



PARENT GUIDE

Senior Year

Your education is a dress rehearsal for a life that is yours to lead.

NORA EPHRON

CONTENTS

The Best Days of Our Lives	3	What Does the Bible Have to Say to High School Seniors?	10
What Makes Senior Year So Special?	4	What Role Does Family Play In My Teen's Senior Year and Onward?	11
What Is On My Teen's Mind During Senior Year?	6	Four Conversations to Have With Your Teen Before They Move Out.	12
Do Kids Still Go to the Prom?	7	This Is the End, But Also the Beginning.	15
So, What About College?	7		
Should I Have Any Concerns About Senior Year?	9		

THIS GUIDE WILL HELP YOU DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- It's Senior Year. How did this happen?
- How should we navigate Senioritis, Senior Day, and Assassins?
- What are teens most worried about during their Senior Year?
- Does Gen Z even care about the prom?
- College decisions: Dreadful or delightful?
- Should 18-year-olds have curfews?
- What does the Bible say about adult children?
- What can parents do to cultivate the next phase of their relationship with teens?
- What are the four conversations to have with our teens before they move out?

The Best Days of Our Lives

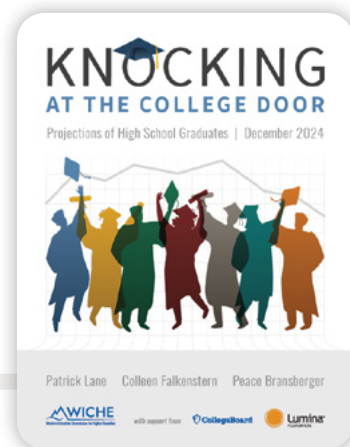
The magic of high school graduation has long been represented in film and popular culture. Whether it's as over the top as soaring away in a flying car in *Grease* or having one final mega musical number in *High School Musical 3*—whether it's as raucous and hectic as the graduation parties in *Booksmart* or *Superbad*, or as philosophically quaint as the final conversations before graduation day in *Dazed and Confused* or *Lady Bird*—these films all convey the idea that senior year is a big deal. And they're right!

But beneath all the spectacle is a less exciting, and all too real truth: senior year can be a scary time for teens—and for their parents.

At the start of senior year, many students and parents are both asking one core set of questions: ***How did we get here so fast? What's going to happen next? And am I ready for things to change?***

With grades, extracurriculars, college applications, curfews, friendships, relationships, or even personal identity, there's a lot to be reckoned with at this pivotal moment. As Bob Dylan famously sang, “the times they are a-changin’,” and you might be wondering how your child went from baby pictures to graduation pictures in what seemed like the blink of an eye. Your child is nearly an adult, or has just become one, legally, and though they are still under your care, they're also yearning to jump into a new chapter.

In 2025, there were almost 4 million estimated high school graduates in the United States, which is the **highest number** of high school graduates ever recorded. If you're reading this guide, you're certainly not alone in your questions and uncertainties. We hope this resource can help you and your teen navigate this transitional time better. With that being said...





What Makes Senior Year So Special?

In many ways, senior year is just like any other year of high school. There's the same blend of class, homework, quizzes, tests, friends, teachers, dances, clubs, assemblies, and an endless yearning for any pocket of free time that can be found. But on top of all that, senior year has many unique perks and quirks that somehow squeeze their way in next to all the regular responsibilities of the school year. There are several senior-year-specific traditions that many schools host, including Senior Skip Day, Senior Assassin, the Senior Prank, and Senior Sunrise/Sunset. You may have just read that jumble of words and wondered... what? So let's break each of those down.

Senior Skip Day is exactly what it sounds like. The school will pick a day during the year when the senior students won't meet for classes. This could be a chance for friends to gather at an alternate location to hang out, to sleep in and enjoy their hobbies, or to catch up on assignments or study for exams (though if we had to guess, this probably wouldn't be a senior's first pick for how they'll spend their day off). Senior Skip Day usually takes place the day after a major event like prom, a big game, or a holiday.

