

Mom's toughest questions answered

By Brenda Spina and Jane Richard

You're "Mom." It's a title that carries a reputation for boundless love, timely wisdom and endless patience. You're ever ready with a hug, word of encouragement, or heartfelt warning.

You wear "Mom" shoes 24/7, knowing no one can live up to the ideal of motherhood. You have your own unanswered questions about life, you wince when you let your impatience slip out and, yes, there are times when you feel more like offering a smack on the wrist instead of a hug.

But through it all, you keep your chin up. You belong to the world's largest sorority and you couldn't be prouder. You're confident God knew what He was doing when He entrusted young lives to your care.

Millions of moms have been where you're headed, and in this article two women who have helped many moms on this journey answer your toughest questions about the eternally important task of raising children.



Brenda Spina is a family therapist and co-director of the Center for Family Healing in Appleton, Wis. She has been a regular guest on the radio program Practical Family Living, has written for Practical Family Living News and was a columnist for Woman's Touch magazine.

Jane Richard is a counselor trainee with EMERGE Ministries in Akron, Ohio. She has been married for 30 years and is the mother of three children.



1 I lie awake at night worrying about my children. How can I protect them without stifling their independence — and what do I do with my fears?

Jane: In Luke 12:25 (NIV), Jesus says, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" Instead of worrying, spend your time building a spiritual foundation. Train your children in biblical principles and pray for them.

Establish solid lines of communication with your children. As you give them more freedom, give them more responsibility — it's one of the most important things you can instill in your children. Allow them room to make mistakes so they learn from them. Trust God to be with them in every situation.

As for your fears, give them to God. Philippians 4:6,7 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

2 Since we had children, my husband complains I don't have enough time for him. Is he jealous of the kids? How can I balance motherhood and marriage?

Brenda: Be gentle with yourself and your husband. Couples often feel pulled away from each other with the demands of parenting.

Men don't use the same emotional language as women. However, men and women often experience many of the same feelings. One way your husband may express loneliness is by complaining about the children. As much as he loves them, he probably misses

having access to you as often as he once did. You may miss connecting with him as well.

Responding to him in small ways when he is present will let him know you are still thinking of him. Look him in the eye, touch him on the arm, or have a fun codeword between the two of you to reinforce the adult friendship you have even though you may be busy at the moment.

Express to him your own struggle to stay connected. Let him know you are not purposefully shutting him out. Create an atmosphere in which you both feel like you are in this together.

3 I'd love to be a stay-at-home mom, but we can't afford it. How can I deal with my sense of guilt?

Brenda: Most women enter motherhood with a dream of what it will be like. However, circumstances often push both parents into the workforce, which means the dream may collide with reality.

Many moms experience a sense of loss upon returning to work. Grieving the loss of your dream is natural and necessary in order to move into what can be accomplished with the time you have. Making the transition requires your belief that God is all that He says He is — for you and your children.

The Lord is not only your comforter but also your provider. Pray for His will in your situation, and be willing to accept it — even if it differs from the dream. Ask God to help you find creative ways to manage your time.

Will your children's experience differ from what it would have been if you had been at home? Yes. Will God provide for them in ways you could not? Absolutely!

4 I have a 3-year-old and want another child. My husband doesn't — he and I have different financial priorities. Is he wrong to deny me another child, or am I wrong to push him for something he doesn't want?

Brenda: Finding a way to honor your husband is important for your marriage. It sounds as if he has been honest with you about his thoughts and feelings concerning the issues of children and money. And you have been open with him about your feelings. To keep pushing the issue at this time will likely communicate disrespect and lead to further arguments.

My guess is you knew, to some degree, his goals even before the

careful effort on your part. Your approach can mean the difference between a peaceful home and a strife-filled one.

Here are five things to keep in mind:

1. Avoid approaching him in front of the children. Doing so undermines your appearance of unity and authority and may be painful for the children.

2. Choose a softened approach. Beforehand, express your desire to talk with him about your concerns and find a time that works well for both of you.

3. Be willing to listen to him. Remind yourself that his point of view is no less important than yours.

4. Find areas of common

Ideally, try to find a balance. Though you're busy meeting the needs of your family, don't forget to take time for yourself and time for the Lord. Don't overcommit, but don't forsake all ministries.

