



Let's Talk about Faith and Real Life with Adolescents

Be a Witness

For two thousand years, the Church has flourished from generation to generation because of people like you who are willing to take the time to share with others the faith and love you have for Jesus Christ. Page 1

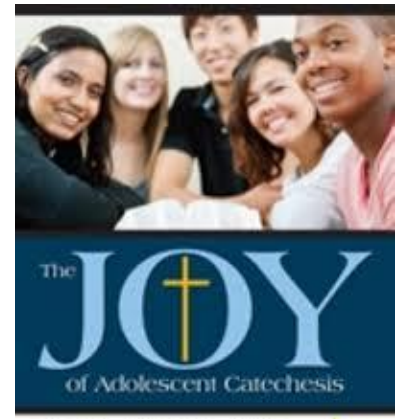
We are privileged to share the love of Christ with others, and to share with them the reason for our faith and our hope in Christ's promises of abundant life. Page 3

The Church has no shortage of words; what she needs are more witnesses. Page 3

We make a profound difference in the lives of teenagers by sharing with them, in words and deeds, the beauty of the Catholic faith. Page 2

Grace empowers us to be witnesses of faith, and the grace of the Holy Spirit works in the lives of young people to invite them to conversion. Page 2

Our young people not only desperately need to see and hear what it means to be Catholic: they need to be apprenticed into the faith. Page 2



Witnesses

- Are centered in Christ and rely upon the Holy Spirit
- Collaborate with others to plant seeds of faith
- Share Christ's loves
- Share a reason for faith and hope
- Lead youth to encounter Christ
- Invite youth into intimate relationship with Christ
- Share a living faith
- Invite youth into conversion
- Mentor youth in the faith

Summarized from *The Joy of Adolescent Catechesis*

A publication of the Partnership on Adolescent Catechesis, which consists of The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, The Catholic Educational Association, and The National Conference for Catechetical Leadership. Copyright 2017.

“This is the essence of witnessing: simply sharing your personal experiences regarding the Lord. In a courtroom, a witness is not expected to argue the case, prove the truth, or press for a verdict. That is the job for attorneys. Witnesses simply report what has happened...You may not be a biblical scholar, but you are the authority of your life. And it’s hard to argue with personal experience.”



Rick Warren, *A Purpose Driven Life*, Zondervan Publishing: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002, 2011, 2012, page 288

Share the story of God in your life. Witnessing is about telling the story not about convincing or teaching. We’ve experienced God’s presence, God’s mercy, and God’s assistance in little ways and in big ways. We witness to everyday faith by sharing glimpses of these experiences.

Your life is your witness. The primary way you witness to your faith is the way you live your life. Youth have heard a lot about faith; they yearn to see faithful living in action. What does it look like to be a person of faith, hope, conviction, and joy? How do we show that we trust God and that we see purpose in our lives that is part of God’s plan?

Be true to your values. Little things (and big things) matter. Youth may not always be listening, but they are always watching. Our witness is our authenticity: we strive to be faithful in the way we treat others, the way we treat students, the way we handle challenges and successes, and the way we rely on God. Youth notice kindness and integrity.

Sometimes our witness is subtle and sometimes we are called to be bold. We can witness in subtle ways by connecting our faith in God in conversations, in the environment in our home, or referring to prayer. There are occasions when the context of the conversation and the relationship may invite a bolder response such as sharing a story of how we experienced God in a personal challenge, or by offering to pray with or for a young person.

A witness is someone whose life has been changed through an encounter with Christ and is able to share that experience.

Who is someone that has been a witness to you?

How did they witness Christ to you?



Be a Faith Companion to Youth

“A good accompanier is a person who is balanced, a listener, a person of faith and prayer, who has the measure of his own weaknesses and frailties. Hence, he knows how to be accepting of the young people he accompanies, without moralizing and without false indulgence. When necessary he also knows how to offer a word of fraternal correction.

The awareness that accompanying is a mission that requires a profound spiritual rootedness will help him to remain free in his dealings with the young people he accompanies: he will respect the outcome of their journey, supporting them with prayer and rejoicing in the fruits that the Spirit produces in those who open their hearts to him, without seeking to impose his own will and his own preferences. Equally he will be capable of placing himself at their service, not taking centre stage or adopting possessive and manipulative attitudes that create dependence rather than freedom in others.”

Final Document for the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, # 102

The Synod insisted that “the **family continues to be the principal point of reference** for young people. Children appreciate the love and care of their parents, they give importance to family bonds, and they hope to succeed in forming a family when it is their time. Often, **grandparents are a crucial aid in affection and religious education**: with their wisdom they are a vital link in the relationship between generations”.

