

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO

TOUGH CONVERSATIONS



Connecting Parents, Teens & Jesus
in a Disconnected World

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Your kids will talk to you about things you
talk to them about. Your kids won't talk to you
about things you don't talk to them about.

CRAIG GROSS,
FOUNDER OF XXXCHURCH

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A LETTER FROM AXIS

Dear Reader,

We're Axis, and since 2007, we've been creating resources to help connect parents, teens, and Jesus in a disconnected world. We're a group of gospel-minded researchers, speakers, and content creators, and we're excited to bring you the best of what we've learned about making meaningful connections with the teens in your life.

This parent's guide is designed to help start a conversation. Our goal is to give you enough knowledge that you're able to ask your teen informed questions about their world. For each guide, we spend weeks reading, researching, and interviewing parents and teens in order to distill everything you need to know about the topic at hand. We encourage you to read the whole thing and then to use the questions we include to get the conversation going with your teen—and then to follow the conversation wherever it leads.

As Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen point out in their book *Difficult Conversations*, “Changes in attitudes and behavior rarely come about because of arguments, facts, and attempts to persuade. How often do *you* change your values and beliefs—or whom you love or what you want in life—based on something someone tells you? And how likely are you to do so when the person who is trying to change you doesn’t seem fully aware of the reasons you see things differently in the first place?”¹ For whatever reason, when we believe that others are trying to understand *our* point of view, our defenses usually go down, and we’re more willing to listen to *their* point of view. The rising generation is no exception.

So we encourage you to ask questions, to listen, and then to share your heart with your teen. As we often say at Axis, discipleship happens where conversation happens.

Sincerely,
Your friends at Axis

¹ Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 137.

**LIFE IS SCARY—
WHICH IS WHY
OUR KIDS NEED
US TO TALK
ABOUT IT.**

ONE OF CHRISTY'S (NOT HER REAL NAME) earliest memories is her parents putting her to bed during a thunderstorm. She was scared of the thunder at first, but her parents talked to her about how neat the thunder was and how it showed God's awesome power. Christy believes that the fact she still sees thunderstorms as awe-inspiring is completely due to how her parents talked to her about them. If they had acted like storms were frightening, she most likely would have grown up hating them.

As parents, we have the ability to shape how our kids see topics that could be uncomfortable and scary. If we treat sex, for example, as embarrassing and taboo, our kids will most likely see it that way as well. They'll still be curious about it, but they'll also view it through a lens of shame and fear. However, if from the

time our kids are young, we treat sex as something they can talk to us about, we will help them not to be afraid of it. More than that, we will set ourselves up as the main authority speaking into their lives about it, instead of leaving them to pop culture and their friends.

Bringing up tough conversations about subjects like sex, bullying, suicide, pornography, death, or school shootings is intimidating. We might want to do everything we can to avoid those conversations or to get out of them as fast as possible when they come up. It's understandable, but just as we wouldn't put our kids behind the wheel without any driver's training and hope it all turns out okay, we can't and shouldn't do the same with other skills—including coping, grieving, and standing up for themselves.

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So rather than seeing these discussions as something to fear, we encourage you to think of them as valuable opportunities from our gracious God. Handled well, these conversations will allow you to influence your kids in important areas of life, as well as set the tone for the rest of their lives. Your willingness to be vulnerable will teach *them* to be vulnerable. It will teach them not to run away from difficult topics and situations and to confront their feelings and deal with them in healthy ways. Maybe best of all, it will strengthen your bonds with your children.

Rather than seeing these discussions as something to fear, we encourage you to think of them as valuable opportunities from our gracious God.

