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The

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MENTORSHIP

Though you are the primary spiritual influencer of your child, there is no shortage of coaches, teachers, pastors, or bosses speaking into her life. That doesn't have to be a bad thing! Biblical mentorship can be an incredibly fulfilling experience for your child, as long as you have a plan for how to do it right.

By Dr. Abby Hill

Teenagers consistently identify parents as their most influential mentors, role models, and heroes. But most teens are also able to readily identify another non-parent adult who is a significant influence in their lives.

When I was growing up, I had built-in mentors in extended family members (grandparents, aunts, and uncles) that I interacted with nearly every day. While some kids may not have that kind of access to relatives, they have many opportunities to be mentored by adults other than their parents and family through the myriad extracurricular options in modern life.

THE MENTOR RELATIONSHIP

Mentors might be teachers, coaches, tutors, youth pastors, bosses, and others in the community. They are in a position of authority, either directly or indirectly, in the life of a teen. Mentoring can be one-on-one or in a club, class, team, or on the job. Sometimes mentoring is formal, but just as often it occurs informally in the natural environment of daily activities. Mentors may teach and provide information and guidance, as well as emotional and spiritual support to the teenager. Mentors may need to exert their authority and apply correction as part of their role.

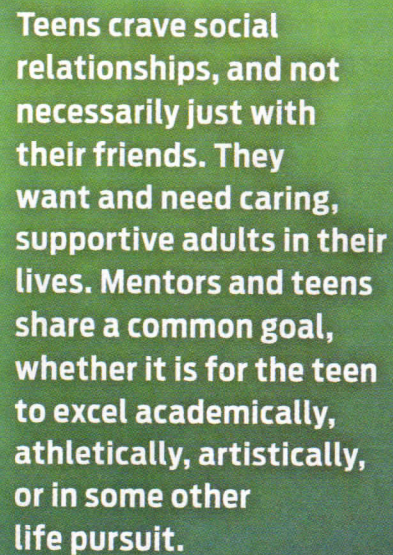
Teens crave social relationships, and not necessarily just with their friends. They want and need caring, supportive adults in their lives. Mentors and teens share a common goal, whether it is for the teen to excel academically, athletically, artistically, or in some other life pursuit. Mentors in faith often have shared spiritual beliefs with the family and the teen.

We know that good mentoring works. Kids with mentors do better in school, they have less behavior problems (sexual activity, drugs, and other misconduct), and they exhibit a stronger self-concept and sense of competence.

A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Mentorship has a rich history. We know that Jesus was the ultimate mentor in His work with the disciples during His time on earth. The Bible offers other examples of mentoring relationships, particularly in the story of Samuel and Eli.

One of the most interesting aspects of that story is the experience of Samuel's mother, Hannah, in connecting her son with his mentor. Hannah had prayed for a child for years, and she was ecstatic when God blessed her and her husband with Samuel. Hannah had promised God that, if she were able to have a son, she would make sure his life was dedicated to God. In fact, she shared that commitment in faith with Eli, a high priest, prior to even becoming pregnant. So, when Samuel was a young boy, Hannah placed him in the hands of God by handing him over to Eli. Hannah knew the importance, the necessity, of mentorship. (Still, as a mom myself, I have to wonder how many times Hannah had to fight the urge to go back and get Samuel that day she left him at the temple.)



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Hannah's experience with Samuel's mentoring provides us some great insight: Hannah knew her child's mentor well. She had spoken to Eli personally and shared her vision for Samuel's life. Eli wasn't exactly "Father of the Year" material, based on the behavior of his own sons, but he was in a position of spiritual authority and could provide what Samuel needed. (To Eli's credit, he did come through by teaching Samuel how to respond to God's calling in the middle of the night.) Eli embraced his mentorship of Samuel, referring to him as his son even though there was no biological connection.

Hannah didn't just drop Samuel off at Eli's and hope for the best. She remained informed and involved, personally checking on her son regularly to be sure he was benefitting and thriving under Eli's mentorship.

Samuel had been raised in a godly home prior to going to live with his mentor, so the spiritual foundation was already there. Hannah did not solely rely

on the mentor to teach Samuel everything he needed to know about God.

Hannah allowed Samuel a great life opportunity in submitting him to mentorship. We know teens that are mentored are likely to become mentors themselves. Samuel eventually became Eli's teacher and, in fact, went on to be the spiritual leader of Israel. This may not have happened without Hannah's promise to God and her commitment to her child's mentorship.

WHAT TO DO

Mentorship is healthy and biblical. But there are a few things to consider as you think through what it might look like in your own home. Here are some steps to think about as you work through the parent-child-mentor relationship.

1. Ask yourself:

- Am I willing to submit my child to the authority of a mentor? Can I accept and support this shared authority over my child?
- Who are the adults that my teen would identify as influential in their life?
- Do potential mentors share our common goals for my teen's life?
- Do I know my child's friends? Do I understand the context my teen lives in every day?
- Do I remember to encourage my teen?

2. Be proactive:

- Know your child's mentor as a person, professional, and community member. Involve your teen with mentors associated with organizations that conduct background checks. If you are not sure, ask for more information.
- Stay involved. Establish regular and ongoing communication with the mentor. Know your teens' friends and stay informed on the latest happenings. Connect with other parents whose kids are involved in the same activities and mentorship as your teen.
- Decide whether you are comfortable with the mentor and your teen communicating electronically (texts, email, Facebook) and establish those guidelines with your child and the mentor.
- Keep in mind that some professionals working with kids are bound by certain ethical responsibilities when it comes to maintaining your child's (and other kids') confidentiality. Talk to the mentor about what they will and won't be able to share with you.
- Pray for your child's mentor. Encourage your teen to join you in praying for their mentor.
- Demonstrate and model respect for the authority of your child's mentor. Teach your teen to bring to you anything confusing or contradictory between what they are hearing from you and from their mentor. Talk it out. If you need to disagree with the mentor, meet with them privately.
- Maintain boundaries with your teen's mentor, always keeping it about your child. Don't demand more from the mentor than he or she is willing or prepared to give by expecting them to be your family therapist.

Above all, don't think that if only you were a good enough parent, your child wouldn't need a mentor. Sometimes, like Hannah, connecting your teen to a mentor is some of the best parenting work you can do.

Above all, don't think that if only you were a good enough parent, your child wouldn't need a mentor. Sometimes, like Hannah, connecting your teen to a mentor is some of the best parenting work you can do.

Teens need parents and other trusted adults in their lives in order to successfully develop spiritually, socially, and emotionally into the person God made them to be. As Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, "And if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken." Nowhere is this more true than in the parent-child-mentor relationship.

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