

Introduction

Engaging teens in conversation can be challenging, particularly around such complex issues as dating and tending to one's physical and mental health. This also rings true for discussing faith beliefs and practices. It is vital to approach each topic with an openness to a young person's views while also providing gentle guidance and direction. This series of booklets provides a range of ideas for approaching these topics with sensitivity and openness. The booklets' authors provide helpful information about the topic, along with suggestions for conversation starters and activities that are grounded in faith and rooted in loving concern for a young person's well-being and growth. Prayers for and with the teen conclude each section. Parents as well as youth ministers, catechists, teachers, and confirmation sponsors will find these useful in developing a deeper connection with their teen's life and concerns.



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What forms us in faith? It's never just one thing. I was shaped by the way my mother takes delight in the created world, living out a sacramental faith that finds God in all things. I was shaped by my father's firm commitment to doing what is right, which was demonstrated in hard work and generosity. I was shaped by seeing my family pray, by teachers who shared their love of God in the classroom, and by a parish that felt like a community.

Talking to teens about faith is one piece of the puzzle, one way to make clear why we make certain choices and what values are most important to us. Many topics of faith are abstract, and few have tidy answers or platitudes that we can fall back on. It's okay to admit you don't have all the answers and to offer your thoughts and guidance anyway.

Young people (most people, really), want to hear someone share from their heart. Hopefully, some of the introductory material in each section will prompt your thinking and praying over these topics so that you can identify what your priorities are in sharing faith and what will work well in your context. Though it might be easy to get discouraged by a lack of response, in my experience teens are listening and taking to heart what they hear far more often than they let on.

When the time comes, dive into these conversations and trust God to work on the hearts of all involved. We share faith with young people because we believe it will enrich their lives. It's worth the effort.

Talking to teens about Faith

A commitment of heart and will to love God and neighbor. Trust in God's ability to pull goodness out of suffering. A comforting awareness that you were created out of love. All of these can be ways to describe faith. Faith is not uniform; every person experiences and expresses it differently.

Faith has an element of mystery that can challenge those among us who like neat and tidy answers. But we are not machines that can spit out a certain formula of faith if we put the right ingredients together. God calls to the uniqueness of each person. There are, though, some ingredients we can feed ourselves to become more faithful in whatever form that might take.

- **Use your mind and senses to look for God.** Faith is like a friendship, and friendships thrive in familiarity. Daily beauty and blessings reveal God all around. Reviewing our day each evening can show us where God was stirring our heart.
- **Let yourself be inspired.** When you feel God urging you toward a good action, don't resist. God's love wants to spill out into the world.
- **Commit to faith.** Inspiration is not always plentiful, so we have millennia of tradition to show us how to stay devoted even when our feelings are a little dry. Go to Mass. Recite vocal prayer. Do acts of service. Behold beautiful things. Listen to others.

Ultimately faith is God's gift to us, but we have control over whether we accept that gift fully or not. Obstacles and distractions are plenti-

ful. If faith is a value, make room for it to grow in your life, and stay open to God's grace.

Suggestions for catechists

When appropriate, share a brief personal example related to a lesson, such as mentioning devotion to the Eucharist or how you have been drawn to a particular kind of prayer. Students learn from models of faith.

When learning about saints or historical role models, try to isolate what elements of faith might have inspired them based on what they focused on. Examples: Jerome showed his love of the Scripture by translating the Bible; Katharine Drexel showed her belief that God loves all equally by educating African American and Native American students.

Suggestions for confirmation sponsors

Ask your teen why they picked you as a sponsor. Learn which of your faithful qualities they admire, and share in turn what gifts of faith you see in them.

Suggestions for parents

Be attentive to what faith might look like for your teen. For one, it might result in quiet hours spent with books or art, but in another, it might lead them to march out and try to change the world. Encourage them to think about what motivates their inner growth.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What is a recent experience that prompted you to act on your values?
- When are your values hard to stick with?
- How would you define faith?

Prayer for teens

God, help this child to grow in knowledge of you and in commitment to living out your commands.

