



A Parent's Guide to
**A STRUGGLING
TEEN**

axis

in partnership with

mercy
MULTIPLIED

"The greatest place of walking your faith out [as a parent] is trusting God with your child."

— Mercy Multiplied

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This guide will help you discuss the following questions:

- How do I assess and manage my emotions when my child is struggling?
- What should my priorities be when my child participates in life-altering behaviors that can negatively impact their health, well-being, and future?
- How do I respond well to my child when they are struggling emotionally or participating in harmful behaviors?
- What questions should I ask when my child is struggling?
- Why is it important to assess my own well-being when my child is not doing well?
- How do I stay mentally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy when my child is not doing well?
- When should I seek out professional help?
- How do I bring alongside others to support me and my child when our family is in crisis?
- Where do I find hope when my child is struggling?

Put Your Own Mask on First

If you've ever traveled on a plane, you've heard these [instructions](#) about what to do if the cabin loses pressure: "Remember to always put your own mask on first before helping others."

If a parent puts the child's mask on first out of concern for their child, the parent *might* save the child's life. But that same parent might also fall unconscious from lack of oxygen and be unable to take care of the child further, leaving the child at great risk.

In a crisis, our primary goal as parents and caring adults will always be to put the safety and needs of the children in our care first. That said, the well-being of our children is connected to our own. If we don't first assess our own physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual condition, we will not care for our children from a place of health.

For this guide, [Axis](#) has partnered with [Mercy Multiplied](#), a ministry committed to helping teenagers and adults break free from issues like anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm, addiction, and unplanned pregnancy. Our goal is to help parents know how to respond to struggling teens from a place of health and love.

In this guide, you will discover practical and effective ways to respond to your teenage children when they are struggling. You will also find practices we can all use to remain healthy and whole as you engage with a teen who might be struggling.

Engaging Your Child from a Place of Health

We want to do everything possible to ensure we show up for our children from a place of stability and health. But sometimes, the issues in our own hearts and minds get in the way.

Assessing our mental, emotional, and spiritual health starts with self-awareness. Psychologist [Dr. Tasha Eurich](#) defines self-awareness as being internally attuned to what's happening in our personal world as well as externally aware of our impact on others. As parents and caring adults, we need to be aware of our thoughts, feelings, strengths, and weaknesses and how the actions and behaviors resulting from those internal processes can impact our children. Doing this requires slowing down, paying attention to our emotions and thoughts, and asking God for guidance and wisdom to express them in a way that is loving to others.

In [Psalm 139](#), David famously reflects on how God made him “fearfully and wonderfully.” Near the end, though, the psalm turns in a pretty different direction:

Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

These closing verses reveal that David was wrestling with very strong feelings about the wicked people in his life, including hatred and fear of those who wanted to harm him. However, David asks God to search him and test his anxious thoughts. He invites the Lord to reveal his heart's grievous and sinful inclinations and to convict him of any anger that may not be justified. In need of a consult concerning his soul, David asks the One who knows him best to investigate his heart.

When our child is in crisis, our emotions will be high, and rightly so. Our kids' pain and fear are often *our* pain and fear, and our love for them can easily push us into a defensive or reactionary emotional space. This can make us more susceptible to leaping before we look rather than taking time to listen to the loving and wise counsel of the Holy Spirit. When acting on pure emotion, we are often more liable to cause harm than to cultivate health. We must slow down, even if it feels uncomfortable or wrong. But taking time to pay attention to what's happening inside us creates

space to bring our emotions before God and practice self-control so we can show up as our best selves for our children.

Here are some helpful steps we can take to become more self-aware as parents and adults. This framework is adapted from *Untangling Emotions*, by J. Alasdair Groves and Winston T. Smith.

Step One: Identify Your Emotions. Invite God to help you identify the emotions you're experiencing by processing the below questions with Him.

- God, what am I feeling?
- Have I felt this way before? If so, when?
- What is my child's struggle stirring up in me?
- Am I angry? Scared? Disappointed? Or all three?
- Are there any secondary emotions I'm feeling right now? If so, what are they?

