

Confirmation Parent Guidebook



“...Confirmed by the gift of the Spirit, that they give witness to Christ by lives built on faith and love...”

General Intercession from the *Rite of Confirmation*

Congratulations! Your child has chosen to prepare for the sacrament of Confirmation. You have been journeying with your son or daughter in this adventure of life and faith for quite a stretch. This is an important part of the road you are traveling; a chance to stop and view where you have been, where you are and where you are going both in your own life of faith and together with your child. As a parish community, we strive to support you and your family as you share life and faith with your adolescent.

This guidebook is a resource, a “trail guide” for your continuing journey with your young person. It is our hope that you will gain a few new insights and understandings about your teenager and your relationship with him or her. We offer an understanding of Confirmation that is based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In addition, Scripture reflections accompany ways that you can share faith with your teenager during the Confirmation preparation process. You will also find guidance in helping your child choose a sponsor for Confirmation.

Blessings for the journey!

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From One Parent to Another Guiding Your Adolescent

Adolescence ushers in a new era in family life brought on by new adolescent life tasks and the changing role of the parents in relationship to their adolescent children. The changes of adolescence—puberty, new ways of thinking, wider sphere of social activity and relationships, greater autonomy—present the family as a whole with a new set of challenges. In fact, it would be fair to say that the whole family experiences adolescence. The challenge for families with adolescents involves

- allowing for the increasing independence of adolescents, while maintaining enough structure to foster continued family development
- reflection by parents on their personal, marital and career life issues
- adjusting patterns of family communication, traditions, celebrations to accommodate the growing adolescent
- beginning the shift toward joint caring for the older generation, for some families

The task for most families with adolescents—and it is by no means an easy one—is to maintain emotional involvement, in the form of concern and caring, while gradually moving toward a relationship characterized by greater behavioral autonomy.

What if the period of Confirmation preparation for your child could become a time for you to reflect on this special and challenging time in your life as a parent—parenting an adolescent?

Parent-teen relationships will challenge everyone involved to grow. This growth involves a little pain. Here are a few of the issues unique to families with young adolescents and ideas on how individuals and families can facilitate growth. The following is adapted from Janet Drey's book, *Parenting for Faith Growth—The Young Adolescent Years* (published by the Center for Ministry Development).

Parenting Young Adolescents

Janet Drey

Challenging the Myths

Realizing a child is becoming an adolescent can be both exciting and traumatic for parents. There are many myths about adolescence which are not necessarily true; two of the most prevalent are:

- Adolescents and parents fight all the time.
- Adolescents are rebellious by nature.

To be sure, adolescents and parents do have difficulties—but then again, so do young children and their parents, and so do adults and their parents. The early adolescent years are a time of rapid change and frequent challenge, but most young people (and their parents!) survive it without serious problems. Understanding the nature and needs of young adolescents can be the best resources for effective parenting.

Changing Bodies—Shifting Self Esteem

During puberty, physical growth can be rapid and dramatic—perhaps three to five inches in a single year. If young adolescents feel awkward and gawky, it is because their bodies *are, temporarily*, out of proportion. And there is nothing they (or you) can do to speed up or slow down the process. At this stage in life when young people want more than anything else to be like everyone else, they find themselves the *least* alike. Physical, social, emotional, spiritual and intellectual growth happens at different rates *between* different youth as well as *within* each young person. A girl may look like a woman long before she feels like one inside. A boy may be mature in almost every way but still look like a child. We need to be sure our expectations are in line with our children's actual abilities, not based on their outward appearance. Young adolescents need to know that who they are and what they do is valued by their parents and others whom they respect. Helping young adolescents find new areas of strength and giving lots of praise and positive affirmation for their efforts goes a long way to bolster their sometimes tenuous self-esteem.

New Ways of Thinking—From “What is” to “What if”

Young adolescents are applying new thinking skills to the issues and situations they face in life. Family rules and beliefs that used to be taken for granted are now openly and regularly questioned. They are beginning to develop the capacity to think abstractly, although this shift can happen gradually and be experienced inconsistently. Often they will ask to be involved in planning and deciding family activities or guidelines: having their opinion valued is important to them. Their emerging abstract thinking can result in creative “what if...” alternatives as well as

persistent “how come...” challenges regarding what is “fair” from their perspective. It is important to include their input as appropriate, especially since they are more likely to be invested in the rules and outcomes if they are involved in the decision-making process.