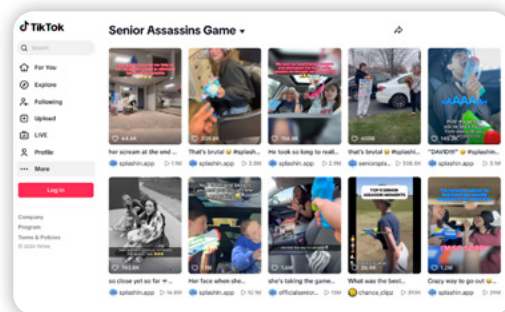
Senior Sunrise or Senior Sunset is another event intended to give seniors a break, but with a more communal and sentimental focus. Often taking place in the fall, either as the sun rises or sets, seniors will typically gather at a park to enjoy a meal together, play games, connect, and celebrate the hard work they've put in to reach this important milestone.

Senior Pranks are where things get a bit more controversial. Senior Pranks involve pulling off a "prank" of some sort at school. Lighthearted senior pranks could include filling the hallways with balloons or cups of water, hiding Bluetooth speakers around rooms and playing random noises throughout the school day, or covering classes in post it notes or pictures of favorite teachers.

However, there have been **many extreme stories** of seniors taking the prank too far, which has resulted in many schools either placing extreme protocols on what the Senior Prank can and cannot include or banning it altogether. Whether your teen's school officially allows and encourages Senior Pranks or not, emphasize to your teen the importance of discernment, as students have faced thousands of dollars in fines and even legal repercussions for taking things too far.



Speaking of taking things too far, **Senior Assassin** (or simply “Assassins”) is a game for seniors that involves students going around “assassinating” fellow classmates, usually with water guns, within a certain time period. The rules can vary by region, but often students will enter to win by paying a small fee, and the winner of the game (the last student left “alive”) will receive the pool of money. Often, a witness must be present (or there must be video evidence) for the “kill” to count. These videos of creative “kills” are **often posted** on social media. The thrill of the game is that it doesn’t take place on school grounds and isn’t school-sanctioned, so students will often be on edge throughout the whole allotted time period in case their classmates pop up out of nowhere and spray them.



In theory the game could be perceived as harmless, but many schools and authorities **have condemned** Assassins primarily because it can cause harm to students. There have been instances of students getting **seriously injured** from either not practicing safe driving while they look for other students, or being unaware of their surroundings and getting into accidents. In addition, for a passerby unfamiliar with the game, seeing children sneaking around with what look like guns can be a strong cause for alarm. In light of the prevalence of school shootings in the United States, the very nature of a shooting game has been questioned for its appropriateness.

If your teen does decide to participate in the game, emphasize the importance of taking extra care to be safe by using brightly colored water guns that can’t be confused with real ones, obeying traffic laws and vehicle safety, and preferably playing the game during the day when it isn’t dark out.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

**Does your school have any senior year traditions?
Do you plan to participate in them? If so, which are
you most excited for? If not, why?**



What Is On My Teen's Mind During Senior Year?

The short answer? A lot. But looming over every thought is probably an overwhelming case of senioritis. **Merriam-Webster** defines senioritis as “an ebbing of motivation and effort by school seniors as evidenced by tardiness, absences, and lower grades.”

Taking a lack of academic responsibility out of the equation (though it very well could be part of it), senioritis is essentially the yearning to just be done with high school. The last twelve years of school are almost over, and after all that work, seniors are rightfully ready for a bit of a break! Regardless, we think it's important to remind your teen of the value of finishing strong, even when it's difficult.

Senioritis could also be an intrinsic coping method for the amount of stress seniors are under. They aren't just finishing senior year, they are likely also applying to colleges or trade schools, starting jobs, and saving money, all while the graduation clock is ticking and the entrance into the real world is impending. It can be a lot for a teenager to think about all at once.

