

# Rites of Passage Ideas

## Ideas for Parents and Youth Workers to Help Teens Mark Their Lives

**P**rom and graduation seasons have become ones of survival--will we lose another teen to something reckless? There was a time when these were significant rites of passage signaling a teen's entrance through adolescence and into adulthood. Prom was a chance to dress up in adult clothes and promenade with a date. Graduation was a ceremony to honor the completion of the child part of one's education. These were rites of passage given by adults to recognize the emerging adult.

Over time we have turned over these rites to the peer culture. Prom has turned into all kinds of other "adult" behaviors away from the presence of adults such as drinking, reckless use of vehicles, and sex. While graduation still involves the family, right after the actual ceremony the new graduate takes off with his/her fellow new graduates, minus the adults again, to celebrate in the same reckless "adult" ways. Then they take off for beach week or whatever week it is in your area to live like what they see on reality TV shows. Only they have to live with the results.

Too often teens are growing up cocooned in their own peer group. Teens already have a natural aversion to adults due to normal adolescent development. But in no way does it mean that they are to be left alone in this process nor do they want to be left alone in this process. Every study says so. For proof, go to Support Statistics at Family Based Youth Ministry . o r g [http://familybasedyouthministry.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=30](http://familybasedyouthministry.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=30)

The peer group may be supportive and accepting for adolescent growth bumps, but they clearly lack the wisdom that only comes with age. And with that lack of wisdom and lack of adult recognition from those who have "made it," we have teens growing up but not knowing what growing up is or when they have grown up. This new lifestage, which is what it has ended up becoming, is coined Youthhood. Chap Clark, for Fuller Youth Institute, did a great job of surmising this new life stage: "By the 1960s the end of adolescence was still generally accepted to be around age 18 to 19, for young people left high school and pretty much decided who they were and what they were going to do with their lives. While the social revolution of the late '60s and early '70s was fueled by the dreams of a newly emerging young adult

force willing to take responsibility to right the wrongs of former generations, it further lengthened adolescence. For those who could afford it, college moved from being the preparation phase for young adults to halfway houses for old high schoolers. 'What are you going to study?' was a question that actually made sense in the early 1970s-but it's met by blank stares today! In contemporary society, graduate school is often a place to 'find oneself,' and numerous studies attempt to understand the historically unheard of phenomenon of 30-somethings who have Ph.D.s living at home or waiting tables who have yet to 'discover what they want to do.'" (Chap Clark, "Youth Ministry in the Age of Delayed Adulthood," <http://fulleryouthinstitute.org/2005/09/youth-ministry-in-an-age-of-delayed-adulthood/>)

Not knowing what being grown is and the collective abandonment by adults (for a great read on this, read Chap Clark's book, *Hurt*), teens and young adults have made their own rites of passage by joining a gang or fraternity or simply having sex (not that unmarried sex is ever that simple). But then they find out (and too soon) that sex doesn't necessarily lead to love which doesn't necessarily lead to marriage or even commitment. This so-called rite of passage didn't lead to anything grown up.

Koren Zailckas is a young adult writer who wrote an introspective autobiography of her life as a teenage drunk called *Smashed*. While writing about what happened during her freshman year of college she had this to say: "En route to the party, we amble up the sloped sidewalks of North Campus, past the domed roof of the chapel, the university bookstore, and the alumni center, which was once a frat house. ...As we walk, we compare life stories. Adult strangers do this by giving an inventory of their careers, their spouses, their children's schools; by trading names of decorators and personal trainers, recipes, and favorite brands of driveway sealant. And as girls, we do it, too, by quantifying experiences. Even as strangers, our conversations drift back to the personal stuff of drinking, sex, and drugs. Within an hour of meeting Tess, I may not be able to tell you the last book she read, what she does for exercise, or if she eats or skips breakfast; I may not even know her last name (in college, I'll end up knowing almost everyone by first name only), but I know how many boys she's slept with, whether she prefers beer or liquor, and if she does speed to study. We don't necessarily flaunt these facts because we're proud of our delinquency; we do it because the confessions represent our only milestones and emotional investments as of yet. They are the only way we can think to distinguish ourselves." (*Smashed*, p. 117)

Let's give our youth true ways in which they can distinguish themselves. We need to regain the power of rites of passage. We need to give our teens markers, including spiritual markers, to guide them into adulthood. Simply, part of what we need to do to grow our teens is to let them know when they have taken a step towards growth.

To help we have compiled a list of ideas, some for parents to do and some for youth workers to lead in the planning. Take these ideas and personalize them to acknowledge these important life stages and to make memories which will last a lifetime.