Step Two: Examine Your Emotions. Now that God has helped you identify your feelings, invite Him to help you consider why you are experiencing those specific feelings. Be careful not to deny, judge, or dismiss your emotions. Emotions are allies, not enemies. They reveal to us what we love, what we value, and what we hate. They're the response to a stimulus or situation, in the same way that the physical feeling of pain is the response to touching a hot stove. They can motivate us to keep moving forward even when parenting is hard. But to do that, we must understand our emotions by asking God where they come from and what they are. Here are some questions to help you start examining your emotions with God:

- God, what am I scared of the most?
- What am I angry about the most?
- What do my emotions reveal about what I love and desire to keep safe?
- Is there any unresolved trauma or shame from my life that's intensifying my emotions?
- Is there a worst-case scenario that keeps coming to mind?
- Is there a core value of mine that my child has broken that is contributing to my emotional reaction? If so, what is it?

Step Three: Evaluate Your Emotions. Whereas examining is about trying to understand what our emotions are telling us, evaluating emotions is about letting God show us how our emotions might be misleading us.

We may be tempted to be too hard or too easy on ourselves, which can cause us to respond to the situation we're facing in an ineffective or unhealthy manner. To help, you may want to invite your spouse, a family member, a counselor, or a trusted friend to help you discern if you're overreacting or underreacting to the situation at hand. Here are some questions to process with God when evaluating your emotions:

- God, is my emotional response an underreaction or overreaction to what's happening right now?
- Does how I want to respond to my child reflect God's heart? ([Psalm 103:8-14](#))
- How likely is the worst-case scenario in my head to happen in real life? How can I keep from acting out of anxiety or fear of that scenario?
- Are my anger and fear making it so all I can see is the bad? Is there anything here that is praiseworthy or good? ([Philippians 4:8](#))
- Do my emotions reveal any sin or idolatry in my heart? ([James 4:1](#))
- Is there something I could be missing or misunderstanding about my child or this situation?

In an emergency or life-threatening situation, it will not always be possible to physically slow down and process all these questions with God. Sometimes, the first thing that needs to be taken care of is safety, like when our child needs to go to the emergency room. We prioritize urgent needs and react quickly in urgent situations. However, when the emergency has passed, it is important to process these questions with Him so we can provide the counsel and support our children need from a healthy, stable place.

Before moving on, let's look at two of the most common emotional experiences parents face when their child is struggling:

01 Fear. When we discover our teen is struggling, our natural response is to want the problem to go away. While love for our kids primarily fuels this impulse, it's often also driven by fear. In their book [Untangling Emotions](#), Christian psychologists J. Alasdair Groves and Winston T. Smith explain, "Fear motivates us to seek safety, control, and certainty."

A healthy awareness of potential danger can motivate us to respond when our child needs help. However, when that awareness turns into an unhealthy fear, it can cause us to become short-sighted and impulsive. When we operate in fear, we cannot meet anyone else's needs, including our child's. If you find yourself being motivated by fear, process that fear with God and ask Him to cover you in His perfect love that drives out fear ([1 John 4:18](#)).

02 Shame. Because caring for teens and kids is such an all-consuming journey, it can be easy for us to find our sense of identity and self-worth in parenting. When this happens, our children’s well-being, accomplishments, shortcomings, and responsiveness to instruction become the lens through which we evaluate our own worth and success. We come to believe that their behavior is a direct reflection of our parenting, and thus, our value as people. So if our child is struggling, we will likely struggle with feelings of shame.

We must be willing to take responsibility for the things that are ours to own, but we must also understand that we are not responsible for all our children’s choices and struggles. We are responsible for their love, support, and care. You aren’t a perfect parent, but your child’s struggles are not a direct reflection of your parenting. In fact, the health of your parenting is more about how you *respond* when your child is struggling than whether or not your child ever struggles. If you find yourself dealing with shame, process that shame with God and ask Him to remind you where your actual value and worth lie—in being His son or daughter, not in whether your child is struggling or not.

Fear and shame are very common emotional experiences for parents when their children are struggling. There is much grace to be extended if you are experiencing fear and shame, but it’s also important to recognize that they are very unhealthy motivators. They can cause you to overreact, which will only push your child away. Or they can cause you to underreact. It is common for parents to deny, ignore, or downplay their child’s struggles to avoid the intense emotions associated with facing those struggles.

Either way, identifying and processing our own emotions with God will help us engage our children from a place of health, love, and stability.

