

# HomeWord

Dedicated to household harmony & family faith

## Sharing About

- Typical conflicts between parents and teens
- Compromising and reconciling in the family
- Adjusting rules and expectations as we move into the teen years

## Letting Go and Moving On by Eileen Pettycrew

Over and over again, I am called to reconcile with my husband and our daughters.

One night during the Olympics broadcast, my husband, Jim, and our two daughters were watching television. Since it was a school night, we had all agreed that the television would be turned off at 8:45 p.m. As the appointed hour approached, I stationed myself by the kitchen intercom and began a minute-by-minute announcement of the time. My voice became more insistent with each message. I was convinced that if I didn't take control of the situation things would get out of hand.

At exactly 8:45, our younger daughter climbed the stairs without a word. Behind her, the howls of our other daughter, a young teen, rang out. Why couldn't she finish watching the gymnastics? What was the big deal? Just five more minutes! On and on it went, until in frustration I locked myself in the bathroom, lamenting that we were now in the middle of yet another conflict.

Abruptly the yelling stopped. Jim had told our young teen that she could watch a little more of the Olympics. I was shocked. Although I was secretly relieved that the conflict was over, I felt betrayed and angry, and I let Jim know it. My head spun with confusion and self-doubt: What kind of message were we sending to our daughter? That she can get what she wants by staging a loud protest? Just then I heard our young teen go upstairs to bed. She had watched television for maybe three more minutes. She asked me to tuck her in.

Feeling wretched, I followed her upstairs. "I'm sorry, Mommy," she said in a voice choked with tears. Love instantly flooded my heart. "I forgive you," I whispered, holding her close.

My young teen's sincere apology prompted me to reconcile with Jim. He admitted that he shouldn't have let our young teen watch more television after her protest. But he also told me that if I hadn't insisted that the television watching end at exactly 8:45, he would have felt free to extend the time for a reasonable amount. My constant interference and pressure had created tension. The clincher was finding out that when I had recently been out for the evening, bedtime—even with the Olympics on—had gone smoothly.

It was a wake-up call. I had to admit that I was holding on to past conflicts, bracing myself for the worst. I had rigidly enforced a rule and refused to trust Jim and our young teen to negotiate their own decisions. I needed the courage to admit that I was wrong. I needed to let go and move beyond the rules, toward a fresh beginning with God and my family. Vowing to do better next time, Jim and I forgave each other for our mutual failings.

In the morning, our young teen hugged us both and agreed to do something nice for us to make up for her behavior the night before. Her deep desire to mend her relationship with me and her father had led us all into genuine reconciliation. It is an example I strive to follow every day.

*Eileen Pettycrew lives in Portland, Oregon, where she enjoys hiking, bicycling, reading, and playing the piano.*

### *10 Best Gifts for Your Teen*

by Patt and Steve Saso

In *10 Best Gifts for Your Teen* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 1999), Patt and Steve Saso suggest that the best gifts we can give our teenagers are not things we can buy at the mall. They are respect, room, receptivity, revelation of self, responsibility, resolve, recognition, reconciliation, release, and role model. About reconciliation the Sasos write:

Reconciliation is one of the most important of our 10 gifts because it integrates all the others. It requires respect, sensitivity to feelings (one's own and others), vulnerability, honesty, responsibility, self-discipline and courage. It is essential to building a trusting, loving relationship with your teenager. As you model for your teenagers a willingness to ask forgiveness and seek reconciliation, they will be more open to admitting their mistakes. The healing will be mutual. You will hurt one another from time to time and you will have the understanding and ability to reconcile, to walk with one another again.

For more information about this book, see the latest *HomeWord Review* on our Web site. Go to [www.smp.org](http://www.smp.org), click on Family Faith-Life Resources, and then click on *HomeWord*.

# Forgiving Self and Others at Home

by Leann Barden

As in most teen-parent relationships, my parents and I often disagree on issues varying from dating to taste in music. Fortunately, we try to solve our conflicts in an agreeable manner. We normally try to compromise. For example, if I want to stay out until midnight on Homecoming night but my parents want me in by 10:30, we compromise and make the curfew 11:00. This helps us all maintain our sanity.

However, compromise doesn't always solve the more difficult issues. In many families with teens, disagreements lead to lies, distrust, and constant yelling. For example, a teen may tell a lie to keep out of trouble but when the parents recognize the lie, they create a punishment that the teen often thinks is unfair. Before long, a pattern of mistrust develops and the teen loses direction in life and may stumble down paths fraught with negative choices and consequences (such as doing drugs, stealing, etc). The first step to getting back on the road to life is recognizing the problem. The next step is forgiving oneself.

Forgiving oneself is the hardest step. As I grew up, I made new friends and lost old ones, causing many arguments. (This seems particularly common between girls: friends today, enemies tomorrow.) In grade school, name-calling and the silent treatment accompanied many of these fights. I remember coming home, hurt by a friend and wanting to hurt her back even more.

Eventually I would feel remorse, and my friend and I would make up. Often though, the harsh things I had said would haunt me, and while my friend would forgive me, I couldn't forgive my own cruelty. I'd be sullen for weeks, and then I would try to be "the perfect kid." This was my self-imposed form of penance. After a while, I'd be back to my old self again, and this was the outward sign that I had forgiven myself.

These fights also happen between family members, only family relationships can be more complex and, once damaged, much harder to repair. Yet family relationships are more resilient than friendships because of the love that binds the members together. Family arguments must be resolved by working together. Each member contributes his or her strengths, which counterbalances the group's shortcomings.

I think the younger we are, the easier we find forgiveness. The innocence of children allows them to accept imperfections in themselves and others. I often see examples of this when I baby-sit: a six-year-old might deliberately knock down his younger sibling's Lego tower. The six-year-old knows this is wrong and, without my saying anything, will give himself a time-out. After this period of penance, the two children can play happily together; the younger one doesn't hold any grudges.

Families need to work together like these two children. We achieve genuine reconciliation when all members recognize their wrongs and forgive themselves. This renewed self-esteem helps us to forgive others. The final step is letting go—of everyone's mistakes.

Solving conflicts between parents and teens is always easier said than done. We must be open to new ideas and opinions. Homecoming night is a time to stay out late; most dances don't even end until 10:00. Yet teens also have to recognize that parents who set an early curfew do so because they really care. A conflict-resolution tip that guidance counselors have always handed out *does* work in real situations like this: Parents and teens can cope if they are willing to listen and learn from one another.

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## Reflections on Forgiveness

"Life is an adventure in forgiveness." —Norman Cousins

"If you want to see the brave, look at those who can forgive." —*The Bhagavad Gita*

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."—Jesus

"Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude." —Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"We witness by being a community of reconciliation, a forgiving community of the forgiven." —Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu

"For both parties, forgiveness means the freedom again to be at peace inside their own skins and to be glad in each other's presence." —Frederick Buechner

"The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world." —Marianne Williamson

Quotes from *Spiritual Literacy* by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat [New York: Scribner, 1996]

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