Their increased thinking capacity also means they can think about what others are thinking. Often young adolescents perceive (and believe!) that *everyone* else is *always* thinking about them, which can lead to self-consciousness that may seem to be obsessive at times. Much time and energy can be focused on personal appearance in a concern over what others think about them. Parents can help by having empathy for their child’s self-consciousness, rather than judging it to be self-centeredness or selfishness. Understand and accept their questions, exploration of issues and testing of limits as a sign of growth. They need non-judgmental opportunities to express their new feelings, interests, abilities and thoughts to help them understand and accept the new people they are becoming.

Developing a New Sense of Right and Wrong

Young adolescents, to a large extent, make their moral judgments by what is expected of them by family, peers and other persons significant in their lives. They want to live up to the expectations of people they know and care about. They *want* to please, and above all, they want others to like them. In their expanding world, their desire to please now includes peers and other adults beyond their family. An effort to be popular can be heard in statements such as “But Mom, *everybody* does it.” A desire for approval can lead to unexpected behavior. A girl who was kind and generous in sixth grade may turn cruel and clannish in eighth grade to maintain her status with her peers. Eventually young adolescents will move on to more internal personal judgments of what is right and wrong, but this desire to please and be accepted by others is a necessary middle step. In the process of clarifying their values and beliefs they will also look to other adults beyond their parents as models and mentors. However, be assured, parents are still a strong and necessary influence on their moral formation.

Seeking Independence

Teenagers want and need to take charge of their own lives. Young adolescents may not know who they are yet, but they do know they are more than a parent’s son or daughter. Their growth toward independence is easy to mistake for rebellion. Young adolescents may begin questioning values, challenging opinions, debating rules and distancing themselves from you. At the same time they treat their friends as ultimate authorities on many aspects of life. This does not mean they are rejecting their upbringing. The first steps toward independence are almost always taken at home. This may cause a period of disequilibrium in families as individual family members adjust to the new person in their midst.

Growing Up Healthy and Holy!

What do you want your young person to become? How do you want him or her to grow up? What do you want your teenager's life to look like, both now and in the future? What picture do you have in your mind? These are critical questions for parents. Answering them can help shape the way we raise our children.

Perhaps this Confirmation preparation period is a time for you, a parent of a young adolescent, to identify how what you do as a parent influences -- in fact helps "build" -- your young person into a healthy adult. Perhaps this is a time for you to reflect not on what you don't want your child to become, but on the wonderful possibilities for your adolescent to be a healthy, whole, (and holy) human being. Your young person's development of essential life skills is a process of achieving wholeness and "holiness."

The **Search Institute** has identified forty developmental assets that are necessary in order for young people to grow in a healthy way. In *What Teens Need to Succeed* Peter Benson, Judy Galbraith and Pamela Espeland describe external and internal assets and ways that parents can help their adolescents develop these assets.

External Assets

External assets come from outside the teen—from you as parents, from other people, from institutions such as schools, churches and youth serving organizations. External assets are those that surround the young person with support, boundaries and structure. Have you ever...

- wiped your child's tear when he or she was hurt by a friend's unkind words?
- accepted him or her regardless of the hair style or the clothing?
- helped your child through the awkward physical and emotional growth points of adolescence?
- cheered on the sidelines during that football game or swim meet?
- encouraged your child's involvement at church?

These simple actions illustrate ways in which parents provide external assets for their adolescents.

Consider these tips to build the external assets of your child...

- ➔ Tell your child how much you love him or her—over and over, verbally! Adolescents are not "too old" to hear "I love you" from mom and dad.

