

SHE'S *Almost* A  
TEENAGER

ESSENTIAL CONVERSATIONS  
TO HAVE NOW

*Peter & Heather* LARSON

*David & Claudia* ARP



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This book is dedicated to our tween girls, Kate and Anna. Thanks for being such great sports and giving us so many stories to share with others. You are both a gift from God; we treasure who you are and are excited to see who you are becoming.

Thanks to all the parents and grandparents who have gone before us. You give us hope, encouragement, and direction.

*Peter & Heather*

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# INTRODUCTION

*Welcome to the Tween Years:  
Let the Conversations Begin!*

Ten-year-old Elle announced to her mom, “If I had my driver’s license, car, and apartment, I could live alone. I really wouldn’t need a mother.” She had always been a precocious kid, but this declaration got her mom’s attention. Had puberty just begun? Was it time to batten down the hatches?

Too often our daughters’ tween years are like a journey through a long, dark tunnel, and the only light to be seen is the oncoming train called adolescence! But don’t panic. Help is here, both for Elle’s mom and for you. In the following pages, we will help you prepare for and launch your daughter into adolescence. As you probably remember from your own tween and teen years, this can be quite a ride. It won’t be perfect or smooth every day, but we hope to arm you with some helpful thoughts and direction for the journey ahead. First, let us introduce the team who will be your coaches on this trip into the world of adolescence.

## Meet Heather and Peter Larson

We are right here with you on this journey, as we have tweens and teens in our own home. As parents of two tween daughters (Anna, age eleven, and Kate, age twelve) and a teenage son (AJ, age fourteen), we have treasured taking the time to write and talk through these essential conversations in our own family. Peter is a clinical psychologist and Heather is a life coach. Once upon a time, Peter was a youth worker and Heather taught fifth grade. We've had a lot of experience with children and have combined our professional and personal experiences to offer guidance and insight throughout this book. Gathering input from other families and working with Claudia and David Arp has been a blessing to us and will be an encouragement to you as well.

## Meet Claudia and David Arp

First, a disclaimer. We have three adult sons and no daughters. However, for many years we have helped parents launch their sons and daughters into adolescence and navigate the sometimes turbulent teenage years. We founded PEP (Parent Encouragement Program) Groups for Parents of Teens and wrote the book *Suddenly They're 13—Or the Art of Hugging a Cactus*. So we can share the experiences of many parents who do have daughters. We have three granddaughters who, of course, are perfect. (Just kidding!)

For this journey, Peter and Heather will be leading the way, as they are in the middle of the adolescent years. Rest assured that they understand where you are, so you'll easily relate to them. Peter's training as a psychologist and Heather's as a former teacher and current life coach are invaluable in giving you helpful advice and support.

We will be the behind-the-scene supporters, and from time

to time will share some “Arp Adages”—tried and true principles—as well as practical tips from other parents who have successfully navigated this passage. Years ago Dr. James Dobson helped us prepare for this stage of life in his classic book *Preparing for Adolescence*.

All four of us are standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. The Arps especially appreciate the wise counsel and advice from educators Bill and Kathy Clarke, who encouraged them to keep the lines of communication open and build the relationship with each child, and from Phyllis Stanley, who first shared the concept of preparing for the teen years through the vehicle of the Teenage Challenge (our Project Thirteen).

Our team would not be complete without you! You’ll be amazed how much wisdom and insights you already possess. You may be part of a couple, a single mom or dad, or a grandparent or other guardian who is parenting an impressionable young woman. Whatever your situation, you might want to pull others into your support circle. You can use this book in a small group with friends who also have tween daughters, and challenge them to experience these important conversations with their daughters as well. As parents, you can share your successes (and redos when things don’t go as planned) with each other.

You will discover that you are not alone in this process. You will also learn that each stage your daughter will go through is temporary, and each stage is leading to maturity! Thank goodness there is light at the end of the adolescent tunnel.

## **Why Conversations?**

One truth that continues to rise to the top is the importance of the relationship you have with your daughter today. Although this book is for you as the parent to read, our hope is you will have new questions to start a dialogue with your daughter about

the upcoming teen years. A conversation is an opportunity for you to be curious and really learn more about who your daughter is and who she is becoming. This isn't a typical parenting book with a "do this and expect this" kind of formula.

