent’s quest to find the answer to the question, “When will I be an adult?”

The need for individuation is essential to all adolescents, and it is not equal to other needs teenagers have.

Knowing how to meet your teenager’s need for individuation is the key to effective parenting during their adolescent years.

Individuation is made up of autonomy and attachment. That is, adolescents need to be given freedoms but these freedoms need to be given by a parent or adult that knows them well and who has legitimate authority over the teenager.

Questions To Consider:

What is the “needs-words” gap?

What is an adolescent’s primary emotional need? How would you define this in your own words?

Many parents feel their teenager would be happy if they were just left alone to “do whatever they want.” Is this true? How does your knowledge of adolescent needs help you understand this?

What is the change in cognitive functioning that happens in adolescence? How does this effect a teenager’s tendency to argue?

“Without a cultural roadmap to mark a path to adulthood, today’s adolescents are more like vagabonds than rebels.”

Do you see this in your or other teenagers around you? Why do you think so many more teenagers today seem unmotivated to get their driver’s license compared to your own generation?

SECTION TWO

A NEW WAY TO PARENT ADOLESCENTS

Chapter Four: Understanding Planned Emancipation

“The greatest gifts you can give your children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence.”

— Denis Waitley

Key Concepts

The big question that all parents must answer is: When will you consider your adolescent to be completely an adult? That is, when will you say they deserve all the rights and privileges of an adult just like you?

Parenting teenagers can be viewed a bit like carrying out diplomatic relations with an emerging independent nation.

Parents should think of their teenager’s distinct areas of responsibility (room, friends, appearance, grades, use of money etc.) as “territories” that are either “occupied” by the parents’ enforcement “troops” or “free” areas where the teenager uses his or her own judgment.

The goal of Planned Emancipation is to display your willingness to systematically withdraw your authority from more and more territories, as your adolescent gets older.

For adolescents to be ready for life after high school, they need at least some period of time exercising their own judgment in all aspects of their life while they are still at home, with their parents.

Freedom always comes with responsibility. A teenager's increasing freedoms should not be allowed to be a burden on parents or the rest of the family.

Giving freedom in an area of your teenager's life does not mean that you will no longer have influence in that area. In fact, the effect is just the opposite. Giving over freedoms allows for much greater communication between parents and adolescents.

Questions To Consider:

How did you answer the “big question” of when you will consider your teenager to be completely an adult? How did you decide on your answer?

Do some of your teenager’s complaints sound like he or she feels over-controlled?

Considering the example from the movie “Gandhi,” how should parents of teenagers adopt the same attitude that Lord Mountbatten displayed as the last Viceroy of India?

In what areas (if any) of your teenager’s life have you clearly given them autonomy (e.g. what music they listen to, how they keep their room, who they choose for friends etc.)?

Does the idea of willingly giving over control to your teenager scare you a little? Why or why not?

Does it seem counterintuitive that, in many cases, giving up control of an area of your teenager's life can *increase* your influence as a parent through greater communication?

Planned Emancipation allows teenagers to feel they have really grown up at home and not that they just "got away." Are you one or do you know someone who felt more like they "got away" from their parents?

Chapter Five: Implementing Planned Emancipation

“A hero is someone who understands the responsibility that comes with his freedom.”

— Bob Dylan

Key Concepts:

In the end, Planned Emancipation requires making two lists. The “Freedoms List” and the “Expectations and Consequences List.” The Freedoms List should be shown to your adolescent first.

The first step in this systematic transfer of authority is to clearly think about the areas of responsibility in your adolescent’s life you can let go of.

One important criterion to consider when deciding which freedoms to grant your teenager is whether this is something you can effectively control. When parents have little ability to control an area of a teenager’s life (e.g. choice of friends, choice of music), parents should consider giving this over as a freedom.

Examples of freedoms that can be handed over are given along with the boundaries to these freedoms. Boundaries are to keep a teenager’s choices from adversely affecting others.

When conflicts over micro-managing school work outweigh the benefits of improving grades, parents should strongly consider giving the teenagers freedom to manage school themselves as long as minimum grades are maintained.

The final freedom, to decide when to come in at night, should be granted after your teenager graduates from high school.