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, # 262

Empower All of the Contacts

Parents / Aunts / Uncles / Grandparents / Siblings / Cousins

Ministry Leaders / Catechists / Teachers / Coaches / Group leaders

Sponsors / Godparents

Peers

Faith Companion Tasks

Prays

Faith Companions pray for young people in their care.

Connects

Faith Companions connect with young people. This includes initiating contact and finding regular ways to connect for conversation.

Listens

Faith Companions listen to questions, concerns, hopes, wonderings, and experiences.

Empathizes

Faith Companions empathize with young people.

Cares

Faith Companions provide care for young people, providing practical good news for their life situations.

Witnesses

Faith Companions witness to their faith with young people.

Calls

Faith Companions challenge young people to grow and share their gifts; they help young people to hear God's call.

Empathy

Theresa Wiseman's four attributes of empathy:

- ***To be able to see the world as others see it***—This requires putting your own "stuff" aside to see the situation through your loved one's eyes.
- ***To be nonjudgmental***—Judgement of another person's situation discounts the experience and is an attempt to protect ourselves from the pain of the situation.
- ***To understand another person's feelings***—We have to be in touch with our own feelings in order to understand someone else's. Again, this requires putting your own "stuff" aside to focus on your loved one.
- ***To communicate your understanding of that person's feelings***—Rather than saying, "At least you..." or "It could be worse..." try, "I've been there, and that really hurts," or (to quote an example from Brown) "It sounds like you are in a hard place now. Tell me more about it."

Brene Brown explains that empathy is a skill that strengthens with practice and encourages people to both give and receive it often. By receiving empathy, not only do we understand how good it feels to be heard and accepted, we also come to better understand the strength and courage it takes to be vulnerable and share that need for empathy in the first place.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/partnering-in-mental-health/201408/bren-brown-empathy-vs-sympathy-0>

Watch Out For

We spend a lot of time talking about the charity model of mentoring, where the young person is this empty vessel and the adult has all of the answers and will pour that information into the willing vessel. And just how problematic that is and how sometimes, the idea of mentoring has some really intense power dynamics that are just about fulfilling or acting out that sort of idea. So, when adults come to a relationship also with the idea that they're receiving, not just giving, and that they are building some sort of scaffolding but they're also learning, thinking about things in a different way, and valuing the context that the student is in, instead of judging the context the student is in, I think those are really different types of relationships.

“Getting Relationships Right” – Search Institute, page 14.

- Judgement
- Adulthood
- Coercion
- Lecturing

Reflection

Recall a faith conversation you've had with a young person.

- *What was hard?*
- *What was easy?*
- *What worked?*
- *What doesn't work?*

Create Safe Places

We need to create safe places for doubt, remembering that doubt is a sign that young people are struggling with God questions. We must be confident that this struggle will take them into a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Hold questions as a sacred trust

Creating a space in which such questions can be asked involves being able to 'hold' young people's question as a sacred trust. Rather than declaring what a young person must believe, we need to adopt a position of patient accompaniment, of inviting dialogue, of proposing rather than imposing faith.

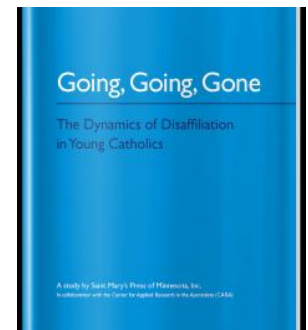
Use only love

We must relinquish any means other than love to persuade young people to the truth of the Gospel and the inherent value of a life lived in service of Christ and neighbor.

Robert J. McCarty, *Faith Talk – Having Conversations that Matter with Youth*. Winona, Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press, 2018, page 42.

Going, Going, Gone – The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics

A study by Saint Mary's Press of Minnesota, Inc. In collaboration with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). September 2017



Three Categories

Summarized from pages 13 to 24.

The Injured

- Disruptions in family life
- Witnessing inauthentic or hypocritical expressions of faith
- Feeling forced to participate
- Unanswered prayer



The Drifter

- Lack of connection between faith and life
- Lack of companions on the faith journey
- Families with marginal practice of faith
- Unable to find answers to "so what?"