Instead, the following chapters include eight meaningful conversations, each crafted around a topic of interest to talk about with your daughter. These conversations are designed to help you both get ready for the years ahead. Reading the chapter will help you, the parent, prepare for a conversation to have with your daughter. We will look at the developmental process, biblical guidance, and plans for shifting more responsibility to your daughter as she matures. And for each conversation, we will provide questions and talking points for meaningful discussions together.

### ***Conversation 1: The Big-Picture Talk***

You'll talk about the shift that will be taking place and how over the next few years your daughter will go from childhood to being a teenager, and finally to adulthood. Together you'll talk through goals and the changing roles each of you will experience in the upcoming years.

### ***Conversation 2: The Friends Talk***

This conversation will focus on the natural shift in priority for tweens from family to friends. You'll have an opportunity to define together who she is becoming and talk about the importance of good friends.

### ***Conversation 3: The Academics Talk***

Together identify academic goals for your daughter during the teen years. Discover her strengths and challenges and plan together how to help her grow and reach her goals in school.

***Conversation 4: The Body Talk***

This conversation will help you navigate the upcoming wave of hormones sure to hit your home. You'll talk about body image, a balanced approach to food, and the responsibility of dressing modestly.

***Conversation 5: The Faith Talk***

Faith is the most important piece of who we are; it informs so many of our decisions. Your daughter will soon own her personal faith journey. Together, explore her plan for continuing to grow in her faith.

***Conversation 6: The Boys Talk***

Even though boys may not be a big topic yet, they soon will be! This conversation gives you both an opportunity to talk about the purpose of dating and describe the “dream guy.” There are several thoughts to help your daughter stay pure in an over-sexualized culture.

***Conversation 7: The Money Talk***

One piece of independence is finances. This chapter will give you questions to help you discern your daughter's awareness of money and handling finances. You'll discuss expectations for future financial responsibilities and begin discovering your daughter's financial personality.

***Conversation 8: The Tech Talk***

In our culture, many parents are confused about the differences between rights and privileges. This chapter gives you a formula for how to handle technology (or any other privilege)

using a series of questions to help you clarify the responsibilities and expectations associated with these privileges.

### ***Project Thirteen and Birthday Boxes***

This final chapter pulls it all together with two great ways to mark the transition from tween to teen to adulthood. Project Thirteen celebrates the arrival of the teen years with a creative opportunity for your teen to accomplish meaningful growth. The Birthday Box provides a clear road map for progressively releasing your daughter each year in several significant areas.

### **What's the Best Format? Weekly? Weekend Away?**

What's the best approach for you to initiate these conversations with your daughter? This depends on you and your daughter's style and personality. Some of you may find that a structured weekly date works well. For others, a weekend away together is a great time to discuss the conversations introduced in the book. Perhaps you prefer a more casual dinner conversation by picking a question each week to introduce to the entire family with more personal conversations to follow.

What if your daughter is not cooperative? You're thinking, *She'll roll her eyes if I even suggest a special date.*

Know your daughter. Some children like the formality of a special date. Others think it's corny or may feel like a "big talk"

ARP *Adage*

Times with your tween daughter can be bonding times that help you focus on your relationship and convey the message that you are excited your daughter is growing up.

is coming. Some parents will choose to read the book and be ready to discuss the topics as they naturally surface in daily living. The topics are core to most tweens' experiences, so you won't have to wait long before they begin coming up. One parent said, "I knew if I wanted my daughter to cooperate, I'd have to make it really low-key. I never used the term *special date* or labeled the time as a tween conversation. Instead I would use opportunities to ask questions when we were alone in the car or other natural settings."

### **Get Started!**

Your tween is quickly becoming a teenager. Fear not, help is here. Unlike other parenting books, there will not be a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, you'll be challenged to think through questions and see how your answers fit you, your family, and your unique and wonderful daughter. Make it work for your family. If you feel the need to rephrase the questions so they fit your situation better, go for it. Write down your own thoughts and notes in the margins as you read through each chapter. Decide what topics, questions, and conversations you want to use. If something in this book doesn't fit your circumstances, feel free to skip over it. We want this to be helpful to you and your daughter and not feel like a forced or contrived experience. Our prayer is that these essential conversations will set you and your family up for success and joy during the teen years and beyond.