While there's a lot on seniors' minds that they may want to leave behind, there are also things they may *not* want to leave behind. If your senior is an athlete who isn't planning to play their sport in college, or a longtime member of a club, there could be sadness about soon leaving behind something that has been integral to their daily routine and identity for years. If your senior has been in a romantic relationship, it can be pretty stressful figuring out the future or potential lack of a future with that person. And it's safe to say that no matter what your senior does post-graduation, some if not most of their friends will be doing something different. All of these relationships and activities that were a huge part of your senior's life are about to change in some way or another, and they may be scared or sad about it.

Like we said at the beginning, there's a lot on your teen's mind during their senior year. They are dealing with a wide range of emotions, positive and negative alike, and at times it may feel overwhelming for them to process it all with the responsibilities and deadlines in their schedule. We want to take this moment to emphasize the importance of prayer for the seniors in your life. Here are a few verses you can pray over your senior as they navigate all these big feelings:

- **1 Peter 5:7** “Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.”
- **Isaiah 40:31** “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”
- **Hebrews 13:6** “So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”
- **Psalms 55:22** “Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.”

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Is there anything you're sad or worried about leaving behind once you graduate? Is there anything on your mind about graduating that is stressing you out?



Do Kids Still Go to the Prom?

The **Senior Prom** is still a staple of senior (and also junior) year, but whether teens are going is a bit up in the air. **YouGov's 2023 data** shows that the percentage of students who attended their prom averages right around 50% across all age ranges. While it can be hard to believe that half of students pass up the opportunity to go to the prom, many factors could speak to this data. Every senior is different, with their own subcultures and friend group traits that may or may not align with the ethos of prom.

The allure of the prom often has less to do with the actual dance and more to do with the memories made with friends. The YouGov study shows that socializing is the top surveyed reason for attending the prom, followed next by dancing and enjoying music, creating memories, and wearing special attire. Even if dancing isn't your forte, going out to a nice dinner and dressing up with all your friends can be a special treat for high schoolers who are looking for a taste of independence. The prominence of social media and "viral" moments also creates plenty of desire to share prom memories for the internet to see. Currently, the "**prom**" hashtag on TikTok boasts around 3 million videos, most of which involve showing off prom outfits and cute couple moments.

Before the prom even happens, teen culture is still obsessed with "Promposals," with **TikToks** of high schoolers asking their crushes to the dance in extravagant ways, generating millions of views. This could be another instance where the viral potential of prom-related happenings outweighs the actual interest in the dance itself.

In short, prom isn't going anywhere, but whether your child wants to go is entirely up to them. When we asked young adults about prom in a recent survey, one respondent said, "It's not a huge deal, but it's definitely a fun event you can make a day of. I think everyone should go if they can, but don't feel too bad about missing it. *At the end of the day, it's just a dance.*"



CONVERSATION STARTERS

Do you care about the prom? If you were to go to the prom, why would you want to go?



So, What About College?

Many factors go into the college decision-making process. And with 62.8% of high school graduates **enrolling** in colleges or universities in 2024, millions of seniors will be assessing these factors throughout their senior year.

CollegeData **found** that in 2024, the top stressor for seniors during their senior year is applying for colleges. Things like finding schools and programs to apply to, comparing themselves to their peers and what they were applying to, college essays, application deadlines, and filling out the FAFSA were all listed as reasons for the application process to be so stressful.

Speaking of the FAFSA, the second top stressor for seniors is paying for college. Applying for scholarships and grants is another added task for students on top of all the other application processes.