The Dissenter

- Active resistance to the faith, particularly around social issues like same-sex marriage, abortion, and birth control
- Disillusionment and frustration that questions were never answered or heard
- Difficulty in reconciling faith with science



5 to 1 Ratio instead of 1 to 5

We really need a 5 to 1 ratio. Many children's and youth ministries wish they had one teacher for every five kids. But researchers Kara Powell and Chap Clark have found that to see students remain in church into adulthood, there should be five adults for each student.

This is a research-based reversed ratio. Ideally, there should be five people praying for one student by name and showing up at their sporting events throughout the year. It's a paradigm shift. It's not about finding five small group leaders per student, it's about finding five adults who show an interest in a teen.

The key is to motivate and equip parents to create that team around their child. Then the youth pastor can focus on the kids who don't have parents at home who are able to do this. They need to look for teachable moments along with modelling a healthy relationship with Christ.

The Team

Here are some people that can be part of this team

1. **A committed youth leader:** You were expecting this one. This person would connect with the student with the parents' permission every week. They connect at youth meetings and various ways, much like big brother big sisters.
2. **An uncle or an aunt.** Some people have God parents. How can you encourage them to be more involved in a teen's life? Some may be at a distance
3. **A coach.** Coaches can play a role in a student's life, believing in them and bringing the best out of them.
4. **Small group members.** If you are part of a small group of other parents' natural connections can be made between them and a teen. We have always been blessed with "aunties and uncles" within our church who have shown an interest in our kids.
5. **Sunday School Teachers.** Lilly was such a blessing to our family. She taught our girls and continued to stay in touch after they left her class. She gave them gifts on their birthdays and always went out of her way to connect with them at church
6. **Grandparents** can play a significant role in a teen's life. They may be at a distance, but their visits can be very meaningful if they stay in contact throughout the year.

(Ron Powell, Youth Ministry Unleashed, March 3, 2016)

From: <http://youthministryunleashed.com/how-to-get-the-ratio-right/>

See Also: <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/moving-away-from-the-kid-table>

The Qualities of a Mentor

The same young people described to us the qualities they hope to find in a mentor, and they expressed this with much clarity.

“The qualities of such a mentor include:

- being a faithful Christian who engages with the Church and the world; someone who constantly seeks holiness;
- someone who is a confidant without judging.
- Similarly, someone who actively listens to the needs of young people and responds in kind;
- someone deeply loving and self-aware;
- someone who recognizes his or her limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey.
- An especially important quality in mentors is the acknowledgement of their own humanity – the fact that they are human beings who make mistakes: not perfect people but forgiven sinners. Sometimes mentors are put on a pedestal, and when they fall, it may have a devastating impact on young people’s ability to continue to engage with the Church.

Mentors should not lead young people as passive followers, but walk alongside them, allowing them to be active participants in the journey.

They should respect the freedom that comes with a young person’s process of discernment and equip them with tools to do so well.

A mentor should believe wholeheartedly in a young person’s ability to participate in the life of the Church.

A mentor should therefore nurture the seeds of faith in young people, without expecting to immediately see the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit.

This role is not and cannot be limited to priests and consecrated life, but the laity should also be empowered to take on such a role.

All such mentors should benefit from being well-formed, and engage in ongoing formation”.

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, # 246

Parent and Faith Companion Toolkit



Discovering what kids need to succeed

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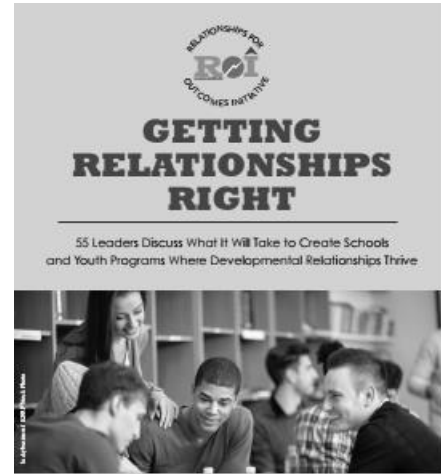
The Developmental Relationships Framework

Young people are more likely to grow up successfully when they experience developmental relationships with important people in their lives. Developmental relationships are close connections through which young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them. Search Institute has identified five elements—expressed in 20 specific actions—that make relationships powerful in young people’s lives.

