

# Parents - Show Your Teenagers You Care!



*Are you presenting God's way of  
life to your teenagers in a positive light?*

By Richard Rice

**I**t is Monday morning at the local high school in a midwestern U.S. town. As Susie, 15, walks to her locker, she is surrounded by several jubilant friends. They are all excited about the weekend just past.

"Oh, Susie, you should have been at the football game Friday night!" they exclaim. "We won! And the party afterwards was a real blast. Some really neat guys were there from out of town!"

Dejected, Susie trudges to her first period class. "Why is my life so dull?" she ponders. "Why can't I have an exciting life like my friends? I don't want to break God's Sabbath or go out with guys in the world, but Mom and Dad don't seem to understand that I need recreation and excitement.

"Since we came into the Church, our lives have become so dry and boring. We seldom do anything as a family, and Mom and Dad don't want to bother taking me and my brothers to Church socials."

Could your teenager take the place

of "Susie" in this scene? The above experience is not uncommon in God's Church.

## **Double responsibility**

Though many parents don't realize it, their teenagers are harboring deep resentments because they are deprived of recreational opportunities and regular social experiences. These teens are developing negative attitudes toward God's Church, not through any fault of their own, but because Mother and Dad have neglected their responsibilities.

Mark well this fact: Whether or not our teenagers stay in the Church and remain true to God's way depends largely on how well we present God's truth to them and relate its benefits to their lives.

The world seems to offer such tantalizing fun and glitter, and our children are naturally drawn to its perverted influence. Therefore, we have a double responsibility to not only point out to them the evil of Satan's society, but also to provide the kind of wholesome activities that properly represent the *better* way of God.

Every father knows that it is his duty to supply the basic necessities of

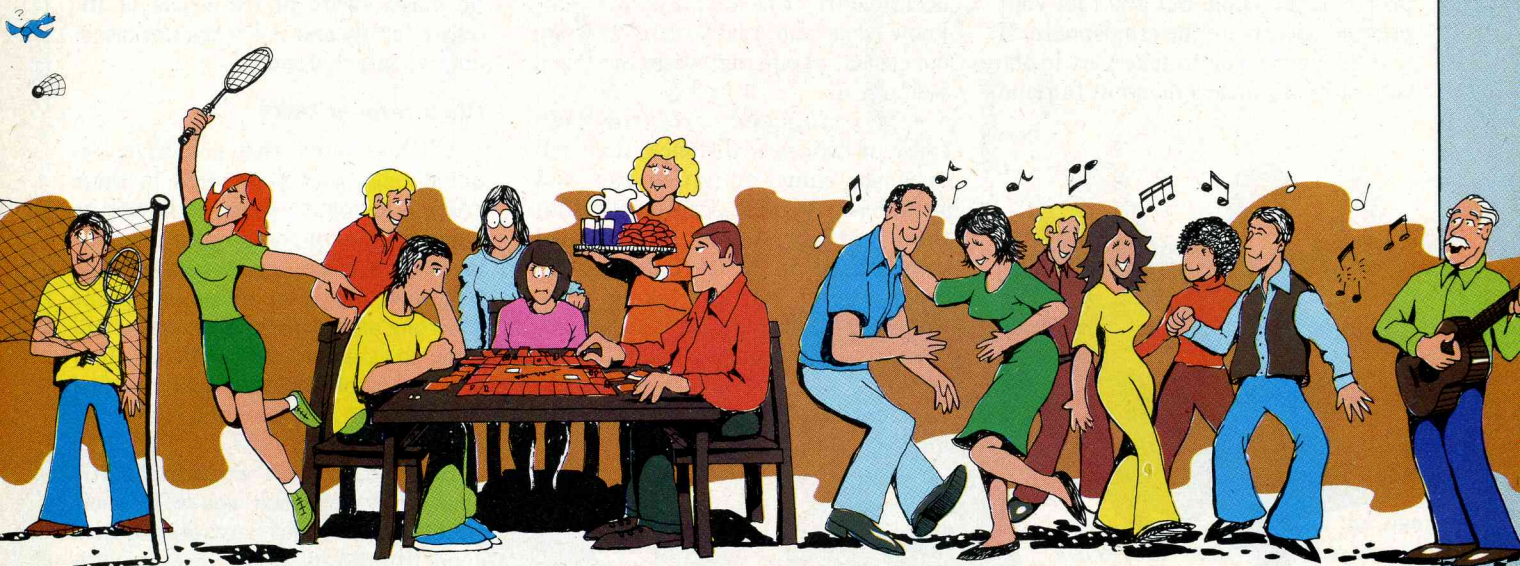
life for his children — food, clothing and shelter. Likewise, every mother knows that she's responsible for providing nutritious meals, clean clothes and a neat, attractive home.

But, how many parents realize that in addition to providing these basic needs, they are equally accountable to God for their children's social life? God's way of life is happy, exciting, abundant!

But too many parents seem to have overlooked their duty to present this aspect of God's way to their children. Thus, their kids may have become self-conscious social misfits, lacking poise and confidence and devoid of a proper, healthy respect for God and the Church.

Paul wrote, "Fathers, stop exasperating your children, so as to keep them from losing heart" (Col. 3:21, Williams).

Paul also states in I Timothy 5:8, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." While this verse basically means caring for the physical needs of a family, in principle it also means providing for their social, cultural and spiritual development.



God wants our teenagers to grow up to be intelligent, well-adjusted, happy men and women. Therefore he levies on us as parents the sacred trust of providing a rich and fulfilling life for them, so they become responsible individuals and an attractive light to the world.

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

### Never too late

Some kids were already teenagers when their parents were called into God's Church, and because of this the parents reason that there is little they can do to win the children over to God's way. Others who have been in the Church for years may not realize they are about to lose their teenagers to the world because the kids have been robbed of fun and excitement.