Questions To Consider:

Make out a freedoms list for each of your teenagers. There is no need to make a freedom list for a child under the age of thirteen. How did you feel when you wrote words like “use your own judgment?”

Remember that freedoms are *not* privileges. A privilege is “I’ll be nice and let you buy that horrible CD.” A freedom says, “It’s no longer up to me as your parent to decide what music you listen to.” Are all the freedoms on your list truly freedoms and not privileges?

Boundaries are only given to ensure that a teenager’s own choices don’t interfere with others in the family. Make sure these boundaries are not unnecessarily restrictive or unnecessarily numerous. Are all the boundaries you’ve listed really necessary?

Are there any more freedoms you could give over that you haven’t listed? Remember, the question to be asking is “*can we* give over this freedom?”, not “*do we have to* give over this freedom?”.

Show the freedoms list to your adolescent. How did he/she react? Did they seem a bit confused? Do you think they believe what you say that this is now “up to them”?

Chapter Six: Communication With Adolescents

“So the whole war is because we can’t talk to each other.”

— Orson Scott Card, *Ender’s Game*

Key Concepts

Effectively communicating with adolescents is more important than your ability to control them. Only through good communication can you hope to remain relevant and have any influence in your children’s lives as they pass into adulthood.

Letting go of control improves your ability to communicate with teenagers. Planned Emancipation is not a process of reducing your controlling influence; it is a process of increasing your influence through communication.

They may not be particularly good at talking to their parents, or, more commonly, there may be problems in the relationship that discourage them from sharing, but adolescents always desire good communication with their parents.

Lecturing to a teenager is *not* communication. Parents can easily fall prey to the belief that just one more lecture is all that’s needed to really “get through to” their teenager. I can assure you that when they look like they’re not listening, they aren’t.

One common communication problem is control battles. Behind the communication control battle lies one essential thought: “You can’t make me listen or share with you!” Because communicating with

you is a choice they already control, adolescents will assert that independence quite often.

Another common problem in communication is emotional immaturity. Some adolescents fail to communicate well with their parents because they're intimidated and unable to express themselves as well as the adults with whom they're communicating.

Trust issues are also a common problem in communicating with adolescents. If parents do not take their teenagers' need for privacy seriously, their teenager will stop sharing with them.

One effective method of reducing arguments, particularly in close families, is learning to "agree to disagree." Agreeing to disagree also conveys an important message to a teenager: "You are free to think your own thoughts. I know I can't make you change your mind."

Another communication tool parents need in communication with adolescents is "advice-giving." The hardest thing about advice giving is that it is a method of communication that's counterintuitive. Feedback that is hard for your teenager to hear or something you know they are likely to disagree with needs to be made smaller, not bigger.

If communication is waning, or if it has completely stopped, you must try to initiate communication by regularly and respectfully asking them to talk with you.

Learning to talk non-judgmentally to a teenager can be the key to regular and open communication with him or her.

Questions To Consider:

How would you rate your communication relationship with your teenager? Did communication used to be better or worse than it is now? What, if anything, has caused this to change?

Does your teenager seem defensive all the time? Does this demonstrate that they see you as constantly controlling? Have you implemented the freedoms list? Have you seen any changes?

Be honest with yourself... are you a lecturer? Do you like to think of creative ways to “make your point” to your teenager? Does your teenager seem to pay attention when you lecture?

If you are having problems communicating with your adolescents, which (if any) of the common problems listed do you think you have: control battles, trust issues or emotional immaturity?

Have you tried curtailing an argument when you and your teenager clearly see something differently by “agreeing to disagree?” Does this feel wrong to you, like “as a parent I should be getting my kid to see the right way...”? Does your teenager keep badgering you even after you’ve offered to “agree to disagree?”

Try changing your next lecture into advice-giving. Remember to own your view as only your opinion and signal that your teenager is free to disagree with you. Did that go differently from what you expected? Was there more back-and-forth talk than usual?

Have you had any significant problem occur with your teenager (failing grade, behavior problem at school etc.) that you gave your teenager time to remedy the problem her/himself? Does your teenager see the trouble they get into as “a problem for my parents to clean up?”

If praising kids is supposed to raise their self-esteem, why do so many adolescents reject their parents’ positive feedback?

