

Help teenagers recognize and develop their talents



During this season of gratitude, we usually remember to thank God for our families and material blessings. But often we overlook how God, in his wisdom, has given us each unique talents and spiritual gifts. He wants us to show our gratitude for these gifts by using them to their full potential—and to his glory (see Colossians 3:17).

Throughout the New Testament, we read how people have varying gifts and capacities for using them (see Matthew 25:14-30; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; and Ephesians 4). Instead of burying our talents, God wants us to hone them. Teenagers may need help recognizing their special gifts and how they can apply them for God's kingdom. Young people will lead more fulfilled lives when we help them discover and give out of their strengths.

Leadership is just one of many gifts young people may have. But leadership potential in teenagers often goes unnoticed and undeveloped. Here are five common indicators of a high leadership aptitude: 1.) Peers listen to a teenager and pursue him or her for ideas. 2.) The teenager has lots of opinions and ideas about how things should function. 3.) The teenager has already been singled out by other adults for leadership roles. 4.) The teenager isn't satisfied with the status quo and always has several projects on his or her plate. 5.) The teenager is sometimes disruptive; leaders by nature are noncompliant. Read on to discover more about helping your teenagers recognize and use their God-given talents.

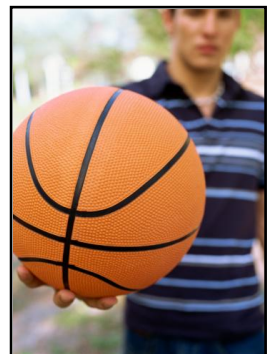
These tips from the small-group Bible study *Guy Talk, Girl Talk 2 (Group)* will help kids pinpoint and use their gifts:

- 1. Stop comparing.** Comparison is always a lose-lose situation. It leads to either pride (when we think we're better than someone else) or shame (when we feel we don't measure up to expectations).
- 2. Embrace who God made you to be.** It's hard to control the voices in our heads that whisper, "I wish I could do something other than what I'm doing" or "I wish I could be somebody that I'm not." Know yourself: your strengths, your talents, and your personality.
- 3. Serve out of your S.H.A.P.E.** This acrostic helps us understand the areas that make us who we are: Spiritual Gifts, Hear, Abilities, Personality, Experiences. Knowing your S.H.A.P.E. will help you find a place to serve that fits you. Sometimes finding a place to serve is like trying on a new pair of jeans: The first few might not fit, but eventually you'll find the perfect pair. Knowing and using your S.H.A.P.E. leads to fulfillment and joy. It also causes any feelings of pride or shame to quickly fade.

Pulse

Here are some recent findings about teenagers and their developing talents:

- Although 66% of teenagers can identify at least one "spark" (talent, passion, or gift) they have, fewer than half get support for these sparks from outside their families. (Search Institute)
- Fifteen-year-olds who develop strong relationships and receive adequate opportunities have a sense of hopeful purpose, express caring values, are actively engaged in school, and take on leadership roles. (www.at15.com)
- Talents are nurtured most successfully when parents guide kids at an age-appropriate pace, gradually allowing young people to make responsible choices on their own. But parents must communicate they're "there" for teenagers by providing some structure and setting limits, when necessary. (University of Michigan)



Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Help teenagers open up about talents by asking these questions:

1. What talents has God given you? Which of these might people be surprised to learn about, and why?
2. How well do you use your talents? Do you use them to serve yourself? others? God?
3. Think about a talent you'd like to work on: What would it take to further develop it?
4. What leadership qualities do you have, and how are you using them?
5. How can you make a difference with the gifts God has given you?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. God will help your teenagers recognize the unique gifts, abilities, and talents he's blessed them with.
2. God will give your kids courage and confidence to explore their talents and opportunities to develop them.
3. Your teenagers won't be tempted to compare their talents and skills with other people's.
4. Your teenagers will see a range of valuable contributions they can make at home, at school, and in church.

Verse of the Month

"In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. ... If your gift is serving others, serve them well. ... If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously." (Romans 12:6-8)

Wisely, God made each of us different. As individuals, we have a wide variety of talents—and a wide variety of ways to use them. God wants us to harness our gifts to meet other people's needs and to give him glory.