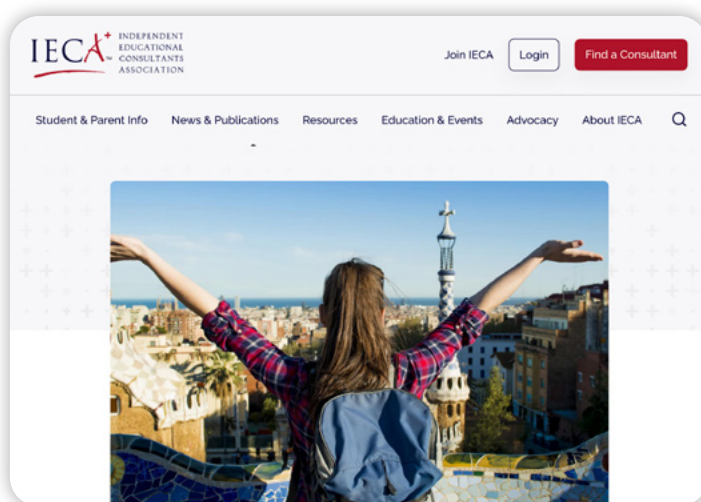
Seniors can also experience stress and discouragement if they do not get accepted into a college they applied to. Whether it be because of the program they want to be a part of, because their friends are going to that school, or because of the location or cost, these rejections can be devastating to a senior who has put in so much work during the application process.

Decision Day, a day when students have to officially choose the college they will be attending, usually happens before May 1st of senior year. This is the final step in the college application process, which signifies a commitment to the next chapter, but can still cause stress or disappointment depending on whether it was a senior's top option or not.



There is also a **small percentage** of students who may decide to take a gap year after graduation. A gap year could provide students time to travel or volunteer, but **recent studies** indicate that the primary reason students are considering a gap year is to work on themselves. Whether it be things like saving money and preparing for independent living, leaving more time to focus on college applications without the added stress of senior year responsibilities, or simply needing a break and taking a mental health recharge, the gap year can provide space and time for students to figure themselves out and what they want to do before jumping into a 4-year college commitment.

Whether your senior is considering college, a gap year, or something else altogether, there are lots of factors that can stress them out about this big decision, especially if they're moving away from home. As the year progresses, their emotions may fluctuate about their college decisions. No matter what they decide, it's important to remind our seniors that they aren't defined by the colleges and programs they do or don't get into, but that their ultimate identity is in Christ.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

How do you feel about going to college? Does anything stress you out thinking about college as a senior? And if you aren't interested in going, what might you want to do instead?





Should I Have Any Concerns About Senior Year?

In the 2019 comedy *Booksmart*, two high school seniors, Molly and Amy, take pride in the rigorous academic effort they've made to get into prestigious colleges once they graduate. That is, until they find out all the kids who slacked off and partied got into the same colleges.

On the night before graduation, they decide they HAVE to go to one big high school party because, as Molly puts it, they “missed out” when they decided to focus on their studies. We certainly wouldn't wish the chaos that ensues throughout the film on your teen, but it does open up a question: will seniors feel like they're “missing out” if they don't participate in certain activities in their senior year? As they become legal adults, are they pressured to make more “grown-up” decisions as a rite of passage? The answer to these questions is entirely individual to your teen, but we'll address some common questions below.

Should my legally adult senior have a curfew?

When your teen has turned 18 or is close to it, their desire to stay out later may become stronger. Some states have legal curfews for minors, often beginning somewhere between 11 p.m. and midnight and ending at 5-6 a.m. the following day, but if your teen is a legal adult, there is no mandated curfew recognized by the law. This leaves the idea of a curfew entirely up to you as a parent. You know your teen best, and their curfew should directly correlate to your family rules and your teen's level of responsibility.

Is my senior engaging in risky behavior, like drinking, vaping, and having sex?

Recent statistics show a significant decline in all of the above among Gen Z teenagers, but these activities are still prevalent. In 2023, **approximately** 14.6% of teens reported consuming alcohol. What's more cause for concern (and something that hasn't changed) is that teens are more likely to binge drink when they drink, consuming 3-5 drinks in the span of 2 hours.