Reflection Questions: On a scale of 1-10, how internally self-aware do you think you are? What can you do to grow in that area?

13 Ways to Love and Support Your Struggling Child

As we talk with our struggling child, it's vital to know that our *presence* in these conversations is even more important than asking and saying all the "right things." American poet and civil rights activist [Maya Angelou once said](#), "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." We make the most significant impact by *how* we interact with our children. Don't be overly distracted by trying to say all the right words and miss the more important emotional connection.

With this in mind, here are 13 significant principles to help us prioritize both the "what" and the "how" when responding to our child:

01 Listen carefully, actively, and prayerfully. It's essential to *always* practice active listening with your child, especially as you enter these tough conversations. Focus on exactly what they're saying and how they're saying it, and respond actively with facial and vocal affirmations as appropriate (such as an encouraging nod or the occasional "mhm"). Try to restate what they're saying in your own words to ensure you are understanding. You might say something like, "I'm hearing you say _____. Is that right?" For as long as the conversation lasts, try to keep one ear tuned to your child and the other ear tuned to the Holy Spirit. As you listen, ask the Lord to help you lay aside your assumptions and responses so you can clearly hear and see your child. Ask Him to give insight not only into what they are saying, but what they're trying to say and what they aren't saying at all.

02 Be present. Maintain loving eye contact with your child throughout these difficult conversations, even if they struggle to meet your eyes. This reassures them that you are in the room, that you're in this struggle with them, and that you are not afraid of what they're telling you.

Your child will likely be hyper aware of all your movements, expressions, and behaviors. If they are trying to tell you something and you look away from them to check your phone, they will perceive themselves as less important than whatever you're distracted by. This can also extend to others in the conversation; if another parent or caring adult is in the room, try not to exchange concerned looks or talk too much to them during

conversations with your child. Your child and their crisis should be your central focus in the conversation.

Do everything you can to stay physically present in the room with your child. As we've already said, hearing what your child is going through may be incredibly distressing. If you abruptly leave the room, it may communicate to your child one or more of these things: they are on their own, you can't handle this situation, things are beyond repair; what they've done is so horrible you can't stand to be near them. If you *must* step out of the room for a moment to take some deep breaths and gather yourself emotionally, say, "Hey, I am with you. I just need a quick minute because I want to be with you in a healthy way."

Sometimes, our children tell us things that make us feel helpless and lost, but from their perspective, we are the ones who should know what to do. When they open up to us, they demonstrate their trust that we can and will take care of them.

03 Try to be "unshockable." We are all sinners capable of doing things we might never have imagined ([Psalm 51:5](#)). If your child shares something that is difficult for you to hear, you must remain calm. No matter what they tell you, try not to react with shock or dismay that they can see. Don't express shock that they have sinned or are having a deep struggle. They need to know you are safe and strong enough to walk with them through their pain. They need to know you still love them unconditionally. If you gasp or look horrified, it will confirm the negative things they may already think about themselves.

04 Be thankful. This may sound counterintuitive and not even something you can imagine doing, but it is a blessing to be brought into your child's struggle. Whether or not they share voluntarily or you find out about what's happening while they were trying to keep it hidden, be sure to express your gratitude to God for bringing your child's pain to light so you can help. Thank your child for any and everything they share with you. Even if they don't want to tell you anything, let them know you are thankful for whatever they say. Every milestone of honesty is praiseworthy, and every emotion openly expressed is cause for thanksgiving.

05 Validate their willingness and courage to face their issues. This principle takes being thankful one step further. If your child is willing to face their issues, that's brave and difficult. Affirm and emphasize how proud you are that they're asking for help. Many people go through their whole lives without facing any of their issues or getting help from anyone. The fact that your child is having uncomfortable conversations while they are young is admirable and should be encouraged.

06 Validate their emotions. It's important to remember that while certain emotions your child expresses might seem unhealthy or inappropriate, that doesn't mean they're not real. What's more, there's not anything you can or should do to make your child *stop* feeling what they're feeling. Validating your child's emotions doesn't mean encouraging them to let those feelings have free reign over their hearts and actions; it just means acknowledging that what they feel is real.

