



Book Club Discussion Guide

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Introduction

Parents can greatly benefit from getting together and talking about the challenges of parenting teens. Even when you know what you want or need to do there are so many different ways to respond and difficult things to try to balance.

RTin21c was written as a resource for parents to pick up and get suggestions for dealing with common teenage issues. You can turn to a topic and quickly get an idea about the issues involved. Then, there are specific suggestions or strategies for how to respond. You won't find much discussion about the dilemmas you face, the uncertainty you may feel or the complications of applying general strategies to your unique kid. A community of parents can be really helpful by providing support and putting your collective heads together to figure out what might work better with YOUR (or their) kid. Parents are an excellent source of collective wisdom and experience.

A few words about groups. If you have an established book club group, don't change a thing. However, if you are just starting a book club or are having some trouble with your current book club you may find some of these suggestions helpful.

A lot is known about group process. There are few things you might want to consider when getting together as a group. If you all know each other already, then things will probably go smoothly without any formal discussion about group behavior. If group members don't already know each other well then it can help to come to a few agreements before you get started.

- Have a discussion leader. It helps to have someone take the lead for each meeting. While there may be an industrious and willing participant who will do the general organizing, it is really important to rotate the role of discussion leader for each meeting. Encourage everyone to take a turn (but don't pressure someone who isn't comfortable). This can help to minimize the possibility of one or two participants taking over or monopolizing the time.
- Encourage everyone to participate. Take turns going around the room. Have the discussion leader keep track of who hasn't talked yet and ask for their thoughts specifically (even if someone else has to yield the floor).
- Size of the group. When groups get bigger than 8-10 people, they tend to be less meaningful to each individual member.
- Length of each meeting. This is an individual thing and can be influenced by how much time the participants have to devote to the meetings. Ninety (90) minutes provides time for everyone to socialize and then get down to business. You will want enough time for the participants to have a chance to contribute as well as to cover the range of things brought up by the reading selection. Some groups can talk enjoyably and productively for longer; some get things covered in less time. Keep track of when the discussions tend to start winding down and plan on that being the length of the meeting.

- Frequency of meetings. It will be important to meet frequently enough to develop and maintain a connection between the participants. On the other hand, meeting every day may be a bit too much. Two to 4 weeks in between meetings will give enough time to read the selections for the meeting without placing too much of a strain on everyone's schedule.
- Number of meetings. If you have formed this group specifically to discuss this book you may want identify a set number of meetings. On the other hand, you may get along so well that you decide to continue on to other books.
- Make a commitment. A significant benefit of meeting to discuss this (and any) book is the opportunity of everyone getting to know each other. When you know each other, discussions can be more personalized and meaningful. Make a commitment to attend the meetings. Only extraordinary events should supersede the meeting.
- Make a calendar. Set the meeting dates at the first meeting and try your best to stick to this schedule. This makes it easier for everyone to arrange their schedules accordingly.
- Privacy. Parenting is a very personal thing. If your group goes well, people will be comfortable talking about challenges and even tragedies and embarrassing issues. Make an agreement that things discussed in the group are considered private and are not to be shared with people outside of the group.
- Don't get personal. While the discussion will inevitably include personal information about parenting situations, the focus of the discussion is on the book and strategies for dealing with parenting teens. Stay away from criticism and judgment. Avoid moralizing and shaming. Be nice. Be supportive. Learn from each other, especially from someone you disagree with. The club meeting can be a place where you think through your arguments (or adjust your own views). If you put your foot in your mouth, apologize. Privately. Immediately after the meeting.
- Consider having food. Food makes everything better. Snacks and drinks are great. Consider soft foods. (Chips may be too noisy.) Pot luck can be really enjoyable. (Just make sure arranging the food doesn't become a burden.)

Some suggestions for ways group members can contribute to the discussion:

- I agree because...
- I disagree because...
- I also noticed....
- I'd like to add that...
- I didn't understand
- Say more about what you mean.
- I don't understand what you mean.
- Can you show me where that is in the text/illustration?
- What is your evidence?
- Why do you think that?
- I think the author meant....
- How do you know that?
- We're getting far away from the text.
- What does the author say that makes you think that?