Going Deeper

On SimplyYouthMinistry.com, author Doug Fields writes about cultivating young leaders:

Teenagers aren't the leaders of the future; they're the leaders of today. We must create an environment where kids are challenged to serve others and can discover the significant life God has called them to live. Here are some tips for making that happen:

- **Think small.** Cultivating leaders is a process of developing kids individually. Use resources such as youth ministers and guidance counselors to help your teenagers discover and apply their talents.
- **Paint potential.** Teenagers need to hear from us that they're gifted and talented, and that they can use those talents to carry out God's work. Some kids believe that if they aren't outgoing or popular, they can't make an impact. We must encourage and challenge them by "painting their potential." Kids need to know and see that their lives can make a difference—now.
- **Position individuals.** Set up your teenagers to win. Maybe they want to start a baby-sitting business, for example. When my three kids were younger, they'd always want a few "favorite" baby sitters: the ones who were the most fun, the most energetic, the ones who'd jump on the trampoline with them, wear weird clothes, etc. When I'd hear that, I'd put my arm around the baby-sitting teenager and say, "My kids love it when you come over. You have a gift with children. Why don't you get involved with the children's ministry at church?"



Every teenager has potential as a leader in some area. Helping them find their niche won't only benefit God's kingdom, but it can alter kids' understanding that God has shaped them in unique ways. Developing your teenagers' talents will leave an imprint in their community and a legacy in their long-term walk with Jesus.

MUSICSPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: The band formed in 1996, and their debut album *Hybrid Theory* was the top seller of 2001. The band combines rock, nu metal, and rap metal in a catchy, radio-friendly format. Linkin Park has won two Grammy awards.

Albums: *A Thousand Suns* (2010), *Minutes to Midnight* (2007), *Meteora* (2003), *Hybrid Theory* (2000)

What Parents Should Know: The band's recent albums—including a collaboration with Jay-Z—have included profanity. Many topics are thoughtful, at least, including war, poverty, terrorism, and post-Katrina New Orleans.

What Linkin Park Says: Chester Bennington wrote "Messenger" as a letter to his kids. "Eventually you're going to go out into the world and find out it's challenging," but "there's always a place for you where you are accepted for who you are," he says.

Discussion Questions: Should Christians accept everyone? Why or why not? Does accepting people mean we accept their actions and beliefs? Read aloud John 13:34-35. What guidelines about acceptance and love does Jesus give—and not give? How accepting do you think our church and youth group are? What are some things we can do to be more accepting?

Christian Artist

Background: Charlie Hall, a worship leader from Oklahoma, is part of the Passion movement, along with artists such as Chris Tomlin, David Crowder, and Matt Redman. Hall won a Dove award in 2007 for the Passion album *Everything Glorious*.

Albums: *The Rising* (2010), *The Bright Sadness* (2008), *Flying Into Daybreak* (2006)

What Parents Should Know: The Passion movement uses modern worship music to inspire the next generation of Christians. Hall combines heartfelt lyrics with great musicianship. He and his bandmates support many social-justice causes.

What Hall Says: The new songs "come from the pursuit of God in everyday life and God's pursuit of us," he says. "Like the Psalms, these songs speak of the ascension to and the embracing of God inside the intense, peaceful, and mundane places in life and all the emotions that fill those spaces."

Discussion Questions: Describe a time when you've felt God's presence. Does God show up in everyday moments or only at "special" times? Explain. Why doesn't God make himself known more often? Read aloud Psalm 139:7-10. How and why might we sometimes miss God's presence? What can we do to become more aware of God and to experience his presence each day?

FILMWATCH

Not recommended

Movie: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (releases Nov. 19)

Genre: Action-adventure, fantasy

Rating: PG-13 (for some sequences of intense action violence and frightening images)

Synopsis: In this first part of the final "Harry Potter" installment, Harry, Hermione, and Ron must track down the source of Lord Voldemort's power—the Horcruxes—without help from their professors or protection from Dumbledore. They have to rely on each other and the power of love and friendship.

Discussion Questions: Tell about a time you've had to rely on someone. How did that make you feel? Is it wrong to rely on people? Why or why not? Read aloud Psalm 20. Instead of "chariots and horses" (verse 7), what things do we often rely on today? How can we rely on God more? How would that affect our lives?