It's time to awaken to the seriousness of your responsibilities and realize it is never too late to change! Teenagers have natural, healthy social drives that cry out for fulfillment. Therefore, working with your teenagers should not be looked upon as a burden or an impossible task, but as a wonderful new challenge and opportunity. Granted, changing old patterns and approaches may require

much sacrifice, time and prayer, but the end result will be abundantly worth it!

Start by building a new relationship with your teenagers. Sit down with them and have a heart-to-heart talk. You might begin by reading and discussing this article with them, and telling them you are making a new commitment as parents. Taking the initiative may seem awkward and embarrassing at first. But it's necessary — it's your duty as a parent. And it will break the ice that has perhaps been there for years.

Draw your kids out and get them to talk about their feelings. Don't criticize or react negatively when they are honestly expressing their views. You want to know how they really feel about their family life, and they must be able to tell you without fear of rejection or recrimination. You want to get their total input as to how the situation in your home can be improved.

Ask for suggestions on what activities they'd like to participate in. Encourage open give-and-take communication while stressing God's wonderful way and the necessity to obey our Creator.

### Plan activities

In these family discussions — of which there should be many — you

and your children should plan small group activities with other teenagers in the Church. Include both boys and girls, so that they have the opportunity to interact with the opposite sex in a proper, wholesome environment.

Remember, we're not necessarily advocating single dating. Nor do we encourage building cliques. It is important, therefore, for your children to be exposed to a variety of friends. The purpose for these activities is to broaden their horizons and build their social skills.

There are several ideas you might work into your schedule as time, money and opportunity permit. These are activities you personally can plan, so as not to depend solely on the Church to fulfill your teenagers' social needs.

- *Saturday night parties.* Saturday night is an ideal time to plan get-togethers. Transportation problems and the soaring costs of gasoline can be minimized. Those who live in distant areas could plan to stay over from the Sabbath. Some types of activities you might consider are: card games, board games (Monopoly, Careers, Risk), sing-alongs, Bunco, Spoons, Charades or limited dancing.

Serve simple refreshments such as punch, popcorn and cookies. Perhaps the guests could chip in to help cut

costs. It is necessary to maintain proper supervision, but don't let your presence dominate the atmosphere. If the kids invite you to take part in the action, by all means do so in fun and



courtesy. But allow the kids to be themselves.

Occasionally, invite an out-of-town family with children the same ages as your kids' to spend the night. You could have a potluck dinner or some other special event on that evening.

After you've approved a given activity, let the kids do most of the planning and preparation. With most teenagers, anticipation is just as meaningful as the activity itself. But be available to lend your support.

- *Sports and games.* This category could involve limitless possibilities: volleyball, softball, croquet, basketball, badminton, soccer, dodge ball. You and your teenagers can no doubt think of many more. If you don't have space in your yard or immediate neighborhood for these games, check out a nearby park or school.

Again, the emphasis should be on group involvement to give your sons and daughters an opportunity for social mixing. Your direct participation in this type of outing may be especially helpful in bridging the gap between parents and youngsters.

- *Church activities.* Let your children get involved in church socials, dinners and outings. And get more involved yourself!

Throughout the year the Church will have several Youth Opportunities United (YOU) functions. See that your children attend if at all possible. Share transportation with other

families. Volunteer to chaperone occasionally, if needed. Let your kids know that you really care and are concerned about their happiness and welfare.

- *Miscellaneous activities.* Because of factors of distance, time and expense, some activities can and should only be held occasionally. But these outings should be included somewhere in your calendar of events: beach parties, hiking trips, overnight camping trips, all-day picnics, trips to the zoo or an amusement park.

Occasionally take in a special movie, play, concert, ice show,

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museum or art gallery or go sight-seeing or skating.

Some of the above suggestions may seem complicated or financially out of reach, but with careful planning and forethought workable solutions can be found.

If all parents in the Church cooperate and share responsibilities, no one family will need to suffer.

Suppose Susie had 10 to 12 of her friends in the Church over for a Saturday night party. If the parents of each of these friends in turn invited Susie for an activity, no hardship would be imposed on anyone too frequently.

To finance some of the more expensive outings, several children could launch a fund-raising activity.

In all fairness, the teenagers should be made aware of the needs of the entire family and not make unreasonable or selfish demands.

### Have regular talks

It's imperative that you have frequent talks with your teens in these crucial, formative years. It is vital to keep the lines of communication open to build a close family relationship. Your love for your children should be so strong and so obvious that they will want to come to you with all their personal problems and will not feel compelled to seek only the counsel of their peers.

Be kind, patient and empathetic when they approach you with their hang-ups, fears and frustrations. Be a good listener — don't rush in with advice until you've heard the whole story.

Treat them with respect, and as individuals. Consider their feelings. Be generous with praise in those areas where they are making progress.

Reinforce their good behavior by pointing out their strengths and successes. Gently correct their weaknesses.

For example, if a son or daughter is expressing a bad attitude in a sports activity or pouting about losing a game, bring this out during one of your talk sessions.

Continually encourage them to venture out socially in order to grow in confidence, culture and self-esteem. Teenagers need exposure and experience to round out their lives.

The more opportunities your kids have to interrelate with other teens in proper activities, the more well adjusted they will be as youngsters. And as adults, they will know how to conduct themselves with maturity and responsibility in most situations.

God has given a serious charge to us as dutiful, loving parents. We need to teach God's truth to our young people in the most appealing way possible.

Whether or not our teenagers survive the pressures of this world and respond to God's eventual call depends on how effectively we fulfill our responsibility to them now.

Let's prove to our teenagers that we really care! □