

# the basics

4

parent guide

## Parents as first teachers

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We strongly believe that parents have the greatest privilege and responsibility for developing healthy and godly character and skills in their children. This means that what your children are learning in their classes should find their way into your conversations and interactions at home. However, parents usually find themselves depending on their children to explain what they are learning and doing in their classes. Parents often must examine some take-home handout with a colored picture or bullet points in order to try and decipher the details of what was done for the last hour or two in their children's classes. And as children round the corners into middle school and high school, parents' involvement in what their kids are learning seems to lessen even more.

This Family Guidebook is designed to provide you, the parent, with a robust understanding of what your children are learning in the Relationship Goals series. There are specific questions for both your elementary age children and your adolescents after brief overviews of each lesson so that you can be actively engaged with what they are learning about building and sustaining healthy relationships.



# The Relationship Goals Series

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Relationship Goals is a 6-week churchwide sermon series that is designed to strengthen healthy and Biblical relationship goals with elementary lessons, a small group track for singles (from Middle School through all adult singles and singles-again) and another track for married couples.

This series is unique because it provides a common understanding and language for all relationships with the easy-to-understand Relationship Attachment Model, or RAM, which is the framework for the content of what all ages learn about being intentional in running their relationships.

John Van Epp, Ph.D. and Morgan Cutlip, Ph.D. (father-daughter team) are featured together in each 20-minute video session that provides the content for the questions in the Discussion Guides for the two tracks.

The RAM portrays five major bonds that exist in all our relationships. These are how we know each other, trust and rely on each other, practice our commitment to each other and engage in loving touch. The first elementary lesson applies these five bonds to how we build and sustain a relationship with God. Each of the remaining lessons focuses on just one bond, with the older elementary children learning about the interactions between these five bonds in their relationships.

The Middle-High School lessons use the video single small group track. The Discussion Guides provide the option of applying most questions to either friendships or dating relationships. This enables the content of the lessons to be relevant to the age and experience of each student.

## How to use this guidebook

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Many of you will be enjoying your Pastor's sermons on Relationship Goals, as well as attending your own small group study in this series. But be sure to also make time to review the lessons that each of your children are learning so that you can engage in dynamic and positive conversations about their relationships.

Making use of this Guidebook is as easy as reading through the lesson, looking up Scripture references, and then talking through the questions for that particular lesson. The questions are designed to address topic areas of each lesson, while they create conversation-starters that can lead to deeper and more meaningful talks between you and your kids.

If you only have elementary age children, an advantage of having the adolescent summaries and questions in this Family Guide is that you can



read ahead and feel better prepared to talk about significant friendship and dating relationship concerns before they occur. And because our kids have very diverse experiences and mature at different paces, some of those topics will be relevant to your children even before they become adolescents.

And if you only have adolescent kids, take some time to read the elementary lessons and parental suggestions. Because the RAM is the relationship tool that is used in all lessons, small group studies, and even the sermon series, there is a continuity in what everyone is learning about relationships. This also enables you as a parent to share from your own relationships as you talk with your children about their relationships, not just what you went through during your own growing up years.

The five dynamic bonds portrayed in the RAM cross generations and apply equally to various relationship types (e.g. friendship, parent-child relationship, dating, and marriage) allowing you to talk about trust, for example in both your own relationships as well as in your child's relationship experiences. Meaningful conversations with your kids involve a balance of asking relevant questions, listening with grace and attentiveness, and sharing personal experiences of your own that they can relate with. Children need to feel like they "know" you as you engage with them in ways that make them feel known.

It is our hope that this Family Guide enables you to join in with what your children are learning throughout their Relationship Goals lessons, and to engage in conversations that continue long past the six weeks of this series.



# teaching great relationships

# Raising your kids to have great relationships

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There are over a hundred Bible verses on raising children. **Proverbs 22:6** captures the entire parenting process in a profound statement: *Start children off on the way they should go*, and even when they are old they will not turn from it. For those who learned this verse many years ago, it probably was, “Train up a child...” Although this was written almost 3,000 years ago, it still holds true.

