Confirmation Parent Guidebook

"...Confirmed by the gift of the Spirit, that they give witness to Christ by lives built on faith and love..."

General Intercession from the *Rite of Confirmation*

Congratulations! Your child has chosen to prepare for the sacrament of Confirmation. You have been journeying with your son or daughter in this adventure of life and faith for quite a stretch. This is an important part of the road you are traveling; a chance to stop and view where you have been, where you are and where you are going both in your own life of faith and together with your child. As a parish community, we strive to support you and your family as you share life and faith with your adolescent.

This guidebook is a resource, a "trail guide" for your continuing journey with your young person. It is our hope that you will gain a few new insights and understandings about your teenager and your relationship with him or her. We offer an understanding of Confirmation that is based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In addition, Scripture reflections accompany ways that you can share faith with your teenager during the Confirmation preparation process. You will also find guidance in helping your child choose a sponsor for Confirmation.

Blessings for the journey!

What's Inside?

From One Parent to Another—Guiding Your Adolescent 2

What is Confirmation? 9

How Can I Support My Teen During Preparation? 10

Helping Your Child Choose a Sponsor 14

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

From One Parent to Another
Guiding Your Adolescent

Adolescence ushers in a new era in family life brought on by new adolescent life tasks and the changing role of the parents in relationship to their adolescent children. The changes of adolescence—puberty, new ways of thinking, wider sphere of social activity and relationships, greater autonomy—present the family as a whole with a new set of challenges. In fact, it would be fair to say that the whole family experiences adolescence. The challenge for families with adolescents involves

- allowing for the increasing independence of adolescents, while maintaining enough structure to foster continued family development
- reflection by parents on their personal, marital and career life issues
- adjusting patterns of family communication, traditions, celebrations to accommodate the growing adolescent
- beginning the shift toward joint caring for the older generation, for some families

The task for most families with adolescents—and it is by no means an easy one—is to maintain emotional involvement, in the form of concern and caring, while gradually moving toward a relationship characterized by greater behavioral autonomy.

> What if the period of Confirmation preparation for your child could become a time for you to reflect on this special and challenging time in your life as a parent—parenting an adolescent?

Parent-teen relationships will challenge everyone involved to grow. This growth involves a little pain. Here are a few of the issues unique to families with adolescents and ideas on how individuals and families can facilitate growth. The following is adapted from Audrey and Joe Taylor's book, *Parenting for Faith Growth—The Older Adolescent Years* (published by the Center for Ministry Development).

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

Parenting Older Adolescents

Joe and Audrey Taylor

✱ Teen independence—"I can do it myself."

You heard this phrase when your young person was two years old. But the difference now is, when our children as teenagers say "I can do it myself," they mean it! There are no easy answers or foolproof guidelines as we watch our young person explore that new emerging sense of self which is partnered with a growing independence...from us! How tightly should we hold on as dating becomes serious? How much can we loosen the reins when they start their first job? If we don't allow more and more independence, how can we expect to see a mature and self-sufficient adult emerge? In watching our teenagers, full of contradictions as they struggle with the challenges of this exploration, we become less and less captains of their journey and more and more loving companions.

✱ Parental Flexibility—"But Dad, this is different."

"OK, is he being manipulative, or should I bend this time?" Don't we ask ourselves questions like this as our young person explains (and how good they are at that!) why a particular rule should apply differently, *this time*? Here comes the challenge for us parents – how to be flexible and consistent at the same time. Let's take the age-old family issue of curfew. We'd all like to call it a night at midnight and expect that our young person would be home by then. But perhaps the situation or event requires more flexibility than the standard mandatory time to be home. For instance, we know a teen whose curfew is rigidly set at 11:30 p.m. After working at a local fast food restaurant until 9:00 p.m., the only weekend movies he could attend were at 9:30 or 9:45 p.m. That young person walked out on the climax of several films in order to get home by the 11:30 deadline, and his resentment towards parents grew every time. Even though he lived up to the curfew, his relationship with his parents was stressed. A little flexibility on the part of the parents would have paid wonderful dividends. So what is our motto? The rigid tree breaks in the storm; the tree that sways and bends with the wind survives and flourishes.

✱ Permeable Family Boundaries—"But, mom. It's not the same as when you were a kid."

