

# 6

WAYS CHRISTIAN

PARENTS CAN LESSEN

TEENAGE ANXIETY



BROUGHT TO YOU BY

— *the* —  
**RELATIONSHIP  
PROJECT**

# Hello

FROM FAITHTREE

RESOURCES!

Real life experience proves that for many of us there is a significant rise in the stress and anxiety we feel nowadays (can anyone say pandemic and social distancing?). Research tells us this is especially true for our teenagers. According to the National Institutes of Health, one in three teenagers between the ages of 13-18 are struggling to cope with the pressures they are facing in healthy and productive ways. That's 33%. That equates to millions of teens.

Research also shows teenagers are more likely to have unexpected and disproportionate reactions to certain experiences, and in too many scenarios, struggle to make healthy choices and exhibit appropriate responses to the stress and anxiety they face. This has the potential to harm teenagers' relationships with friends, families, and can even negatively impact their physical health and inner lives.

Christian teens are not exempt from the struggle.

As parents, we want to eliminate pain and suffering from the lives of our children. If we could wave a magic wand and make the hard things disappear, we would. But managing stress and anxiety requires more than that. It requires action.

The good news is there are things each of us can do to impact the effects of anxiety and chronic stress in our lives. We can learn ways to cope. We can seek help when we need it. Most importantly, through our relationship with God and other people, we can impact not only our mental health, but also our inner life as well. And we can teach our teenagers how to do the same.

Here are six practical ways you can lessen the anxiety your teenager may experience:

# 1

## Create regular and predictable opportunities to talk.

When our children are little, it can be a normal part of our daily routine to sit by the side of their beds, perhaps read them a story, and have meaningful interaction and conversation with them. It's part of tucking them in at night. However, for many parents, somewhere between the time our children start reading on their own and the teenage years, the depth of that connection fades. And let's be honest, what 16-year-old wants us to tuck them in anymore? (Sniff.)

But staying connected and having those predictable opportunities to communicate with your teen is still a possibility. Setting regular, consistent and predictable times to connect with your teenager helps create occasions for them to talk about their fears, struggles, or worries. When we have open conversation, we are able to step in and help to support our teens when they need us.



### APPLICATION IDEA

**Go on a weekly outing with your teen.**

**Coffee, dinner, a walk: the venue is less important than your commitment to a regular time with your teen.**



# 2

## Give them your full attention.

We all live full lives. Generally, most of us have more to accomplish in each 24-hour period than we could accomplish in 100 hours. This can leave us distracted, unfocused and sometimes only partially listening when our teens try to connect with us. It's easy to fall into the trap of looking down for a quick scroll in the middle of conversations with our children. Because so many of us do at least a part of our business via our phones, we might have lost the awareness that we never completely shut it down. Our days no longer have that "5 o'clock whistle" blow to remind us that the workday has ended.

When you have time with your teen, commit yourself to no devices whatsoever. Stop what you're doing and give him or her your full attention. It can be a game-changer when it comes to connection. It helps to show your teen that at that moment, they matter more than anything.



### APPLICATION IDEA

**When your teen draws close to you, make an extra effort to put your phone down and step away from it. This specific act of keeping it out of your reach allows your teen to know they have your full attention.**



# 3

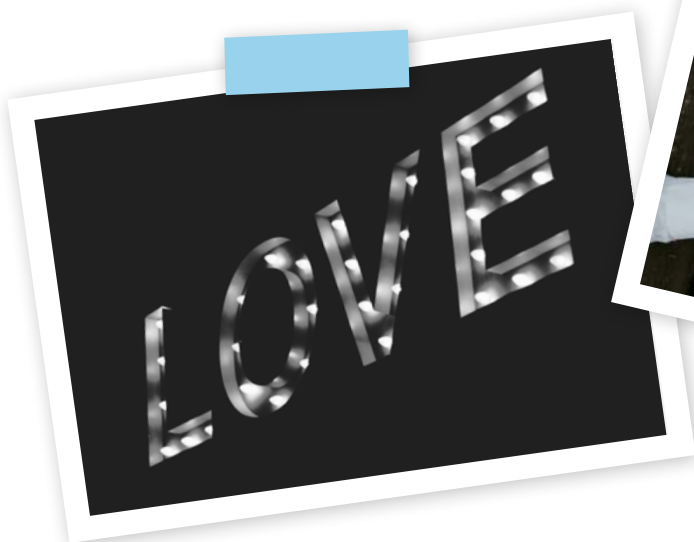
## Listen without judgment

Any parent of a teenager knows that sometimes, the things they say can make us cringe. For Christian parents, this is often seen when our teen is trying to navigate what the greater world teaches compared to the truth the Church reveals. As your teen wrestles with reconciling the two, listen without judgment. Be the safe space where they can start to understand what *they* believe and why they believe it. Maybe they'll ask tough questions. Maybe they'll share frustrations. Maybe they'll tell you they want a belly button ring. Or perhaps they'll say nothing at all. Regardless of what your teen wants to communicate, let your listening ear illustrate to them that you are a safe person to open up to. Once they've had the opportunity to express what's on their mind without judgment from you, you'll have far more credibility to deal with the belly button ring.