There was a recent study (2015) conducted with over 700 kindergarteners to examine the influence that **development of their relationship skills** had on their success in adulthood. Researchers from the Pennsylvania State University measured “soft” skill development (e.g. cooperativeness, positive interactions with adults, and good relationships) in 5-year olds in four sites across the nation and followed those kids for twenty years until they were twenty-five.

The researchers found that these relationship skills predicted every domain of well-being not only in adolescence, but also in adulthood. This included educational achievement, increases in income, lowered criminal activity, positive mental health, lowered substance abuse, and greater economic independence.

There was another longitudinal study from the 1980’s conducted with children who were raised in strong Christian homes but during their adolescent years, deviated significantly from the values of their families.

The study was called the **Prodigal Son study**. What researchers found was that close to 80% of those who had departed from their family’s faith had returned to it by their late twenties.

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. Isaiah 55: 10-11, NASB.*

You can be confident that God is faithful to work in the lives of your children as you make investments of time, togetherness and great talks. These are the 3T's that are taught throughout the Relationship Goals series as necessary ingredients for growing in all your relationships. But they clearly capture the description of how parents are to "train up" their children in one of the most dramatic Scriptural passages about parenting.

*The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9, NIV.*





It is through relationships that healthy relationships are both caught and taught. In this passage, we find several keys for raising your children to have great relationships. The first key is to **model a loving relationship with the Lord and with others.**

Jesus was cornered by a Jewish law scholar and asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" He immediately went to this passage, and basically answered, "Loving the Lord in your relationship with God is the number one commandment."

But then, Jesus left this passage and basically stated, "*Loving others as yourself is the second greatest. And together, these two commandments become the framework upon which hangs all of the law and prophets.*"

When you live out a loving relationship with God and loving relationships with others, then you will be fulfilling what God has revealed through His commandments and prophets.

As you learn the RAM, you will find that it helps you and your children to have an easy-to-use tool for actively evaluating and setting goals for all of your relationships, including your relationship with God. Many of you will be attending a small group track in which you will be growing stronger in your own relationships. This is exactly what the Scriptures portray as the first step of effective parenting: **model love in your relationship with God and others.**

There was a research study published in The Family Journal in 2014 that reviewed all of the previously published research between 1984-2008 on what influenced the development of attitudes of people in the

U.S. toward marriage. The reason that this is so important is because researchers have found that a **strong predictor of successful marriages is the attitude toward marriage held by the two spouses.**

What was so enlightening about this review was that almost all of the factors that influenced attitudes had something to do with the relationship of the parents during one's childhood. Here are some of the childhood factors that predicted someone's adult attitude toward marriage.

- *perception of parental discord*
- *parental separations*
- *divorce and post-divorce conflicts of parents*
- *parent living arrangements*
- *parental marital quality*
- *parental expectations of future family formation of their children*

This study clearly confirms the importance of working on your own relationships, especially your relationship with your spouse! And even if you are divorced or not married to the biological parent of your children, working to have a positive and loving relationship with that person is also affirmed as a strong predictor of the overall well-being of your children and the attitudes they form toward marriage.

As important as it is to model healthy relationships, **it is equally important to “teach” healthy relationships.** This is the second key to raising kids to have great relationships, and is what was meant by the phrases, *“Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at*



# elementary lessons

## Introduction

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Relationship Goals for Kids is a 6-lesson series that builds an understanding of relationships around the five themes of the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM). These themes are the five major bonds that exist in all relationships—they are know, trust, rely, commit and touch. A key concept that repeats in every lesson is that God wants our head and heart to work together in our relationships.

The first lesson applies these five aspects to growing in a relationship with God. And then, each of the five remaining lessons take one of the bonds from the RAM and builds the lesson around that aspect of healthy relationships, primarily focused on family and friends.

There are five primary sections within each lesson.

1. The Big Idea: this is the introduction of the theme of the lesson.
2. Questions and discussion about things the children can relate to that help to make the concept understandable and clear.
3. Bible story that addresses the theme of the lesson.
4. Application questions for class or small group discussions.
5. Activities—these are often included in #2 and #5

*In every lesson the children learn five hand motions done, one for each of the RAM components.*

# Lesson One: God

*Big Idea* I can actively grow in my relationship with God.