Chapter Seven: Limit-Setting With Adolescents

“If you want to recapture your youth, just cut off his allowance.”

— Al Bernstein

Key Concepts

Like a foreign power that is systematically giving over territory, you can and must maintain effective control over those territories that you have *not* granted them freedom over. The key is how to discipline effectively.

The goals of our discipline should be significantly different when we’re dealing with a child versus an adolescent.

To continue disciplining teenagers as if they were still children is to leave them ill-prepared to handle adulthood. Adolescents who have never developed beyond the level of obedience will seek another strong-willed adult to obey as adults (a spouse, friend, or peer group).

The four “laws” of disciplining adolescents:

1. A parent can never *make* an adolescent do anything.
2. Adolescents learn from experience not words.
3. Anger and yelling are counterproductive to effectively disciplining adolescents.
4. Lack of parental unity seriously undercuts effective limit-setting.

As a parent of teenagers, you need to think and act, not like a policeman, but more like a judge.

Speechmaking is a way for parents to feel like they're offering discipline while actually keeping real consequences from occurring. Substituting speeches for real-life consequences prevents adolescents from learning true responsibility.

Parents responding with anger does not help your teenagers see themselves. It only helps them to see you in a very bad light.

Effective limit-setting requires that parents clearly communicate their expectations to their teenagers.

An "Expectations and Consequences" list is a clear statement of what parents require of their teenager *and* the consequences the parents will inflict if the teenager fails to do what is required.

The key to creating an effective Expectations and Consequences list is to communicate your expectations in "video-camera" terms. In other words, if you were recording video of your teenage son or daughter fulfilling a particular expectation, what words would you use to describe what you see?

Believe it or not, it's a very loving thing to stay up late into the night devising creative ways to help your teenager suffer appropriately — when necessary.

There's a type of teenage lying so common that you shouldn't make too big of a deal about it. What I call "normal teenage lying" are lies

that are intended to thwart a parent's attempts to monitor and supervise teenage behavior.

Generally speaking, when giving consequences for a significant behavior problem (e.g. intoxicated, theft, sneaking out etc.) one month grounding is equivalent to a life sentence. Longer periods of grounding become quickly less effective.

Questions To Consider:

In your own words, explain your understanding of the difference between the goals of disciplining children and the goals of disciplining teenagers?

Do you still use any form of physical intimidation (yelling, getting “in your kid’s face,” spanking or threats of spanking)? This book describes physical intimidation as the *weakest* form of discipline. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

“Feeding the Mouth...” suggests that parents should see themselves as a “judge” and not a “policeman.” Can you give examples of how these two approaches differ?

What is your most effective weapon in giving consequences to your teenagers?

If you are regularly yelling at your teenager then you are probably *not* giving appropriate, real consequences as much as you should. Do you agree with this statement? Do you have any personal conflicts that make giving out consequences difficult for you?

Did you fill out the Behavioral Expectations worksheet? Did you find any expectations that need to be added to an Expectations and Consequences list? Were you careful to express the expectations *clearly*?

Did you fill out the Consequences Worksheet? You should have at least four or more consequences to choose from. Even if they don't use that game much, it can still be irksome to have it taken. Remember, if you have only one *big bomb* (e.g. phone, car) then you'll not be able to respond to little behavior problems (e.g. late on chores, food in their room etc.).

Give your Expectations and Consequences list to your teenager. Remember to ask them for feedback. Did they give you any feedback or were they just angry? Was there any suggestions that you could reasonably try to do it their way?

Does it surprise you to hear that there is such a thing as "normal" teenage lying? Does your adolescent lying to you bother you more than anything else? Lying is, of course, wrong but why does it bother you so much? Did you never lie to your parents?

SECTION THREE

SPECIAL TOPICS ON PARENTING ADOLESCENTS

Chapter Eight: School

Key Concepts

By far, grades and school-related issues are the most common problems that bring teenagers into my office. Parents naturally want to help their adolescents do their best in school but often end up fighting with their teenager from September to May.

To have the most influence in your teenager's school performance, you must address the issue of control. This means making a realistic assessment of what you can and can't control in their schoolwork as well as seeking a path toward completely handing over freedom for your adolescent to make his or her own choices about school.

