

Going Solo

"I'm the single mother of a 12-year-old boy. I could really use some ideas on how to stay connected to him as he moved into his teenage years."

by Karen L. Maudlin, PsyD

A. In my experience, 12-year-old-boys are the quietest creatures on the planet. It's strange how they turn from bubbling and blabbering 9- and 10-year-olds to silent teenagers. Still, there are plenty of great ways to stay close to your son as he enters this new stage of life:

Get active. Boys are typically doers more than talkers. Think of a sport, game, or hobby that the two of you can do together, perhaps with another mother and son. Plan a regular "date" with your son and give him some input on what you can do together. How about skiing or sledding? Read a book together (The Lord of the Rings series is a great one for boys) and discuss it over pizza. Cook a meal, plant a garden, ride bikes—whatever gets the two of you used to being together as friends as well as mother as son.

Use technology. As strange as it sounds, some parents of teens keep in touch with them through e-mail or via instant messages (IMs). If you work outside the home, IM your son when you know he'll be online after school. Send him an e-mail to let him know you're excited to see him when you get home. Even if you're there when he gets the message, he'll know you've been thinking of him.

Check in every day. One way or another, make the time to ask how his day went, share highlights about yours, and follow up on his activities and friends.

Create a hangout. The more you can be the host place for his friends, the more you'll know about his friends, his interests, and his life.

Meet the girls in his life. Young teen girls are much more talkative than their male counterparts, so you'll get more insight into his life from his female buddies than you're likely to get from him.

Find him a mentor. Ask your son to help you think of a trusted Christian man with whom he has a natural connection who can act as a kind of "big brother." Have this guy over for meals, invite him to your son's activities, and encourage the two of them to spend time together. Check in with your son periodically to make sure he continues to feel good about this relationship. Not only will your son benefit from this friendship, but you'll have another adult who can offer a perspective on your child.

Single parenting is no picnic, but with a little extra effort on your part, you and your son can forge the special bond that will sustain both of you through the ups and downs of the teenage years—and beyond.

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