If you are a pastor or youth worker downloading this, hand this out to your parents. Also volunteer to help your parents in the planning of these rites of passage. Some ideas call for a father specifically or a mother specifically. If the other spouse is not available for any reason, feel free to find that special significant other adult to be a part of the memory. From personal experience, this special adult involvement works well.

Let's purposely give our teens ways to distinguish themselves.

Brenda Seefeldt

# Acknowledged as a Teenager

**T**he goal of this rite of passage is to remove the fears and wrong messages about adolescent growth and to acknowledge to the now teen that you no longer see him/her as a child but as a teenager. He/she will always be your baby but your child is desperate to know that you see him/her also as a teen.

## Parent Ideas

- C Make a weekend out of this. Make it a special one. Take your daughter to a nice hotel. Take your son on some sort of adventure weekend. Over the weekend, make sure to cover the sex talk and the changing body talk
- C Talk about making an abstinence pledge. At the end of the weekend, have the other parent (father to daughter or mother to son) show up to have dinner with just the two of them. Present a promise ring passing on the hope that he/she can pass this ring on to his/her child someday. For more about promise rings and the abstinence pledge, search "promise rings abstinence pledge" on the internet.
- C Sometime during the weekend, present to your son/daughter letters which you have had his/her mentors write. The letters should contain advice as well as point out qualities which they have noticed about your son/daughter.
- C Extend a new privilege like an increased allowance or a later bedtime.
- C Give your child a set of keys. It sounds simple and "latch-key-

## Youth Worker Ideas

- C Provide a library of resources on adolescent development and sex education which parents can borrow to help them as they have these important talks with their child.
- C Help the parent gather the Recognition as Teenager letters for the teen.
- C Write your own Recognition as Teenager letter with loads of personal insight from what you have noticed from him/her and heartfelt advice you want to pass on.

ish," but a personal set of keys is a sign of some sort of independence. It doesn't seem like much but we are adults. It really is something to a new teen.

- C Put together a time capsule of favorite "childish" things. Seal and bury this in your yard to be opened again when your child is moving out as an adult.
- C Write down 40 affirmations about your new teen. After it is completed and shared with your teen, post it on the refrigerator for about a week or two.
- C Latin teens have a quinceaneras (quince for short) for their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday in recognition of their coming of age. The party usually begins with mass then is followed by a reception. Between the girl's gown and the reception of presents, quinces can cost as much as \$10,000. You can do something similar on a much smaller scale to acknowledge a daughter's coming of age.
- C Native Americans boys traditionally go out on a big hunt and return as a man to the tribe. Arrange some sort of challenging yet accomplishing adventure for a boy to do on his own (with your oversight just far enough away).

# Confirmation

**N**ot all churches have the sacrament of confirmation anymore. The ones that do have set aside a special time for further education to teach youth the doctrines of the faith. At the completion of the classes (varies from six weeks to three years), the youth is "confirmed" in the church as a knowledgeable adult. Thus the name confirmation. Whether your church has a confirmation program or not, something needs to be done to recognize the child as a part of the church family.

## Parent Ideas

- C Continue to encourage your child how important this education is throughout the confirmation classes. They need this. It may feel too much like school at times.
- C If the first communion is in connection with confirmation, give a personal communion chalice engraved with name, date, and a blessing from your pastor and/or parent and/or other special adult.
- C Buy your child one of those heritage Bibles and fill in the spiritual history of your family into those designated pages. Present this keepsake after the ceremony.
- C Purchase a new Bible. Over the years your child is in Confirmation, read that Bible in your quiet times. As you are reading the Bible, highlight the verses you love; write some notes of what you learned in the margins; write prayers you prayed over your child as you read this Bible, and personalize it in other ways. Present this Bible as a Confirmation gift.

## Youth Worker Ideas

- C Coordinate volunteers from your church to make a scrapbook of the confirmer's life with his/her family and the church.
- C Coordinate the church ceremony where church leadership (not necessarily you) verbally says that the child is recognized to have grown in knowledge and wisdom.
- C Have the individual do part of the Sunday worship service. It could be to lead a prayer, sing, lead worship, read Scripture, give announcements or something else. Something so that on that day he/she contributed to the life of the body together.
- C Have the church lay on of hands over the youth. This is a powerful memory.
- C Have the church prepare a banquet for the occasion. The banquet should be complete with table linens and dishes if possible.

# Entry to High School

**E**ntry to high school is big time. These are the years which are glamorized by Hollywood and real people stories. Now they get to be a part of that life. Recognize this step so you can be a part of their high school life. Particularly the 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. All major studies on drug use, alcohol use, sexual activity--all those areas you fear--show a spike in 14- and 15-years-olds engaging in this risky behavior. Instead of your teen marking entry into high school that way, provide a better rite of passage.