No matter how school goes, in almost every circumstance you should cease trying to exert any control over how your teenager handles school by their senior year. You should also start announcing this as soon as possible.

Letting go of daily management of schoolwork is usually a first step in backing away from control battles with a young teenager. Parents must still apply consequences if the adolescent fails to maintain minimum grades.

Success in school is much more than just a matter of motivation. Learning differences in adolescents often look like motivation problems. Parents must be discerning if constant consequences fail to bring expected improvement in grades.

If your young adult child desires to go to college and you have funding options to help them, then you should think of your post-high school relationship with their schooling as something like a “benevolent bank.”

There’s no question that education is valuable, but when success in school overshadows family relationships, happiness, or even physical and mental health, you’re doing it wrong.

Questions To Consider:

How big an issue is school in your home? Do you have problems battling with your teenager over homework etc.?

Have you talked often with your teenager about his or her own goals in school? How do they feel about their performance to date? If they don't have much to say on this subject, shouldn't you be concerned? Do they see school as "something my parents are concerned about"?

If you struggle with micro managing their schoolwork have you considered leaving that to them? Does that worry you? Does leaving your teenager to manage their daily work feel like your an uninvolved or uncaring parent?

Do you or anyone in your family have a history of learning problems (e.g. dyslexia, Attention Deficit Disorder, etc.). Is there any evidence that a learning problem exists for your teenager?

Do you think your family keeps school success in it's proper place? Does academic success sometimes overshadow more important aspects of your family life? What can you do to keep this from happening?

Chapter Nine: Alcohol and Drugs

Key Concepts

Adolescents who regularly receive appropriate freedoms from their parents, who can talk openly with their parents, and who know the significant consequences these same parents will administer if they are caught in any of this behavior are at an extremely low risk of having trouble when navigating choices about alcohol and drugs.

The trick to maintaining sanity in your thinking and talking about the use of alcohol or drugs is to keep your eye on the ball. The issue is not drinking alcohol or using drugs. The issue is *intoxication*.

Teenagers don't *drink*... they *get drunk*.

One major influence often reported by teenagers is that they drink "to feel grown up." Planned Emancipation is an effective tool in reducing adolescent motivation to use alcohol and drugs! By openly giving over sanctioned, adult freedoms, you're reducing your teenager's need "to feel grown up."

To set effective limits on adolescent alcohol and drug use, parents need to act as judges ready to hand down significant consequences for violations.

Your expectations should obviously include consequences for alcohol and drug use, but consequences should also exist when your

teenager is *present when and where these substances are being consumed*.

A Note About Vaping

Since the publication of *Feeding The Mouth That Bites You* there has arisen an *epidemic* of adolescent use of e-cigarettes also known as “vaping.” These devices are now being used by an estimated 80% of high school kids in some areas. While they probably reduce some of the bad chemicals in cigarette smoke (e.g. tar), e-cigarettes contain currently untested chemicals in the flavored oils used. More importantly, e-cigarettes allow for very high levels of nicotine consumption since the vaping liquid can be artificially infused with extreme amounts of nicotine. Also, a careful teenager can vape undetected *all day long*. Many e-cigarettes have no smell and can be used at your home when you’re just around the corner as well as at school. This means there is much more opportunity to inhale these vapors than compared to the few times one could go somewhere and smoke a cigarette undetected.

Your response to vaping needs to start by *relaxing!* Vaping is everywhere but it’s not the same as marijuana or alcohol. Your message should be clear, e-cigarettes are illegal and bad for health therefore they are not allowed. Your discipline however should be measured. If you find vaping material you should throw it away (it’s amazing how many kids actually expect their parents to allow them to sell contraband after they have been busted) and give a reasonable and escalating consequence. This probably should be a weekend grounded or something like that. Don’t make too big a deal about it but don’t let it go either.

Questions To Consider:

Do you have any solid evidence that your teenager is involved with drugs or alcohol? What, if anything, have you done in response to this?

Have you talked with your adolescents about your expectations regarding drugs or alcohol? Specifically, have you made sure they know that they are not allowed to *be where it is consumed by minors*? What was their reaction to this?

Have your teenagers come up with arguments for why they should be allowed some level of alcohol or drug use? Did these work? Did you drink when you were in high school? Does this matter when it comes to whether or not you will enforce what you know is good for your kids?

