

Discussion Guide  
TODAY'S TEENS #2  
"What Will He Do Next?"



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## Instructions to Discussion Leaders

This guide is designed as an aid to discussion leaders who are presenting the Collage film Today's Teens #2 "What Will He Do Next?"

There are four topics selected from the film developed very briefly as a reminder of the point made in the film. Following each there is a question designed for group discussion. Allow the group time to consider answers after you have read the introductory statement and given the question. It would be helpful to put the question on the chalk board or newsprint. Buzz sessions may be the most useful way to bring out the thinking of all members.

After you have given the participants ample time to share their ideas you may want to use the points indicated by an arrow (  ) as significant ideas related to the question in a total group discussion period.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### TODAY'S TEENS #2 *What Will He Do Next?*

#### No Ready-Made Model

From the primitive societies to the frontier days of Lucas McCain and his son, Mark, ("The Rifleman") youth have had ready-made models for their adult lives. There was understanding of what was expected of them as adults. Boys had their patterns, girls had theirs. Today this is becoming less and less true. In a rapidly changing and complex urban industrialized society young people have many roles from which to choose. They have to try them out by assuming the superficial characteristics of the role and try different styles of life. In doing so they must measure each step and its effect on peers and on parents. They ask "How is it accepted? Is it approved? Is this really what I want to be?"

QUESTION 1 In what ways is a father less of a model today than his grandfather was?  
A mother?



Probably the most important way in which a father is not as much of a model as was his forebear is in the occupational example that he can set for his children, his boys in particular. Formerly a boy could follow his father to the factory or the field and learn almost by imitation what the father did and how to perform many of the tasks. Today the boy may want to be in the same occupation as his father but he doesn't really learn much about it by observing him work. It's also probably true that the father is less of a model in things like style of dress, fun, and recreation. While many boys go hunting and fishing with the father the recreational pursuits of young people today are in a world of their own.



The father is, of course, a model of the kind of person he is in contrast to the things that he does. This includes the way he relates to other people, the way he acts in terms of everyday personal decisions to be made. He is also a masculine model in the way he treats his wife and the way he treats women in general. These kinds of models are the same, although more difficult to imitate in a world in which the father is not with the boy as much as he was in the past. How can a father make more time for his family?



The mother as a model is a little more difficult to identify with any certainty. If the mother is primarily a homemaker she might operate much the same as her forebear as far as what we might call an occupational model is concerned. If, on the other hand, she is a working mother as large numbers are, the same thing can be said for the mother as a model for the girl as we said of the father as a model for the boy. It's also true, of course, that she is not the same kind of model as her ancestor was in terms of style of dress and recreational pursuits.

- ↳ She is important as a feminine model in the way she treats her husband and relates to men in general. As a model and a person, what kind of person she is, rather than what she does--these factors are similar with both the father and the mother roles. Unlike the father, however, the mother is with the child enough for the child to pick up by imitation many ways of relating and to use the mother as a model for the kind of person he will become. Of course, working mothers face this problem, also.

## Need For Confrontation

The teen years are the years when we want our children to gradually become independent--to move from childhood to adulthood. During this transition period he has mixed feelings about this growing-up process. At times he wants the opportunity to explore and do things for himself while at other times he wants the security of restrictions and limits. Particularly in the early teens he needs the experience of confrontation--of being refused something he thinks he dearly wants. A child is cheated in his growth and development if he is denied this experience.

QUESTION 2 What attitudes on the part of parents will best help youth weather these little storms?

- ↳ Of course the most obvious thing that the parents can do to help a young person "weather the storms" that develop out of confrontation, is to understand why he is upset and why he feels sometimes unfairly treated. Why, in response to this frustration, he sometimes vents his feelings.
- ↳ It is wise often to accept feelings in order to show that one is sympathetic or empathetic to the kind of frustration that a child is feeling. It's easier to help the teen accept the restriction or the limit when a parent does show this kind of acceptance.
- ↳ It is important for the parent at the point of confrontation to show respect for the young person's feelings and to realize that, appropriate for his present stage of development and present state of mind, he does have ideas that need expressing. These are important to him, and while they may not be determinant in what is decided in a given situation, they are very real to him.
- ↳ It is certainly important for the parent to avoid any ridicule or any statement such as "I just can't understand how you could think such a thing!" Thus the youth will be given a feeling of security in the fact that his parents really care for him and understand what he's going through even though they do not give in to what he wants to do.
- ↳ Frustration over restriction should come as infrequently as possible. This means the parents need to watch the points upon which they set down arbitrary limits, making sure that the confrontation is really significant.