Consider serving in areas at church where you can include your children, such as vacation Bible school, children's choir or puppet ministry. Or look for ministries you can support from home, such as phoning, baking, sewing or praying.

Try not to look at being involved as an obligation but as a living sacrifice, and use your gifts according to the grace given to you.

7 As a single mom, how can I provide a male role model for my boys?

Raising a teen is a process of providing guidance and gradually letting go.

first child was born. These kinds of beliefs and goals are usually evident in some form early in the relationship. Many men and women dismiss the signals, thinking things will change once they are married or become parents. Expecting this kind of transformation is a disservice to your marriage.

God understands the desires of your heart. Keep bringing your concerns to the Lord, and trust His purpose and plan. God may have something for you to learn about yourself in all of this. His ultimate goal in our lives is not always giving us what we want, but changing the condition of our spirit in relationship to Him.

5 What should I do when I don't agree with my husband's parenting methods?

Brenda: Differing parenting styles is one of the top three sources of disagreement among couples with children. Addressing the situation in a way that communicates respect for your husband requires

ground, such as shared values and parenting goals.

5. As you proceed with the discussion, allow yourself and your husband the freedom to postpone strategizing if the conversation escalates to arguing.

The overall goal is to start dialogue. Developing mutually acceptable steps toward solving the problem is more important than immediately attaining the desired resolution.

6 I have three children and often feel overwhelmed by the combination of raising my family and the various ministries that need my help at church. Am I obligated to be involved in church ministry?

Jane: Your family is important; your service is important, too. But God will hold you accountable for your family before He will hold you accountable for your involvement in your church. Listen to the Holy Spirit, as He is our teacher and will lead in every decision.

Brenda: Rest assured, there are many ways in which your boys are absorbing information about what it means to be a man. This information is mostly caught rather than taught. They will take in what is said to them and what they overhear about male roles and expectations, and they will make their own decisions about what is most important.

You can influence this process to some extent by choosing some of the sources of their information. Perhaps you could encourage a close relationship with a Christian grandfather or uncle or get them involved in a church Royal Rangers program or youth group. Male pastors, teachers, neighbors and other community leaders can all be positive role models.

Be sure to discuss and challenge the worldly depictions of "manhood" your boys glean from media, pop culture and peers.

Finally, don't underestimate your own influence. Your opinions and attitudes about men won't escape

their notice and may ultimately affect the way they view themselves.

8 Our 16-year-old seems constantly drawn to the world in spite of his Christian upbringing — what can we do?

Brenda: Nothing hurts more than having a child who seems to rebel against everything you value. Some level of rebellion is typical of adolescent development and is not always cause for alarm.

Don't personalize your teen's behavior. Understand that unless you're in a major power struggle, this behavior is not meant to hurt you.

Developmentally, your teenager is trying to transfer from a role of being directed to one of being self-directed. That transition will take many forms before the arrival of adulthood.

When children go in the opposite direction from their parents, it may be an indication they're afraid they can't make it on their own. Their solution is to assert an independent identity by reversing or revising what has been modeled.

