Ten ways to grow your teen’s heart!

A helpful way to understand relationships is to think of people having relational needs. These needs are as vital to our relational health as water and air are for our physical health. Whenever we meet someone else’s needs, we strengthen the relationship between us. Whenever we neglect to meet one of their needs, we damage the relationship between us.

One definition of love is meeting the other person’s needs before they are even aware that they have a need! We need to know each other quite well before we can do this easily. But we can learn to listen for our teen’s needs and recognize them.

Although it can be challenging at times, our teens need to know how much we love them. The more unlovable their actions, the more they really need to know we love them! Research into teens’ brains shows that they find it very difficult to empathise with others at times, but they still need our empathy and love.

When we show loving empathy to our teens, we show them how much we love them and how much God loves them. We also show them what a healthy, loving relationship looks like, so that they can recognise true love when they find it. If they want to know if someone really loves them – use these top ten needs to identify if the other person is able to love them in all these different ways most of the time. If your young person wants to know if they are really in love – are they willing to love the other person, in all these different ways, for the rest of their lives?

The great thing about these principles is that they work for every relationship. If you want to grow closer to a child, spouse, or family member, or if you want to improve your relationships with a friend, church member or colleague, then choosing to meet their needs, as often as you can, will grow almost every relationship in a healthy way.

Putting these ten ways to grow your teens heart into action will also protect their relationship with you and enhance their spiritual and emotional well-being.

# The top ten needs that people have are:

* Comfort – listening and consoling when we are sad
* Acceptance – especially when we mess up
* Affection – caring kindness, hugs, etc.
* Appreciation - being thanked
* Attention - focused time and listening
* Respect – protecting the other from shame
* Encouragement
* Security/Safety – protecting the other from fear and harm
* Specialnessl/being valued – letting the other person know how special they are to us
* Support/help

Their initials spell out CAAAARESSS (Cares or Caress!)

What are your top 3 needs?

What are the top three needs of your teenager, or other family member?

When people’s needs are not met (or have not been met when they were younger) they are more likely to feel alone and have:

* unhealthy thoughts (I am not loveable, I am not special to anyone, I am not valuable, I deserve to be treated badly, etc.)
* unhealthy feelings (overwhelming or persistent sadness, anger, fear, etc.)
* unhealthy relationships (possessive, abusive, neglectful, etc.)
* and unhealthy behaviours (addictions, obsessions, hurtful behaviours, etc.)

When people’s needs are met we take away their aloneness and help them to feel loved.

* healthy thoughts (I am loved, special, valued, etc.)
* healthy feelings (happy, loved, peaceful, grateful, hopeful, worthy, etc.)
* healthy relationships (empathic, caring, unselfish relationships, etc.)
* and healthy behaviours (helping others, striving for excellence, etc.)

# Comfort: having my Sadness and pain soothed

* The God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble. 2 Corinthians 1:3,4
* Mourn with those who mourn. Romans 12:15
* Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of kindness and sympathy. AH 107

## Comfort in practice:

* Saying: “I’m so sad for you. I’m sorry you are going through this. I know how disappointed you are. I hurt with you.”
* Hugging.
* Crying with someone who is sad.
* Sitting with the other person and just being there with them when life is hard.
* Listening to their painful stories and hurt feelings without trying to ‘fix’ them.
* Making the person a cup of hot tea, or their favourite drink.

## Thinking about comfort:

* What makes you feel sad, and how do you most like to be comforted?
* When is your teen/young person most likely to become distressed or sad, and how do they most like to be comforted?

# Acceptance: being welcomed unconditionally

* Accept one another just as Christ has accepted you. Romans 15:7
* Let all seek to discover the excellencies rather than the defects. Often it is our own attitude, the atmosphere surrounding ourselves, which determines what will be revealed to us in another. Adventist Home (AH) 105

## Acceptance in practice

* Welcoming a young person who has messed up with open arms and love rather than criticism and a good telling off.
* “I’ll always love you/be there for you, no matter what you do.”
* Not comparing a young person negatively with others or being critical of them when they have made a mistake.
* Being warm, comforting and supportive when things go wrong.
* Being forgiving and not bringing up the mistakes of the past.

## Thinking about acceptance

* When might a teenager most need my acceptance?
* How can I show others how freely and warmly I accept them, in spite of their imperfections?
* What do I find difficult to accept in myself? How might this affect those I love?

# Affection: being shown care and kindness

* Greet one another with a holy kiss. Romans 16:16
* The warmth of true friendship, the love that binds heart to heart, is a foretaste of the joys of heaven. AH 106
* Love cannot long exist without expression. AH 107

## Affection in practice:

* Saying things like: “You’re so special to me!” and “I love you!”
* Sending caring texts, cards and emails etc.
* Giving hugs and kisses, pats on the back, warm smiles and eye contact, etc.
* Being kind and caring. Think about the kindest thing you could do for them, and then do it.

## Thinking about affection:

* How do I like to be shown affection and kindness? How do I not like to be shown affection?
* How do my friends and family members like to be shown affection?
* List ten ways you could show warm and appropriate affection and kindness to your teen, friends and family members…Then put your ideas into practice!

# Appreciation: being thanked or praised for effort and help

* I praise you…1 Corinthians 11:2
* Make your home atmosphere fragrant with tender thoughtfulness. AH 16

## Appreciation in practice:

* Saying: “That looks lovely! I really enjoyed that meal! Thanks for ironing my shirt/cleaning my car/helping me fix my computer, etc.”
* Sending thank you cards, SMS/texts, and notes, giving flowers, etc.
* Telling others how much you appreciate your teen, especially when they might overhear.