## *Conversation 1*



# THE BIG-PICTURE TALK

## *Begin With the End in Mind*

“Where is my sweet little girl? Who has taken up residency in her body? I don’t recognize this new attitude! She doesn’t listen and questions everything. It’s a full three years until she is a certified teenager. If she is difficult now, what will the teen years be like? Any help out there?”

Nervous parents are realizing the “golden years of childhood” are ending earlier and earlier. Their precious eleven-year-old is beginning to show symptoms of adolescence. They’re scared. They feel unprepared. They’re panicked and don’t know how to prepare for the coming tsunami.

One parent gave an excellent challenge: “If you feel uncomfortable, embrace it!” In the following pages we want to help you embrace the coming years and develop your own balanced

approach to guiding your daughter safely into and through the teenage years and into adulthood. In each chapter we will frame questions to help you evaluate where you are in your relationship with your tween daughter, prepare for where you are going, and connect with her on a new level. These questions will be your guide for several essential conversations to have with your daughter now. Together, you can navigate successfully through the adolescent years and guide her toward maturity. Let's get started.

### ***Conversation Suggestions***

- Parents, start by reading the whole chapter before you start your conversation. This book is written for you; we don't expect your daughter to read it. Her only job will be to participate in the conversation with you.
- Consider each question, as well as the perspectives offered in the chapter, and be ready to discuss your thoughts on each question with your daughter. Feel free to take notes, underline, or adapt the question so it is worded in a way that feels most natural to you.
- Both the parent(s) and daughter are invited to answer each question, but we strongly recommend you let your daughter answer first. Give her the gift of being a good listener. Give her time to think, listen closely to her responses, ask follow-up questions, and respect her opinions. If you judge or criticize her answers, the conversation will quickly shut down. If you really listen and care about what she's saying, you're earning the right to be heard when it is your turn to answer. These are not questions that require quick or immediate decisions. For the most part, they are thought-provoking conversation starters.

## **“How Are You Feeling About These Upcoming Teen Years?”**

I am nervous about my future teen years. I am nervous about my friends judging me if I make a mistake. If I wear the wrong clothes or if I say something wrong . . . will they still be my friends?

—Sydney, age 10

Excited! I can see our daughter has a strong sense of herself stemming from her fabulous relationship with her father. I never had that as a teenager and therefore looked to boys to provide that sense of security. I can already tell that my daughter has a better sense of who she is without needing attention from a boy to make her feel confident outside of her father and her brothers.

—Kristin, mom of a 10-year-old daughter and her two big brothers, 15 and 12

I’m excited, but I hope I don’t struggle with school and friendships.

—Brynn, age 12

Nervous! It is sneaking up way too fast and I don’t know if I’m ready! I’m hoping that I haven’t completely messed up as a mom and that they feel just as amazing about themselves as I feel about them.

—Jennifer, mom of four daughters ages 10, 8, 6, and 2

Concerned. I can’t believe she wants to wear that! I know what boys are thinking!

—Craig, dad of two girls ages 12 and 10

Hopeful. Those years were incredibly hard for me. I had such a deep yearning for acceptance and tried lots of destructive

things to gain it. My hope is in a chance to walk alongside my daughter as she navigates these rough waters and whisper in her ear how amazing she is and how much she is loved. I want to help her discover her strengths and find her voice. Most importantly, I can't wait to know the young woman she is becoming.

—Amy, mom of a 10-year-old daughter and 8-year-old son

Unsure. I'm not sure how to relate to my little girl, who looks more and more like a woman. Is she still *my* little girl?

—Jon, dad of a 14-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter

I am anxious and excited for the teen years for my girls. I remember a lot of hurt feelings and confusion around who I was and what I wanted to stand for during my teen years. I'm hoping my girls don't make the mistakes I made during those years. I want to be a good support for my girls, but I'm worried I could be too much of a helicopter parent and end up pushing my girls away.

—Rachel, mom of 8- and 12-year-old daughters and 15-year-old son

### ***From the Parental Perspective***

If you have wondered or worried about some of these same thoughts, you're not alone! Parents often feel the stress of the teenage years coming and are not sure how to respond. We love our kids and don't want them to face the same difficult experiences we encountered in our own tween to teen transitions.