See the above note on vaping. Have you had evidence of vaping with your kids? Have you been careful to differentiate the importance of avoiding alcohol and drugs compared to vaping? What is your consequence for vaping? If your teenager is 18, how does that affect your stand on e-cigarettes?

Chapter Ten: Video Games, Social Media, And Pornography

Key Concepts

The world you once knew is not the world you live in today. The explosive growth of technology requires parents to be proactive in responding to harmful exposure while still progressively allowing teenagers freedom to manage these influences themselves.

While there is no current diagnosis of video game addiction, there probably soon will be. Most parents' concerns about limiting video game usage are much broader than just avoiding addiction.

The best way to determine if playing video games is a problem for your teenager is to assess what impact their playing has on important areas of their life. How much is time spent playing video games taking away from time spent in other— and more worthwhile— spheres of their life?

To effectively impact an adolescent's video game use parents should consider the following:

1. Know what kinds of games your teenager plays.
2. Seriously consider the importance of games in their world.
3. Communicate, communicate, communicate.
4. Hold true to other areas of Planned Emancipation.
5. Hand over more control by mid-adolescence (freshman or sophomore year).

6. Drop the reins completely by the spring of their senior year (at the very latest).

While there remain good reasons for parents to monitor social networks, especially with young teenagers, there is no need for unreasonable fears that “anything can happen” when adolescents use the Internet. Maintaining your relationship with your teenager is easily the most important element in providing safety online.

To best influence a teenager’s social media involvement parents need to:

1. Join the social media site(s) your teenager uses.
2. Inform yourself about the dangers of social media, but don’t obsess.
3. Talk about social media with your teenager.
4. Set clear, progressive freedoms.

Because of our hyper-connected, instant-gratification world, access to pornography has never been higher.

Pornography’s greatest appeal lies within the fact that it is everywhere and yet no one wants to talk about it. But using pornography is based in shame and secrets, and this is a vital aspect to consider when talking with your teenager about the issue.

The main way to best influence your adolescent’s pornography viewing is through communication, not limit-setting.

Parents should approach the issue as helping the teenager maintain his or her own boundaries when it comes to pornography.

Questions To Consider:

Are video games a big part of your adolescent's life? What limits have you put on these? Have they been successful? Why or why not?

What ideas suggested in this chapter and throughout the book might you put into place to more effectively impact your teenager's use of video games?

How much time does your adolescent spend on social media and texting friends? Does this concern you? What efforts have you made to limit their over-use?

How much time do you spend on your phone or computer? What effect do you think this has on your teenagers? Should you consider limits for yourself when it comes to electronic influence on your family's relationships?

Have you come across any evidence of pornography use by your teenager? How did you handle it? Does it change your reaction when you know how pervasive pornography use is in today's culture?

Have you talked with your teenagers about pornography? What more can you do to improve communication with your teenager about pornography and its dangers?

Chapter Eleven: Dating And Sex

Key Concepts

Planned Emancipation is a powerful tool that can significantly increase a parent's influence in their teenager's dating and sexual behavior.

When parents simply say no to anything they deem to be an inappropriate sexual influence without regard for their teenager's age, they become an increasingly irrelevant voice to adolescents who intentionally keep their parents in the dark about their sexual choices.

Adolescent romantic relationships have always been complicated, but now they're just downright confusing— for teenagers and parents. However dating relationships are labeled, they always involve two important elements: intimacy and security.

Your first step in knowing how to best help your teenager navigate dating and sex is to take stock of what sources of intimacy are currently available to him or her. Does he have close, stable friends? As a parent, you must do all you can to encourage every type of healthy intimacy available to your kid.

As a parent, it is important that you initiate any talk about sex. Initiating conversations about sex heavily depends on your own comfort level.

Father-daughter relationships commonly go through a significant change when a girl reaches puberty. Fathers need to prepare their daughters for womanhood by modeling how they should expect to be treated by a man.

A mother's influence on a teenage boy's dating behavior is not as clear-cut as it is with fathers and daughters. Moms can most influence their teenage sons' dating behavior by showing them the positive impact they can have on a woman.

There is a great deal of data outlining the dangers of early dating, but waiting too long can invite unnecessary rebellion. The most common age is sixteen, the same age as driving.