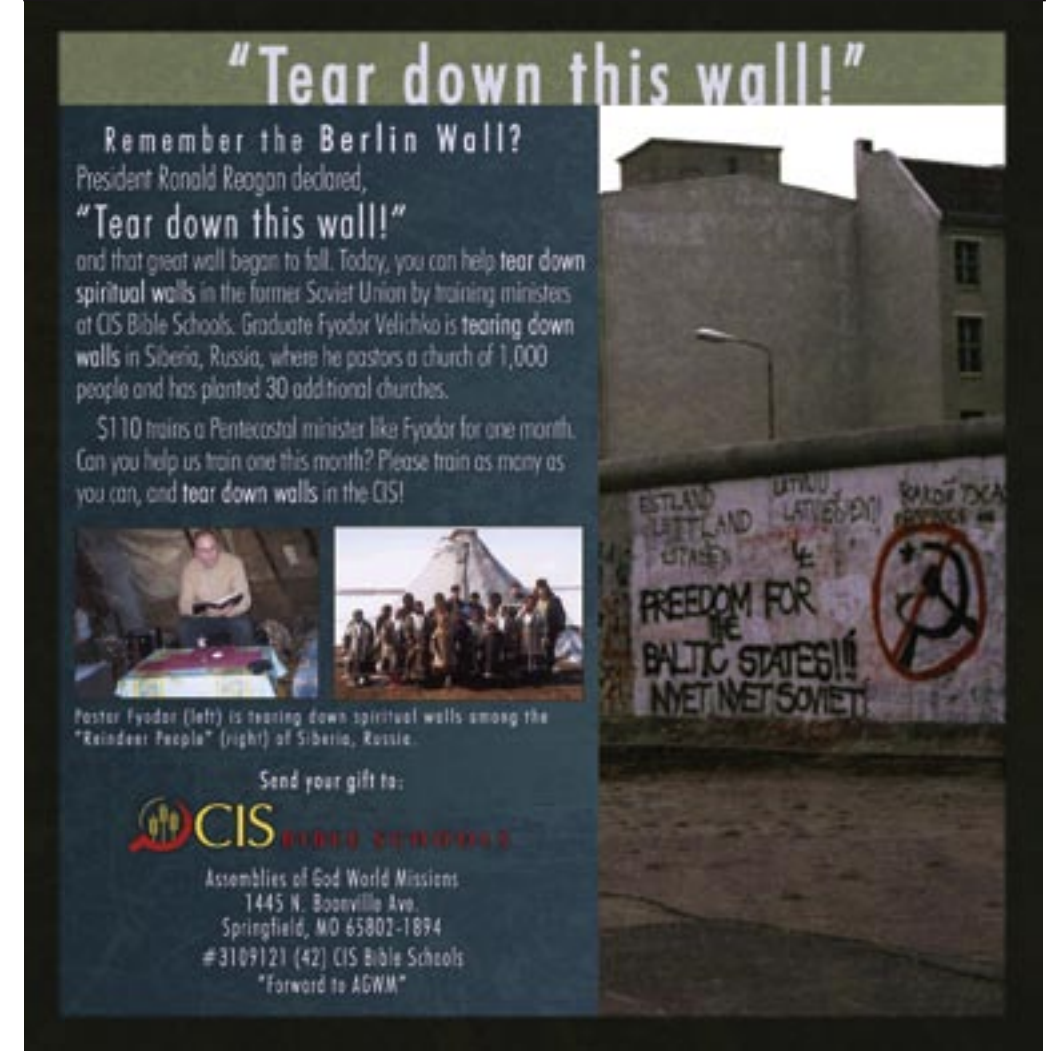
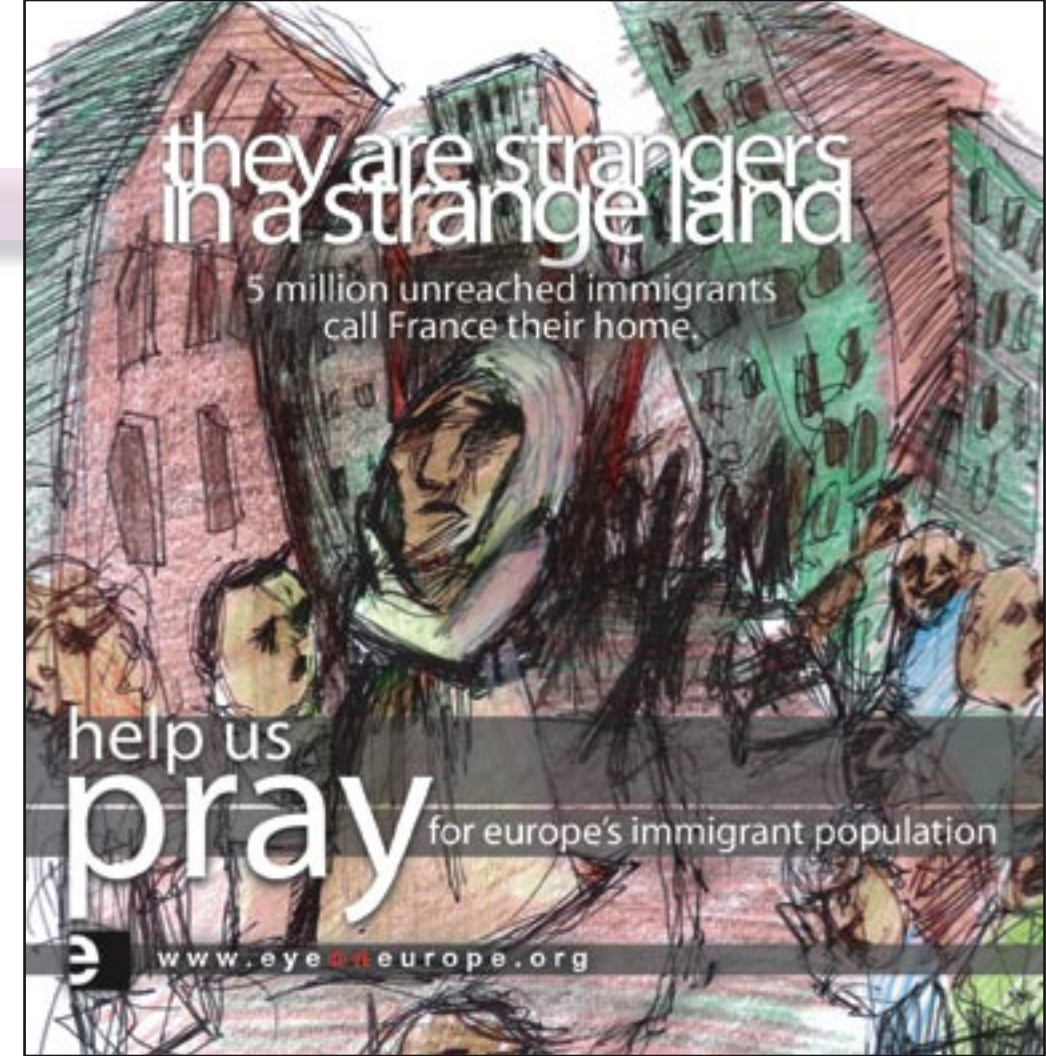
Keep the lines of communication open. Discuss the reasoning behind your differing views. Talk about the consequences of bad choices and offer ideas for appropriate alternatives. Respect your teen's feelings and listen to what he or she has to say.