Jesus told us that there are TWO commandments that are most important: love God with all your heart, mind and body. And the second is to love others as yourself. So, we are going to look at what all is involved in having a GREAT relationship with God, and GREAT relationships with others.

In this lesson, you will learn that every relationship has five parts—even your relationship with God. So, we will look at how to begin a relationship with God and keep growing in your relationship with God in ALL FIVE parts.

## Bible Story

Jesus and Peter. When Peter called out on the Lord to save him, it showed that he still was committed to Jesus even though he was struggling with doubts. When Jesus reached out and grabbed his arm, that physical touch brought Peter out of danger. But then, Jesus challenged Peter to grow in his faith and rely more confidently on the Lord.

## Memory Verse

I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

**PHILIPPIANS 3:8**

## Relationship Skills

Growing to learn the Bible, talking with God in prayer, trusting and depending on God to help

## Questions To Ask Your Child

1. What are some things that we do to learn about God?
2. Do you remember the Bible lesson? What was it?
3. Why do you think that Peter began to sink?
4. What are some things that can make you worried... or afraid... or feel that you might fail at something?
5. What are some ways you can "hold Jesus' hand" while you do these things?

## Questions To Ask Your Older Child

1. What does this mean for you... to take Jesus' hand when you feel worried, or that you are sinking in some deep water (some challenging situation)?
2. What is something that you have learned about Jesus and from the Bible that you can put into action.

# Lesson Two: Know

## Big Idea

People know me and I know others by talking, doing things together and spending time. To make a great relationship, you need to know lots of things about someone who also knows you really well.

## Bible Story

The twelve disciples grew to deeply know Jesus by 3T's—lots of time (3 years), being together in many situations, and amazing talks! In the Gospel of John chapter 10, Jesus gave an example of what it really means to "know" someone by describing how a shepherd deeply knows his sheep, and how the sheep know the shepherd. The shepherd is loyal, committed to the sheep, and would risk his life to protect them. This is what it means to genuinely know someone in loving and healthy ways.

## Memory Verse

I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and my sheep know me.

**JOHN 10:148**

## Relationship Skills

Asking questions, answering questions with some detail, listening, and paying attention to body language when communicating

## Questions To Ask Your Child

1. What are some ways you get to know God?
2. What are some ways your family gets to know you? How do you get to know your family? (brainstorm ideas from 3T—Talking, being Together, spending Time)
3. What are some things you need to do to in order to get to know someone new?
4. What are some good questions to ask someone you've first met?
5. What do you think you learn about another person by spending time with him/her in different settings?

## Questions To Ask Your Older Child

1. How are the questions you ask to a friend different than the ones you ask to someone you've just met?
2. Can you truly know someone right away? Explain why.
3. Have you ever felt like you really knew someone and later realized you didn't? Explain what happened and what that was like.

32

parent guide

A photograph of three young people (two women and one man) sitting on a grassy field, smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green. A white dashed rectangular frame is overlaid on the image, containing the text.

# middle to high school

## Middle to High School

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*"Driver's ed? C'mon, son, you don't need that! Just slide behind the wheel and head on out to your party. Be home by midnight!"*

Who would agree that it's better for a child to drive without any driver's training, perhaps even to crash a few times before they get their license? Would we say the same about riding a horse or a motorcycle? "Let 'em fall off or crash-and-burn a few times, get some scrapes and bruises, they'll learn how to handle themselves soon enough."

A safer approach to driving and riding would certainly be to give the child solid instructions (and clearly, to provide a good example) before they head out on the road or trail so you could help them avoid danger, pain, scars or even death. Should we not be equally as intent upon preparing the next generation of husbands and wives to make the best, most informed decisions they can make about building lifelong relationships – or even close friendships? The consequences can be as serious as a car crash.