Questions To Consider:

Have you considered when you will allow your teenager to begin dating? That is, when will you say it's ok for him or her to get in a car and go spend an evening with a potential dating partner? Have you talked with your teenager about this?

What kind of friendship relationships does your teenager have? Is he or she over-reliant on closeness with a boyfriend or girlfriend? What can you do about this?

What is the right answer if your teenager asks about your sexual history?

Does your teenage daughter have a good relationship with her father? Does your teenage son have a good relationship with his mother? How do these relationships effect dating choices?

Chapter Twelve: Influencing An Adolescent's Faith

Key Concepts

“Religious principles” may get you past the importance of honesty and kindness, but you’re going to get stuck when asked deeper questions about sexual behavior and gender identity, or what’s “wrong” with people of other faiths or those who aren’t religious.

If you haven’t done the kind of teaching you think you should have, or if your family hasn’t been consistent in attending services, adolescence is a tough time to start. Teenagers know hypocrisy when they see it.

Because faith is so important to many families, parents often make the mistake of trying to control this aspect of their teenagers’ lives as long as they have any power over them.

Research has recently shown that somewhere between sixty to eighty percent of active high school youth will fall away from any church involvement in their college years. Planned Emancipation must be applied to faith just like any other freedom. This is to increase your influence and isn’t “turning your back on your job as a Christian parent.”

Eventually you must pick a point before they leave your house when your teenager can completely use his or her own judgment regarding faith and whether or not to go to church, temple or synagogue.

Questions To Consider:

How well do you and your teenager communicate about faith issues?
Is this something that needs working on?

Is your teenager aware that there is no rule “requiring” that he or she believe the same way you do? How can you find a way to make sure this is clear?

Do you see aspects of a control battle in your relationship with your teenager when it comes to faith?

Would it make a difference if you allowed your adolescent to attend a different church but of the same religion? Is this a freedom you would be willing to consider at some point?

When (before they leave your home) will you announce to your teenager that it is now up to them whether or not to attend religious services? Does that seem weird?

Chapter Thirteen: Let's Talk About You (Parent Issues)

Key Concepts

One of the best ways to find hidden weaknesses in your own character is to take an inventory of what bugs you the most in your kid.

Fear is by far the most common reason parents struggle to follow through with Planned Emancipation. This is the kind of fear that is closely tied to control. It is the artificial feeling that, as a parent, your teaching, encouragement, and monitoring of their every move is the only thing keeping your teenager from certain disaster.

The problem of parent fear versus the adolescent need for freedom is one of the true tests of a parent's love for his or her kid.

Married parents of adolescents must do all they can to keep their marriage strong. When adolescents sense that their parents won't emotionally survive their departure, it makes it hard for them to feel permission to move on.

To be a really good single parent to your adolescent, you have to get really good at taking care of yourself.

Planned Emancipation is very often hard on mothers. A mother's instinct to nurture runs counter to the adolescent need to individuate.

Fathers need to be involved and learn how to communicate their involvement, not just stand around looking passive. Dads are often particularly helpful as the spokesperson for the parents, and particularly when there is bad news to relate.

Questions To Consider:

Are there any struggles or characteristics of your teenager that you find particularly annoying? How does your impatience relate to your own weaknesses or strengths?

Do you consider yourself a fearful parent? Are your friends fearful in their parenting? What are you doing to try and counteract your own fears in parenting?

If you are married, is your marriage strong? What are you doing to maintain marriage unity during this time of parenting teenagers?

If you are a single parent, which friends or family members do you particularly lean on for emotional support? Do you have enough support around you for the emotional difficulties involved in raising a teenager?

If you are a mother, what problems (if any) have you had in initiating and maintaining planned emancipation? Do you ever get comments from other mothers suggesting concern about what you're doing?

For Dads, do you consider yourself an equal partner in parenting? How well do you talk through differences in parenting decisions you may have with your wife?

Chapter Fourteen: Final Words

Being the parent of a teenager means investing yourself in working your way out of a job. It is a process that can either beat you down or take you to a higher level as an individual. In my opinion, there is no greater love a parent can give than to give what your kid needs, even when they need to not need you anymore. That is feeding the mouth that bites you!