When appropriate, you can also say to them, "I think what you are feeling makes a lot of sense," or "I can see why that makes you feel that way." If you share their feelings about the situation, calmly saying, "I'm feeling [this emotion], too," can sometimes help create an experience of solidarity.

07 Stay self-aware. As parents, we love our children and hate to see them hurting, even if they are hurting us in the process. Because of this, it's essential to practice the other part of self-awareness, which is governing our outward expression of emotion so that tough conversations with our teens remain as calm as possible.

External self-awareness includes being conscious of what your face and body communicate. If you can't hold back your tears, take a moment to share with your child what you're feeling or thinking. Since your child might feel guilty or ashamed for making you cry, it's important to contextualize this reaction as coming from love. Affirm that you are grateful for your child's honesty in telling you what's happening and that you are crying because you're sad that they have been in pain and walking through it alone.

If you get angry, which is sometimes very understandable, be aware of any body language that might cause your child to shut down. Things like taking intense deep breaths, aggressively rubbing your face, or pacing the room communicate disapproval, disappointment, and judgment—and can end a conversation. Remember that the goal is to listen to your child and get them the support they need.

If you are struggling to conceal your anger, take a moment to explain your feelings to your child. What our kids might believe from our anger is that we see them as a failure or an embarrassment. In reality, anger about our children's actions often comes from sadness that they have been hurt or have hurt themselves. This stems from our deep love and desire for them to always be safe and happy (even if we know that's unrealistic). Remain as calm and open as possible during the conversation, then take your anger to God and others you trust later.

08 Avoid saying, “I completely understand.” While it may be tempting to say this in an attempt to validate our child’s feelings and experiences, this response can sometimes feel insensitive and dismissive. Though we might have walked through similar circumstances, our experiences will not be the same. You might have both been bullied in sixth grade, but for them, it’s happening in a world with different technology, culture, ideas, and social norms than it did for you. Apart from that, you have different temperaments, personalities, interests, emotions, and of course, different parents. So while you may have gone through a similar situation, your experience was unique to you, and theirs is unique to them. Affirm your child in ways that make them feel heard and seen, such as, “That sounds really hard,” or “I bet that really hurt.”

09 Be okay with not understanding. When your child tells you they’ve done something that shocks or surprises you, it’s natural to try and make sense of it. This is especially true if you think you’ve provided all the tools and instruction they need to avoid the current situation. It can be easy to slip into self-doubt and despair here, wrestling with questions that don’t have answers. *Didn’t I love them enough? Didn’t I raise them with Christian values? What did I do wrong? How is this happening? Why is this happening?*

Asking these questions might be a natural response, but it also takes attention away from your child and their needs. Teenagers will pick up on that quickly. In addition, your child may not even be able to say exactly how or why they’ve found themselves in a place of crisis. But the reality is that trying to figure out what could have been different, tallying everywhere you failed and succeeded, and looking for solutions in the past only keeps you from seeking a way forward. The past can provide clarity and give you wisdom, but it can’t be changed. Your time is best spent on the present, where you can make a difference.

10 Don’t be afraid to speak hard truths into the situation (when the time is right). When your child shares things they’ve done, they may try to explain why they felt justified doing them. It may be easy for some parents to step into that justification with them. But helping them take whatever responsibility is appropriate is the only way for them to fully address what they’re struggling with. Jesus led the way in showing us how to operate in both grace and truth ([John 1:14](#)), and we are empowered to do the same in our parenting. As parents and caring adults, we want to meet our children where they are with empathy and compassion, but we also don’t want to beat around the bush or avoid saying what’s true. Unless there is a legitimate concern about your child physically harming you (or themselves), we are responsible for telling our child if their behaviors don’t align with God’s best for them.

This doesn't mean it needs to happen immediately. Sometimes "hard truths" are best shared in follow-up conversations. And in spaces like these, "speaking truth" is not telling your child off or punishing them for their unhealthy coping mechanisms. Instead, it's about helping them learn how to abandon the things that lie to us about the good they do and seeking out the healing that lasts. It's saying, "I can see how you would want to deal with your (shame, anxiety, loneliness, etc.) with these behaviors, but there are healthier ways to deal with what you are going through. This isn't God's best for you. And we're going to figure that out together."