So why aren't more parents participating in their child's relationship decisions? There are several likely reasons:

1. Parents believe their kids wouldn't want them involved (and nobody likes to be rejected).
2. Many adults didn't have a good model for parental involvement when they were young: "My parents didn't help me with these choices; my kids will be fine on their own."





3. They may believe it's healthy for kids to experience a number of relationships – including joys and heartbreaks – before they “settle down” and get married.
4. Parents don't have a lot of time with their kids; life is so busy.
5. They feel awkward or uncomfortable talking about very personal choices their kids are making, including talking about sex.
6. They simply don't know where to start.

The series your child is participating in provides a starting point for meaningful discussion with your child. And we hope to remove any apprehension and self-doubt you may have in this area, while giving you a map to follow in ongoing dialogues with your child about his or her relationship choices.

Our desired outcome for you is that you will feel prepared to talk with your child about building healthy relationships and making wise choices with friends, dating partners and ultimately, a spouse.

### *Why does all this matter?*

When families break down or fail to form, people suffer. Today, it's likely that many people reading this have experienced divorce or single parenthood, either as a child or as an adult.

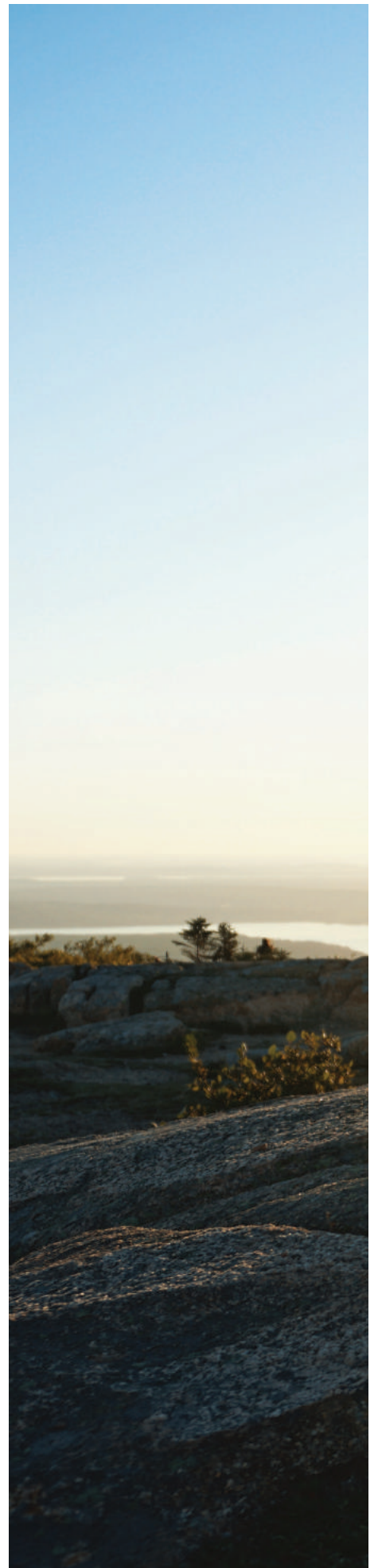
Our hope is to lower the number of failed relationships by equipping the next generation of adolescent and adult singles, singles-again and parents to make better relationship decisions – decisions that lead to life-long, healthy marriages and strong families.

There is a large body of research that shows that the alternative – broken families or those that never form in the first place – carries with it a series of related outcomes that bring pain to individuals, families and entire communities:

- Crime
- Academic failure
- Poverty
- Teen pregnancy
- Teen suicide
- Substance abuse
- Gang membership

As you can see from this list, when families fall apart or fail to form, we all experience the effects. Whole communities where families are fragmented suffer the consequences of the problems above.

## **Equipping parents to more actively participate in their child's relationship decisions.**



# ten truths

## The Ten Truths

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In the Relationship Goals series your child will be taught a curriculum that will help them think differently about love, dating, building good friendships – even about marriage. There are 10 truths that are covered in the six lessons of Relationship Goals that can provide a wealth of understanding as your young person grows and builds relationships.

