

A Child at Different Ages

PRE-TEENS & TEENAGERS

Teens are on the exciting (and sometimes challenging) journey from childhood into adulthood. It is during this important period of time that they begin to “break away” from their parents and become individually functioning adults. (Sometimes this goes smoothly, and sometimes it does not.)

But as one of the important persons in their lives during this period, YOU as their Sunday School teacher must know as much as possible about what they are going through during this stage of their life, so that you can interact with them in more helpful and meaningful ways. Here are some of the important changes going on in their lives during this time period.

Change:

- **Physical:** Physical Growth and Development now includes moving toward sexual maturity.
- **Emotional:** Attraction toward the opposite sex, hormones and testosterone, and life in general create intense new emotions varying from extreme anger to extreme joy, which the child has never experienced before.
- **Social:** The teen is self-centered and strongly focuses on individual desires. Pleasing friends and peers takes first place as the child seeks approval from them rather than from parents or teachers.
- **Cognitive:** The child who imitated the parents in everything, now begins creating new thinking patterns for themselves which have been shaped by home, school, church, and other influences. This causes much confusion, as the child is trying to figure out for themselves, what is right and what is wrong.
- **Spiritual:** During this time, the teen will be seeking to make their own faith or possibly abandon it altogether. Occasionally, their questions and doubts are quite disturbing to them or to their parents.

PRE-TEENS, AGES 11-13

Pre-teens will be experiencing many changes that will not only scare themselves, but will scare their parents as well. They are learning that “I am a person, who is becoming an independent adult in society,” which of course is terrifying, so they cover that fear with a thick coat of confidence, anger, or attitude. They may not admit it, but they have a strong desire to be accepted by their peers and classmates and will go to great lengths to receive their approval. More than anything, they want to be accepted and loved.

These children are beginning a stage where they seek to clarify and express more complex concepts, moving from the concrete to the abstract. They begin applying general principles to the particular. They enjoy a variety of activities at a more complex, exacting level of performance, such as woodworking, making pottery, staging plays, advanced science projects, and generating computer graphics.



Children during this period continue to develop their skills at many of the sports, games, and activities from their early elementary years, however, some games become predictable and boring. Therefore, they are looking for a new range of activities to challenge their more advanced motor skills and thinking. Instead of finished products, they often prefer raw materials for creating their own unique products.

Development and Characteristics

1. Strong desire for independence
2. Intense identity search (Always wondering “Who am I? To whom do I belong?” etc)
3. May consider themselves indestructible and always right (even if they are wrong)
4. Critical and condemning in their opinions
5. Have strong absolutes
6. Have high expectations toward others, but not necessarily themselves
7. Desire acceptance from friends and peers
8. Interested in the opposite sex
9. Worry about their future (education, marriage, profession, etc)
10. They engage in thoughtful discussions of moral, ethical, and philosophical issues
11. Show interest in current events
12. Easily manipulated by outside influences/idols/stars etc

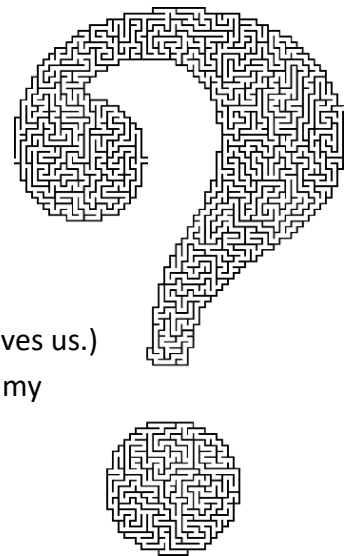
In the Classroom:

- Teach teens to read the Bible for themselves.
- Read the Bible together.
- Teach the Doctrines of our Faith. Why we believe what we believe.
- Teach Christian Apologetics. How to defend the Christian faith outside the church.
- Use various methods and activities in your lessons. Bring in speakers or guests.
- Allow class participation: short sermon, lead in prayer, lead singing etc.
- Have group discussions.
- Be open to questions
- Don't ridicule the child in front of others.
- Give challenges that teens can strive for.
- Visit outside of the classroom. Take a trip together. Plan activities together.

- Children this age enjoy this type of play:
 - a) Complex, thoughtful games such as chess, checkers, and other board games
 - b) Trivia and Knowledge based games
 - c) Team games
 - d) Competitive sports and athletic events
 - e) Complex arts and craft work

- Questions pre-teens & teens need the answers to:
 - How do I relate to God?
 - What does that mean to my life?
 - How am I supposed to live my life?
 - If God's going to judge me, how do I want to live?
 - What gets me saved? (Our best behavior is NOT what saves us.)
 - Why be good? (Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey my commands.")

