



REDFIELD COLLEGE

Some notes on...

Parents and their Adolescent Children

Professor David Isaacs

Features of adolescence

- * Development of personal intimacy.
The wonderful discovery of one's interior world. An understanding of who one is, of one's individuality; a growing realization that one is an autonomous person, with far reaching decisions to be made, and goals and ideals to pursue.
- * Development of a capacity for critical thinking.
One begins to judge issues and act from inner principles, with depth of conviction. The virtue of prudence is the key to sound critical thought.

An adolescent is faced with the challenge of choosing the values which will lead him to happiness. The only true values are those which bring happiness not only in the future but in eternity.

During adolescence the major decisions of life are made. Adolescence can be said only to end when life goals are clarified and personal responsibility to pursue those goals accepted.

Some of the more superficial aspects of adolescence

- * self absorption...moodiness, introspection, indifference to others;
- * insecurity...peer dependence, impressionability, wanting to be noticed, comparisons with others;
- * anxiety and confusion...feelings of being unhappy, emotional and temperamental;
- * lack of motivation...laziness;
- * need for affection and attention...superficial relationships;
- * yearning for greater independence...argumentative, contesting authority, pulling back from parents.

Some proven approaches for parents

Refine family values. What are the **basic values** of our family which we want our teenagers to make their own? Can they see us trying to live these values ourselves? Can they see that these values are important to us? How can we use the things that interest our teenagers (TV programmes, books, entertainment, friends, social events, etc) to explore with them these basic values?

Focus on values, not on behaviour. Different behaviours or personal styles may be consistent with the same values. When a teenager's behaviour seems inappropriate, parents should consider, before reacting, "what value is underlying this". Also, help teenagers relate their behaviour to values.

Challenge your teenager to think critically. Encourage your teenager to judge events according to sound values.

Respect your teenager's intimacy Build your relationship on friendship and trust. Don't pry or spy. Realise that he is changing very quickly **on the inside**.

Foster generosity. Give him an example of parents who act consistently with values which are not selfish. Take him or encourage him to do deeds of service to others and works of mercy. Show him that happiness is tied to love and generosity.

Show affection, appreciation, and understanding. Listen to him. Try to look at issues from his point of view. Recognise and build on strengths and positive areas.

Ensure your teenager feels that it is **his** home. Less emphasis on conformity in a multitude of small issues. Ask as few "required" behaviours as possible. Fill your home with lots of good memories for your adolescent.

Foster a positive peer group for your teenager. As it is likely to have more influence than you do, be sure that the families of your teenager's friends share your values. Get to know the parents.

Set demanding but attainable goals. Teach responsibility with clear expectations, accountability, consistency, and follow-up. Require him to exercise **personal** responsibility for his actions.

Be seen to struggle to live up to your values. Win prestige in your teenager's eyes by your personal struggle to be faithful to your ideals and the family values. Avoid double standards. Look on the family budget as a numerical expression of the values of your family.

Show that living with faith is attractive. Do not compel adolescents to live their faith and to pray. Show that a personal relationship with God gives cheerfulness and meaning to one's life.