No, it's not. It is a difficult world at the same time that it is an awesomely marvelous world. The point is, the world is much different than the one in which we grew. "Family" is a much more encompassing word and the boundaries are much less rigid. Experience of family can occur outside of our doors. The move back and forth between different homes and lifestyles can be an occasion for tension or for growth depending on how it is handled by the adults involved.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

✱ Parental Authority—"You can't make me. You parents don't know anything."

Yes, how often we are reminded of our lack of knowledge! After all, we learn as we go and grow as parents. In a family with adolescents, we, the parents, are no longer the complete authority in the lives of our children that we were in their young days. As our young people develop their lives separate from ours, they will seek out other authorities in their quest. No longer being the authority in your adolescent's life is scary, but it is also freeing.

✱ Influence of the Adolescent's Friends—"But my friend said..."

What friends say carries a lot of weight. The world of adolescents is a world of friendships, some healthy, some destructive. Either way, friends are influencers. A wise parent learns to pay attention to friends and their lifestyles. Accepting your child's friends is an important part of living through this stage. We must be careful to accept their friends even if their behavior leads to some intense discussion and compromise. Our acceptance can be a lesson in Christian love and a model for our young people. An added benefit of knowing your youth's friends is that you will learn a lot about your son or daughter from them.

✱ Fluctuation between Independence and Dependence—"I can't wait to get my driver's license."

Families with adolescents experience a lot of fluctuation. Teens may move from feeling independent and confident to dependent and insecure several times a day. This is normal. The adolescent years are the years when young people can test out their independence knowing that they have you to fall back on. Wise parents increase their adolescents' independence and diminish the dependence gradually as the years pass.

✱ Relationship with Extended Family Members—"You parents don't understand as well as Aunt Beth does."

Independent relationships, particularly with members of your extended family, broaden the young person's social skills, human resources and ability to love. Your relationship will benefit from the independent relationships your son or daughter forms with grandparents, aunts and uncles, et al.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

Growing Up Healthy and Holy!

What do you want your young person to become? How do you want him or her to grow up? What do you want your teenager's life to look like, both now and in the future? What picture do you have in your mind? These are critical questions for parents. Answering them can help shape the way we raise our children.

Perhaps this Confirmation preparation period is a time for you, a parent of an adolescent, to identify how what you do as a parent influences—in fact helps "build"—your young person into a healthy adult. Perhaps this is a time for you to reflect not on what you don't want your child to become, but on the wonderful possibilities for your adolescent to be a healthy, whole, (and holy) human being. Your young person's development of essential life skills is a process of achieving wholeness and "holiness."

The **Search Institute** has identified 40 developmental assets that are necessary in order for young people to grow in a healthy way. In *Parenting with a Purpose* and *240 Ideas for Building Assets in Youth* Dean Feldmeyer and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain describe external and internal assets and ways that parents can help their adolescents develop these assets.

External assets come from outside the teen—from you as parents, from other people, from institutions such as schools, churches and youth serving organizations. External assets are those that surround the young person with support, boundaries and structure. Have you ever

- wiped your child's tear when he or she was hurt by a friend's unkind words?
- accepted him or her regardless of the hair style or the clothing?
- helped your child through the awkward physical and emotional growth points of adolescence?
- cheered on the sidelines during that football game or swim meet?
- encouraged your child's involvement at church?

These simple actions illustrate ways in which parents provide external assets for their adolescents.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

▶ Consider these tips to build the external assets of your child…

Tell your child how much you love him or her—over and over, verbally! Adolescents are not "too old" to hear "I love you" from mom and dad.
Young people need their "space"—allow your child his or her own space, but at the same let them know you are available. When they need your attention, be present to them!
Do you know what your child is thinking and believing? Ask!
Adolescents grow much through relationships with other adults. Give your child opportunities to be with other adults; recommend that they ask other adult role models for advice.
Ask your child, "what one new thing did you learn today?" While reinforcing the value of their education at school, expand their notion of learning beyond the classroom by helping them pull new learnings out of their day-to-day experiences.
Ever find yourself in a bind, not quite knowing how to deal with a particular situation with your son or daughter? Talk with other parents of adolescents, or those who have raised teenagers to get feedback and advice.
Be consistent! If you and your child negotiate rules of behavior, stick to them!
Put a family calendar up in a prominent place (refrigerator door?!) where your teenager can track his or her activities as well as those of the rest of the family.
Do you know who your young person is hanging out with at the dance this Friday night? Ask!
Is your home the neighborhood teenagers' hangout? Inviting your child's friends into your home is a great way to get to know them.
We want our children to be involved in Church. What do you model? Are you involved in the religious activities of your community? Participate in intergenerational religious education experiences, gathering with other families to learn, grow and live the Catholic faith. Participate together in the sacramental preparation of individual family members.

