

Many adult women find teenage girls a little bit alien and scary—which is funny, when you consider that we've all been adolescents, and many of us are, have been, or will soon be the mothers of adolescents. Yet the "generation gap" is not entirely unjustified. Adolescence is a unique time of life, and every generation of young women experiences it a little differently because of the culture in which they're growing up.

With all this in mind, how do we reach out to the young women in our congregation? Teen girls often see Women's Ministries as something directed at their mothers' and grandmothers' generation, not their own. How can we tailor our Women's Ministries programs to meet the needs of adolescent women?

Before we answer that question, let's take a moment to examine what those needs are.

- Invite a social worker to talk about dating violence
- Have a counselor conduct a seminar about overcoming pain from childhood abuse
- Plan a mother-daughter (or general parent-teen) seminar on family issues, how teens and parents can learn to communicate better
- Chastity Banquets
- Career Planning

Include teens in your Women's Ministries program:

- Pass out *PLEASE PRAY FOR* _____ cards with a teenage girl's name in the blank to women in your church. Rotate the cards among the women.
- Include teen girls in a secret sisters program.
- Invite one or more young woman to be part of your Women's Ministries team to help in planning meetings and program which will appeal to adolescents. Some ideas might include: crafts, aerobics, hair and facial makeovers, outings, and many others.
- Allow the young women to have their own committee that plans for their needs. Have an older woman sit in on the committee as an advisor.

Tap into the potential of the young women in your church! Find out what Women's Ministries can do for them, and what they can do for Women's Ministries!



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Women's Ministries and Our Teens

Teenagers: Who they are

If someone asks you “What is a teenager?” you’re probably pretty certain that the answer would be “A person between thirteen and nineteen years of age.” In fact, though, the time of life that we usually refer to as “teenage” can have more flexible boundaries than just the chronological teen years.

Culture is a big factor here. In some cultures, where young people are expected to marry and take on adult responsibilities in their late teens, there is only a very short period of teenage change and upheaval.

In North America and in many other Westernized countries, the opposite is true. North American culture expects children to begin thinking and acting like teenagers even before the onset of puberty—often by ten or eleven years of age. And as more and more young adults delay the transition to marriage and careers, young people in their twenties are often still dealing with adolescent struggles.

The eleven-year-old girl in your church’s junior class may have little in common with the twenty-one-year-old college student sitting in the back pew, but even though they are going through different stages of teenage, they have some common concerns and needs.

• Change

Physically, emotionally, mentally and socially, teenagers are going through change. It begins with the physical changes of puberty—young girls have to adjust to their changing bodies, in a society that sets unrealistic standards for the “perfect” body (statistics show that 80% of adolescent girls are unhappy with their bodies). Teens are also changing the way they think, as they move towards adult reasoning skills. Their social center changes from the home to their

peer group. And all these changes can add up to an emotional roller-coaster, with moods that can change with lightning speed.

• Independence

The most important challenge for teens is to establish their independence from their parents, to step out on their own as individuals. This doesn’t always have to mean rebellion, but it can result in some stormy struggles as the young girl fights to establish the fact that she’s an independent person with a life of her own.

• Identity

As she makes her declaration of independence, the adolescent girl has to define not only who she *isn’t*—Mommy and Daddy’s little girl—but, more importantly, who she *is*. Teenagers often do this by exploring different roles and “trying on” various styles and peer groups. This can be scary and confusing for the adults in their lives. Relationships with the opposite sex are of vital importance at this age. It’s also important for a teenager to establish her identity as part of a peer group, which is why a strong church program for youth is so crucial.

• Acceptance and Mentoring

Just because teenagers are establishing a separate identity doesn’t mean they no longer need adults. Parents, teachers, and older church members are still very important in their lives. Teens need to feel they are accepted in a loving, non-judgmental way, even as they experiment with different roles and identities. And they need mentors who can model what it means to be a Christian woman in today’s world.

The number one factor for keeping young women drug

free and sexually pure is a good relationship with at least one parent or other respected adult.

What Next?

So, the young women in your church family need you. And, whether they know it or not, they need Women’s Ministries...and Women’s Ministries needs them, because the dynamic energy and enthusiasm of youth can be a “shot in the arm” for your program!

Make a personal effort to get to know young women by name, to spend time one-on-one with them, and to pray for them. Also, explore with your Women’s Ministries team some ways you can reach out as a group to adolescent girls in the congregation. Here are a few ideas to get started:

Consider hosting one or more of these events:

- Mom and daughter banquet
- Mom and daughter slumber party
- *Going-away-to-school* shower for young girls moving into a dorm for the first time.

Find out if the women in your church would be interested in any of the following support groups:

- Parenting teens and pre-teens
- Blended families
- Single moms
- *Prayer and Love Saves* by Dorothy Eaton Watts—program for parents to pray for their children

Work together with your church’s youth leader to host seminars and programs aimed at teenage girls. Some ideas include:

- Invite a crisis pregnancy worker to talk about abortion and adoption
- Bring in a woman doctor or nurse to talk about teen sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases