

supplies

You'll need Bibles, 3x5 cards, pens, and a trash can. Optional: laptop, video projection unit, YouTube video (see below), and a paper shredder.

(Option: Start by showing kids YouTube's "Things Teenagers Wish Their Parents Knew"—<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxMvXa6Hwgo>.)

HONOR MY PARENTS?!

Have teenagers stand up and form pairs. Explain that you'll say a sentence-starter, then they'll have one minute to talk with their partner about how they'd finish it and why. After a minute, call "Switch" and have teenagers find new partners to talk through another sentence-starter. Continue with this pattern of one-minute discussions until they've discussed all five sentence-starters with different partners:

- One thing parents don't get about teenagers today is...
- When I'm a parent, I will never...
- When I'm a parent, I will...
- I wish my parents understood that I...
- If I could ask my parents to change one thing, it would be...

Gather together, then say something like: **The Bible teaches that children should honor their parents. But what does this mean for teenagers? You aren't little kids anymore, but you're also not autonomous adults.**

Invite volunteers to read aloud Exodus 20:12 and Leviticus 19:3 and ask the group:

- **What do parents think this command means? Explain.**
- **What do you think this command means? Explain.**

Invite volunteers to read aloud Ephesians 6:1-3 and Colossians 3:20. Then ask:

- **Why do you think Paul reiterated these Old Testament ideas in his letters to the early church?**



- **Why do you think he thought this was important?**

Say something like: **Arguably, it's more complicated for teenagers to honor their parents than it is for little kids. You've probably each faced situation in which it's been hard to determine what it really means to honor your parents.**

Ask volunteers to read aloud Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21. Explain that *exasperate* means to make angry or annoyed; *embitter* means to make resentful. Point out that Paul's teachings here shows that it's a normal reality for everybody: sometimes parents anger, annoy, or embitter their children.

Form small groups of three to five and have them to read and discuss Ephesians 6:1-8 and Colossians 3:20-25—these passages focus on a slave's responsibility to his master, but there are truths here that can impact a teenager's relationship with his or her parents. Ask groups:

- **What truths for first-century Christians in slavery could translate into times you feel it's hard to honor your parents?**
- **Give some examples of situations between teenagers and parents that seem unfair. What would honor and respect look like in those situations?**
- **What about when you feel like parents don't "deserve" respect or honor? How could these passages speak into those situations?**

Gather together as a large group and get feedback from small group discussions. Then ask: **How should a Christian teenager—who is no longer a little child—honor his or her parents?**

Pass out 3x5 cards and pens and ask students to each think of something about their parents that they need to forgive or let go of—something that exasperates or embitters them or that's a constant point of conflict. Prompt them to spend individual time asking for God's strength to help them forgive and to empower them to honor their parents even when it's hard. To represent their choice to "let go" (or to at least *try* to forgive), invite kids to throw away their cards as they leave or destroy their cards in a paper shredder. ●



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supplies

You'll need Bibles, five posters (see below), papers, markers, and tape.

Optional: laptop with Internet connection and a video projection unit.

Option: Begin by showing students 10 to 20 "awkward family photos" (<http://awkwardfamilyphotos.com/>) that you've previewed in advance. Laugh together and lead the group in voting for the "awkwardest."

(DYS)FUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

Form small groups and have teenagers discuss:

- What's something that drives you crazy about your family?
- What's something you appreciate about your family?

Invite a volunteer to super-quickly draw a happy stick-figure family on a poster board and write "The Perfect Family" at the top. Then ask: **Imagine what you'd consider the "perfect family"—a family that, in your opinion, is ideal. What would it be like? Describe it.**

Brainstorm ideal family traits and write the words or phrases on the poster. Then stick "The Perfect Family" poster on the wall. Stretching across the wall, add four more posters (prepared in advance) to create a spectrum in this order:

- BAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAD!!!
Family
- Bad Family
- Messed-up/Normal Family
- Good/Normal Family
- The Perfect Family

Have teenagers form pairs and explain that each pair will read a biblical account of a real human family. In their pair, they'll discuss their story and write a few descriptive words on a piece of paper. (For example: For Adam & Eve's family, words might include jealousy, conflict, and murder.) Next, they'll decide where on the spectrum (from BAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAD!!! to Perfect) they think their family fits. They'll tape their paper on the wall and stand by it.

When everybody understands, make assignments using the following families:

- Cain & Abel (Genesis 4:1-16—conflict, jealousy, fratricide)
- Noah's family (Genesis 9:18-27—drunkenness, cursing)
- Abraham's family (Genesis 16—polygamy, child abandonment)
- Lot's family (Genesis 19—offering daughter to rapists, incest)
- Isaac's family (Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-45—sibling conflict, favoritism, manipulation, hatred)
- Jacob, Rachel, Leah (Genesis 29:1-30—polygamy, favoritism)
- Jacob's family (Genesis 37—favoritism, jealousy, hatred, violence, deception)
- Manoah's family (Judges 13—Prayer, care for son)
- Naomi's family (Ruth 1:1-2:17; 4:13-14—loss, loyalty, commitment, healing)
- Saul's family (1 Samuel 20:12-24—violence, attempted murder)
- Eil & wicked sons (1 Samuel 1:12-17, 22-25; 3:10-14—Lack of parental discipline; sons cheating and sexual immorality)
- David: Amnon, Tamar, Absalom (2 Samuel 13—incestuous rape, fratricide)

When everyone has placed their families on the spectrum, invite each pair to give a brief explanation about their family and why they chose that spot on the spectrum. Then ask: **Does all this family dysfunction in the Bible make you feel discouraged or hopeful? Why?**



Talk about how (outside of severe or dangerous situations) it's common to feel disappointed with their "normal" families.

Say something like: **No family is perfect, but God gave you yours. Your family is God's gift to you.**

Encourage kids to embrace a realistic perspective on their own family, with its dysfunctions and flaws, rather than measuring it against a false, idealized standard. Challenge them to let go of a you-always-let-me-down-and-annoy-me stance toward their families and embrace gratitude and grace instead. Invite them to consider the attitude of grace described in these passages: Ephesians 4:31-32 and Colossians 3:12-14.

Wrap up by having teenagers re-form small groups to pray for each other's families, asking God to help them each in their unique family situation. ●