



## The Catholic Youth Community of St. John Neumann

Dear Parents and Guardians,

The issues and decisions that the youth of today are facing are difficult. Your teen needs you to help them learn how to navigate the world. If we're honest, sometimes you might be tempted to shy away from talking about or dealing with the difficult issues facing our teens and their generation. Here are a few thoughts about how parents can step into these tough conversations...

**First, affirm your teenager's identity in Christ.** It all starts here. If our kids can rest in who they are as a child of God and come at life through that lens, it'll help them have a solid foundation when they face difficult and confusing issues. I don't mean just teach them Bible stories, or pound Biblical principles into them... Help them embrace a real relationship with Jesus that matters in their everyday life. If your teenagers can feel confident about who they are as a follower of God and disciples of Jesus, it will help them as they face the difficult issues in the world. Go to Mass as a family every Sunday! Take them to confession regularly! Pray together! Make faith a priority for your family!

**Second, talk about everything so that you can talk about *anything*.** You have to engage your teenager in regular conversation if you want to be able to have deep conversations with your teenager. As a High School Youth Minister, I have definitely talked about and learned more about Taylor Swift than I ever wanted to, and I know more of her song lyrics than I care to admit... Talking about the normal, everyday things in life helps open the door to deeper conversations. And we need to be OK with talking about what our teens want to talk about, not what we want to talk about. I promise you, your teens are thinking about deep issues, and if they are developing a real faith in Jesus, they are facing intense moral dilemmas every day.

When you are in a conversation with your teenager and you hear something that maybe alarms you or makes you cringe a little, control your body language and maybe say this: **"Tell me more."** Just ask them to tell you more so you can stay engaged in the conversation, learn more about how they are thinking, and formulate your plan on how you can lead and influence them the best. When you start consistently asking your teenager to tell you more, you might be amazed at the number of words that start coming out of their mouth in conversations! "Tell me more" indicates that you are genuinely interested and gives them the freedom to dictate where the conversation goes next.

**Finally, as we seek to work and talk through the difficult issues facing our teens and their world, do this – pray.** Pray that God will give you the words in these conversations. Pray that God will give your teenager clarity. Pray that God will help them embrace their identity in Christ. Pray that God will surround them with friends who will point them in the right direction. Pray that you can have a great relationship with them and there can be open communication. Pray for your teens all the time so that God will shape their hearts and minds to be the men and women He wants them to be. Be encouraged!

*James Gregory Curran*



(512) 328-3220 ext. 110  
JCurran@SJNAustin.org

# FACING CHALLENGES — A FAMILY DEVOTION



Teenagers today are facing many challenging issues. As they struggle to navigate their way through what often feels like a minefield of difficult circumstances, they are simultaneously hit with a never-ending barrage of incoming messages and influences that are sowing seeds of fear, doubt, comparison, sexuality, depression, identity, anxiety, and confusion. All of the feelings, raw emotions, fears, and attitudes that build up, often spill over into our homes and directly impact the dynamics of our family relationships.

God created the family unit to be the primary place for your teenager to be nurtured, developed, disciplined, and experience His unconditional love and care. If that doesn't sound like your home at the moment, you are not alone. You are also not a failure as a parent. Just the fact that you are reading this shows that you desire to engage. And that is a good thing! So, take heart and know that every family experiences times when they need to press pause, regroup, and hit the reset button to ensure there is a positive atmosphere in the home and that everyone is doing their part to create it.

Much of what you can do (and must do) as a parent revolves around building real relationships, having open/honest conversations, and spending time in prayer. This can take a lot of work and can even be a little intimidating for many, but it is so worth it because just these simple steps can have more of an impact than most parents realize. When it comes to teenagers, it is not always about teaching and instructing. It is often more about connecting, listening, being present, and pointing them to the One who created them and loves them deeply.

*Use the passage of Scripture located below and the questions provided as a family. Allow this exercise to be a first step, or a next step, in your working to keep spiritual conversations open and engage with your teenager by taking time as a family to pause, reset, and seek the Lord together.*

## STEP 1

Read Ephesians 4:25-32 to yourself.

"Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry, but do not sin, do not let the sun set on your anger, and do not leave room for the devil. The thief must no longer steal, but rather labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with one in need. No foul language should come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ."

## STEP 2

Write down your answers to the following questions.

1. What commands do you see in the Scripture passage?
2. Which verse holds the most meaning to you or hits you the hardest and why?
3. How can these verses be applied to the way our family interacts with one another?

## STEP 3

Once everyone is done, discuss questions #2 and #3 as a family.

## STEP 4

Ephesians 4:29 states that our words should help build others up.

- Have Each Family Member Share Something They Admire About Every Other Family Member.
- Have Everyone Share One Thing They Love About Your Family In General.

## STEP 5

Give everyone an opportunity to share one thing they think your family could do differently to make it stronger.

## STEP 6

Take some time to plan something fun for the family to do together. Brainstorm ideas together and pick one. Choose a date to do it in the next couple of weeks.

## STEP 7

Share one personal prayer request each and pray for each other.

