

**Theme:** Learning from My Mistakes

**Question:** What is one mistake you made from which you learned a key life lesson?

Teens and parents in conversation

# HomeWord



## Teen Talk *by an anonymous teen*

When my mother went on a trip to Florida, she made me stay with my aunt. I was very homophobic at the time, and I told my mother I would rather die than stay with my gay aunt.

My mother told me that my aunt was the only person I could stay with while she was gone and that I only had to stay with her for a week. I called up

all my friends to see if I could stay at one of their houses, but none of their mothers would let me stay for a whole week. My mother said that my aunt was a very fun person to be with and that I would have a pleasant time staying with her.

When my aunt came to pick me up, she greeted me with a hello and asked how I was doing. I told her, "All right," then I sat in the car without saying anything else. My aunt told my mother that everything would be all right and that we were sure to have an enjoyable time. I laughed out loud, knowing that I was going to have the worst week of my life.

On the ride to my aunt's house, I turned the volume of my walkman to

the highest setting so I wouldn't have to talk to her. When we arrived at the house, we went inside and ate Brunswick stew and grits that my aunt had made. It was one of the best meals that I had ever had. I told my aunt the meal was excellent, and I

was actually amazed that I had enjoyed something at her house.

My aunt won my affection when she showed me two 17th-row tickets to the World Series between the Toronto Blue Jays and the Atlanta Braves. I gave her a hug and told her that she was my favorite aunt.

That night I felt terrible thinking that I wouldn't have liked her if she hadn't bought me the World Series tickets. I told her how sorry I was for being rude to her and for not giving her any chance to be my friend because she was a lesbian. She forgave me and told me she could understand my being upset with her and scared of her because she was different from most people. I told her it would take me some time to feel completely comfortable around her. ▼

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## Parent Talk *by Kim Vogel*

Did you ever wake up in a cold sweat, eyes wide open, and find yourself sitting straight up? It's one of those dreams where the characters and images are distorted, the place and time seem unreal, and yet your heart is racing. For me these dreams are

often the result of fear—fear of a particular situation or, more often, fear surrounding a particular emotion.

The one thing I fear most is making a mistake. I don't mean the insignificant mistakes that we all make daily—typos, driving a few miles over the speed limit, and so on. I'm talking about the big mistakes, the ones where we say, "Oh, why did I do that?"

Looking back at the mistakes I have made, I realize they follow a simple pattern, one that I am slowly recognizing I can change. I'm thirty-three. I need to learn this. The big mistakes I have made most often revolve around hurting someone, usually by saying something inappropriate or out of line. I tend to believe I can help just about anyone. If people



would just listen to me, I could fix their problems. Never is it so simple.

In my zeal to help, I have sometimes found myself sharing personal information with a third party, believing that I am helping the person I am talking about. These mistakes hurt

relationships and compromise trust. It takes a long time to heal and rebuild after such a mistake.

I made this mistake with my brother, and it nearly destroyed our relationship. I told one of his friends some very personal information about him, assuming that the friend already knew. My brother was crushed. It took a lot of apologizing and a lot of time before he would share his life with me again.

I make my biggest mistakes when I don't listen. By "failing to listen" I mean failing to be present with a person, respecting who that person is and what that person is all about. Instead I assume I know what's best for the person, that I have all the answers, so I start thinking about my response to what he or she is saying instead of really listening. And then ▼

**I make my biggest mistakes when I don't listen.**

## Teen Talk *continued*

The baseball game was thrilling. We spent the entire time on our feet cheering on the Braves and conversing. On the way home, I thanked her for taking me to the game and for letting me stay with her. I asked her many questions about her life and found that it wasn't much different from others'. The rest of the week we watched movies and went out to eat, but every day I became more and more comfortable being around my aunt.

I now talk to my aunt without thinking anything is wrong with her, and I realize that fear and hatred of gay people is because of ignorance.



*Adapted from "A Breakthrough," in I Know Things Now: Stories by Teenagers, edited by Carl Koch (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1996), pages 64–65.*



"Forgive and you will be forgiven."  
—Luke 6:37

"In this Sacrament [Reconciliation] . . . you are freed from sin and from its ugly companion which is shame. Your burdens are lifted and you experience the joy of new life in Christ."

—Pope John Paul II, Message to the Young People at the Kiel Center, Saint Louis, Missouri, January 26, 1999

## Think About That

Shame is that bad feeling we have when we know we have done something wrong—something that goes against what God wants us to do. The way to get rid of the burden of shame is to seek forgiveness and to live our life like Jesus did from now on. When we do that, joy is the feeling we have inside.

## Take Action

When is the last time you received the sacrament of Reconciliation? Check with your parish to see when the sacrament is offered this week. Plan on receiving the sacrament to experience the lifting of the burden of shame that the Holy Father speaks of.

## Say a Prayer

Lord, help me to know that when I feel shame it is because I have done something that goes against your will. Help me to forgive others and to ask for forgiveness from others when I do something wrong. Fill me with the feeling of joy.

—*John Vitek, editor, My Dear Young Friends: Pope John Paul II Speaks to Teens on Life, Love, and Courage (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2001), pages 70–71.*

## Parent Talk *continued*

when I go off and tell another person about the situation under the guise of helping the first person, I'm certainly not listening.



Listening requires patience, presence, and willingness to journey with a person. Listening requires a positive attitude, trust, and courage. Sometimes to truly listen to another we have to share the truth of the situation. We have to be courageous enough to tell another how we feel—even if it's not what that person wants to hear—and do so in a spirit of trust and love.

Had I listened to my brother about his situation, I would have

discovered how hurt he was. When he needed to trust someone, I betrayed him. Ouch!

Mistakes are made all the time, but listening has been one tool that has helped keep me from falling into a pattern of harming my relationships. I am a good friend, wife, mother, sister, and daughter, and one of my gifts is sharing my life with others. When I listen I share all that God has intended for me and for my relationships.

*Kim Vogel lives with her husband, Tom, and their two children in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.*



Recall the scene in John's Gospel after Jesus and his friends had breakfast on the beach (see John 21:15–19). Jesus and Peter had a conflict to resolve. I picture it this way:

Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Let's take a walk, and talk a few things over."

Suddenly it all came back to Peter. "I denied him three times, and now I've got to face up to it. What am I going to say?"

As they walked along the shore, Jesus began by asking, "Peter, do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord, I love you."

Three times Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to make this proclamation. It's no coincidence: three denials followed by three proclamations of faith.

What a beautiful modeling of reconciliation Jesus gives us in this story. I wonder how many times I've laid into my sons with a lecture on their behavior when what they really needed was an opportunity to say they were sorry and tell me they loved me.

So many missed opportunities. . . .

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