

HURTING

Mom and Dad, do you remember what it was like to be a teenager? Do you remember Pong, Atari and Battle of the Network Stars? Do you remember riding your bike in the neighborhood and having one bestest best friend? I know that I keep looking at my own children's growing-up through my lens of the past. The problem is that those lenses are not accurate anymore.

In fact the "growing up" experience our kids are living through is drastically different from anyone who has come before them. When I was growing up, the adolescent period lasted about 4-5 years, from 13-18. At 18ish I would be expected to be able to care for myself. Today, the adolescent period runs from 11ish to 25. Do the math – that is 14 years of development! What people have found out about this period is that most kids are hurting, desperately hurting. This extended adolescence has created some huge voids in our kids' lives.

Our kids try to fill this void with lots of shallow friendships. Places like Myspace.com are built around the idea of teen community... but just shallow community. Our kids judge themselves by how *many* friends they have, not by how deep those friendships are. Without deep friendships, kids have no place to vent their pain. Instead they simply skip on the surface like a rock across a pond.

I want to encourage you as parents to deeply study this developing, changing – and hurting – culture. Assume nothing. As we try to keep up with everything our kids are asking from us we often forget to give them the few things that they really need.

When kids are hurting what they really need is compassion, comfort and safety. Remember, parents, they **do** love you ... they just live in a teen culture that tells them not to trust you! If they do not trust you then they don't feel safe and they don't feel comfortable. And without trust in you there will be no compassion showed for your requests.



Well, how do we get there? Building trust requires lots of time and setting limits.

Time... Remember, the most important investment in your life is your kids. Who do you love more than anything? Give them the time they need. Step away from the work you bring home, step away from your favorite show (that's why we have Tivo™ now), step away from your email and make time to teach your kids who you are so they can build off the foundation that is you!

Limits... No kid will tell you this, but they want you to be... well, predictable! Have clear limits for their behavior and follow through. Say you've given your kid a 10 p.m. Curfew. If it's broken – no phone, no computer for 1 week, or some other consequence that gets your kid's attention. Set a limit and stick with it – it helps kids know you are there for them. Do not bend because of whining, or tears, or the fact that other parents are allowing it. If it smells bad it probably is.

Building trust is tricky but important because if your kids do not trust you they will not let you into their often pain-filled, hurting world.

I'm praying for you and your kids – We're in this together.

Pastor Mike