

# LIFE TEEN

## PARENT LIFE

PARENTING PRACTICALS

### Knowing I Am Yours

by NICHOLE SCHNEIDER

*“Tell me I’m your child, the one your heart beats for, I can find my strength in knowing I am yours” (Tell Me by Carrollton)*



Before you read any further, I encourage you to take a few minutes and listen to the song quoted above, entitled *Tell Me* by a band called Carrollton. This song is a beautiful reminder that all of us, children of God, gather strength and confidence from being known, valued, purposed, and loved.

The following are five tips to help cultivate confidence in your teen and as you read this, I pray that you will keep this song in your mind. Showing and telling your child who he or she is to you just may be the melody behind his or her music.

#### **Pray over your teen.**

This may seem intimidating, or you may already utilize this spiritual tool. Try to get into the habit of asking your teen what he or she is worried about or fearful of each evening before bed. Take your teen’s needs and desires to God (out loud) in front of him or her. Praying over your teen will help him or her feel secure and may even encourage your teen to strengthen his or her own prayer life when you are not together. A few minutes of prayer for your teen each day can help him or her build confidence and resilience by trusting in God through life’s daily conflicts.

#### **Make Sunday Mass a family priority.**

Teens thrive on stability, which enables them to be more confident in approaching setbacks and peer pressure with clarity. Make it your mission that Sunday Mass together as a family each week is a “must” and comes before sports games, school events, and vacations.

Otherwise, busy-ness can become an idol. When you prioritize your child’s relationship with God, your teen will develop not only a sense of comfort and stability in your direction but also a deeper commitment to the First Commandment: “I am the Lord your God...you shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3).

#### **Make it known that your child is unconditionally loved.**

Belonging is one of the deepest human needs. Without love and acceptance, human beings cannot thrive. Considering adolescent development, teens yearn for even more love and acceptance than you may realize. To help your teen be confident in his or herself, ensure your teen often that he or she is loved unconditionally. Just as there are not conditions with God’s love for His children, so too there should be no conditions with a parent’s love. Too often, teens may feel that they are only loved because of things they do, rather than who they are.

They may fear that they will lose their parents' love if they mess up. Make an effort to verbally convey your love, especially when your teen makes mistakes.

### **Carry on the work of secure attachment as your teen grows.**

It is generally known in the world of human development that psychologist Mary Ainsworth and child psychiatrist John Bowlby created theories about how infants develop attachment styles to their primary caregivers. It has been supported by research that "secure attachment" is the ideal form, predicting better outcomes in academics, health, employment, and relationships as an adult (Barlow et al., 2016).

Psychologist William Blatz hypothesized that as children grow and learn to trust in caregivers who are consistently loving and responsive, they develop the confidence to explore the world on their own, helping to form secure attachment (Van Rosmalen et al., 2016).

Regardless of what your teen's attachment style may have been as an infant, you have the opportunity to create or keep re-creating a secure base. Doing so may be aided by things like consistent and predictable expressions of love and discipline such as support, hugs, and holding true to your words and actions regarding rewards, punishments, promises, and expectations. A secure base will allow your teen to experience independence while knowing that he or she always has a safe space to land.

### **Talk to your teen about his or her inherent worth and specific purpose.**

Teach your teen that his or her worth is not reliant upon accomplishments, test scores, popularity, or sports achievements. Sensitivity to peer pressure increases during the teenage years due to a developing prefrontal cortex which is still trying to navigate proper decision making and emotional regulation processes (Pharo et al., 2011, p. 971). As such, teens are quite susceptible to creating meaning around friendships, talents, pursuits, and taking risky behaviors for approval.

Though accomplishments and friendships are integral parts of identity, they must be kept in perspective. Teens must feel that apart from their self-given or society-ascribed attributes and roles, they belong to God and have been created in His image for a unique and specific purpose. Be sure to convey to your child that his or her personality and interests are God-given and *needed* in the world today.

These 5 ideas are practical and simple ways to place your love song (and God's love song) on your teen's heart. It is important that your teen learns healthy confidence and that is not something that is easy for them to do on their own without a little parental love and guidance.

### **REFERENCES**

- Barlow, J., Schrader-McMillan, A., Axford, N., Wrigley, Z., Sonthalia, S., Wilkinson, T., Rawsthorn, M., Toft, A., & Coad, J. (2016). Review: Attachment and attachment-related outcomes in preschool children – a review of recent evidence. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 21*(1), 11-20. Doi: doi:10.1111/camh.12138.
- Pharo, H., Sim, C., Graham, M., Gross, J., & Hayne, H. (2011). Risky Business: Executive function, personality, and reckless behavior during adolescence and young adulthood. *Behavioral Neuroscience, 125*(6), 970-978. Doi: 10.1037/a0025768.
- Van Rosmalen, L., van der Horst, F.C., & van der Veer, R. (2016). From secure dependency to attachment: Mary Ainsworth's integration of Blatz's security theory into Bowlby's attachment theory. *History of Psychology, 16*(1), 22-39. Doi: 10.1037/hop0000015.