### ♥ Three facts before you begin

1. It matters who you marry.

- *Think of the ways the person you marry can affect your life.*
- *It is equally important to everyone, male or female, which person you choose to marry.*

2. Some people are real jerks in relationships.

- *Jerks can be either gender*
- *There is a difference between acting like a jerk and being a jerk.*
- *The defining characteristic of a jerk is the unwillingness to change a significant problem area that disrupts relationships and negatively affects another.*

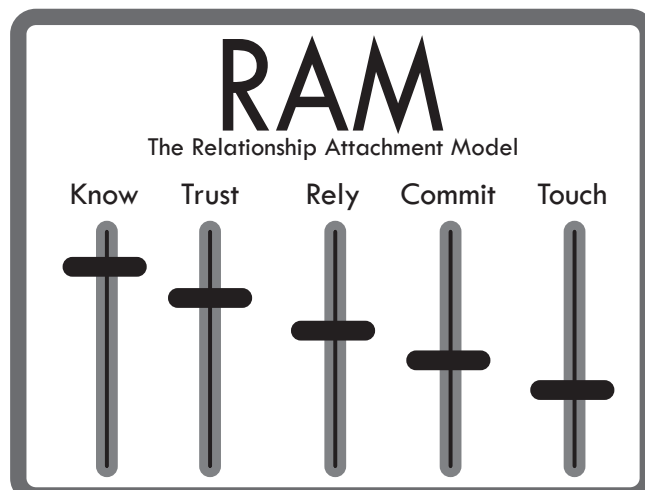
3. Developing good character and choosing friends with good character is most important.

- *It's important to be a good friend and to choose a good friend. One of the best ways to not fall for a jerk is not to be one!*
- *It's important to be a good partner in dating/courting/marriage and to choose one.*



# Truth One

Relationships are comprised of five bonding links whose balance depicts the risk and safeness of the relationship. Healthy relationships tend to develop with a specific balance between these five relationship connections: know, trust, rely, commit, touch.



Dr. John Van Epp has developed the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM) to provide a picture of a relationship and the different bonds or links that make people feel connected.

The five relationship links on the RAM board above represent the overall relationship; the strength and balance of these links describe the closeness and health of the relationship. Let's briefly look at each one and then see how they work together to describe healthy and risky relationships.

Note that each of the five links of the RAM are "reciprocal;" that is, they work both ways. You can know someone and you can also be known, you can trust and you can be trusted, and so on. As you can imagine, the stronger each of these areas are for both people, the stronger the bond. However, vulnerabilities and potential risks result whenever extreme imbalances exist between any of the five links of the RAM or even between what one person is investing in the relationship compared to the other.

**Know** – The more you know and are known by someone, the more potential you have to feel a strong tie to him or her. Deeply knowing someone takes time and develops only after having many shared experiences and open communication. In this first lesson, students will learn about communication and self-disclosure, using discretion and setting boundaries with what they share with others, and the importance of taking time to truly get to know someone in a new relationship.

The most important areas to explore, or grow to know, can be represented by the acronym **F.A.C.E.S.** – five keys to truly understanding who another person is and whether they make a good candidate for a close friendship or romantic involvement.

1. **Family** experiences and background
2. **Attitudes and actions** of one's **conscience**
3. **Compatibility** potential
4. **Examples** of other relationship patterns
5. **Skills** for building good relationships

The Relationship Goals series is organized around the RAM and the five areas (FACES) to explore when building a relationship. Lesson one introduces the RAM and describes the importance of truly getting to know someone ("Know").

Lessons two through four define and describe each of the five FACES. The rest of the links of the RAM (Trust, Rely, Commit, and Touch) are covered in lessons five and six.

**Trust** – Trust is a feeling of **confidence** in someone that is based on your opinion of them. This confidence should be based on their track record. In other words, as they prove themselves worthy of trust in small things, you then allow yourself to trust them with larger things.

**Rely** – Reliance is **trust in action**. It grows as you look to someone to be there for you, to meet your needs and/or they depend upon you to meet theirs. Examples include looking to someone for companionship, fun, and understanding; or giving a friend a ride home from school, copying notes from a class if they're out sick, or doing someone a favor.