According to the FDA, there has been a sharp decline in teenage e-cigarette use, with the percentage of teens vaping **dropping** from 7.7% in 2023 to 5.9% in 2024. In 2024, about 10.1% of high school students reported current use of *any* tobacco product (not just vaping).



Over the past 30 years, the percentage of high schoolers who haven't engaged in sexual activity **grew from** 45.9% to 70%, and teen pregnancy rates have declined by 78%, which is all great news. However, teens who are sexually active are at a much higher risk for STIs, and **have been reported** to make up half of all reported STIs overall. While we celebrate the decline in sexual activity amongst teenagers, it still occurs, and it remains imperative to be vocal about the medical risk and, more importantly, spiritual harm of premarital sexual activity.

It is crucial to remind our teens that these activities are risky, and in some cases can lead to long-term habits and addictions. Each can shackle our bodies to a substance, and our souls to something that is not our savior. As parents, one of our deepest desires should be to see our teens live their lives to the fullest.

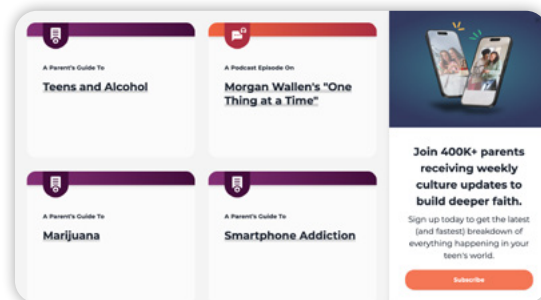
Should my senior be allowed to go to parties?

This again is entirely up to you as a parent based on family rules and your teen's level of responsibility. While we encourage you to begin allowing your teen to embrace their own decisions, we understand your concern based on some of the things mentioned in the section above. If your teen is under 18, have a talk with them about the details of the party they might want to go to and see if they align with what your family expects and prefers. A good rule of thumb could be to always make sure a parent or legal guardian will be in the vicinity, and that no drugs or alcohol will be present. If your teen is a legal adult, it may be less practical to set these precedents, but we would still recommend at least asking about the details and making sure they know you'll be on call if they feel unsafe or need help.

Is my senior cutting class—and does that matter?

Many schools are experiencing cases of “chronic absence,” in which students **are missing** 20-30+% of class throughout the year. A strong case of senioritis may go hand in hand with a case of chronic absence, and we encourage you to remind your teen of the importance and pride to be had in finishing strong. Some classes directly correlate absences with grades, and missing too much class could have a negative effect on your teen's GPA which can hinder their college application prospects.

If you want to dive deeper on some of these topics, check out our other resources on teens and **alcohol**, **vaping**, and **FOMO**.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

Do you feel like you're missing out if you don't go to high school parties? Are people your age doing things you think they're too young to be doing?





What Does the Bible Have to Say to High School Seniors?

High school and senior year didn't exist during Bible times, and neither did the concept of a "teenager," but Scripture certainly has something to say about the relationship between parents and adult children. For parents, a verse like Proverbs 22:6 ("Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.") emphasizes the importance of instilling Christlike values in their children no matter what age, as their impact can last for the rest of their life.

Senior year is the final step before your child becomes a legal adult, and all sorts of new responsibilities, opportunities, and even temptations arise. There will soon come a day when you aren't spending every day with your child, and even in this period of their life at the end of high school, you'll be loosening the leash a bit as they begin to explore their newfound freedoms. We are called to invest in our children's spiritual success, as it will always be the most important part of their foundation.

Even if Jacob wasn't pulling off twelve graduation parties for his sons, the Bible makes it clear that the most important thing you can do for your teen during their senior year, and throughout their whole life, is to once again pray and pray often. Here are some other verses you can pray over your senior as they prepare to enter their new chapter, and begin to say goodbye to the one they're in. Along with these verses, ask your senior how you can be praying for them!