11 Seek to find the root of the issue. It's vital to understand that your child's behavioral struggles don't define them—and they aren't even the heart of what's going on inside them. Bad behaviors are often simply bad solutions to deeper issues. Under the behavioral issue(s) you see, there are likely stories of hurt, lies they have believed from the enemy, and unhealthy roots that have grown like rejection or fear. They are trying to address healthy needs in an unhealthy way. For whatever reason, whether you understand or agree with it, the way your child is seeking to meet that need may have made sense to them at some level. For example, if your child is seeking attention with unhealthy behaviors, is it because they feel/have felt alone, abandoned, or ignored? If your child is trying to numb themselves in some way, is it because they are carrying pain they have not been able to process in a healthy way? Be curious about what is going on at a deeper, root level.

12 Be aware of subjective memory. When emotions are high, the human brain can exaggerate or even fabricate a perspective and timeline of events. It's why at a crime scene, one witness says they heard just one gunshot, and another says they heard four. It's also why someone can swear they arrived home at noon, but someone else remembers seeing them elsewhere at that time. Be aware that your child's recounting of events or situations may not be 100% accurate. Be gracious. They may not be intentionally trying to deceive you but are just trying to communicate the intensity of their feelings. Do not feel like you must be an investigative reporter to confirm that every detail they share is exactly what happened. What matters most is not every single detail, but the *effects* of whatever happened on your child and how they are responding.

(Note: If your child reports any form of abuse, it is not your job to investigate or confirm whether or not it's true. Your job is to contact your local child protective services office or law enforcement agency so professionals can assess the situation.)

13 Pray first and always. Though it's last on this list, prayer is the most essential part of helping a struggling child. None of these other steps are sustainable without God's guidance and strength. Reach out to the Spirit for wisdom and discernment as you enter these conversations. It's not your job to have all the answers or to know how to fix everything—that's why we reach out to the only One who does. You may struggle to have grace for your children, but God gives grace in abundance. While you can never honestly say "I completely understand," God knows everything about us. He understands us at the deepest possible level. Ask Him to make you more self-aware of your emotions as you have difficult conversations with your children and help you discern the next right step to ensure your child's well-being as well as your own.

Reflection Questions: Do any of these principles of engagement come naturally to you? Which ones do you see a need to grow in?

Assessing Your Child's Struggle

When your child is struggling, it's important to pray for discernment and wisdom from the Holy Spirit before engaging your child in conversation about what is happening. God is fully aware of the situation at hand and intimately acquainted with your child's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs. You need His wisdom and direction as you navigate difficult conversations. In addition, these conversations will probably be uncomfortable. Asking the Lord for wisdom will help prepare your heart for the normal and understandable discomfort of discussing hard topics.

Before talking with your child, it's also important to assess how the behaviors in question are impacting how your child functions in life. Have school grades gone down? Has their friend group changed? Have they stopped participating in or showing interest in extracurricular activities or hobbies they used to enjoy? Have they withdrawn from family? If new or recently discovered behaviors are negatively affecting your child's overall daily functioning, it may be time to seek professional support (see the section below).

As you talk with your child, your primary goal is to assure them of your unconditional love. Your child needs to hear that they are loved and that nothing they do will change that. This important message reinforces a foundation of trust before you start inquiring about *what* is happening and *why*.

The tone of these conversations is crucial. The words you choose and your tone of voice should communicate that you are asking questions because you love and care for your child and want to understand the best way to support them. Avoid sounding like you are judging your child or trying to get them in trouble. We want to invite our children to share their difficulties with us and open the door to come alongside them. Here are some questions to consider:

- If your child is facing emotional or mental challenges (i.e., anxiety, depression, etc.):
 - When you feel like this, what do you do?
 - How long has this been going on?
 - How often do you feel this way? Is it all the time or after something specific happens?
- If the problem your child is having includes a specific harmful behavior (i.e., substance use, self-harm, unhealthy sexual behaviors, etc.):
 - When you say you are doing this, what do you mean by that? What does that look like?

- How often are you doing this? Is it triggered by anything specific, or do you desire to do it in general?
- Do you do this with other people, or alone, or both? How long has this been going on?

If your child indicates substance use/abuse, assess which substances they are using or have used, the amount they're using, how often the use occurs, and where they are getting the substance(s). This information will provide insight into any current danger and the level of urgency required to address the situation.