**Commit** – Commitment is your investment in another, the extent to which you give to that person and share a feeling of **belonging** to him/her. Greater amounts of commitment include making sacrifices, overlooking faults and forgiving offenses, sticking by someone through a difficult time, and going out of your way to do something nice or thoughtful.

**Touch** (Affection) – This relationship dynamic is a strong contributor to feelings of intimacy and closeness, especially in romantic relationships. All forms of affection and touch – high fives, fist bumps, hugs, holding hands, cuddling – influence the relationship by expressing one's attention and care for another. More intimate touch also increases feelings of connection and love by creating changes in your thoughts and attitude toward a partner, and activating **chemical changes** in your brain and nervous system which cause strong bonds.



# Truth Two

**Your FAMILY influences the ways you build and maintain relationships, and the qualities you tend to look for in a dating partner and someday a marriage partner.**

For many young people just beginning to experience deep relationships with the opposite sex, this concept may seem completely irrelevant. "I'm not dating his/her family," one might say. "I'm in a relationship with him/her!"

That's true to a point, but the "significant other's" family is involved in the relationship whether your child realizes it or not. Even if their parents are not overbearing or overprotective, their imprint is likely to be burnt into the subconscious of their children. And the evidence will come out the longer your child is in relationship with another person.

Family background can significantly impact the way we show emotions, especially love/affection and anger/aggression.

46

parent guide

In Relationship Goals, your child will learn to first identify their own family's influence on them, then what to look for in the background of their friends and any future dating partner.



A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a light-colored hat and a dark red sweater, is shown in profile, looking out over a landscape at sunset. The background is a soft, hazy orange and yellow sky. The text 'part 3' is overlaid on the image, enclosed in a white dashed-line box.

# part 3

## an engagement strategy

# An Engagement Strategy

*How to interact with your child and this curriculum*

Assuming that you have at least one child in the Relationship Goals class, we suggest that you use this section of the workbook to guide you in discussions with your student – in other words, an “engagement strategy.” (No, we don’t mean a strategy to get your son or daughter engaged to be married!) In the following pages, we provide a list of questions you may want to ask, depending upon your interest, your relationship with your child or your own relationship history.

We are aware that parents from a variety of life-situations will be reading this workbook. We want to make it as easy as possible for you to guide and mentor your child, so we have suggested these questions, hopefully to be used in a setting that is comfortable and relaxed for the child so that he or she doesn’t feel interrogated and you, the parent, feel like you know how to generate a comfortable and beneficial conversation with your son or daughter.

## Keep the lines of communication open

The most important thing you can do at this time is to offer your love, acceptance and support to your child during an important, formative time. If you want them to keep coming back to you – or to open up to you for the first time – you would do well to refrain from surprised, angry or frustrated responses.

Stay calm as you listen, and ask yourself as your student speaks: “What are they really thinking?” “What are they trying to say?” or “Where did that idea come from?” Make your first objective to understand your child; your second objective to impart values regarding relationships, dating and marriage.

## There are Ten Truths that are covered in the Relationship Goals six lessons.

Lesson One: This includes Truth #1

Lesson Two: This includes Truth #2

Lesson Three: This includes Truths #3-4

74

parent guide

Lesson Four: This includes Truths #5-6

Lesson Five: This includes Truths #7-8

Lesson Six: This includes Truths #9-10

When you talk through these lessons, please be aware that lessons 3-6 two truths in them. You can go through the content and questions of both truths in one conversation. However, it may be better to have two different times that you talk through the lesson of the week and take only one truth per conversation. This makes your talk time more focused and within a reasonable amount of time (about 20-30 minutes).