- ➔ Young people need their “space”—allow your child his or her own space, but at the same time let them know you are available. When they need your attention, be present to them!
- ➔ Do you know what your child is thinking and believing? Ask!
- ➔ Adolescents grow much through relationships with other adults. Give your child opportunities to be with other adults, and know who these adults are; recommend that they ask other adult role models for advice.
- ➔ Ask your child, “what one new thing did you learn today?” While reinforcing the value of their education at school, expand their notion of learning beyond the classroom by helping them pull new learnings out of their day-to-day experiences.
- ➔ Ever find yourself in a bind, not quite knowing how to deal with a particular situation with your son or daughter? Talk with other parents of adolescents, or those who have raised teenagers to get feedback and advice.
- ➔ Be consistent! If you and your child negotiate rules of behavior, stick to them!
- ➔ Put a family calendar up in a prominent place (refrigerator door?!) where your teenager can track his or her activities as well as those of the rest of the family.
- ➔ Do you know who your young person is hanging out with after school, at the dance or mall this Friday night? Ask!
- ➔ Is your home the neighborhood teenagers’ hangout? Inviting your child’s friends into your home is a great way to get to know them.
- ➔ We want our children to be involved in Church. What do you model? Are you involved in the religious activities of your community?
- ➔ Participate in intergenerational religious education experiences, gathering with other families to learn, grow and live the Catholic faith.
- ➔ Participate together in the sacramental preparation of family members.
- ➔ Nurture an attitude of gratitude by asking family members each night to share one thing for which they are grateful.
- ➔ Pray at home individually and as a family at meal times, bedtimes or by means of a prayer intention board or book.

Internal Assets

Internal assets are commitments, attitudes, values and skills that support youth from within. These are assets that parents support, encourage and nurture through modeling. Have you ever

- modeled a commitment to lifelong learning by reading or taking a night class?
- volunteered as individuals or as a family in the community?
- involved your young people in family decisions?
- welcomed your child’s friends into your home?

Actions such as these can nourish internal assets in your young person.

Consider these tips to help build the internal assets of your child...

- ➔ Are you a motivated learner? Model interest in learning for your children.
- ➔ Share your life goals, dreams and priorities with your adolescents. Ask them about theirs.
- ➔ What's ahead in high school and what's beyond high school for your youth? Make a commitment to make post-high school education a reality for your young person.
- ➔ Gather as a family in service to others. Talk about why you are involved in outreach and what you as a family are learning. Nurture "serving" as an attitude of helpfulness.
- ➔ Include the whole family in discussions about which charitable organizations the family will make contributions. Use dinnertime to talk about world issues.
- ➔ Put downs and negative humor do not have a place in the family. Model respect and verbally acknowledge and appreciate the respectful actions of your child.
- ➔ Allow your teenager to express his or her feelings without those feelings being minimized. Model acceptance and listening, and teach your child to listen to others.
- ➔ Teach and model appropriate ways to show affection. Make sure that the family's expectations in this regard are clear.
- ➔ Young people need to learn how to make healthy decisions. Involve them in the family's decision making process and allow them to "learn" from their poor decisions.
- ➔ Be there to support your child in establishing and maintaining healthy friendships. Model healthy friendships yourself.
- ➔ Celebrate the things about your son or daughter that are unique. Affirm first! Seek out opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate the giftedness of your child.
- ➔ The dreams of your son or daughter are very real. Do not dismiss these dreams!
- ➔ Continue to grow in your faith through reading, informal discussion or participation in parish or community educational programs and share your learnings with one another in the family.
- ➔ Help your teenager make the connection between their life experiences and faith values, drawing on the rich resources of Scripture, Catholic Tradition and the faith traditions found in their ethnic heritage.
- ➔ Recognize the impact of media and learn to evaluate media critically in light of the life-giving values of the Catholic Christian faith.

Resources

- Benson, Peter and Galbraith, Judy and Espeland, Pamela. *What Teens Need to Succeed*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 1998.
- Feldmeyer, Dean and Roehlkepartain, Eugene C. *Parenting with A Purpose*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1995.

Sharing Stories of Faith

As important as faith may be, it isn't a normal topic of dinner conversation in most families with adolescents. Most often young people (and their parents) need a bit of assistance and structure in order to move faith to the forefront in family discussions. This activity takes a story sharing approach to discussing faith. It helps young people and parents articulate why faith is important to them and how they find it in the ordinary experiences of their life.

Reflect

Use any or all of the following open-ended sentences as a starting point for a family discussion on faith. Choose the questions together. Give people some quiet time to reflect on their responses before moving to discussion.