- **Joshua 1:9** "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."
- **Philippians 4:6** "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."
- **Proverbs 3:5-6** "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."
- **James 1:5** "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him."
- **Romans 8:28** "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."



CONVERSATION STARTERS

How can I be praying for you during your senior year?





What Role Does Family Play In My Teen's Senior Year and Onward?

At Axis, it is our life mission to minister to families of teens and help parents understand the importance and significance they have in their teens' lives. Through the power of conversation and culture translation, we hope to equip you with all the skills you need to foster forever conversations with your child about anything and everything going on in their lives. Though this resource specifically focuses on senior year, we believe the role of the family is just as crucial every step of the way.

Parents have the joy of responsibility in helping our seniors figure out what's next for their lives as they continue to discover the plans and purposes God has for them, and who He has created them to be. Though you may be tempted to hold on as tightly as you can as your child becomes an adult, we encourage you to allow your teen the freedom to enjoy themselves and begin to grow in their own spaces.

In a survey we conducted with recent high school graduates, one student implored parents to “set healthy boundaries, but don't be afraid to let your kid make mistakes on their own and learn from them.” As hard as watching your teen make mistakes can be, these mistakes are the catalyst for growth—and they will inevitably happen. We should stand firm in the fact that we will always have our child's best interest at heart, and always make ourselves available as a safe space as our seniors navigate this tricky year and beyond. As eager as we may be to step in and help, we should be just as eager to sit back and watch when our seniors tell us they want to figure something out on their own.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

What is something you need from me most during your senior year? How can I be there for you best if you make a mistake?



Four Conversations to Have With Your Teen Before They Move Out

It may feel like the clock is ticking and you're running out of time to give your teen instruction and advice. Try to relax. You don't have to cover everything—even after they move to the next phase of life, you're still going to be their parent. But in the meantime, here is a brief list of conversations you may want to prioritize before your teen graduates from high school.

Conversation #1: Planning for More Responsibilities

As your senior graduates and enters adult life, they are going to be taking on more and more responsibilities. This is a crucial time for them to learn the importance of time management for personal and professional/academic pursuits alike.

Help your child put together a list of all the things they will have on their plate post-graduation. For example, if they're going to college, this could include things like classes, homework, and exams, but also things like church, clubs, chores, and outings with friends. It doesn't have to be specific (it probably won't be yet), but you can use this as a tool to help your teen begin to understand how to put together their schedule. While they've already had plenty of practice managing academic guidelines, there's a chance they'll be riddled with leftover senioritis, so it couldn't hurt to give them a refresher.

We also don't want this conversation to come across as promoting an addiction to work. Though the Bible emphasizes the importance of work, it just as much emphasizes the importance of rest. Throughout the Scripture, God calls us to observe and enjoy the Sabbath, and we encourage you to remind your child to do the same. While there's going to be more responsibility in this new chapter, there's also going to be more opportunity to have fun! Talking to your teen about managing these new responsibilities well will leave more time for said fun to be had.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

No matter how busy you get after graduation, what is one thing you always want to make time for? How will you make sure to fit that into your schedule?



Conversation #2: How to Be a Good Roommate

If your senior is moving out, chances are that they're going to be living with one or more roommates. Even if they grew up with siblings, there are some fundamental differences when it comes to living with a roommate, and it's important to discuss the importance of boundaries, open communication, and fostering friendships with new living partners.

Remind your teen that even if they'll be living with a friend or someone they already know, that relationship will be tested as they start spending every day together. If they're going to be living with someone they've never met before, the challenges are even more unknown. Talk through things like shared chores lists, expectations on guests/significant others visiting, preferred bedtimes and quiet hours, and being communicative about where you'll be and when for safety reasons.

As much as it's important to know these things going into a new roommate situation, it's even more important to remember that it's never going to be perfect, and conflict will inevitably arise. A new roommate might even be entirely closed off to respecting or reciprocating the preferences you set. This is a worst-case scenario, but it still happens. The Bible constantly calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves, especially when we feel wronged. Talk with your teen about what their plan is for conflict management and resolution, and what their options are if they have a roommate who makes them feel uncomfortable or disrespected. Remind your teen that it's okay and important to know and express their boundaries.