Elements	Actions	Definitions
1. Express Care Show me that I matter to you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be dependable.....Be someone I can trust. • Listen.....Really pay attention when we are together. • Believe in meMake me feel known and valued. • Be warm.....Show me you enjoy being with me. • Encourage.....Praise me for my efforts and achievements. 	
2. Challenge Growth Push me to keep getting better.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect my bestExpect me to live up to my potential. • StretchPush me to go further. • Hold me accountable ...Insist I take responsibility for my actions. • Reflect on failuresHelp me learn from mistakes and setbacks. 	
3. Provide Support Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigate.....Guide me through hard situations and systems. • EmpowerBuild my confidence to take charge of my life. • Advocate.....Stand up for me when I need it. • Set boundariesPut in place limits that keep me on track. 	
4. Share Power Treat me with respect and give me a say.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect meTake me seriously and treat me fairly. • Include meInvolve me in decisions that affect me. • CollaborateWork with me to solve problems and reach goals. • Let me leadCreate opportunities for me to take action and lead. 	
5. Expand Possibilities Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspire.....Inspire me to see possibilities for my future. • Broaden horizonsExpose me to new ideas, experiences, and places. • Connect.....Introduce me to people who can help me grow. 	

NOTE: Relationships are, by definition, bidirectional, with each person giving and receiving. So each person in a strong relationship both engages in and experiences each of these actions. However, for the purpose of clarity, this framework is expressed from the perspective of one young person.

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Resources for Mentors / Faith Companions:

<https://www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Getting-Relationships-Right.pdf>

https://www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/0201/09/DevRel_Framework-1-Pager-04-26-2017.pdf

Talking with Youth about What's Important to Them!

Some Open-Ended Conversation Starters

Adapted from "W.H.E.A.T.S." by Bob McCarty

W	Where are you from? Who is in your family? Work: Do you have a job? Are you looking for work? Where?
H	Hobbies or Interests: What do you like to do?
E	Experiences or Events: What have you done lately?
A	Acquaintances (friends): Who do you hang out with?
T	Travel: Have you gone anywhere special lately? Tell me about the best place you've visited. Where would you like to go?
S	School: What school do you go to? Best/Worst Teacher, Subject Extra-Curricular activities, Stresses

20 Questions for Getting to Know Your Teenager

Nicole Fabian-Weber, April 3, 2019, <https://www.care.com/c/stories/778/100-questions-to-get-to-know-your-teenager/>

Tip #1: Don't wait until it's too late

Start open lines of communication early. If you wait until your child has entered full-on rebellion mode, it'll be much harder to get things under control.

Tip #2: Practice what you preach

Modeling the behavior you hope to see in your child speaks louder than any lecture ever could.

Tip #3: Give your teen some control

Want to connect with your teen? Switch roles.

Tip #4: Listen and be open

Of course you have a lot to say, but listening to your child will yield much greater rewards than talking.

20 questions to ask your teen

Ask them about their friends

It goes without saying that you want to know who your child is hanging out with, but military-style interrogations are a guaranteed way to get your teen to shut down fast. Instead of coming from a place of suspicion, be genuinely curious about your teen's world and the people who inhabit it.

Some questions to ask:

1. Why are you friends with so-and-so?
2. Do you feel good about your friendship with him or her?
3. What kind of things do you like to do together?

"These questions will help parents get a better understanding of whether or not their child's friendship is a positive or negative influence in their life," says Morrison. "If you determine that the friendship is more of a bad influence, you can then ask follow up questions."

Two follow-up questions Morrison suggests are:

4. What will you do if this person makes you do something you don't want to do?
5. How do you think this person will impact your life?

Ask them about school

Teenagers are spent when they come home from school, so expecting them to give you a dissertation on their day after a generic question is unrealistic. Instead, get specific.

"I've learned that I'm rarely going to get much of a response when I say to my daughter: 'How was school?'" says New York City mom Rebecca Owens.

So, instead, when speaking to her 16-year-old about her day and school in general, Owens asks more detailed questions, such as:

6. Who is your favorite teacher this year?

7. Who is your least favorite teacher this year?
8. What's your all-time favorite class?
9. What's your least favorite class?
10. Did anything funny happen with [friend] at school today?
11. What's your favorite lunch to have at school?

"When all else fails, I always ask my daughter what she had for lunch, if she bought, or about her all-time favorite school lunches," says Owens. "It isn't super probing, and I get a small peek into her day."

Light-hearted questions

A good chunk of many teens' lives revolve around pop culture and frivolity, so why not ask about that? Not only is your child more likely to talk if it's about something they're genuinely interested in (and don't feel put on the spot), you may just remember what it's like to be in their shoes.

"It's so important to keep a sense of humor when talking with your teen," says Grover. "Be playful and open, and your child will reward you with the same attitude. Getting information and providing strong leadership doesn't have to be done so through a dictatorship."

