



The Catholic Youth Community of St. John Neumann

Dear Parents and Guardians of our Parish's Amazing Teens,

One of my favorite pieces of Scripture is **Philippians 4:6-7**. It says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

I wonder how that verse hits you as a parent. We're in an extra busy season of the year right now – on top of all your regular busyness! Your life may revolve around a busy schedule with little or no time to develop real relationships with your spouse or your kids. You may be so busy that most of your life and interaction with others is simply mechanical and you just hope to get through each day. Your life may revolve around relationships that are difficult, especially with your teenagers as they continue to grow and struggle with finding their identity in a culture that is constantly confusing. You may be experiencing financial or job stress, a difficult diagnosis, a sense of loneliness, or an overall lack of purpose in life. You may get reeled into politics, social issues, or even local neighborhood drama. (It's all about the Next Door app, am I right??)

I don't know how much you get sidetracked by any of this, but I know there is hope for you. There is hope for you as someone who is moving through this life trying to lead your family in a healthy direction, to a life with God. So, if we go back to the verses I started with, you'll hopefully see how this might be helpful for you as a parent. *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

The first part of what Paul is saying to us might be hard for you. He flat out says, "Don't be anxious ... about anything." Much easier said than done for most of us, right? Stress and anxiety can mount so easily as we muddle through the madness of the world, but the words of Paul remind us that God doesn't want us to live in the anxiousness, in the madness.

We're then told to take every situation and present our requests to God. We're encouraged to pray and ask God to intervene, to heal, to lead, and to guide. And what's next is interesting. Paul doesn't promise us that, if we pray to and petition God, everything will work out. We're not told that all of our prayers will be answered just how we want them answered.

We're told that "the peace of God, that transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts." The madness doesn't win, peace does. In the midst of the madness, that isn't likely going away, our hearts will be guarded and a peace that is bigger than anything we can possibly imagine will lead the way in our lives. Now, imagine if

you could live that way. Imagine that you could have peace in your heart no matter what happens. Imagine that you could navigate difficult situations and difficult relationships, not with fear and sense of angst, but with a peace that is bigger than anything you could ever imagine.

And then, imagine what YOU living that way will do FOR and TO your teenagers. If your teens see you, as their parent, living in a world gone mad with a real, true sense of peace in your heart, they just might believe they can do the same. They might not get caught up in their school drama or the pressure they feel to perform or the identity struggle that they don't know how to navigate. They might learn how to be in the madness of life with a sense of peace themselves.

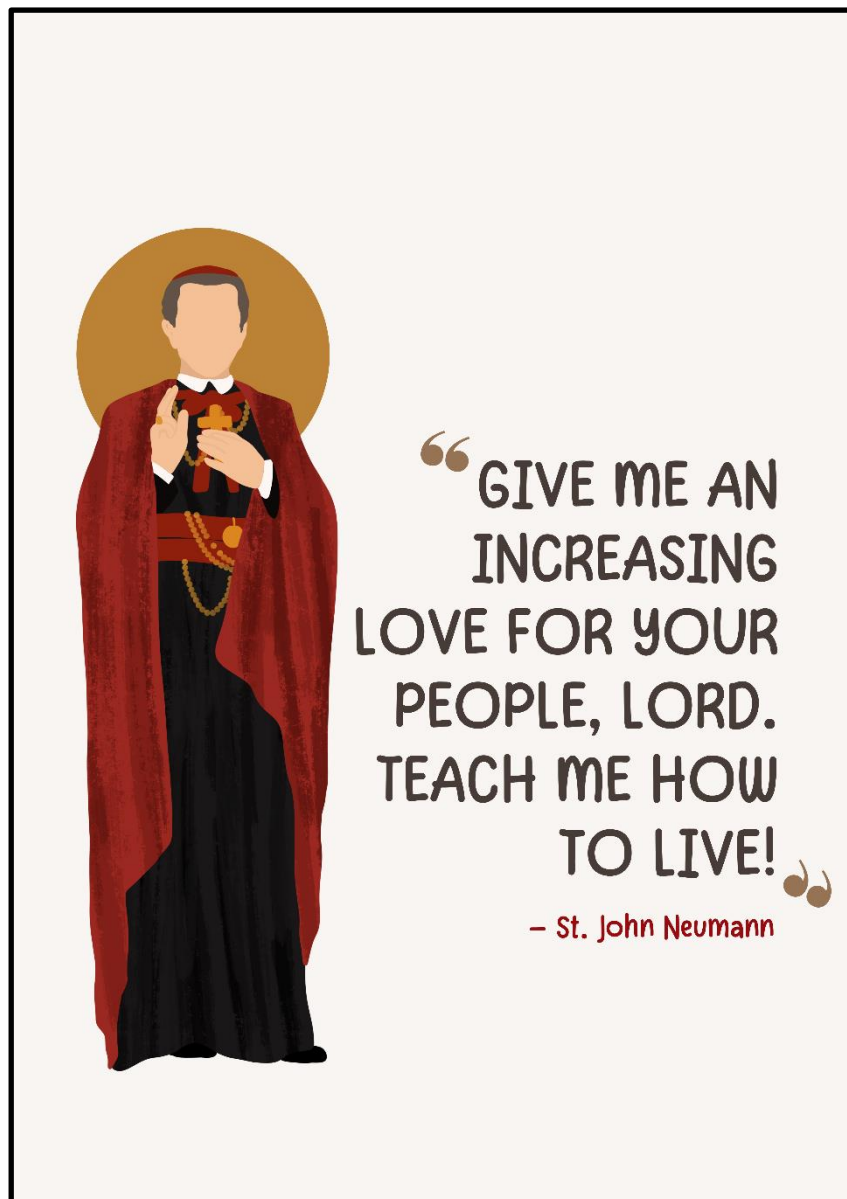
There is much craziness during this holiday season, and in life in general, and I'm pulling for you! But don't forget that the madness of the world can be overcome with the peace of God for you and for your family!