One extreme is for parents to close their eyes and just hope for the best. The other extreme is to hold on so tightly in an effort to control their daughter that she has no other option but to jump ship!

One thing is for sure. There is a predictable tension between parents and their tween/teen daughters. Friends of ours compared their experience of raising four daughters with the

metaphor of mountain climbing. Your daughter's job is to pull on the rope as she moves farther up the mountain, exploring and pushing herself. As parents, your job is to encourage her as you decide how quickly you can safely let out more rope. Climbers have a technique called "belaying," which exerts friction on the rope attached to the climber so they don't fall too far should they lose their grip. Just like belaying, there is healthy tension between parents and their daughters. When each is doing their job, it will result in some necessary friction. Rather than trying to figure out why there is tension, wise parents accept it and recognize it as something normal and needed.

### **"What is Your Goal?"**

Parenting with your goals in mind will help you navigate the teen years. After all, you wouldn't typically head out in your car without having a destination in mind. Likewise, you want to know where you are heading as a parent. The road may have twists, turns, or detours you aren't expecting, but at least you have a sense of where you are going.

It is easy to agree that the number one goal of parenting is to raise independent and well-functioning adults. However, this goal seems to be taking longer and longer today, as more and more adult children are living with their parents after high school and college. According to a Pew Research finding, 36 percent of eighteen- to thirty-one-year-olds are still living with their parents.<sup>1</sup> There are several economic and cultural factors contributing to the rising age for launching children, but without clear goals around independence, it will be even easier for your daughter to move back into her familiar home, where the laundry is done, the refrigerator is stocked, and the cable TV is free.

To this day, I (Heather) remember the conversation my parents had with me about becoming an independent adult. They clearly communicated that after four years of college, degree or not, I would be on my own. I would be responsible for obtaining my own car and place to live. This meant I would need to have a job and a plan upon college graduation. Talk about motivation! I did not feel rejected or pushed out by my parents, but instead empowered, challenged, and motivated to be independent and successful.

While independence is an important goal, it cannot come at the cost of the relationship between parent and daughter. Be

## ARP *Adage*

As we examined our own parenting and that of our friends, we noticed three different styles of parenting. Actually, we can compare parenting styles with the way we nurture plants. Consider the following three profiles.

### **The Smotherer**

The smotherer wants to stay in control and help the adolescent avoid mistakes.

Because of her fear, Erica shows a lack of trust and gives the impression that she is always trying to keep her daughter in the hothouse—holding her back as her daughter surges ahead toward independence. Just as plants that are kept in the hothouse too long become weak and root-bound, adolescents who are smothered may be unsure of themselves and unable to resist peer pressure. The teen who is held back may resent and reject her parents and their ideas.

### **The Pusher**

An equally disastrous approach is to push your children out of the hothouse too soon before they are strong enough to survive on their own. Mike is a pusher. He expects his daughter,

intentional about building and maintaining a strong relationship with your tween—it's a key factor in being able to successfully navigate the adolescent years. But it's extremely hard to develop that relationship during the teen years if you haven't worked on it previously. Build relationship with your children early. Do it now. Don't wait until later.

Peter has started by taking our twelve-year-old daughter, Kate, for a weekly date. They may choose to go for a bike ride or out for an ice cream. I (Heather) have found that most nights the kids will still let me tuck them into bed and pray together. This is often the time when our kids are willing to open up

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Sarah, to become an adult overnight and gives freedom too quickly. His daughter doesn't have the maturity to consistently make wise choices and can easily become a peer-pressure victim. Where is the balance between being a smotherer and a pusher? Consider one other option.

### **The Releaser**

Young seedlings must be acclimatized gradually to the new environment in which they will grow by allowing them short times in the sun and wind with temperature variations in the real world outside the greenhouse. They must have a "hardening-off" period. If the tender young plants aren't given this period to adjust, many will wither and die. However, if they are properly trained for survival in the new environment in which they are to grow, they will thrive.

Children also need a "hardening-off" period, which gives them limited freedom and increased responsibility under the watchful direction of their parents. Wise parents release them gradually. Your interaction with each other, which is greatly influenced by your parenting style and different personalities, will provide a foundation for helping your future teen enter the outside world.

