



## 5 Fundamental Needs of Teenagers

### 1. THE NEED TO BE UNDERSTOOD

The need to be understood is a great psychological need for us as human beings. Unfortunately, the majority of teenagers do not believe that adults understand them. When an adult takes a genuine interest in a teenager and seeks first to understand, that adult earns the right to be heard. If adults want to hand on the faith to teenagers, they must seek first to understand what is going on in their minds and hearts. Teenagers don't care how much we know until they know how much we care.

### 2. THE NEED TO BELONG

Teenagers are driven to meet the "need to belong" before higher growth needs like understanding and living the Christian faith. In fact, it is often the case that teenagers will compromise the morals in which they have been raised in order to belong somewhere. If adults don't help teenagers build healthy, life-giving relationships with one another, then teens will find a way to meet that need themselves. On the other hand, if adults create an environment where teens are known, loved, and cared for, they create an ideal environment for discipleship.

### 3. THE NEED TO BE TRANSPARENT

Teenagers rarely have the freedom to be transparent today, especially with one another. It is too dangerous to be vulnerable in a peer-dominated world focused on image and popularity. Teens long for the opportunity to be transparent about their doubts, concerns, fears, insecurities, hopes, and dreams, and to have the confidence of knowing they will not be judged, but loved and supported. In fact, this is necessary in order for them to grow in self-awareness and self-esteem. A small group where trust has been established creates an environment where transparency can take place.

## **4. THE NEED TO ENGAGE IN CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT FAITH AND LIFE**

Teens are transitioning from concrete thinking to abstract thinking and are able to conceptualize ideas such as love, justice, fairness, and truth. They are also capable of pondering the big questions in life such as: Is there a God? Do I need religion? Can I know God's plan for my life? In addition, they are in the process of establishing independence and becoming their own person. Deep down they desire to be treated as adults and no longer want to be told what to do or what to believe. They are critically evaluating what they have been raised to believe and are not that interested in answers to questions they are not asking. Thought-provoking questions, lively discussion, dialogue, and freedom of expression engage teenagers in critical thinking.

## **5. THE NEED FOR GUIDANCE**

Teenagers need dialogue, collaboration, and friendship with adults in order to become adults themselves. Relationships with adults help them answer deep fundamental questions like: Am I lovable? Am I capable? What difference does my life make? They are naturally idealistic and desire to be challenged to greatness through the direction, encouragement, and support of caring adults. It is a well-known educational principle that young people will rise to the level of our expectations of them. Teenagers will give their lives to Jesus through the witness and encouragement of loving, faith-filled adults.