- Bible Comprehension
 - a) Provide a broad overview of whole Bible
 - b) Finding out how the Bible all ties together historically
 - c) The Bible tells about Jesus from beginning to end
 - d) Learn about the different books in the Bible
 - e) Who wrote different parts of the Bible and why



Spiritual Truths they Need to Hear:

- The Message of Salvation
- Teens are able to learn and understand profound truths from the Word of God
- God can be trusted at His Word
- They need to have a personal prayer life
- They need to read God's Word regularly
- God loves them and cares for them
- God has a plan for their lives
- That they can trust God with any secret
- That God's way is the best way

Other Ideas for Working with Pre-Teens

- ✓ Consider separating boys and girls into different small groups during discussion times
- ✓ Provide a nice, safe, place where they can burn off some of their excess energy
- ✓ Encourage activities outside
- ✓ Organize service projects that get them working together
- ✓ Plan Activities where you demonstrate normal social behaviors and good manners
- ✓ Involve a few, fun, older folks (they will serve as mentors and examples)
- ✓ Outings to various places/ camps/ etc
- ✓ Campfires – can have some fun, and also have some serious talks
- ✓ Make cookies or other baked goods for neighbors near church
- ✓ Visit the elderly of the church or a nursing home
- ✓ Help a widow with house or yard work
- ✓ Make blankets to give away
- ✓ Pair teens with younger children in other classes at church
- ✓ Have Small Groups
- ✓ Prepare a play for younger classes or for parents
- ✓ Have Bible Drills / Bible Passage Memorization

TEENS, AGES 14-18



At this point, pre-teens need to move into the youth group where they can grow into young adults. They will continue seeking independence from their parents, but still desperately need the security that the home provides. As teenagers, they will be moving into making big decisions that will affect their entire life.

Education and career goals will be made as teens finish high school. Dating and marriage choices will be made which will affect the society. A desire to live for God and serve Him through Baptism will often be declared during these years. Though the teenager appears confident and arrogant, they still need guidance in making life decisions from parents, strong leaders, and wise teachers.

Characteristics

1. Seeks own identity and purpose for their life.
2. Desires independence and individualism.
3. Forming their own personality rather than imitating others.
4. Has high ideals and standards for self and others.
5. Searching for his/her place in the church and society.
6. Learns to carry responsibility in the church and school.

How to help a teenager:

1. Be a reliable friend, teacher, mentor
2. Do not condemn the teenager but correct them when necessary
3. Bring them up in the Biblical Truth and in Christ
4. Work with them and guide the teenager to find their place in church and in life.
5. Give the teen your time

CHURCH YOUTH PROGRAM SHOULD INCLUDE THESE 10 GUIDELINES

1. Modeling

- a) Like Ap. Paul, the teachers are modeling Christ, and encouraging teens to follow them.
- b) Teachers are modeling in:
 - Spiritual Truth
 - Attitudes and behavior
 - Character, inside and outside the church

2. Learning

- a) Learning must be active. Help bring students to a place of obedience to God.
- b) Teachers must be learning, as well as encouraging students to learn.

3. Thinking

- a) Teenagers are still moving from concrete to abstract and from a literal thinking process to the abstract thinking process.
- b) We need to teach Biblical Truth in the context of a deep, personal relationship.
- c) Jesus taught through relationships.
- d) Do not be afraid to have a friendly relationship with teens.

4. Evangelizing

- a) Teach evangelism by modeling and by example.
- b) Take opportunities to share Christ with others, especially when teenagers are with you.

5. Multiplying

- a) Bring others to Christ.
- b) Build them up in the faith.
- c) Teach them to do the same.

6. Large and Small Groups

- a) Teens need identity in both large and small groups.
- b) Large groups are for services, worship, singing, prayer, sermons etc.
- c) Deeper relationships are made in small groups. (Bible studies, group work, etc)

7. Building Students

- a) Some students are leaders, find them and let them lead.
- b) Develop older students to lead Bible Studies.
- c) Give affirmation when they reach out to peers.

8. Building Relationships

- a) Teens are relational in their thinking.
- b) Seek to improve the student/teacher relationship.
- c) Focus on the quality of relationships, rather than the quantity of students.

9. Building Excitement

- a) We should show our excitement about Jesus and walking in His Truth.
- b) Our focus should be that every teenager may come to know Jesus Christ as Savior.

10. Building Environment

- a) Ask yourself, "What does the environment of my youth ministry reflect?"
- b) As quality relationships are built, so will the environment.

IDEAS FOR WORKING WITH TEENAGERS

- ✓ Create programs to develop unity and bonding in youth:
 - Camps
 - Retreats
 - Special events
 - Large group gatherings
 - Holiday events, etc.
- ✓ Visit outreach programs in the community
- ✓ Visit homeless shelters, food banks, soup kitchens, etc.
- ✓ Have teenagers volunteer in younger Sunday School classes
- ✓ Mid-week Bible studies
- ✓ Mid-week prayer meetings
- ✓ Teach children drama
- ✓ Organize children's play with teenagers
- ✓ Create Monthly Newsletter
- ✓ Develop student leaders
- ✓ Organize service project
- ✓ Organize outreach projects