(Adapted from The Reading Lady

<http://www.readinglady.com/mosaic/tools/Book%20Club%20Guide%20Cue%20Card.pdf>)

Suggested Discussion Questions

General Questions

- *What are the central ideas of this selection?*
- *What upset you in reading this selection? Surprised you?*
- *What specific passages did you find important or useful?*
- *What did you take away from reading this selection?*
- *What did you think was missing from this selection?*
- *What did you disagree with in this selection?*

These General Questions will often be enough to fill the time you have for your meeting. However, sometimes your group may want to take the discussion outside of the facts of the book. Here are some questions for a couple of the book sections that challenge your group to go a little deeper, make it more personal or critique the selection you are discussing.

The Essentials of Parenting

- If you could pick only one essential parenting technique what would it be?*
- What essential parenting technique is missing? (Sense of humor? Love? Self-sacrifice?)*
- Which of these essential parenting techniques will be the most difficult for you to use?*
- What creed or motto described your family when you were growing up?*
- What was your favorite family tradition or ritual as a child?*
- How can you still be a role model if you were less than a model kid or young adult?*

Alcohol and Drug Issues

- What is the impact of the legalization of marijuana movement on teenager's alcohol and drug use?*
- If you support legalization of marijuana can you still have a zero tolerance policy? How?*
- Is it hypocritical to drink alcohol but still have a zero tolerance policy? Why?*
- What are ways to encourage your kid to have personal goals or aspirations? (See Motivation chapters for more on this.)*
- What are the pros and cons of having your kid make a public commitment to sobriety? Is it shaming them to require them to reveal if they break their commitment? Should you care? Why?*
- What is the justification of using marijuana? Why shouldn't they use?*
- What is the hardest thing for you about dealing with your kid using alcohol or drugs?*
- How do you deal with your kid having friends who are a bad influence? How can you block or minimize the bad influence without just banning the friendship?*

Communication Issues

- What good can come from letting your kid argue with you? How do you know when arguing is no longer productive?*
- How did your family handle arguing or conflict when you were a kid? How has that affected your parenting?*
- What is appropriate arguing?*
- What are different ways to end a discussion (other than just saying “We’re done here.”)?*
- What question about personal information should you NOT ask your kid?*
- Who was your role model when you were a kid?*
- What do you do if your kid values something that is stupid?*
- How has your communication style affected other people in this study group?*
- How can you violate a confidence your kid has trusted you with while also respecting their wish to keep it confidential?*
- What are the worst ways to get your kid to talk to you?*
- What are things kids should never know about your past?*

Discipline and Praise Issues

- What is the difference between “correction” and “criticism”?*
- If a kid is embarrassed by something you do to correct them is that the same as shaming or humiliating them? What are the differences?*
- What are the arguments for and against corporal punishment?*
- When does grounding lose its effectiveness?*

Family Management Issues

- Why even have family meetings?*
- How do you give your kid too much money for allowance?*
- Do kids need to have chores? Why?*
- How do childhood chores predict your housekeeping as an adult?*
- How do you instill a work ethic in your kid?*
- What rights should every kid have to privacy?*
- Where does privacy end for teens?*

Grades and Studying Issues

- At what point should you force your kid to study?*
- Are there circumstances where you should allow your kid to perform below their abilities? What are some of these situations?*
- How can you tell if you are too involved in your child’s school work?*
- When should you let your kid “learn” by failing at schoolwork?*

Technology Issues

- Cell Phones
 - When do kids really need a cell phone?*

- *Are cell phones really necessary? Why?*
- *What is the biggest risk for getting children a cell phone?*
- *What is the biggest risk for getting teens a cell phone?*
- *What is your policy on cell phone apps?*
- *When is the right time to talk to your kids about cell phone etiquette?*
- **Texting**
 - *What right to privacy should kids expect when it comes to texts (and other forms of digital communication)?*
 - *What is the best way to monitor your kids texts?*
 - *At what age should you quit monitoring your kids texts?*
 - *What are the biggest risks with texting?*
- **Social Media**
 - *What is the official age for kids to have a social media account?*
 - *What are the biggest risks for kids to have a social media account?*
 - *What are the biggest risks for teens to have a social media account?*
 - *Are social media accounts necessary? Why?*
 - *What are some of the signs your kid is not ready to have a social media account?*
- **Video Games**
 - *How many hours a week should your kid be allowed to play video games?*
 - *When should you start to worry about the effects of video games on your teen?*
 - *What are the best kinds of video games? What are the worst?*