

Their reasons: "He shows interest in me. He makes me laugh. He sits by me. He sticks up for me." We affirmed Justin for using his gift of mercy with his friends.

Study Bible verses about spiritual gifts with your teen: Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 and 14:1-40; Ephesians 4:7-16; and 1 Peter 4:7-11.

### **Brick #6: Reinforce Spiritual Identity**

No brick is more foundational than this one. When teens understand their worth in Christ, they can reject negative thinking that peers, insecurities, and problems hurl on them. Just because teens fail—which they will—doesn't mean they are a failure.

Teens develop confidence when they believe they are loved by God no matter what. This inner strength will carry them through trials and peer pressure. As they search for significance, our teens can influence their peers to do the same.

Google "Who I am in Christ." Print and review with your teen. If someone tries to embarrass them about a mistake, say, "...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" Romans 8:1. Don't criticize your teens when they are knocked down. Instead extend your hand and your heart.

### **Construct a Strong Identity Wall**

Building our teens' identity is a long process. The Great Wall of China took years of extensive labor before it fended off enemies. Our teens live in a hostile culture. They need a wall of protection. As parental masons, we can help them stand up under fire. The challenge is to be like Beth's family—and not quit.

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### **Going Further — Resources**

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 more! Fusion meets Sundays from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Get info here:

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

# How to Build Your Teen's Identity

Helping families  
trust and follow Jesus

@home

In many ways, American teens have never had it tougher. If you're a parent today, you know what I mean. Social pressures are more pervasive and destructive than ever before. Parents often feel helpless to equip their teens with the tools to navigate—and steer clear—of harmful relationships, attitudes, and behaviors.

Ideally, equipping our kids to live and thrive in an often Christian-hostile world begins as soon as they are born. In fact, parents are the single most important developmental influence in a child's life, apart from the Holy Spirit himself. But even if time has slipped away and your teenager seems out of reach, you can begin to lay building blocks to help your teen grow to maturity in Christ and make a positive impact on his or her world. Love, commitment, self-discipline, perseverance, and a lot of prayer are required, but you can do it.

Assisting teens in forging a strong, positive identity is one way to help them form convictions based on truth, and then stand firm in them regardless of what everyone else does.

As parents, we can build our teen's identity by using a brick mason's approach. Masonry is an art that requires intense study of the project's design before setting the first brick in place. The job is messy and it requires hands-on application and commitment.

Parental brick-layers labor alongside our teens as they experience the joy of discovering their significance in Christ and their identity. Teens today are overscheduled and often lack the skills to communicate or set boundaries. They need our help to decide which bricks fit and which ones don't.

The challenge? To encourage teens to be who God made them to be, rather than who we want them to be. Brick-by-brick, we can make a difference for our teens and in their world.

### **Brick #1: Encourage Self Discovery**

My husband Derek shared a devotion about integrity with our 14-year-old son Justin and his friend Tim\* (name changed). Derek asked them, "How committed are you to integrity?"

"I'm not that committed. But I want to be," Tim answered.

Derek said, "Telling the truth is integrity. Thanks for being honest."

"I get in trouble with certain friends," Tim said. "The pressure to be liked affects me."

"Until you decide who you are," Derek told Tim, "you will be like a

chameleon, blending in to whatever situation or whoever you are with."

Derek mentioned a former game show and said, "Will the real Tim please stand up? Until you figure out who the God-designed Tim is, you will struggle with your friends."

### **Brick #2: Acknowledge Natural Abilities**

Teens yearn for our support and relationship. It's important to affirm their natural abilities. Be their cheerleader. Attend activities even if they say, "It's no biggie."

Encourage athletes to stay involved in sports throughout high school. Challenge the artsy to try a new instrument, audition for a play, take a watercolor class or voice lessons. If they love to argue, consider the debate team. Talk about career choices that use their talents. For example, math skills are priceless for computer software engineers.

### **Brick #3: Create a Family Motto**

When my friend Beth's three teens were growing up, their family motto was "We aren't quitters." Anytime her son or daughters wanted to stop short of a commitment, they heard this phrase. Eventually Beth's children believed, "I belong to a non-quitting family."

By creating a tagline, our family identity is established. Then when difficulties arise, our motto serves as a stake in the ground declaring who we are as individuals—and as family.

### **Brick #4: Value Uniqueness**

Physically and emotionally, teens' lives constantly change. They can feel overscheduled, unknown, abandoned, or even betrayed. Adolescents still want a unique place in our home. They need to know they belong and that they matter.

Encourage busy teens to enjoy down time, which strengthens creativity and problem-solving skills. Inform your son his sense of humor is missed when he's gone. Tell your daughter you notice her thankful heart.

### **Brick #5: Highlight Spiritual Gifts**

Ever since our son Justin was little, he has shown kindness to kids that are different. As a high school freshman, he continues to tap the heart of the lonely.

Justin's gym teacher asked the students to share who their best friend was and why. Both a popular and an unpopular guy picked Justin.