### APPLICATION IDEA

**Allow for silence to occur as your teen is sharing. It may feel awkward and unnatural, but sometimes those ten extra seconds will allow your teen to articulate what they are feeling more fully and give you a chance to respond more thoughtfully.**



# 4

## Help them cultivate the right squad.

Being part of a community is paramount in the life of a teenager. Establishing a community of like-minded peers helps your teen meet social and emotional needs and teaches life skills like conflict resolution and forgiveness. Plus, community creates a sense of belonging.

For many of our teens, developing this type of peer group is hard to do. And for many of them, having a “not-so-right” squad is easier than having no squad at all. But hanging with the wrong crowd is a quick way to turn the power of community into a source of stress and overwhelming anxiety. And it can lead our teens down an unhealthy path.

Christian parenting benefits from consistently cultivating deep and meaningful friendships in the context of the Church. Gathering with peers who understand the Faith and are growing in relationship with God and others around the local altar table is a sure way to help our teens face anxiety.



### APPLICATION IDEA

**Open your home to your teenager’s friends and be the place where they can gather and hang out. And don’t forget to provide snacks. This type of hospitality provides a home court advantage and allows you to stay connected to your teenager’s squad.**



# 5

## Bring other trusted adults into their lives.

We've heard it said and we know it's true: it takes a village. Great parenting doesn't happen in isolation. Just like you think about which adolescents your teenager spends their time with, also consider other adults that can pour into them and mentor them, especially in the context of the Church. Involving a pastor, youth advisor, godparent or Sunday School teacher that reflects the same belief and value system that you do gives your teen one more trusted adult for them to lean on when they are feeling anxious. Although we'd like our kids to seek us out whenever they experience pain, or have a struggle, they might not. Creating a tribe of trusted adults to co-labor with us in our parenting journey is invaluable and a great gift to our teens.



### APPLICATION IDEA

**Find ways to include a trusted adult from the parish community into the life of your teen by hosting them for dinner, inviting them to a sports event or having them join your family for an extracurricular activity.**



# 6

## Remind them of the source and magnitude of their value.

We are all children of God. He is the source of our lives and loves us beyond measure. He created us in His image and after His likeness. That might sound lofty but knowing our true identity as children of God can change so much about how we experience things. This is especially true with anxiety and stress. As Christians, we know that nothing we do can ever make God stop loving us. We may choose to turn away from His love, but we can't lessen it. Understanding this is truly like taking a deep and calming breath.

If we teach our teens this truth, that God loves us no matter what, their struggles in how to deal with pressure, how to make the right choices, and how to feel worthy, known and loved—rest on the knowledge that God loved us enough to send His Son to die in our place. This is so much easier than thinking it all depends on us. When we truly begin to understand this, dangerous feelings brought on by anxiety or stress are much more likely to lift.



### APPLICATION IDEA

**Pray with and for your teen regularly.**



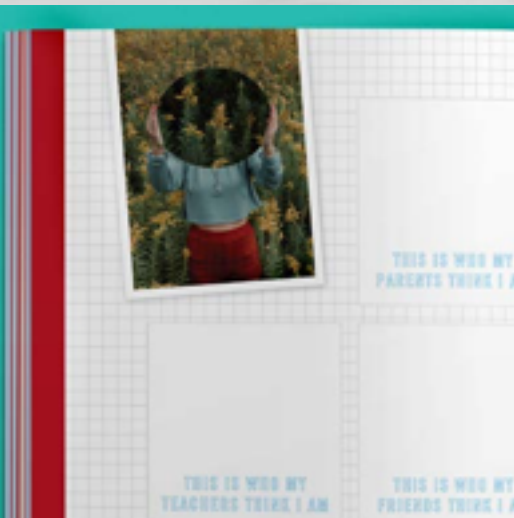
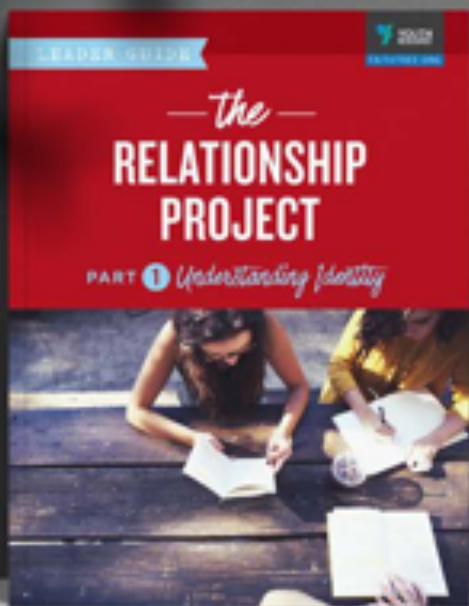


Available **JUNE 2020**, Faithtree Resources brings a series for teenagers to parishes around the world. *The Relationship Project* invites teens to experience a three-part series within their local church community:

PART ① *Understanding Identity*

PART ② *Understanding Intimacy*

PART ③ *Understanding Mental Health*



Visit [FAITHTREE.ORG](https://www.faithtree.org) and see how you can help the teens in your parish thrive in the context of the Church.