There are some cases where a student may need their own space and room during their freshman year, but we'd also encourage emphasizing that having a roommate can be a great first step into understanding and navigating adulthood! Talk with your teen about the ways roommates can be a great first step into learning how to live with someone like a future spouse, how to learn the balance between compromise and standing your ground, and how to live like Christ and be a good example for people you may not know well.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

What does your roommate need to know about how you like to live?



Conversation #3: The Internet is Yours Now

We've covered the importance of wisdom and discernment while using technology **several times before**, but as your teen begins applying to colleges, looking for jobs, and in general taking on newfound independence, we think it's extra important to have a conversation with your teen about being smart about what they post and look at. It's **been reported** that 28% of college admissions officers review applicants' social media profiles, with a larger 67% believing it's at least fair to factor social media presence into the admissions process. It's also **been found** that 70% of companies check social media profiles when hiring, with 57% not hiring candidates because of what they found on an applicant's profiles.

As much as we'd hope your teen abstains from drinking and excessive partying, the temptation will be there. And as they look to create new social circles, the temptation to post about these things will be there too. While it's important to encourage your child to make new friends and enjoy new experiences, it's also important to remind them that what they post is how they are perceived by people who haven't gotten to know them yet. Nowadays, a social media profile can be equated to a first impression, so remind them how beneficial it can be to make a good one.

Along with this, if your child is going to be living away from home post-graduation, the temptation to look at pornography may be even stronger without a parent's watchful eye nearby. We've covered pornography in much greater depth **here**, and would recommend using this resource as the primary guide for that discussion, but having conversations about this if your child will be living away from home is extra important.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

If I had never met you and I saw your social media profile, what would I think about you as a person?



Conversation #4: Respecting New Authority Figures

Post-senior year, your teen will likely be reporting to some sort of boss at some point. Whether it be for a job or even as they encounter college professors, these new authority figures may be less lenient or understanding than you are as a parent/loved one. Talk to your teen about the importance of heightened respect for new authority. In Hebrews 13:17, Paul calls church members to obey their leaders and submit to them, so that the leaders can lead with joy and not groaning, "for that would be of no advantage to you." It would even be good to elaborate on how beneficial it can be in the long term to foster good working relationships with employers, and the importance of networking as a young adult.

As your teen begins to work under new people, it's also important to talk to them about learning from and accepting mistakes. Becoming an adult is full of missteps and wrong decisions. It's how we learn best! Remind your child of the importance of humility, grace, and determination when these mistakes happen. It might be a great opportunity to share some personal stories of mistakes made, and how you learned from and overcame them. Regardless, remind them that it's never the end of the world, and you'll always be there to help.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

What are some ways you should treat your boss differently than you treat your parents? What are some ways you should treat them the same?



This Is the End, But Also the Beginning

Even after reading this Parent Guide, you still may be in disbelief that it's already time for your senior to graduate. And we understand! No matter how much you prepare, a big change like this will take some growing pains and getting used to. But as you and your senior co-navigate this year, we encourage you to embrace the joy that is to be had in celebrating how far they've come and the exciting opportunities that await them. As you begin to loosen the leash and let them begin to step into adulthood, remain proactive in reminding them how proud you are of them, how constant you are in being there for them, and how deeply loved and cared for they are by you and the Father. And lastly, but certainly not least, take at least one silly graduation photo. Congratulations to you and your graduate!

CONVERSATION STARTERS

What are three things you want to take away from your senior year?
And what are three things you're looking forward to most after you graduate?



Axis is free because of donors like you.

If you like what you learned in this Parent Guide and want to help us continue to make great resources to serve parents like you, consider making a gift at axis.org/give. Thank you!