## *Parents' Questions for Adolescents*

### **Lesson 1 + Truth One:**

**Relationships are comprised of five bonding links whose balance depicts the risk and safeness of the relationship. God wants us to have healthy and loving relationships with others, especially those with whom we are the most committed (family members, best friends, dating partners). These relationships have a great influence on the direction we take in our lives. Read and discuss Matthew 22:33-40; Proverbs 13:20, 22:24-25; and 1Corinthians 15:33.**

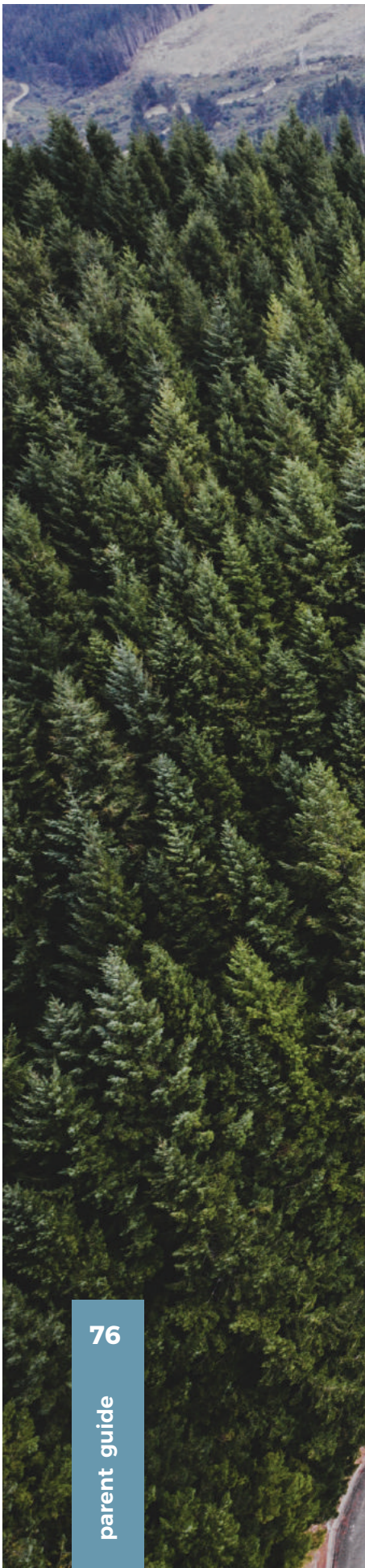
**Question 1:** What kind of behavior have you seen from people in relationships that you would label "jerk-ish"?

**Question 2:** What do you think about the idea that relationships should develop in a balanced and safe way as represented by the RAM (you can review the safe zone of not allowing one level to exceed the levels of any relationship bonds to its left on the RAM chart)? In other words, really getting to know someone before you decide to trust them, rely on them, commit to them, or move forward with any physical touch with them? How do you imagine doing this in your relationships?

**Question 3:** Which level of the RAM are you prone to move up too fast?

**Question 4:** What have you noticed about how safe or unsafe are the relationships of people you know?

**Question 5:** How do you think relationships (especially dating) would be different if people followed the safe-zone principle of not letting one of the relationship bonds get higher than the ones to its left?



## Lesson 2 + Truth Two:

**Your FAMILY influences the ways you build and maintain relationships, and the qualities you tend to look for in a dating partner and someday a marriage partner. Read and discuss how the practice of favoritism kept repeating for three generations of families that led up to Joseph's life. Read and discuss these families in Genesis 21:8-12; 25:21-28; 37:1-4. Joseph experienced 13 years of hardship as a result of his brother's mistreatment of him. But Joseph was willing to do the hard work of forgiving his family and finding God's good plan from his family experiences. It seems that he took several years to work through his family issues before he came to this healing point in his life (look closely at the names of Joseph's two children in Genesis 41:50-52, and also Genesis 50:18-21).**

**Question 1:** What are some characteristics of your friend's family that you like? Why?

**Question 2:** What do you think would be an ideal family situation/background for the type of person you hope to marry one day? Why?

**Question 3:** Think of some habits or characteristics of a potential dating partner's family. Which do you think would

## Lesson 3 + Truths Three and Four:

**The ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS of someone's conscience will reveal much about their character and can act as a predictor of their behavior in a relationship (friendship, dating relationship and even future marriage). God desires to shape your conscience with both the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. Read and discuss the different conditions and levels of maturity of the conscience in Romans 2:14-15; 9:1; 1 Corinthians 8:10-13; 1 Timothy 4:1-2; Hebrews 13:8.**