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Starting a Teen Book Study Group

By Rachel Paxton

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by: **Rachel Paxton**

If you're looking for a way to connect with your teenage daughter this summer, consider starting a girl's book study group with your daughter and her friends.

You may think that teens would not respond well to this idea, but think again...you just might be surprised.

First bounce the idea off your daughter and see what her thoughts are on the subject. If she shows any sign of interest, then brainstorm some possible book titles and/or topics. When my daughter and I started our group last summer, we had in mind to get some girls together from our church's high school youth group. So we talked about some of the books that people were reading at the time.

Next my daughter started calling her friends and acquaintances to see who she could interest in the idea. Almost everyone she talked to was interested in coming and liked the idea, but many were already busy with other summer activities. We narrowed the list to around four or five who committed to reading the book and getting together to talk about it. We all gave input into which book we wanted to read, and ended up with "What's So Amazing About Grace?" a popular non-fiction book by Phillip Yancey.

I broke the book down into three- to four-chapter sections, and we decided to meet Wednesday evenings for six weeks. Overall, the study went very well, and it was very rewarding. We all have fond memories of it, and it was great to spend that quality time with my daughter.

If you think this is something you might be interested in doing, here are some tips I picked up along the way:

Don't take it personally if everyone doesn't come every week. Everyone has busy schedules and conflicts arise. Probably only one or two girls came every single week, even my daughter missed at

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least one. You'll find that conversations can greatly differ depending on the mix of girls, which is good!

Meet in a low-key, relaxed setting so everyone is comfortable and doesn't feel like they're in a classroom. We took blankets to sit on down to a local park and had snacks every week.

Don't pressure yourself into having to "lead" the group. You're not there to teach them, but only to facilitate the conversation. I found it helpful to choose a book that included group study questions. Some books have the questions in the back. This particular book had a companion study guide that had to be purchased separately. Just let the girls talk, and ask questions if there is a big lull in the conversation. Although you might be tempted to challenge "wrong" answers, let the girls challenge each other first and see what conclusions they come to. It is rare that you'll have to intercede. Instead of challenging someone directly, ask them more questions to help them reach a another answer.

On the same note as the last point, don't feel you have to give advice or have all the right answers. Most teenagers love having someone, particularly adults, listen to their thoughts and feelings. They don't expect you to know everything, they just want you to listen. You'll find that the teens come from all different family backgrounds and don't always have other people to listen to them when they need to talk.

Encourage girls to come to the discussions even if they didn't do their reading for the week. You'll find that most are embarrassed if they didn't do their "homework" and don't want to show up. Encourage them to come even if they didn't read it, to encourage fellowship among the girls.

Dads can have book study groups with their teenage sons and their friends too! They may need to goof around some more and maybe burn off some energy before they get down to business (some kind of outdoor activity), but teenage guys like to get together and learn from each other also.

A book study group is a great way to get to know some of your teenager's friends. Encourage them to also invite people they don't know very well...people from school or work who they want to get to know better. It's a great way to make that first step towards friendship and teaches them to reach out to others.

Rachel Paxton is a freelance writer and mom who is the author of *What's for Dinner?*, an e-cookbook containing more than 250 quick easy dinner ideas. For more recipes, organizing tips, home decorating, crafts, holiday hints, and more, visit [Creative Homemaking](#) at

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Setting Rules for Teen Dating

By Larry Westfall

As your children grow up, it's normal for them to think about having a boyfriend or girlfriend. They've probably been hanging out with friends of both sexes and doing things as a group, but they may be

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thinking about one-on-one dating. It's time to talk about the different types of relationships and love and to prepare to set rules for dating.

Talking about relationships in regular, everyday conversations lets you and your child talk about your family values when it comes to friendship, dating, and love. Dating helps young people learn to get along with others, communicate, negotiate, make decisions, and learn to be assertive. It's an important part of growing up, and talking about it together will help your teen mature.

So, how will you handle the teen dating scene? Parents approach teen dating in different ways. Some set strict rules while others let teens make their own decisions. However, a more "middle-of-the-road" approach may be best. This includes setting ground rules while giving young people options from which they can choose.¹ It also means being available and open to ongoing conversations.²

Setting Ground Rules

Even though they can make many decisions on their own, teens still need boundaries from you. Exactly what those boundaries are is something that you and your teen should discuss. Here are a few suggestions that may work for your family:

- * Meet all of her friends, and insist that her date come into the house so that you can say hello.
- * Know the details about each group outing or date, including what adults and teens will be present, where it will take place, who is driving, what they're doing, and when they'll be home.
- * Make sure your teen knows that alcohol or drug use is not allowed by anyone on any date or group outing.
- * Explain that if she wants to come home from a date, you are willing and available to pick her up at any time.
- * Make yourself available if your teen wants to talk after a group outing or date.

There are many areas to discuss when it comes to teen dating. You will need to set rules that are appropriate for your child's age and maturity level. These rules will change as your child grows up and as he handles different dating situations. For example, you may extend his curfew as he gets older. His curfew might change based on whether he is driving, his date is driving, or if a parent is driving. The curfew also might change based on the day of the week (weekend versus school-night dates) and time of year (summer versus school year).

Dating is a big deal to teens. They need you to stay involved and attentive to what's going on. By setting rules with your teen about dating, you will help her learn to make good choices and to build healthy relationships while she navigates the teen dating scene.

Larry Westfall is the owner of

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