Internal assets are commitments, attitudes, values and skills that support youth from within. These are assets that parents support, encourage and nurture through modeling. Have you ever

- modeled a commitment to lifelong learning by reading or taking a night class?
- volunteered as individuals or as a family in the community?
- involved your young people in family decisions?
- welcomed your child's friends into your home?

Actions such as these can nourish internal assets in your young person.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

▶ Consider these tips to help build the internal assets of your child…

Are you a motivated learner? Model interest in learning for your children.
Share your life goals, dreams and priorities with your adolescents. Ask them about theirs.
What's beyond high school for your youth? Make a commitment to make post-high school education a reality for your young person.
Gather as a family in service to others. Talk about why you are involved in outreach and what you as a family are learning.
Include the whole family in discussions about which charitable organizations the family will make contributions. Use dinnertime to talk about world issues,
Put downs and negative humor do not have a place in the family. Model respect.
Allow your teenager to express his or her feelings without those feelings being minimized. Model acceptance and listening, and teach your child to listen to others.
Teach and model appropriate ways to show affection. Make sure that the family's expectations in this regard are clear.
Young people need to learn how to make healthy decisions. Involve them in the family's decision making process and allow them to "learn" from their poor decisions.
Be there to support your child in establishing and maintaining healthy friendships. Model healthy friendships yourself.
Celebrate the things about your son or daughter that are unique. Affirm first!
The dreams of your son or daughter are very real. Do not dismiss these dreams!
Continue to grow in your faith through reading, informal discussion or participation in parish or community educational programs and share your learnings with one another in the family.
Help your teenager make the connection between their life experiences and faith values, drawing on the rich resources of Scripture, Catholic Tradition and the faith traditions found in their ethnic heritage.
Recognize the impact of media and learn to evaluate media critically in light of the life-giving values of the Catholic Christian faith.

Resources

Feldmeyer, Dean and Roehlkepartain, Eugene C. *Parenting with a Purpose*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1995.
Roehlkepartain, Eugene. *240 Ideas for Building Assets in Youth*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1994.
Taylor, Joe and Audrey. *Parenting for Faith Growth: The Older Adolescent Years*. New Rochelle: Don Bosco Multimedia (Center for Ministry Development), 1993.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

Sharing Stories of Faith

As important as faith may be, it isn't a normal topic of dinner conversation in most families with adolescents. Most often young people (and their parents) need a bit of assistance and structure in order to move faith to the forefront in family discussions. This activity takes a story sharing approach to discussing faith. It helps young people and parents articulate why faith is important to them and how they find it in the ordinary experiences of their life.

▶ Reflect

Use any or all of the following open-ended sentences as a starting point for a family discussion on faith. Choose the questions together. Give people some quiet time to reflect on their responses before moving to discussion.

- ❖ Something that is really different about Catholicism today, compared to 20 or 30 years ago is....
- ❖ In my experience as a teenager, attending Mass on Sunday.....
- ❖ A person who has really influenced my faith life.....
  He or she influenced me by.....
- ❖ As a child, I was taught to pray..... Now I pray.....
- ❖ Something I love about being part of the Church.....
- ❖ A difficulty I have with the Church.....
- ❖ A time in my life when I really needed God was.....
- ❖ When I think about Jesus.....
- ❖ I believe faith is important because.....

▶ Share

Invite family members to share their reflections with one another. Some may find it difficult to share aloud the first time or two, so patience is essential. Just talking about faith together reflects its importance in your life and offers family members a chance to rethink how they see or experience faith. Here are a few hints on dialoguing about faith with adolescents:

- ❖ Allow and encourage young people to be honest with themselves and with you about where they are at in their faith journey. For some young people faith is a certainty. For others it is a real struggle. Both faith stances can be very real. Both need to be respected.
- ❖ For many young people faith is most tangible when seen through the perspective of personal relationships and/or values. Raising the issue of who and what they believe in, and why, can be a fruitful starting point for discussions of faith.
- ❖ Be flexible in your conversations about faith. Discussing issues and questions of immediate concern to young people, even when the issues do not appear to be explicitly religious, can be a prelude to an encounter with the deeper questions of personal faith.