Talking to teens about God

I hesitate to even start writing about God. There is so much to say about our God of mystery and power, and every word feels like an opportunity to say the wrong thing. But I just can't help myself, because every word is also an opportunity to share my enthusiasm for the One who creates, redeems, and sustains us.

I turn to Scripture for a place to start, where I read that God is love, like a Father who embraces and a Mother who gathers her offspring. God is gracious and merciful, a good shepherd, a consoling breeze.

God is Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Different people with different spiritualities may be more drawn to one of God's three persons. Teens often find themselves drawn to the person of Jesus, who showed so much of who he was and what he valued in his earthly life.

God's power is always directed toward love. Even biblical stories of destruction or punishment are followed by a re-embrace of God's people. We are part of that people. We are longed for by the God who loves us. The magnificent God who made the winds and the waves also wants to know us and shape our hearts.

Suggestions for catechists

Spend time with the parables to explore images of God.

Prepare a guided meditation that walks students through each person of the Trinity, using Scriptural examples to give insight into each.

Use passages from spiritual writers as an opening prayer or reflection for a session, opening student's eyes to the diverse ways we experience God.

Suggestions for confirmation sponsors

Spend some time thinking about your image of God. Maybe there is one from Scripture, like the Good Shepherd, that is meaningful to you. Having thought this through may make it easier to ask your teen what their image of God is. Don't be bashful. Your teen asked you to sponsor for a reason, so be bold in discussing these themes.

Suggestions for parents

Don't speak about God as if God isn't in the room. Casual uses of the name of God don't go unnoticed.

If you have an observation of God, share it. A connection to a story about Jesus, a sudden feeling of consolation, a burst of inspiration—each of these can be God working in your life. A teen might need those connections made explicit until they come to understand them themselves.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Are there specific images you think of when you imagine God? Where do you think those came from?
- The Bible says God is love (1 John 4:8). With this in mind, where do you see God in your life?

Prayer for teens

God, nothing is more important than that this child comes to know you personally. Thank you for wanting to be with them; guide me in helping them see you everywhere.

Talking to teens about Prayer

There are as many ways to pray as there are people. God wants a relationship with us in all our uniqueness and specificity. Prayer is bringing our hearts, minds, and souls to God.

It may be helpful to also bring our bodies to prayer. We adopt a particular posture. We visit a sacred space that inspires us with beauty, history, or companionship. But the communion with God that we seek is not limited by place.

As you think about your prayer life, what stands out? Are you inclined to spontaneous moments of prayer, or are you more moved in planned and scheduled prayer time? Do form prayers such as the Rosary, with all the tradition they bring, help you speak your heart? Do you find God in the silence of adoration and meditation, or in the bustle of service and gatherings? Does prayer inspire you to create things like poetry, music, or visual art?

None of these is better or worse than others, though I find that it's wise to balance the methods that come naturally to me with those that take a little more self-discipline. We are blessed to have such a rich menu to sample from as we grow in prayer. Teens can experience these in developmentally appropriate ways, recognizing some of the limits on attention spans while also challenging them to push their limits.

Suggestions for catechists

Set up a “prayer sampler” activity with different stations that students rotate through. Activities might include saying a decade of the Rosary, creating prayerful art, being led in an examination of conscience or

guided meditation, or experiencing eucharistic adoration. Ten to twenty minutes of each can give them a taste while keeping them engaged.

Suggestions for confirmation sponsors

When you feel your heart moved with love and care to pray for your teen, make sure to let them know. Be specific about what your hopes are for them, and share the faith you have that God will look after them.

Suggestions for parents

Make frequent, casual references to prayer to demonstrate that this is something that you do regularly.

Commit to a regular experience of prayer, either at home or at your parish, in addition to the celebration of the Eucharist.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- When was the last time you experienced silence, and what did it make you think or feel?
- Do you every have strong experiences of positive emotions like love or gratitude? Those are also moments of prayer.

Prayer for teens

God, guide this child in prayer so that they may come to know you better. Enter their heart so that they are filled with your love and goodness.