## What Will He Do Next?

In their struggle to create an independent person teenagers often seem to stray far from the values and standards held important by parents. Parents sometimes feel teens ignore much that they have been taught at home and exclaim in desperation "What will he do next?" Here we are reassured by research which holds that while children try out the surface behaviors of bizarre roles, they do not stray far from the basic values they have been taught at home. Much of the behavior is both superficial and transitory. Robert Havighurst says that the kind of person a child will become is determined by the way he is treated at home by his parents.

QUESTION 3 How can we parents reassure ourselves that this bizarre or "strange behavior" is superficial and transitory?

- ◇ Here we are confronted with the necessity of making a judgment as to the importance and the basic significance of some kinds of behavior in terms of long-run outcomes. Are we making issues over superficial things? Can we look beneath the surface and see that his basic values have not really been challenged?
- ◇ Can we watch to see if he himself in time abandons the behavior pattern we have been inclined to challenge? This attitude requires that we have some faith in the training and experiences that have gone before and we recognize that what we have done for our child up to this time has had deep-seated influence on him. It means we have faith that in the long run he will retain the really important values that we have been inculcating.
- ◇ Can we make a special effort to observe in other areas of his life tendencies to exhibit the kind of values which we cherish most? If we can do this then we can become reassured that some of the more superficial digressions are really transitory.

## Parents Have Needs, Too

Parents in their desire to do the best for their teenagers sometimes overlook the influence of their own needs on the way they respond to their children. There is a tendency to protect them from risk. There is a feeling that we must control their development or they will go astray. Sometime in the middle and late teens we will have to shift from control and confrontation to guidance and accept the fact that he must become what he is to become--not what we want him to become.

QUESTION 4 What are some parent needs that in some situations may interfere with the best development of their teenager-young people?

- ◇ One of these needs is to be proud of their children, to have their young people socially approved by adults is important to the parents. If the youth does not seem to be satisfying this need, parents may step in and correct his behavior or control

his decisions. Such action may be appropriate for his development, or might be primarily to satisfy parent needs for social approval.

⇒ For example, what are some of the reasons why parents insist on having the teenager keep his room neat? Can you think of situations when insistence on this point might interfere with more important problems?

⇒ Parents may be tempted to strive for the fulfillment of their own unfinished dreams through the accomplishments of their children. For example, a mother who once dreamed of a successful career as a pianist or singer may grasp onto a slight show of talent or of interest in a child and push for great accomplishments.

⇒ Parents also have the need to feel they have in no way failed their children. This concern leads parents to assume risks and protect children from the feelings of failure and from disappointment over unwise choices. Since babyhood this had been a role of parenthood--but as a child grows he needs to make more decisions for himself which involve risk--and failure. He learns and becomes wiser with the experience.

⇒ Parents in their need to avoid a sense of parental failure may assume too many risks for the young person. They want to make their own child into something they can be proud of and may try to make him like themselves in too many ways. If they focus on what kind of person he is rather than what he does parents may be less apt to make the mistake of letting their own needs interfere with the development of their growing teenager.

⇒ Another need which parents feel is the need to be appreciated by the child. When the young person's decisions run counter to parental wishes this may be interpreted as lack of proper consideration for all of the investment in time, energy, and money.

⇒ This forces parents to reconsider why so much investment is placed on the child--for his optimum growth and development or for parental satisfaction in having him to do all the things parents would like him to do. Does this lead parents to exclaim: "After all I've done for you!" What does a teenager owe his parents? Can you owe respect, or is it earned?

QUESTION 5 How can parents develop skills needed for effective communication with teenage children?

⇒ Parents might well begin by letting the young person know what their values are and why they are important to them. A young person is certainly more apt to accept them if he has a clear understanding as to what they are.

⇒ It is one thing for a parent to tell a young person what he believes and another to insist that the youth must also believe. The first step is for the teenager to know what his parents believe, both by words and actions.

⇒ It is important that a teenager be accepted as a person whose ideas are respected, and whose feelings are understood. There is no place for ridicule in the process of guiding children. Parents are apt to overestimate the emotional maturity of teenagers and underestimate their intellectual development.

- ⇒ Parents need to learn how to listen! Young people do want to talk. The time may be inappropriate, but nothing is more important than our listening. Further than just listening, one must listen understandably. In order to listen one must accept, in order to hear one must really listen to not only what he is saying, but what his feelings are telling us. Perhaps sometimes parents listen only long enough to hear something they want to challenge and then cease to listen. It takes skill and practice to develop the habit of listening with an open mind. Nothing is more important.
  
- ⇒ Beware of a too tight schedule that leaves no time or capacity for listening. Be sensitive to when listening is vital and more important than something else bidding for time.



Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. C. B. Ratchford, Vice-President for Extension, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Missouri, Columbia, Mo. 65201.