## Parent Ideas

- C Allow your child to pick out his/her own outfit (bite your tongue within limits) for the first day of high school.
- C Grant a new household responsibility in recognition of being in the last stage of their mandatory education.
- C Grant, also, a new household privilege.
- C Take out one of your high school yearbooks and flip through the pages with your new high schooler. There will be plenty to laugh at so the togetherness of laughter will be happening. But also answer these following questions to your teen: What were my biggest problems as a teen? My biggest fears? How did I feel about my looks? What did I do to rebel against my parents? Was I popular? Who was popular and why? What were the toughest grades for me socially? Why? Did any friends ever dump me? Were my parents helpful and understanding during my teen years? What did I need most from them during my adolescence? Did it change as I got older? Did I ever fall in love? How did I

## Youth Worker Ideas

- C Prior to the start of the new school year, take the rising freshman on a tour of the high school campus before school starts. Teach him/her the ways to navigate through the school. Pass on high school "survival tips."
- C During or after the tour, share stories of your high school days with this student--the good and the pain.
- C For the actual first day of school, write a letter to the incoming freshman. Fill it with first day encouragement and your hopes that he/she will be able to walk with God on that day and for the entire year. And that this walk with God will lead to his/her friends knowing that God is with him/her.
- C Help the parent with any set up for the Year of Challenges.

feel when we broke up? Did I keep secrets from my parents? Why?

These questions may bring up some of the painful memories of your high school years. It will be good for your teen to hear them. It will also be good for you to identify with those memories again so you can be more empathetic as your own child goes through his/her adolescence.

- C Set up a Year of Challenges with your child. Have a long sit down talk and plan 8 to 12 challenging things to be accomplished during the first year of high school. Some ideas may be to build something, to do a large a-thon, to have a day of silence. The sky is the limit. Just when your child may start to feel inept during this first year at the big high school, he/she can actually be accomplishing lifetime memories and empowerment.
- C Discover an interest your teen is developing. This would be an interest that may have a career goal attached to it. Plan a trip just for you and your teen to discover more about this interest together. In your research, write down as many crossover questions you can think of that pertain to the interest as well as to faith in God. Have those ready for the large amount of quality time this special trip will give the two of you.

## Driver's License

**T**his is the youth's first true chance of independence. Recognize this together so that you can still be "in the car" with him/her as they can now move around without you.

### Parent Ideas

- C Make up a special key and/or key chain signifying this life event. Make a big presentation when handing this over.
- C Have the new driver drive the entire family to dinner at his/her favorite restaurant.

### Youth Worker Ideas

- C Allow the new driver to drive your car. If you have a "cool" car, this will really be a treat. If you have a "special" car, this will be a memory.

## Car Dating and/or Prom

**P**rom originally was full of parental involvement as an opportunity for the parents to promenade the young adult. Reclaim this rite of passage back again.

Car dating takes the boy/girl thing to an entirely new level. The question is to what level. In this youth culture, the actual act of dating seems to have gone away. Boys don't ask girls out to dinner and a movie. Girls don't even ask boys out to that. Dating has become meeting up at a party and "hooking up" (which is widely defined) and seeing if he/she talks to you on Monday. Then maybe you will "go together" and maybe proclaim that you have a boy/girlfriend. That is the abbreviated version of what is going on between boys and girls these days. As you may be afraid to imagine, real life versions are more heartbreaking. Through your involvement, reclaim what a date is. Reclaim every aspect of what a date should be. Don't miss this opportunity to guide your youth in this relationship change.

### Parent Ideas

C Make a set of dating and sex cards. These are 3x5 cards with the following words on them. Dating: flirting, information seeking, group date, hold hands in public, movie date, formal dinner date, officially boyfriend and girlfriend, going steady, engaged, married. Sex: first kiss, kissing, french kissing, hand on butt, hand on thigh, hand on breast, hand on genitals over clothing, hand on genitals without clothing, dry-humping, oral sex, sexual intercourse. During a dinner or other focused together time, ask your son/daughter to first put together the date cards in the order he/she thinks. Give the option to take a card(s) out of the pile too. Try not to add too much of your own insight. This is a chance for your child to apply what you have already

### Youth Worker Ideas

C For prom set up a beautiful backdrop or go to a location that will give you that beautiful backdrop. Find a member who is a photographer and offer no-cost or low-cost photos for prom attenders. Make these photos very different and better from the ones the school offers. This way you are able to see many students and have that last minute word or whatever with them so they are "promenading" with your involvement.

