

Activities for Youth

Parenting Skills

Opening Activity: 10 minutes

To begin, ask everyone to write down at least one thing that a good parent does. When they're done, ask them to share, and list the things a good parent does on the board.

Then ask teens how they know this. Tell them the way they know it could be "my parents/foster parents did this and it made me feel good" or "my parents/foster parents didn't do this and I wish they had" or some other source of information, such as friends' families or books or movies. Everyone might not want to share this part, so just ask for volunteers. Encourage discussion here; allow members of the group to agree or disagree with what others say. Use the disagreement to point out that some aspects of good parenting are universal (e.g. show your children love and affection) but others may be subjective (e.g. some parents consider it important to teach their children to be obedient, while other parents think it's important to teach their children to be curious and question authority).

Reading and Discussion: 20 minutes

Read "How I'll End the Foster Care Cycle" by Brittany Lett on p. 28. Ask the group to identify the good parenting actions that Brittany received and wants to pass on [teaching her life skills like dressing and cooking; pushing her to sit and stand with her back straight; encouraging her; setting a good example; talking with her]. Add those to your list on the board of "Good Parenting."

Next, ask teens to identify examples of bad parenting from Brittany's story [her dad abusing her; drinking and drugging; using your child to hurt your spouse]. Add these to the board under "Bad Parenting."

To continue the discussion of how you know what's good and what's bad parenting, ask them about the effects of both kinds of behaviors on a child. Ask them how a child who's been encouraged is different from one who's been insulted and put down. What do they do differently in life? What sort of person will each grow up to be?

Look again at the "Bad Parenting" list. Why do they think Brittany's dad did these things? Can they guess what his own childhood might have been like? What could he have done to be a better parent? Look back at the "Good Parenting" list. Why might it be hard to do some of those things? Which are hardest? Why? (Try to elicit through the discussion that it is difficult to be a good parent and even harder if you don't have your own life together or have a lot of emotional baggage you haven't dealt with yet.)

Closing Activity (10 minutes)

Write the following quote, from early childhood educator Sharifa Oppenheimer, on the board.

"Our inner state of being affects our child on the deepest level. He will carry within him our joy, or our anger, for a lifetime."

Ask teens to respond to the quote in a freewrite. What does it mean to them? What does it say about how to be a good parent?

Protecting Yourself

Reading and Discussion: 20 minutes

Have the group read "She Misplaced My Childhood" by C.F. on p. 5. Ask them to identify specific examples of ways the author's mom let him down. [She didn't show up to court; she disappeared for days at a time; she promised to take her kids out to eat and didn't show up]. Ask them how C.F. protected himself [he said "I don't need you" and took care of himself; he began to advocate for himself in care; he stopped telling his mom personal details or letting her touch his stuff]. Why did he create this boundary with his mom? [the disappointment felt horrible; he saw what nice motherly support felt like from his aunts and his best friend's mother]. Ask teens if they agree with his choice to distance himself from his mom. Why or why not?

Ask the group what they think of C.F.'s story. Is it sad? Did he do the right thing? Ask them if both things can be true. Ask them how they would try to cope with their disappointment if they were the author.

Closing Activity: (10 min)

Write the following prompt on the board, and give teens five minutes to respond in a freewrite. If there's time, ask for volunteers to share.

Think about a time when you drew a boundary with someone. How did you do it, and why? Are you glad you did it? Why or why not? (If you can't remember ever setting a boundary with someone, write about a time when you wish you had.)

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