

SPARK DISCUSSIONS—AND LISTEN

Engaging in conversations with teenagers can seem tricky or downright impossible at times. But it's easier when you learn to ask the right questions. Moving past simple "yes or no" questions and listening without judging helps create an open atmosphere in which discussions can flow naturally.

In his "Jesus-Centered Ministry" presentations, author Rick Lawrence shares a more proactive, penetrating, and "unlocking" way to pursue teenagers and get them to open up. His "shameless persistence" approach is based on how Jesus pursued people over and over—and how he still pursues us today. This approach uses questions that are:

- **Surprising**—The person doesn't see the question coming.
- **Specific**—It's a question about one specific thing, not multiple issues.
- **Personal**—It asks for a personal response, not a general or rhetorical one.

Examples include "What's something about yourself that you secretly admire, and why?" "Why are you drawn to the friends you have?" and "When you're really worried, what helps you feel at peace again, and why?"

Pursuing your teenagers this way may seem awkward at first, but the more you do it, the more you'll be able to unlock authentic places in kids' lives...and the more fun you'll have learning what makes them tick.

TIPS >>>

Youth minister Kent Julian offers these thoughts about great questions:

- They help you listen well, which is the most important principle of good communication.
- They show genuine concern for the other person.
- They make others recognize their importance.
- They turn listeners into learners and help learners see the bigger picture.

Here are some steps that have helped me boost my question-asking skills:

- I ask my family a lot of questions, especially at dinnertime. Examples include

"What was the best thing about your day?" and "How is [name] doing?"

- I always ask special questions on birthdays and holidays. "What was the best thing about this past year?" "What was the most difficult thing about it?" "What are three things you hope to accomplish or experience next year?" "How can I be a better parent [or spouse] next year?"
- I turn to question-filled resources, available from youth ministry publishers. Another great resource is a youth devotional Bible that's filled with in-depth questions about God, faith, and how we apply our beliefs to our lives.

—Group magazine

THE VIEW

- Only one-third of teenagers believe their parents are engaged in their lives enough to pursue them well. In a study, one young person said, "I want my parents to ask me about my day and care about what I answer."

—Families & Work Institute

- 40% of Christian teenagers say that although they're around their parents a lot, they rarely have long, enjoyable conversations.

—Group magazine

- 79% of parents say that by having dinner as a family, they learn more about their teenagers' lives.

—CASA Columbia

PONDER THIS

- In your efforts to converse with your teenagers, what strategies have been effective or ineffective?
- What changes in your question-asking and listening styles might you be able to experiment with?
- How can you use everyday interactions with your teenagers to convey your love for and interest in them?





“SENSE” A GOOD CHAT

Expert Insights for Parents of Teenagers

By Gregg Farah

Creatively applying the five senses helps turn an awkward moment into a positive, lasting memory. Use these ideas as a springboard for significant dialogue.

TASTE: Share a meal.

Food relaxes people. It's much easier to discuss important things when you're talking over lunch, sipping a Coke, or walking while eating ice cream. Use the sense of taste as an excuse to meet, and take advantage of the focused attention you get and can give over a meal.

TOUCH: Share an activity.

The sense of touch is simply a reminder that doing an activity

with a young person is a terrific discussion starter. Talk about the activity (your knowledge of it, how long you've been doing it, etc.) and then go deeper. The time spent engaging in a mutually enjoyable activity makes discussion easier.

HEAR: Share encouragement.

Use your sense of hearing to encourage your teenager by highlighting something he or she said or did. Statements such as "I heard that you..." or "I thought you made a great point when you said..." communicate value and worth. Once you share your encouragement, build on the conversation.

SMELL: Share a direct question.

This is a bit of a stretch, but "sniff out" the real issues. In doing that, you're better able to ask direct questions that deal with the heart of the issue. Teens, when approached with right motives, appreciate honesty.

SEE: Share a dream.

A young person's vision for the future reflects his or her self-worth. Ask your teenager about goals. Start with one-year goals and move to five-, 10-, and 20-year goals. Challenge kids to consider what they want said about them at their funerals. Share your excitement with your teenager's goals and use them to delve into related topics.

—SimplyYouthMinistry.com

RESOURCE



JCQ's: 150 Jesus-Centered Questions (Group Publishing) offers loads of surprising, in-depth questions about Jesus that will help young people grow in their desire to know him better.

BIBLE FOCUS

Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.

Colossians 4:6

MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

MAINSTREAM MUSIC



DIERKS BENTLEY

Background: This country-bluegrass singer has numerous platinum-selling albums. Now 36, he's one of the youngest singers to be inducted into the Grand Ole Opry. The tours he's been part of provide clues about his songs: High Times & Hangovers Tour, Country & Cold Cans Tour, the Jägermeister Tour, etc.

Albums: *Home* (2012), *Up On the Ridge* (2010), *Modern Day Drifter* (2005)

What Bentley Says: Regarding "Tip It on Back," Bentley says, "It's just really, really hard for people right now. A lot of people are out of work and sometimes you need a break and you say, 'You know what, I'm going to drink a little more than I should.' ... I think the idea behind the song is every now and then you've got to blow off some steam. And I think that's what a Friday night is made for."

Explore: In the video for "Am I the Only One," Bentley implies that hanging out with your wife and not drinking is lame: youtube.com/watch?v=Bkzp7Gp2kEU.

CHRISTIAN MUSIC



THEORY HAZIT

Background: Raised by relatives, Razit was exposed to hip-hop at an early age and became instantly enamored. He's honed his skills over the years and is becoming popular in the world of Christian hip-hop. Razit isn't afraid to talk about the mistakes he's made or the challenges that come with being a stepfather. His latest album is a terrific alternative to secular hip-hop.

Albums: *Thr3e* (2012), *Extra Credit* (2007)

What Hazit Says: "There's not much talk about love. People are just out to get theirs. Life has its ups and downs, and there's nothing perfect around it. Focusing on God and relying on God...that helps you to endure the struggles and obstacles that come your way."

Explore: You can download Hazit's latest album, *Thr3e*, for free at humblebeast.com.

MOVIES

Movie: *John Carter*

Genre: Action, Adventure, Sci-Fi

Rating: PG-13

Synopsis: A former military man is inexplicably transported to Mars and gets caught in a conflict among the planet's inhabitants.

Our Take: Because this is a Disney film, expect lots of adventure, humor, and big special effects.

Movie: *The Hunger Games*

Genre: Action, Drama, Sci-Fi

Rating: Not yet rated (likely PG-13)

Synopsis: Based on Suzanne Collins' incredibly popular book trilogy, this film chronicles the trials of Katniss, a strong girl who must fight for her life in a deadly game run by a corrupt, oppressive government.

Our Take: This series is equally popular with both teenagers and adults. The Hunger Games themselves are kill-or-be-killed, so there's lots of violence. And there's a love triangle that has girls temporarily forgetting the Edward/Jacob wars.

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VIDEO GAMES



Mass Effect 3—The first two games in this role-playing series were at the top of nearly every Game of the Year list when they came out. So this third game has *big* expectations behind it. A commander of a starship and his motley crew of aliens must save the entire universe from a deadly and seemingly unstoppable ancient race. (Xbox 360)

Twisted Metal—This sequel to a classic game is all about vehicular combat and mayhem. Unique and crazy cars and drivers fight each other in arenas using various weapons—including the cars themselves. Four players can play local on a split screen, and up to 16 people can play online. The game is rated M for violence, blood and gore, and language. (PS3)