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## ARP *Adage*

The challenge is to help her leave prepared to face life as an adult, and also with a positive relationship with you! So take the time now to set goals and come up with your plan of release.

about their day, ask questions for tomorrow, and let down their guard, allowing for increased connection. I'll never forget the first time I asked my daughter, "What would you like me to pray for you?" The answer revealed struggles I'm sure she would have not shared otherwise. Try asking this question and see what you learn about how you can pray for your daughter tonight!

In addition to having a great relationship with your adult daughter, what other goals are important to you? What are your goals for your daughter spiritually, academically, relationally, physically, or financially? We want to help you think through these areas in the upcoming chapters as you develop your own plan.

### **"What Should the Majors and Minors Be?"**

Too often we tend to major on the minors. Having a clear sense of your parenting goals will help you identify what are the "majors" on which you will hold firm and what are the "minors" you can easily let go. Try asking your daughter today, "What are the things we as parents major on?" You may be surprised by an answer like this: "Always have a clean house, be on time, and brush my teeth and hair." Really?

If a goal is to focus on your daughter's character—respect, honesty, independence, strength in the face of peer pressure—how much time are you majoring on these things? It's easy

for a teen to believe the majors are clothes, clean rooms, and less screen time and candy, when a parent spends the majority of conversation and energy on these topics. Through years of experience, the Arps have become experts on this topic of majors and minors.

Several years ago, we (the Arps) were the keynote speakers at a weeklong family conference. Most of our keynote addresses were to the parents; however, on this evening the teenagers were also part of our audience. But from the expressions on their faces, we could sense that they would rather have been anywhere else!

First, we thanked the teens for dragging their parents to this meeting despite their uncooperative attitudes. A few chuckles encouraged us to continue. Then we introduced the topic of majors and minors. “What are the things your parents major on?” we asked. Before we knew it, we had filled a chalkboard with everything from writing thank-you notes to eating breakfast.

Then we asked the parents what things their teenagers considered majors. It was obvious these parents and teenagers didn’t live on the same planet! No wonder they seemed at cross-purposes.

Next we did something that at the time seemed risky. We asked individual families to dialogue together on what should be the majors and minors in their home and to do some negotiating.

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We need to decide on the majors because you simply cannot major in everything! Ask yourself this question: *Do the major issues coincide with what I am saying to my children every day, or am I majoring on the minors?*

But before deciding if an issue was a major or minor, we encouraged them to ask two questions:

1. Is it a moral issue?
2. What difference will it make in light of eternity? Or even ten years?

Amazingly, as we looked around the room, parents and teens were actually talking with each other! Later, several parents told us that this evening was the highlight of the whole week. Years later we continued to get good feedback. Some of the families got on the same page for the first time as to what their majors and minors should be. Such cooperation in families with adolescents usually doesn't happen spontaneously.

Asking yourself "What battles do I want to pick?" is another way to identify the majors and minors. Some topics to consider putting in the minor list may be clean rooms or hairstyle. You may want to save your ammunition for the more important battles to come. Wise friends of ours, Jim and Suzette Brawner, raised three amazing kids, so we were naturally excited to hear their thoughts on parenting as we were just starting our family. They told us about this idea of picking your battles. They identified three "majors" as they determined, choosing the three battles they were willing to fight. When their child made a request, they would ask themselves, "Is this dangerous, immoral, or illegal?" If not, they would often give their child the go-ahead. Filtering through these three criteria made it easy to know the answer if their daughter wanted to dye her hair blue or spend her money on some crazy new fashion. Since it wasn't dangerous, illegal, or immoral, the answer would be yes. Their daughter never did ask for blue hair, but their answer was ready. One youth pastor wisely said, if you can wash it out, cut it off, or grow it out, don't have a tizzy—it's not worth it!

Another helpful question the Arps encourage parents to ask is “What difference will this make in the light of eternity?” This powerful question brings great perspective. Your daughter does not need you nagging her over minor issues. Withstanding peer pressure, developing a positive attitude, and learning good decision-making skills are the more important issues of life.