Always end these conversations by asking your child, "Is there anything else I need to know or anything else you want me to know?" Asking this question allows your child to share other facts relevant to the present situation or something else on their heart. Often, important information or context is now provided because your child is past the difficulty of having this conversation with you.

After you have gathered information from your child, be aware of the temptation to solve the problem yourself. You are not a detective, and this may not be something you can simply "figure out." You need to take what your child has shared and thoughtfully assess what needs to happen next (see the next section).

You may have already tried to talk with your child about something and now wish you'd handled the conversation differently. Do not let the enemy accuse you, attack you with shame, or tell you that you have done irreversible damage. It is never too late to go back to your child and say, "Hey, when you shared _____ with me, I got scared and responded out of fear. I'm sorry about how I responded, and I want to circle back with you about what you shared." Restart the conversation using the principles from this guide.

Reflection Questions: Are there subjects that trigger your worst impulses when you speak with your teen? In what ways can you communicate with your teen to let them know you are a safe person to tell hard things to?

Assessing the Next Steps to Freedom

After creating a foundation of self-assessment so that you are able and prepared to have difficult conversations with your child and learning some practical tools for engaging in those conversations, the next step is to, well, figure out the next steps.

But first, your teen needs to understand that you're not going to figure out those next steps *for* them; you're going to figure them out *with* them. They need to know that you are on the same team, and they will be involved and engaged in the process. You can begin that conversation by saying, "We're going to figure this out together. I have some ideas about what might be helpful. What do *you* think would be helpful?" (If they don't have any ideas, you can encourage them to let you know if something comes to mind later.)

This doesn't mean you must put all their ideas into action. You can simply respond, "Okay, thank you for letting me know; we'll think more about putting that in the plan."

A helpful framework for deciding what issues need to be prioritized for your child and in what order is [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#). The first thing that needs to be established is your child's basic survival and physical safety. If they are a danger to themselves or others, or if the state of their emotional well-being is a matter of life or death, you need to take your child to the emergency room or urgent care and potentially call the police if the situation becomes dangerous to themselves or others.

These are difficult decisions to even think about, let alone make, and the temptation could be to think you're overreacting or can handle the problem on your own. But our primary responsibility as parents is to keep our children safe.

If the challenge our child is facing is not a matter of basic life safety but is still harming them, the second level of Maslow's Hierarchy (personal security and resources) can offer some structure for what help might be needed. Seeking the professional support of a [Christian counselor or therapist](#) who specializes in the challenges your child is experiencing can give you and your child the emotional and mental structures and resources to move out of crisis mode.

It's important for you to be aware of any stigmas you personally may have attached to getting professional help. Although there is a growing cultural awareness of the benefits of counseling,

negative perceptions are still common and prevent people from seeking the support they need. If you struggle with negative perceptions about counseling, those perceptions are likely evident to your child. Process those negative perceptions with the Lord and ask Him to show you His truth. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness or something wrong; it's actually a sign of strength and health!

You may also struggle with wanting to bypass professional help and solely seek the help of a pastor or small group leader. While we certainly need spiritual guidance, care, and prayer support from spiritual leaders, we also often need the support of professionals who have undergone the training necessary to walk people through the counseling process, just like you would go to a surgeon if you needed surgery. Seeking professional help is not a case of taking things out of God's hands but instead pursuing *all* the available help!

As we said earlier, the behavioral struggles your child is facing are simply bad solutions to deeper problems. There are very real needs they are seeking to meet. A good professional counselor will help uncover those root issues and unmet needs. And once the Lord begins to address those deeper issues, your child is on the road to discovering true healing and freedom.

However, you must be prepared to embrace the process; healing and freedom typically don't happen overnight. There are no quick fixes to remedy what your child is experiencing. Even if there is a distinct next step like ending a certain relationship, removing substances from your home, or seeking professional counseling, that's just the first part of a journey that will require both tangible changes and inward healing. If we try to rush to a solution or greener pastures, we risk undermining the potential transformation and growth of both our child and ourselves.

If your child is reluctant to try counseling, affirm that it's hard to do something new. Be willing to process their concerns with them, but if you believe professional support is necessary, be sturdy and confident in that decision. Their feelings about counseling cannot dictate your boundary. Let your child know that you love them enough to make decisions on their behalf that they don't like. However, share that you would love to hear their thoughts about their counselor and session(s) afterward. If they aren't connecting with their counselor after a few sessions, be open to exploring new counselors.