Peace,

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Game Plan for Peaceful Parenting Your Teen

Here are 12 essential tips for peaceful parenting a teenager!

You may not feel like you have much influence on your child these days, but your teen's behavior is highly connected with the strength of their bond with you. Good relationships between teenagers and their parents are connected with school success, general happiness, good social skills, the ability to make good friends, and good decision-making skills.

By contrast, weak or strained parent/teen relationships are correlated with early sexual activity, experimentation with drugs and alcohol, the teen's involvement in violence (as either perpetrator or victim), and suicide. How do you parent this blossoming person who sometimes seems to be becoming a stranger?

1) Remember you're a parent, AND a friend (but not a buddy!)

Teens crave the security of knowing their parents understand them, appreciate them, and love them no matter what - so they do want the relationship to be a form of friendship as they grow older. But your teen also needs to feel like they have some independence, so sometimes you may feel a bit shut out. If you can navigate your closeness in an accepting way that doesn't take advantage of your role as a parent to tell your child what to do, they're more likely to open up and share with you.

2) Establish dependable together time.

Be sure to check in every single day. A few minutes of conversation while you're cleaning up after dinner or right before bedtime can keep you tuned in and establish open communication. Even teens who seem to have forgotten who their parents are the other 23 hours a day often respond well to a goodnight hug and check-in chat once they're lounging in bed. In addition to these short daily check-ins, establish a regular weekly routine for doing something special with your teen, even if it's just going out for ice cream or a walk together.

3) Parent actively and appropriately.

Don't invite rebellion by refusing to acknowledge that your son or daughter is growing up and needs more freedom. But don't be afraid to ask where your kids are going, who they'll be with, and what

they'll be doing. Get to know your kids' friends and their parents so you're familiar with their activities.

4) Try to be there after school.

The biggest danger zone for drug use and sex isn't Saturday night; it's between 3 and 6 PM on weekdays. Arrange flex time at work if you can. If your child will be with friends, make sure there's adult supervision, not just an older sibling.

5) Keep your standards high.

Your teen wants to be his or her best self. Your job as parents is to support your teens in doing that. But don't expect your child to achieve the goals you decide for them; they need to begin charting their own goals now, with the support of a parent who adores them just as they are and believes that they can do anything they aim to. Support your teen's passions and explorations as they finds their unique voice.

6) Make it a high priority to eat meals together... as often as you can.

Meals are a great opportunity to talk about the days' events, to unwind, reinforce, and bond. They're also your best opportunity to keep in touch with your teen's life and challenges, and to spot brewing problems. Finally, an important factor in kids' happiness and overall success is whether they feel they get time to "just hang out and talk" with parents every day.

7) Keep the lines of communication humming.

If you don't know what's going on, you lose all hope of influencing the outcome. Ignore the eye rolls and the sighing... never give up on communicating with your teen.

8) Encourage good self-care

...such as teens need 9-10 hours of sleep and a good diet. Coffee is a bad idea for early teens because it interferes with normal sleep patterns. (Just say no to Starbucks! Your wallet will appreciate it, too!) Too much screen time, especially in the hour before bedtime, reduces melatonin production and makes it harder for kids to fall asleep at night.

9) Continue family meetings.

Held regularly at a mutually agreed upon time, family meetings provide a forum for discussing triumphs, grievances, sibling disagreements, schedules, and any topic of concern to a family member. Ground rules help like everyone gets a chance to talk; one person talks at a time without interruption; everyone listens, and only positive, constructive feedback is allowed. To get resistant teens to join in, combine the get-together with incentives such as post-meeting pizza or ice cream, or assign them important roles such as recording secretaries or rule enforcers.

10) Keep kids safe and connected to the family by keeping computers in your common space and monitoring their phone usage.

It can be hard for parents to track what teens do online because they usually know more about computers than we do. But research shows that they'll be less tempted to spend time doing things you'd disapprove of if the computer is in a common space, where you can walk by and glance at what he's doing. Kids live online these days, but they can still stay connected to their family if online is in the heart of their home.

11) Stay connected even as she moves into the world.

It's appropriate for teens to want to spend more time with their peers than their parents as they get older, but kids who are well-grounded in their families will respond well to parents' efforts to stay connected.

You may not be at the top of your teen's list nowadays but work like the dickens to stay close, and don't take it for granted that your child will now push you away. Don't give up. It's never too late in your relationship with your child to do repair work and move closer.

12) Pray as a family and go to Mass as a family!

Praying as a family is not something that comes easily to everyone. In fact, a recent study of young Catholic families found that seventy-six percent of parents pray mostly as individuals rather than with family. This is particularly striking when paired with the finding from a similar report that found that eighty-five percent of Catholic parents are likely to watch television with their family while only fifteen percent are more likely to watch alone. In short, families are far more likely to watch television together than they are to pray together.

Let's change that! Pray with your family! Take them to confession regularly and Mass weekly. Make our faith a priority for your family.