Light-hearted questions to bring up:

12. What's your favorite app?
13. What's your favorite filter on social media?
14. What's your favorite TV show?
15. Who's your celebrity crush and why?
16. What's your favorite band/singer?
17. What's your favorite song of all time?

Big questions

Sometimes the time and place is ripe for getting your teen to really talk. The important thing is to be cognizant of these rare situations, and, still, to allow things to happen organically.

"I had the best talk with my son recently on a long car ride," says Keri Peterson, of Wheat Ridge, Colorado. "I was hoping we'd get to talk more than we normally do, but I didn't want to force anything. We covered so many big topics — marriage, death, family — and to be honest, I'm not even sure how it happened! My son was in the mood to talk, so I just sort of followed his lead."

Big questions to consider:

18. Do you want to get married one day?
19. What do you think happens when we die?
20. Do you think you have enough support at home? If not, how can we change that?

And if your child is the one-word type, don't worry; other forms of communication exist.

"If your teen doesn't like talking, think about other ways to communicate," says Golomb. "Some kids will 'talk' more through art or through writing journal messages to each other. The important thing is that you're listening in every way you can."

Hey Young Church – We’re Listening

(blog post from January 4, 2017 – www.cmdnet.org)

In November, Papal Nuncio Christophe Pierre gave an address today at the USCCB that is a preview for the upcoming Synod on Youth and Vocation:

We are called to listen. "We have been describing young people and their relationship to the Church. If we are to help young people discern God's plan for their lives, we might ask: what are they looking for? They are looking to be heard. Earlier I mentioned the idea of accompaniment, which implies going to them and being with them. To this, we add listening to them. Listening is an important element of discernment. Pope Francis said:

'I think that in the pastoral ministry of the Church many beautiful things are being done, many beautiful things... But there is one thing that we must do more, even the priests, even the lay people, but above all the priests must do more: the apostolate of listening: to listen!' (Incontro del Santo Padre con i partecipanti a convegno per persone disabili, 11 giugno 2016)" <http://www.usccb.org/.../usccb-general-assembly-november-2016...>



Listening is the starting point for all ministry. What does it mean to really listen to young people? We need to pause in our quest of sharing with them all the things that they need to know and take some time to really hear their story. Where do they see God? How do they experience our parish? What is their experience of youth ministry? As you discern and plan for your ministry time with youth in this new year. Take some time to listen. Let the conversation go where it will. Here are some questions that could prime the pump:

- Listen to their questions and acknowledge that we also have questions and doubts.
- Ask questions and encourage youth share about their experience of God.
 - *Where do you see God?*
 - *Are there places that you especially experience God's presence?*
 - *Who are the people whom you see as being filled with faith?*
 - *Are there activities in which you feel close to God?*
- Ask youth to share with you about their experience of their parish
 - *What is your experience of belonging to our parish?*
 - *What do you enjoy? What helps you connect with God? What do you experience as helpful in your life?*
 - *What is challenging for you? What is hard for you about belonging to our parish?*
- Ask youth to share with you about their experience of youth ministry
 - *What is your experience of youth ministry?*
 - *If you were going to tell a friend about youth ministry in our parish, how would you describe it?*
 - *What do you enjoy? What helps you connect with God? What do you experience as helpful in your life?*
 - *What is challenging for you? What is hard for you about participating in youth ministry?*

Encouraging Youth to Participate in Mass

Many parents struggle to find effective ways of encouraging their teenage children to attend mass. Consider these ideas:

- + **Attend liturgy together as a family.** Parents, let your children know that this is what we do as a family. Attending mass on Sunday is part of who we are.
- + **Tell your children your feelings about liturgy** and the reasons why their participation is important to you. Take the time to talk about the importance of Eucharist in your life and the real presence of Christ that you receive through participation in liturgy. Share your values and why you believe participation in mass is central in your life.
- + **Make going to Mass an occasion**—go to breakfast afterwards or join in a special family activity.
- + **Let youth sit with their friends during mass if they want to.** Being part of a community means that there are people we look forward to being with. This is true for young people as well.
- + **Plan for time together as a family following liturgy.** This will give you an opportunity to continue the conversation about faith and life.
- + **Be careful about complaining** about the parish, your pastor, the homily, the music, or other aspects of the liturgy and parish community. It is normal to talk about things with each other as adults, but youth can misinterpret such concerns and critique as negativism and become discouraged about being part of the community.
- + **Make it personal** by asking the young person to go to Mass as a gift to you. Sometimes parents just cannot convince young people they should participate for their own good; however, a parent can let youth know what it means to them to be there together.