Let us say it one more time: Major on the majors and minor on the minors. Some battles with adolescents are not worth waging war—plus you will lose the war. Psychologist Dr. James Dobson was asked why, when discussing adolescents, he focuses his comments on parents instead of on adolescents. He responded that when a teenager is about to go over the falls and he is intensely angry and is being influenced by a carload of crummy friends, it’s the parent who can make the difference. In his newspaper column, Dr. Dobson cautions parents about being idealistic and perfectionists. It’s easy to rock the boat. He writes, “Be very careful with him. Pick and choose what is worth fighting for, and settle for something less than perfection on issues that don’t really matter.” Dr. Dobson’s good advice

### ARP *Adage*

Your job as a parent is to work yourself out of a job and into a relationship that will last for a lifetime. By the time we had the answers to our kids’ questions, the questions changed. It seemed we were always regrouping. The paradoxical statement, “We change in order to remain the same,” certainly applies to parenthood and to parenting adolescents. We constantly change the way we relate to our children over the years. We didn’t treat our eight-year-old the same as we did our toddler. But it all happened so gradually that we didn’t realize we were changing in order to remain the same loving, caring parents.

applies equally to adolescent girls as to adolescent boys. He says, “Just get him through it!”<sup>2</sup>

### “How Should Our Roles, as Parent and Child, Adjust as We Age? (What is My Role?)”

Each developmental stage requires different skills or roles as parents. Here are some ways to think about common stages and the roles parents can play in each season of development.

**Newborn/Infant Constant Caregiver:** When your daughter was born, she came into the world completely dependent on you as her parent to care for her every need. It is a parent’s job to feed, bathe, and help her survive! These are the hands-on days of parenting that require twenty-four-hour vigilance. She depends on you to meet her every need. Care for her spiritually in these days as well by lifting her up in prayer. Many parents start praying for their child before they are even born or conceived. Do not underestimate the power of praying for your daughter. Prayer is key for you, your marriage, and your child to thrive!

**Toddler/Elementary Age Teacher:** As the baby girl grows and begins to toddle around, it is a parent’s job to teach. Teaching how to do basic things such as feeding herself, walking, using the toilet, and brushing her teeth are just a few. Parents also begin teaching acceptable ways to talk, respond when given things, ask for things, and play with others. As your daughter

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Sometimes you need to simply listen to your children and save your advice for the family dog!

grows and heads off to school, she will have more experiences with other teachers, coaches, and instructors.

Through the elementary and tween years, your teaching role continues as parents teach how to handle simple chores, how to make choices in getting dressed, or decide what activities to try. Parents have an opportunity to teach family values and spiritual truths during these years. As your daughter is exposed to more and more instruction from others, you have the chance to talk about how to respond with grace when someone believes something you and your family do not hold to be true. Maybe your tween will start asking new kinds of questions about why you believe what you believe. Be honest and open to her questions. It will help you as you move into the next parenting role: parenting teenagers.

**Tween/Teen Coach:** A coach comes alongside and encourages, challenges, and guides someone. One powerful tool for a coach is asking open-ended questions, allowing a person to consider for him or herself what makes a good decision.

As a coach, try answering a question with a question: “Well, what do you think of that?” or “What do you think is the best thing to do in this situation?” It’s easy to give instant answers, so as parents we have to check ourselves before we offer advice.

Coaching requires less talking, teaching, or “lecturing,” as perceived by teens. Instead, there is more listening. A good coach will help uphold goals for her player, so when she is feeling discouraged or like “it’s too hard,” she has someone to remind her of who she is, where she is going, and all the help she has to get there. The teaching from previous years will help her remember these foundational truths.

**Young Adult Consultant:** As parents, your job is not over. The role of consultant is still important but requires less daily energy

from you. A consultant is someone who your daughter may choose to call upon or not. Just like a consultant, she may choose to take your advice or leave it. She is now an adult and will be able to make her own decisions and choices.

Remember, prayer is important in every stage of parenting. Ephesians 1:16–18 says it well:

I have not stopped praying for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.

Adjusting our roles as parents can be subtle but necessary. Take for example one mom's experience of shifting her role. As a former teacher, Amy knew the importance of being firm yet loving with her kids. When her three children were in the toddler and elementary years, she knew how to direct and instruct her children. Her punishment was always firm and fair. There was no room for these kids to talk back or have a fit to change her mind. This parenting style was working great for these young kids who understood the word *no* and responded with respect and obedience. As her children grew, this approach continued to work well with her oldest daughter, who was easygoing and always a pleaser, but when the middle child, Hailey, turned thirteen, Amy noticed this firm teaching style wasn't working as well.