## Thinking about appreciation:

* What do you appreciate most about your teen, and how does your teen most like to be appreciated?
* What effect does it have on other people when you express your appreciation for the small things they do?

# Attention: having a thoughtful interest shown in my world

* But that the members (of the body) should have the same care for one another. 1 Corinthians 12:25
* Determine to be all that it is possible to be to each other. Continue the early attentions. AH 106

## Attention in practice:

* Saying: “What was the best/worst thing that happened if your day?”
* Saying: “What you would like us to do together right now?”
* Spending quality time with your teen on teen/parent ‘dates’. Cheerfully doing things your teen wants to do, even if you are not that keen!
* Putting the other person first.
* Responding positively to the small comments and observations the other person makes.

## Thinking about attention:

* What are your teen’s interests, and what can you do to share in their interests and hobbies?
* How can you show true concern and understanding for the things that are happening in your teen’s life?

# Respect: being treated as an equal or higher

* Honour one another above yourselves. Romans 12:10
* Do not try to compel each other to do as you wish. AH 107

## Respect in action:

* “I’d like to hear your ideas.” “What would you prefer?” “I was wrong, please forgive me.”
* Speaking in a respectful voice to your teen, even when they are being challenging.
* Apologising to your teen. Show a good example of apology and forgiveness.
* Checking before making family plans that involve your teen or affect them in some way.
* Not putting your teen down, laughing at them, or teasing them.
* Honouring your teen in special and thoughtful ways.

## Thinking about respect:

* How do you like people to show you respect?
* How do you show respect to others?
* What do you do that other people might find disrespectful?
* What effect does this have on your relationships, and what could you do differently?

# Encouragement: being helped towards my goals.

* Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11
* In every way encourage each other in fighting the battles of life. AH 106

## Encouragement in practice:

* Saying: “I know you can do it! Don’t give up now! I believe in you!”
* Sending a card/email/text message with encouraging words.
* Doing one of their chores so they can find extra time for the things they need to do.
* Finding useful articles, books ideas, etc. that may help them with their project.
* Being their ‘cheerleader’, especially when life gets tough.
* Reminding them of their past successes.

## Thinking about encouragement:

* What are your teen’s top three life-goals and how can you encourage them as they strive to reach these goals?
* What might you do or say that could discourage your teen? And what might you do or say instead, to encourage them, and help them to keep going?

# Security: being free from harm and being protected from fears.

* Live in harmony with one another. Romans 12:16
* If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18
* Perfect love casts out fear. 1 John 4:18
* Anything that would mar the peace and unity…should be firmly repressed, and kindness and love should be cherished. AH 120

## Security in action:

* Saying “I’m here for you. Let’s work this out. I’m committed to having a good relationship with you.”
* Not walking away from arguments and problems. Staying and talking about things. Working through conflicts to reach a mutually-beneficial conclusion.
* Not causing pain or harm, and not frightening the other person in any way.
* Staying calm and not losing your temper.
* Keeping promises, being on time, or giving plenty of warning if plans change.
* Offering to drive and pick up your teen whenever they feel unsafe or whenever they are unhappy about what their friends are doing.

## Thinking about security:

* What might you do or say that might cause your teen to be afraid? (being angry, threatening to turn them out of the house, changing plans suddenly, being unpredictable, etc.)
* How can you be supportive and respectful when your teen feels insecure and afraid?
* What is your teen most afraid of, and what can you do, if anything, to soothe them, or to diminish their fear?

# Specialness: knowing that I am valued by other people

* Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Ephesians 4:29
* Let your pleasant, cheerful words ever be like sunbeams. AH 442.

## Specialness and valuing in practice:

* Saying: “I’m so glad you’re my son/daughter!” “You really brighten up my life!” “It’s great being your mum/dad!”
* Telling other people good things about your teen.
* Celebrating your teen’s special days and moments in creative, generous and fun ways.

## Thinking about Specialness

* How can you show your teen how much they mean to you as a person – not just appreciating what they have done for you?
* What can you do to show your teen how much you value your relationship with them?

# Support: having someone to help me face a challenge.

Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

## Support in action:

* Saying: “I’ll be glad to help you! Just let me know what I can do.”
* Asking: “What can I do today that would help you the most?”
* Helping with a big project that your teen finds overwhelming, difficult or miserable, even helping to tidy their room.
* Teaching your teen practical skills, like changing a wheel, ironing a shirt etc.
* Being aware when your teen may be tired and doing kind things to help them without being asked.

## Thinking about support

* When might my teen most need my support?
* When do I most need support, and how could I ask someone to help me?

# Listening for the needs

Think about these comments and try to guess the relational need that is being expressed.

Comfort, Acceptance. Affection, Appreciation, Attention, Respect, Encouragement, Security, Specialness, and Support – CAAAARESSS (Cares of Caress!)

There may be more than one need expressed in each phrase:

1. I hate school! I never want to go back!
2. I want to dye my hair purple.
3. I don’t like walking home on my own at night.
4. Go away and leave me alone!
5. I’ll never pass my driving test!
6. My friend is doing drugs.
7. My laptop was stolen from my bag.

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The concept of these top ten relational needs was inspired by David and Teresa Ferguson of Intimate Life Ministries

AH – The Adventist Home by Ellen G. White