

Do Strict Parents Drive their Kids Away?

Question: I have seen many parents who have been so strict and unforgiving with their children's behavior because they believe it to be consistent, that they lose their children as young adults. These young adults believe they have never been able to do anything right in their parents' eyes so they became like slaves who run from their masters never to look back again. Severe rebellion has incurred. It has happened to many good "Christian" families who think they are doing right by never sparing the rod and at the same time sparing grace. These are families who love the Lord. Their children are now out in the world because the world accepts them as they are. I know at least five families in a group of families that this has happened. The young adults say the same thing: "I could never measure up." Surely there must be a balance.

Response: We've observed some of the same things as you. As you mentioned, there is a valid concern that children will turn to the world and to those who will accept them as they are. We all have a strong desire to be loved and accepted, and I fear that most of us will go to unthinkable extremes to find that love and acceptance. That's why I want to be careful to communicate love and acceptance to my kids, and ultimately for them to grasp God's love and acceptance. If they experience that love at home and in their relationship with God, they will be far less likely to be desperately grasping for that love and acceptance from their peers.

While it may be true that many families that have very high standards lose their kids when they hit the teens, we've also noticed another pattern in these families. Typically the father is uninvolved. Because of the combination of high standards and low involvement, a teen's natural response is to rebel. So our goal as a family is not to lower the standards, but to increase the involvement. To an outside observer, I think we would seem "overly" strict, but also "overly" loving and involved. We've found this to be an excellent balance that appears to be working well in our home. Our oldest is only 13, so the wisdom of our approach is far from being proven, but we believe we are following a biblical pattern, so our confidence rests in that.

Next week we'll look at the issue of how to communicate the love and acceptance that our kids so desperately need.