Here's the story. Hailey had been invited to go mountain biking with some friends. Her bike had a flat tire and her parents were out on a walk, so she decided it must be okay to borrow Mom's bike for the off-road excursion. When she got home, she found her mom was not pleased she had taken the bike without permission. To make matters worse, the tire rim had

been bent on the outing and was going to require a repair and perhaps a new tire.

Without any hesitancy, Amy told Hailey her consequence would be to pay for the tire repair. Hailey wasn't too excited about this, but there was no talking back. It all seemed to be going as it had in the past: child misbehaves, parent gives natural consequence, child accepts consequence and hopefully learns valuable lesson and doesn't repeat the misbehavior. End of story.

Well, not quite. Hailey had been baby-sitting for a neighbor for an entire month in an effort to earn some extra money. She had been looking forward to taking the money and enjoying some outings with her friends at the mall. On payday, Amy came to collect the money from Hailey to pay for the bike repair. This is when the wheels came off!

Instead of obediently handing over the money to Amy, Hailey argued and pleaded. Finally, out of frustration, Hailey took off to her room and slammed the door, leaving Amy confused and frustrated. As a mom, Amy wanted her daughter to know she loved her, but she also needed Hailey to understand the importance of taking personal responsibility for making her mistakes right. She might be learning the personal responsibility, but she could see Hailey was not feeling loved at the moment. Amy realized she needed to try another approach.

After they both had some time to cool down, Amy invited Hailey to come sit by the fire pit in the backyard. She let her

ARP *Adage*

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). Before speaking, ask yourself, *Will what I'm about to say build up and encourage my child to grow as a person, or will it attack and tear down my child?*

know she would like to try a new method of communication where they each take turns sharing their thoughts and feelings as the listener reflects back what they hear and validates the speaker's feelings. First Hailey shared. Amy listened as she explained how hard it was to have worked so hard to earn this money for a month and how frustrating it was to just hand it all over for a bike tire. She felt completely deflated.

Then Hailey got a chance to listen as her mom explained how frustrated she was to come home from her walk and find not only her bike gone without her permission, but damaged upon return. She asked Hailey if she could explain how the tire got bent. Hailey had a chance to confess what had happened. She explained how she and her friends took a wrong turn and were stuck behind a fence. She thought she could just toss the bike over the fence and it would be okay, but it's probably when the tire got bent. It had been an accident.

Since much of Hailey's frustration came from having to hand over all of the money at once, she asked Amy if it was okay to give half the money to cover the tire and then come up with a payment plan to cover the rest of the cost. This seemed like a reasonable compromise to Amy.

But the best part of the story was still unfolding. After Amy took the time to really hear and understand Hailey's feelings and show her love and grace, while staying firm on her principle of responsibility, Hailey shyly asked to sit in her lap! This big thirteen-year-old wanted to be hugged and held. Hailey knew she was loved. She was no longer closed off in her room in anger and frustration. Amy saw changing her role from the teacher and instructor to the curious coach was the way to keep Hailey's spirit open and help her take ownership of her behavior.

## ..... CONVERSATION STARTERS .....

You are ready now for your conversation with your daughter. Remember, you'll want to share your thoughts and hear your daughter's ideas about the following questions. These are questions your daughter may not have thought of before. It will be helpful for you to share your thoughts and excitement for these next years with her so she can start thinking about the transition from tween to teen as something positive too. A conversation is both of you talking. Ask questions. Share your answers to the questions and listen to her ideas. No one enjoys a lecture!

1. "How are you feeling about these upcoming teen years?" Be honest. You want your daughter to be able to share honestly how she is feeling. You may want to share the qualities and attributes you see in her that will help her navigate these upcoming years.
2. "What is your goal?" Share your hopes for your daughter and ask her to share her dreams too. She may not have thought much about these years. Encourage her to dream about them.
3. "What should the majors and minors be?" Ask your daughter what she thinks are the majors and minors in your family. Take this opportunity to share your goals and ways you could together let go of more of the minors and focus on the majors.

4. “How should our roles, as parent and child, adjust as we age?” This may be a tricky question for your daughter to answer. Start by sharing your role of shifting from being the teacher to the coach—wanting to start thinking things through together, empowering her to have some input rather than you always being the lone parental authority.