

troubled teenager

by julie theophanes

at your next meeting. Make sure he's written at least 25 qualities—if he hasn't, help him think up a few more. When the list is complete, go through each item and ask, "Did you get this as a child?" More often than not, the answer will be no. Invite the teenager to talk about each one. Sometimes, you'll hear a yes to every question when no is the true answer. It's likely that this person is afraid of blaming his parents. Explain that the exercise is focused on forgiveness, not blame.

Then tell the young person: "Your new father has all the qualities you've listed. You just don't know him very well yet. This exercise is going to help you get to know your father."

6. Over time, work through the list of qualities with the young person. Explain to the young person that, before she gets to know her new father, she must forgive her parents for not demonstrating the qualities on her list. One by one, help her focus not just on the bad things her parents did, but the good things her parents didn't do. Mayhew says, "Most of the time, for-

giveness doesn't get at that half—and that's the bigger half," she said.

7. Help the young person find five to eight Scripture passages that relate to each quality on his list. Use a concordance, and if you get stumped, ask God to give you guidance. One girl challenged Mayhew by choosing the quality "funny." Mayhew found lots of Scriptures that reveal God's sense of humor, but it takes a thorough knowledge of the Bible to understand them. So she prayed for examples, then remembered the animals God created. She and the girl talked about God's funny animals.

Have the teenager write each Scripture reference in his notebook, one reference for each page. The notebook then becomes his devotional guide for the week.

8. Ask the teenager to focus on one of the Scripture passages each day. Have the young person "pray the Scripture" by talking to God about it, then accepting its truth by faith. She may invite God to be that

quality for her. Ask her to rewrite the Scripture with her own name in it. Then have her use the rest of the blank page to write her thoughts or observations.

9. Give weekly feedback to the young person. Ask him what he's learning and what's happening in his life as a result. Mayhew says God often tests what a teenager is learning about a particular quality. Once two girls told her: "God is supposed to be our protector, but we were put in unsafe situations. Where was God?" Mayhew responded: "That was an opportunity for you to trust God. How did you do?" The counselor's job is to help kids stay focused on what God is teaching them.

10. Work at the pace of the teenager's growth. Some hurting young people need to spend a month, rather than a week, on a particular quality. So be flexible. Also, be an encouragement by reminding her that people who persist in seeking God can dramatically change. ■

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