▶ Pray

Close your sharing of faith stories with a simple prayer or Scripture reading.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

What is Confirmation?

The Sacrament of Confirmation....

- ◈ welcomes us and deepens our belonging to the faith community
- ◈ deepens our relationship to God, as Creator, Redeemer and Spirit
- ◈ strengthens us as disciples

A Sacrament is part of the way that God loves us and calls us. A sacrament is God's love expressed as free, undeserved gift.

- ◈ The Gift within Confirmation is that of strengthening us for discipleship and deepening our belonging to the faith community through the Trinity.

God uses visible signs to communicate invisible love. To communicate God's love, God uses our senses: eyes, ears, touch, smell, and taste, and elements of our world.

- ◈ In Confirmation, the signs we will celebrate include being anointed with oil and the laying on of hands as we remember the water of Baptism and the nourishment of Eucharist.

God calls and invites; we respond. An attitude of openness communicates a "yes" to God's invitation to a deeper relationship. This "yes" does not mean we know that we will always be faithful or that we are worthy of the gift. "Yes" means we are open to be strengthened by God who calls and loves us.

- ◈ In Confirmation, we have the opportunity to say "yes" through the various responses in the prayer.

The community witnesses to and celebrates the sacraments. A sacrament is a powerful sign that God is alive and present in the world. As Church, we are called to be sacrament, that is to be God's hand and healing touch in the world. At the same time, we celebrate the sacraments as our most important prayer. This community that celebrates sacraments is global, reaching to other faith communities throughout the world and joined in a common bond. The community is also local as a diocese or archdiocese, as a parish and as a community of faith in families.

- ◈ In Confirmation, the community witnesses our celebration and provides a sponsor who represents the love of the community for us.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

How Can I Support My Teen during Preparation?

◈ Confirmation *welcomes* us as a sacrament of initiation.

Confirmation is linked to Baptism and Eucharist.
Confirmation is part of our initiation into the faith community.
Confirmation honors the spiritual maturity of the individual.

🕮 Scripture Reflection

Each of you is a Son and Daughter of God because of your faith in Christ Jesus. All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with him. There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus. Furthermore, if you belong to Christ you are the descendants of Abraham, which means you inherit all that was promised. (Galatians, 3:26 - 29)

∗ Reflection

How has your Baptism shaped your life?

▶ With Your Teenager

Celebrate the anniversary of his or her Baptism by remembering it in a special way — with a card, a special meal, a prayer with the family, a simple gift.
Share how your Baptism has made a difference in your life.
Pray for family members, pray together for the young people in the Confirmation preparation program.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

◈ We are Confirmed in the name of God the Creator, the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit.

◈ Confirmation is part of the welcoming initiative of God the Creator.
◈ Confirmation unites us more firmly to Christ.
◈ Confirmation strengthens us with the Holy Spirit.

🕮 Scripture Reflection

Jesus left Galilee and went to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John kept objecting and said, "I ought to be baptized by you. Why have you come to me?"

Jesus answered, "For now this is how it should be, because we must do all that God wants us to do." Then John agreed.

So Jesus was baptized. And as soon as he came out of the water, the sky opened, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down on him like a dove. Then a voice from heaven said, "This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him." (Matthew 3:13-17)

∗ Reflection

How has the Spirit been present in your life?

▶ With Your Teenager

Talk with your son or daughter about how God has been a part of your life, about the actions and values of Jesus which draw you to him, and about who the Spirit is to you.
Have your son or daughter share his or her thoughts about these things with you as well.
Together participate in the ritual celebrations of the community—for example, Stations of the Cross, parish Lenten mission, a Baptism.
Be willing to enter into discussion about differing values and guide your son or daughter in reflection on how Christian moral values can guide his or her decision-making.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

◈ Confirmation strengthens us for discipleship, mission and witness to our faith.

◈ Confirmation empowers us to witness to our faith.
◈ Confirmation links us to the ministry of Christ and mission of the Church.
◈ Confirmation initiates young people into the adventure of discipleship.
◈ Preparation for Confirmation is a moment of conversion which includes celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation.

🕮 Scripture Reflection

When the day of Pentecost came it found them gathered in one place. Suddenly from up in the sky there came a noise like a strong, driving wind which was heard all through the house where they were seated. Tongues as of fire appeared, which parted and came to rest on each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to express themselves in foreign tongues and make bold proclamation as the Spirit prompted them. (Acts 2:1-4)

∗ Reflection

The apostles were strengthened with the Spirit to proclaim the Good News of Jesus. How have you been a witness to Jesus' presence in the world?

