



Parents should start laying the groundwork for closer communication by seizing opportunities to affirm your teen. PHOTO/COURTESY

Of conversations with a teenager, values and modern parenting

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80%

How to fight overcharges. Because 80 percent of medical bills contain an error, you may find duplicate or incorrect charges. Request an itemised bill and dispute inaccuracies. Ask the provider or hospital for an itemised bill. Use a medical coding tool to translate medical procedure codes and medical diagnosis codes to understand each charge. If there are any discrepancies, immediately dispute them.

As the holidays draw near, I notice a familiar pattern in almost every household. Parents move about with the urgency of generals preparing for a long campaign.

The shops grow crowded as we stock up on everything from rice and beans to soft drinks and snacks. Some parents ship their children off to their grandparents, those guardians of tradition, patience, and values we still hope our children might absorb before modern life drowns them out. Others rush to renew WiFi, load data bundles, and update Netflix subscriptions, because in today's world, no sitter seems as reliable as an active screen.

But as practical as these preparations are, I believe we need to go further.

This holiday, beyond the food and entertainment, we must deliberately stock up on time, time with our children, time for guidance, time for honest conversations that shape character.

Food fills their stomachs, screens fill their hours, but it is our presence that fills their understand-

ing. And without that, we may later be shocked by the beliefs, confusions, and values they quietly pick up from elsewhere.

A recent experience opened my eyes even more. While visiting a neighbour, I found their 16-year-old daughter, who had just completed her UCE, watching a religious channel.

I felt a surprising relief that she wasn't watching one of the music channels filled with half-naked performers and questionable content. Glad for the opportunity, I sat down with her, and we soon found ourselves deep in conversation about faith, identity, and the world.

She asked me whether Africans were descended from Ham, Noah's son, and therefore born under a curse. I could see that she wasn't trying to provoke; she was genuinely confused.

I told her that these ideas have been widely debunked and are rooted more in historical prejudice than biblical truth.

Our struggles as a continent, I explained gently, are not the result of ancient curses but of modern leadership failures and centuries of resource mismanagement.

Then came her next question: "Why are Christians poor com-

DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PARENTING CHILDREN AND PARENTING TEENS?

As kids hit adolescence and begin morphing into strange new forms of their earlier selves, their parents' communication style needs to morph too. In childhood, we control much of our children's lives, and our habitual conversation style is focused on issuing commands - commands that are often important for our child's education and safety. By the teen years, however, that's a dangerous mode to get stuck in. Directives to get-out-of-bed-or-you'll-miss-the-bus-and-take-out-the-garbage-before-you-leave will still be necessary, but if that's all parents communicate, their teen is likely to drift far from them emotionally. Now, more than ever, it's important to break away from nagging "do as I say" monologues. At this stage of their life, emerging adults don't want to feel controlled; instead, they need to feel valued.

pared to unbelievers?" She had heard from her Nigerian spiritual teacher that none of the world's billionaires were Christians. I did not want to argue with her statistics, I did not know how factual they were, but I tried to broaden her view. Wealth, I told her, is relative. A person's bank balance is not the sole measure of their richness. Values, peace, health, family, generosity, these matter just as much, if not more.

The conversation then shifted to a topic I had not expected from a teenager; the prosperity gospel versus the salvation gospel. She had been taught that the early missionaries "missed the point" when they focused on spiritual awakening and preparation for heaven.

According to what she had heard, they should have encouraged Africans to chase wealth, enjoy earthly pleasures, and prioritise material success.

Here, I realised the depth of the misinformation quietly shaping young minds. I tried to explain that while God cares about our well-being on earth, the message of Christ is primarily about transformation, learning to love our neighbors, practicing integri-

ty, and pursuing justice. And the truth is that a commitment to genuine love often makes it difficult to accumulate excessive wealth, because many of the fastest paths to riches rely on exploitation, dishonesty, or taking advantage of others. A true Christian cannot comfortably engage in slavery, corruption, drug trafficking, or fraud.

By the end of our conversation, I saw a faint light in her eyes, a beginning of understanding. But as I left, I was unsettled. This young girl, who comes from a stable home and attends good schools, had still absorbed so many distorted teachings. It made me wonder: How many other children are quietly being shaped by forces we do not see, simply because we are busy trying to survive?

This holiday, therefore, I believe we must go beyond preparing meals and entertainment. We need to prepare minds, values, and hearts. Let us stock up on books that challenge them, conversations that guide them, and moments that build trust.

Let us sit with them, ask what they are watching, and discuss what they hear from the internet, their friends, or even religious teachers.

Our children do not only need things from us, they need us.

As we pile up the posho, beans, sodas, and snacks, let us remember to also pile up patience, presence, and wisdom.

These are the investments that will outlast the holiday season and shape the adults our children will become.

Time, more than anything else, is the true gift we can offer this season, and it is the one they will remember longest.

NOTE
KNOW WHAT YOU ARE PAYING FOR