Raising a teen is a process of providing guidance and gradually letting go. Demanding sameness rarely works, so develop discernment as to when to let go and what to insist on. This takes prayer, support from other Christian parents and time.

9 I don't approve of the non-Christian boy my teenage daughter associates with at school and chats with online. How can I convince her he is bad news?

Jane: Unfortunately, the more you try to discourage your daughter from associating with this boy, the more she may be interested in him. However, the Bible is also clear: "Do not be misled: 'Bad com-

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pany corrupts good character' ” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

You can't control whom she talks to when she is not home. Talk with your daughter and ask her about this friend. Find out what she likes about him and ask her to help you understand him better.

Forbid communication only if you're certain he poses a danger to your daughter or is involved in illegal activities. As for Internet use, set online controls and time limits for online activity and express your concerns in a nonthreatening way.

If you're concerned because he is not a Christian this may be your opportunity to witness to him. Also, educate your daughter about the Bible's teaching in 2 Corinthians 6:14: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"

Pray about inviting him to attend a church function with your family. It's best if you allow your daughter the freedom to reach her own conclusions about her friend under your careful guidance.

10 My adult son is about to make one of the biggest mistakes of his life — is there something I can do?

Jane: It depends on the nature of the mistake. If he is preparing to sin, lead him to God's Word. If he is doing something you don't approve of for other reasons — a career or financial decision, for example — talk with him.

Use "I" statements instead of "you" statements when you talk to him. Let him know that you love him unconditionally, even when he makes mistakes.

It's imperative you pray for your son. Psalm 62:8 says, "Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out

your hearts to him, for God is our refuge."

11 How can I reach my grown children for Christ?

Jane: Live for Christ in everything you do. Demonstrate patience and humility. Pray for your children faithfully.

Invite your children to attend church or a special church event with you. Lovingly lead rather than nag about your faith. Allow them to experience the power of answered prayer. In times of adversity ask them if you can pray and have others pray for them.

Never give up. The Bible encourages us to "be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Submit your children to God and accept that the end result belongs to Him. **tpe**

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

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