C Invite those who are going to prom to stop by your home or church office before prom. Outside of your home or office, roll out a red carpet and give your youth that "red carpet" experience. This way your connection with them may be their biggest memory of the night. You can also pass on that last minute word.

taught. Then give the set of sex cards to be placed in a second column matching up with the dating column as to when such behaviors should happen. Again, let your child make his/her own decision. If you see a decision of concern, you can talk about it only after your child is done making the order he/she chooses. Often physically laying it out like this helps a teen make these decisions now rather than in the situation. Give the cards as a keepsake after you are done.

- C The first car date your child should have is with you. If you have a daughter, the father should take her out and show her all the manners she should expect and accept on a date. Teach her to accept nothing less. If you have a son, the mother should take him out and teach him how women are to be treated on a date. Explain the whys too.
- C While on this date, explain what makes up an actual date. Together define what a date should be and what should be the proper behavior (manners, respect for the other as well as proper physical behavior towards each other) on these different dates. Encourage your child to value him/herself enough to not accept "hooking up" as being a proper relationship move. Build an excitement as to the true fun an actual date can be.
- C Create a first time for your son/daughter to wear formal wear. Make sure this first time is with you. This will lessen part of the faux excitement of a high school prom.
- C For your daughter, arrange a time with a bridal shop to let her try on bridal gowns. Make it a grand afternoon adventure. There is something about a girl

- C Teach your youth to define what a date is. No need to go into True Love Waits stuff for this teaching. Focus on what makes up an honest-to-goodness date. You may be surprised at how many youth don't know what one is.
- C Put together a long list of cool and creative date night ideas. Ideas that lend to opportunities to talk, get-to-know-you activities and plenty of light and public spaces. Provide this list with a card from you before the first car date.

seeing herself in pure bridal beauty that sticks with her, hopefully through the times she needs to make tough decisions.

- C According to *USA Today*, prom can cost anywhere between \$400 to \$3,000. Decide together what prom will cost for the teen and for you.

# High School Graduation

**T**his marks the end of mandatory school and near the end of the youth's days as a minor. A huge rite of passage is happening and it is an important one to acknowledge to help the youth through youthhood and into adulthood.

## Parent Ideas

- C Give the family cross to your child. If your family does not have one yet, now is a good time to start.
- C Write out your blessings over your child in elegant script and on parchment. Present this to them after the graduation ceremony is over.
- C Throughout this last year of high school, teach a Sunday School class together. This gives you a full Sunday School year to purposely spend time together and to share faith experiences together. Due to the crazy-senior-year schedule, seniors tend to drop out of church. This also helps your teen have one last great year in your church.
- C Grant a new household privilege. Grant a new household responsibility, an adult-type one.
- C Put together a list de how you will now see your son/daughter as an adult. The list will probably not describe full adulthood. It just needs to be something that differentiates from the school child you had before.
- C Together plant a tree or garden in recognition of this honor.

## Youth Worker Ideas

- C Plan a grads-only road trip that will be memorable but also take on the direct task of explaining to them the need to make an adult decision about their faith.
- C Have each grad write a letter to the youth group or to an individual younger youth. Instruct that the letter should contain what they have learned from their time in the youth group--the good and the bad. Encourage them that this is their chance to pass on their wisdom to the younger youth. Hold a special service to read these letters to the youth group.
- C For the senior year, have a seniors-only Sunday School class or small group. For this class, arrange lessons on such topics as handling money (credit card companies target incoming sc ol l e g e c f r e s h m e n ), r fraternity/sorority life, time management (no teachers on their case to turn in papers), how to do laundry, how to keep your quiet time with a non-Christian room mate, etc.

# Moving out of Family Home

**T**his is it. The room will be empty and someone else will be finding the messes the grown youth leaves behind. Mark this moment so the grown youth know the home and the church home are always his/her home.

## Parent Ideas

- C This idea will need an early start. Begin writing letters to your son/daughter throughout their teen years. At different points in their growth or during those times your heart just swells for no reason with love for him/her, write a letter about that moment. Keep them and give them to him/her at this time.
- C Make a recording of the specific things the family will miss about living with your son/daughter. Have everyone in the family add something.
- C Dig up the time capsule which was buried when you recognized your child as a teen. Discuss the growth which has happened since that can was buried.
- C Together go to <http://iusedtobelieve.com/>. This is a very sweet site of submissions from adults admitting to what they used to believe as a child. Read some of these 65,000+ entries and laugh together. Then discuss things you used to believe as a child. Ask your child things he/she used to believe. From these beliefs, make up your own memory album including pictures, funnies, keepsakes, or

## Youth Worker Ideas

- C No matter how long this one has been out of the youth program, put together a care package. Be sure to include those items everyone hates to buy like garbage cans and cleaning supplies. Also include a youth group memory item.

whatevers. Give to your child  
to keep in his/her new home.