- ❖ Something that is really different about Catholicism today, compared to 20 or 30 years ago is....
- ❖ In my experience as a young teenager, attending Mass on Sunday.....
- ❖ A person who has really influenced my faith life.....
He or she influenced me by.....
- ❖ As a child, I was taught to pray..... Now I pray.....
- ❖ Something I love about being part of the Church.....
- ❖ A difficulty I have with the Church.....
- ❖ A time in my life when I really needed God was.....
- ❖ When I think about Jesus.....
- ❖ I believe faith is important because.....
- ❖ One of my favorite stories from the Bible is....., because....
- ❖ Doubts and/or questions I sometimes have.....
- ❖ When I experience doubt or confusion, I find it helpful to...

Share

Invite family members to share their reflections with one another. Some may find it difficult to share aloud the first time or two, so patience is essential. Just talking about faith together reflects its importance in your life and offers family members a chance to rethink how they see or experience faith. Here are a few hints on talking about faith with adolescents:

- ❖ Allow and encourage young people to be honest with themselves and with you about where they are at in their faith journey. For some young people faith is a certainty. For others it is a real struggle. Both faith stances can be very real. Both need to be respected.
- ❖ For many young people faith is most tangible when seen through the perspective of personal relationships and/or values. Raising the issue of who and what they believe in, and why, can be a fruitful starting point for discussions of faith.
- ❖ Be flexible in your conversations about faith. Discussing issues and questions of immediate concern to young people, even when the issues do not appear to be explicitly religious, can be a prelude to an encounter with the deeper questions of personal faith.

Pray

Close your sharing of faith stories with a simple prayer or Scripture reading.

What is Confirmation?

The Sacrament of Confirmation....

- ✦ welcomes us and deepens our belonging to the faith community
- ✦ deepens our relationship to God, as Creator, Redeemer and Spirit
- ✦ strengthens us as disciples

† **A Sacrament is part of the way that God loves us and calls us.** A sacrament is God's love expressed as free, undeserved gift.

- ✦ The Gift within Confirmation is that of strengthening us for discipleship and deepening our belonging to the faith community through the Trinity.

† **God uses visible signs to communicate invisible love.** To communicate God's love, God uses our senses: eyes, ears, touch, smell, and taste, and elements of our world.

- ✦ In Confirmation, the signs we will celebrate include being anointed with oil and the laying on of hands as we remember the water of Baptism and the nourishment of Eucharist.

† **God calls and invites; we respond.** An attitude of openness communicates a "yes" to God's invitation to a deeper relationship. This "yes" does not mean we know that we will always be faithful or that we are worthy of the gift. "Yes" means we are open to be strengthened by God who calls and loves us.

- ✦ In Confirmation, we have the opportunity to say "yes" through the various responses in the prayer.

† **The community witnesses to and celebrates the sacraments.** A sacrament is a powerful sign that God is alive and present in the world. As Church, we are called to be sacrament, that is to be God's hand and healing touch in the world. At the same time, we celebrate the sacraments as our most important prayer. This community that celebrates sacraments is global, reaching to other faith communities throughout the world and joined in a common bond. The community is also local as a diocese or archdiocese, as a parish and as a community of faith in families.

- ✦ In Confirmation, the community witnesses our celebration and provides a sponsor who represents the love of the community for us.

How Can I Support My Teen during Preparation?

✦ Confirmation *welcomes* us as a sacrament of initiation.

- ✦ Confirmation is linked to Baptism and Eucharist.
- ✦ Confirmation is part of our initiation into the faith community.
- ✦ Confirmation honors the spiritual maturity of the individual.

📖 Scripture Reflection

Each of you is a Son and Daughter of God because of your faith in Christ Jesus. All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with him. There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus. Furthermore, if you belong to Christ you are the descendants of Abraham, which means you inherit all that was promised. (Galatians, 3:26 - 29)

* Reflection

How has your Baptism shaped your life?

▶ With Your Teenager

- ➔ Celebrate the anniversary of his or her Baptism by remembering it in a special way—with a card, a special meal, a prayer with the family, a simple gift.
- ➔ Share how your Baptism has made a difference in your life.
- ➔ Pray for family members, pray together for the young people in the Confirmation preparation program.