▶ With Your Teenager

Share how you have read the Good News through the actions of his or her life. Be specific.
Affirm the healthy, life-giving choices of your son or daughter.
Encourage him or her to identify qualities of good friendships.
Introduce your son or daughter to the local "heroes" and 'heroines" who exemplify discipleship.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

◈ Confirmation is a celebration of the community of faith.

◈ Confirmation joins us to the ministering community.
◈ Confirmation is received by individuals and celebrated as community.
◈ Preparation awakens a sense of belonging to the universal Church and local parish.
◈ Preparation includes a sponsor who represents the wider faith community.
◈ Preparation provides an opportunity to partner with families as communities of faith.

🕮 Scripture Reflection

The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one body; and so it is with Christ. It was in one Spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into one body. All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit. Now the body is not one member, it is many... You, then, are the body of Christ. Every one of you is a member of it. (1 Cor 12:12-13, 27)

∗ Reflection

What is the gift that you as a parent bring to this parish community?
How have you been blessed by the gifts of others in your faith community?

▶ With Your Teenager

Talk about a special gift that you see he or she has to offer; share how you have experienced that gift.
Talk about how you see yourselves as a members of the Body of Christ — the challenges of membership as well as the joys.
Share one or more examples of life-giving relationships of which you have been a part.
Discuss possibilities for your son or daughter being involved in the various ministries of your parish.
Participate as a family in community service activities — keep a photo journal of your experiences.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

Helping Your Child Choose a Sponsor

Your child's sponsor is the special person chosen by him or her to represent the faith community at the Rite of Confirmation.

At Baptism, the Church community shares the responsibility for the development and the safeguarding of the grace given to your child. So too are we challenged to safeguard the grace given at Baptism. A sponsor journeys with the young person through the preparation for Confirmation, supporting and nurturing the faith of the young person.

The sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation are intimately connected. Because of this, the Church encourages candidates for Confirmation to choose one of their baptismal godparents as a sponsor. At Baptism the godparents were witnesses to your son or daughter's sacrament which celebrated belonging — being welcomed into a spiritual family. The presence of godparents ritualized and symbolized the presence of the community and her promise to support the newly baptized in a life of faith. A number of years later, your child preparing for Confirmation is taken on a journey of spiritual remembering - knowing and recognizing the presence of a God who has been, who is, and who always will be in one's life. This is a gift given at Baptism, celebrated at Eucharist, and now revisited in its completeness at Confirmation.

The sacred ground in the young person's life is marked by the footsteps of a loving community — of you the parents, of godparents, of nurturers of faith, of challengers to discipleship. It seems fitting that those who held the infant through the pouring forth of sacred water and the sealing with blessed oil would once again stand up as reminders to both the individual and community of the richness of belonging to the Body of Christ. You can guide your son or daughter in choosing a sponsor who is a person of faith.

As Church we are all challenged by what we witness in the laying on of hands and in the anointing with chrism — "hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed." It may be a godparent or another adult in your child's life whose life is a witness to Christ and who will marvel at the privilege and opportunity of being a part of your family and your son or daughter's life by being a sponsor.

The *Code of Canon Law* and the *Rite of Confirmation* prescribe the requirements and duties of the sponsor:

> As far as possible the person to be confirmed is to have a sponsor. The sponsor's function is to take care that the person confirmed behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfills the duties inherent in this sacrament.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.

In Canon 893, para. 2 it states: "It is desirable that the sponsor chosen be the one who undertook this role at Baptism."

The two following statements from the *Rite of Confirmation* further illuminate the sponsor's function:

> 5. As a rule there should be a sponsor for each of those to be confirmed. These sponsors bring the candidates to receive the sacrament, present them to the minister for the anointing, and will later help them to fulfill their baptismal promises faithfully under the influence of the Holy Spirit whom they have received.
>
> 6. Pastors will see that the sponsors, chosen by the candidates or their families, are spiritually fit to take on this responsibility and have these qualities:
>
> a. sufficient maturity to fulfill their function;
> b. membership in the Catholic Church and their own reception of Christian initiation through Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist;
> c. freedom from any impediment of law to their fulfilling the office of sponsor.

Copyright © Center for Ministry Development, 1996. All rights reserved.