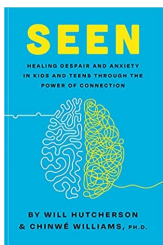


When kids begin to believe that your first goal is to empathize and understand rather than to admonish and correct, you leave the door open for future conversations. And if it's true that their behaviors will continue to shift and evolve as they grow, you'll want to keep that door propped open for as long as you can.

By Philip Daniel De Jesus

## Going Further — Resources



[Seen: Healing Despair and Anxiety in Kids and Teens Through the Power of Connection](#) by Will Hutcherson and Chinwé Williams will help you understand how the teen's brain works when someone is in despair and give you simple yet powerful tools you can use every day to connect with your teen and help them heal.

[Helping Kids Cope with Anxiety](#), a podcast by Dr. Chinwé Williams, a licensed professional counselor, shares ways to identify signs of anxiety and how to help your kids through their experience with it.



Find additional resources for parenting, marriage, and other seasons of life at <https://growfaithathome.org/>

## Going Further — Church Support

**Fusion** is great places for students (grades 6-12) to meet friends and learn more about God, faith, and so much more! Fusion meets Sundays from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Get more info here:

- <https://staffordcrossing.org/fusion>
- Email [fusion@staffordcrossing.org](mailto:fusion@staffordcrossing.org)

# 4 Questions to Ask When You Notice a Shift in Your Child's Behavior

Helping families  
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My oldest daughter just entered middle school. No book, podcast, or theologian could have prepared me for how quickly she'd begin to change in the months leading up to her 11th birthday. The freedom to socialize and text her friends became the number-one priority in her life, closely followed by the need for a new hair conditioner that made her curls bouncier and shinier. An endless supply of scrunchies (for her wrist, not her head as one would wrongly assume) became a bare necessity, and cue the eye-rolls when Dad says no to crop tops and Hydroflasks.

While I'm thankful there's still an innocence about her, the majority of her behaviors are now rooted in a claim for independence, social connection, and personal style.

**Sometimes such shifts in behavior are clear as day; other times they're more subtle.** Regardless, they tend to induce a stress response in us as parents almost always. These are the moments we have a choice to make. We can rail against these changes. We can check out. We can pretend they aren't happening and avoid them altogether. Or we can be brave and lean in.

Choosing to lean in might actually be easier than you think. Yes, it requires courage to initiate conversations, but it also takes simple curiosity and the willingness to listen more than speak. When we notice our kids starting to change, it may require a change on our part too. **What if we saw these changes not as obstacles to overcome, but as opportunities to leverage?** And every great opportunity worth investing in should begin with some questions.

### Questions to ask yourself:

Before this parent-child interrogation begins, I think it's worth our time to first look inward and gain some perspective. **Consider asking yourself if anything has changed in their outer world that may have prompted a change in their inner world.** Are there new pressures they're facing or issues in society they seem concerned about? Ask yourself if anything has shifted in you too. Are you under more stress than normal?

If nothing else, sometimes we simply need to remind ourselves that, regardless of the changes we're seeing, our sons and daughters were made in the image of God. They were born uniquely gifted and wired to do remarkable things. **Whatever we discover behind these new behaviors doesn't change this truth.**

**One of the greatest lessons I've learned as a parent is that my main agenda in these conversations is to establish a connection—not to get my needs met or suspicions confirmed.** As a dad, I have to be willing to continually ask myself: "Do I know my kid this week?" Because if studies prove she is constantly changing, there may be things about her I've yet to discover. And I can't influence someone I don't know.

### Questions to ask your child:

**"Relationships are built with conversations. Conversations start with questions."** —Jon Acuff

Kids and teenagers today crave authenticity, so start with genuine curiosity. When I finally worked up the courage to start conversations with my daughter about her sudden fixation on a certain type of appearance and peer approval, our coffee dates started to center around questions like:

- **Have you seen anything online lately that made you feel . . . joy, fearful, confused, not \_\_\_\_ enough?**
- **Can you teach me how?** Because they usually jump at the chance to be the parent for once.
- **Where do you need courage?** Because I believe in raising brave girls. Though I sometimes prefer to ask, "Who's being a jerk?"
- **How's your heart?** Because everything we do, say, think, and feel flows from it.

Actively listening to my kid share the answers to these questions not only opens up my eyes to the realities of being a preteen today, but reminds me of my own pursuit of freedom and drive to be understood at her age.

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