

WHEN A CHILD REJECTS YOUR BELIEFS



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Adapted by Riverside Church of Christ

Every teen and young adult goes through a season when they try to establish their own identity by distancing themselves from their parents' tastes and preferences. But what do you do when your son or daughter rejects your faith and embraces beliefs or behaviors that you know could be harmful?

AVOID BLAMING YOURSELF OR OTHERS

Rejection brings pain, especially when the child you've poured your life into walks away from everything you care about or transfers their loyalty to a group of strangers.

It is normal to second-guess yourself, wondering what you should have done differently. But even if you did everything perfectly, your child can choose to rebel. They may follow the pattern of Adam and Eve who, despite having the only perfect parent and living in paradise, still chose to sin.

STAY ENGAGED

As far as you are able, stay engaged in relationship. Those who walk away from the faith "still very badly want the loving input and engagement of their parents—more, in fact, than most parents ever realize," writes Christian Smith in his book *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*.

Smith demonstrates that parents have far more long-term influence than they realize—more than friends, youth pastors, professors, or anyone else. He explains that "just at the time when [they] most need engaged parents to help them work out a whole series of big questions about what they believe, think, value and feel...parents are withdrawing."

Stay engaged as much as possible by writing brief cards, calling, sending text messages, etc. But use words that demonstrate humility and affirmation rather than hurt and judgment.

Your efforts may go unacknowledged for some time, but they still serve as deposits for the future by saying "I will always love you and will be here when you are ready."

BALANCE GRACE AND TRUTH

The greatest influence you can have is to reflect both God's grace and truth (John 1:14). It can be difficult modeling both—especially when dealing with prodigal children.

When children are deciding if they want to spend their lives following Jesus, they will look to their parents to see if it is true or not. Parents must faithfully model pursuing a relationship with Jesus in love, grace, compassion, mercy, discipline, faith, hope, and joy throughout their lives. We can't blame our children for rejecting something that has not been truly modeled for them.

Following God's model of patient love with His rebellious people, you can show love even when facing rejection. Ephesians 5:1-2 explains, *Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.* Pray daily that God will use this painful season for good in both your child's life and your own.

But showing grace does not mean subsidizing a child's poor choices. Some parents continue to pay all of the child's bills. Others go so far as to bail their kids out of trouble, letting them avoid the consequences of their sins. Sometimes parents must show tough love by allowing the natural fallout of wrong choices to take effect. Read Jesus' story of the prodigal son found in Luke 15:11-32. It was not until the boy became hungry that he "came to his senses" and returned home to ask forgiveness. Don't interfere with the events God may use to return your child back to Himself.

Parents of prodigal children may experience pain when they read *train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn away from it.* But Proverbs 22:6 is not a promise. It summarizes a general pattern. Besides, your child's story is not over. You have made an impression and have laid a foundation.

Stay engaged in coming days by balancing grace and truth while anticipating a new chapter in your wayward child's life.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Recommended Books

When They Turn Away: Drawing Your Adult Child Back to Christ (by Rob Rienow) provides much needed encouragement and practical advice to parents dealing with the grief and challenge of an older “prodigal” child.

Screamfree Parenting: The Revolutionary Approach to Raising Your Kids by Keeping Your Cool (by Hal Runkel) is a practical, effective guide that introduces proven principles for overcoming the anxieties and stresses of parenting and setting new patterns of connection and cooperation.