It may seem obvious that the person who needs professional support is your struggling child. But you as their parent may also need support. Consider finding a counselor skilled in family therapy who can work with your entire family system. The goal is for the whole family to get healthier *together*. This demonstrates to your child that they are not alone, which is a vitally important

message. It also gives you a space to work through difficult and emotionally volatile issues with the presence of an unbiased mediator.

The next level of Maslow's Hierarchy concerns community, support, and belonging. You've likely heard the proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." This doesn't just affirm that children need the care and wisdom of many people, but that parenting is not a solitary task. If the whole village is engaged in raising a child, everyone in the village is taking on the burden, responsibility, and blessing of parenting.

As parents and caring adults, we need support. We need friends to vent to, mentors to ask for advice, and counselors to help us grow in ways that allow us to love, support, disciple, and raise our children from a place of health. Freedom, transformation, and healing all happen within the context of community. Building a caring and supportive village for our children and ourselves to be known and to grow is essential to making it to the other side of a crisis.

Reflection Questions: Who in your community could provide you and your family the support you need during a crisis? If you don't have a supportive community, what's the first step you can take towards building one?

Life After Death

When you're walking through an unforeseen or heartbreaking crisis with your child, it can feel like there's never going to be an end. It might feel like life has changed so drastically that you can't even imagine recovering. It might feel like good days will never come again. But the great news of the gospel is that light has already won out completely over darkness. Good vanquished evil completely and totally, long before you or your child were even born.

Because we know the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, we often forget how hopeless the people who believed in him must have been when they saw him crucified and entombed. It was one thing for Jesus to bring others back from the dead—and he'd done it three times, after all—but his disciples had *seen* him die. They believed they had lost their messiah—or that perhaps if he had died, he wasn't the messiah in the first place. Peter went back to fishing, ashamed and defeated ([John 21:3](#)). Two disciples left Jerusalem altogether, talking about their disappointment that the man they thought would redeem Israel seemed to be nothing more than another prophet executed by the government ([Luke 24:13-21](#)). For three days, the followers of Jesus sat in disbelief, confusion, and agony, unsure of what to do next.

When our children are struggling, we may feel like these disciples did. Like Peter, we may feel ashamed and defeated, blaming ourselves for what happened and feeling like we failed at the very job we promised to do. Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we may give up hope entirely and trudge through our lives believing everything has fallen apart beyond repair. But because we have a Savior who died on a cross, laid in a tomb for three days, and walked out with power over sin, Hell, and the grave, then no matter what crisis our child is facing, we can have hope.

We can have hope because the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead abides in us ([Romans 8:11](#)). With that power, Christ purchased the souls of sinners and made us family, royalty. That power is more than capable of providing everything we need to parent our children well through the most painful and hopeless situations despite our weaknesses, failings, and fears.

We can have hope that God, who raises dead things to life, can resurrect our children from whatever crisis they are facing. And more than that, we can have hope not just for resurrection, but for transformation. Just as Jesus walked out of the tomb, transformed and unrecognizable to the people who knew Him best, our children can walk through to the other side of even the most

devastating crisis, transformed and made new. This struggle does not have to be the end of their story; in fact, it might be the very thing that marks a new beginning.

Reflection Questions: When you have felt hopeless in your life, how have you seen God work to restore your hope? How can you make time to remember God's faithfulness and His resurrection power when a situation feels like the end?

Questions to start conversations with your teens:

- In difficult situations, how do you wish I would respond?
- Do you feel that I'm a safe person to come to if you need help? How can I become a safer person for you?
- What things hold you back from being honest with me or asking for help?
- Do you ever feel hopeless? How do you deal with those feelings?
- Do you feel like you have a community you can turn to if you need help? What does or doesn't make that community feel safe?
- Have you ever experienced a time when you felt close to God? What was special about that time that made you feel that way?
- How can we work together to grow through hard situations?

This Parent Guide was written in collaboration with Mercy Multiplied, a ministry committed to helping teenagers and adults break free from life-controlling issues. To learn more about Mercy Multiplied, [click here](#).

Sources:

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