

THE PERFECT PARENT

[p a r e n t s — P s a l m 2 7]

THIS WEEK

For the first time in America, single-parent families outnumber two-parent families. And whether or not teens have one parent or two, or a foster parent or a guardian, they can still be part of a family in crisis. Kids are hurting in many ways. Where can they turn to? This TalkSheet discusses how God is a parent—how he can fill the void and soothe the pain.

Note: The term parent here and in the following items refers to all kinds of parenting adults—birth, step, foster, or guardian. Be sensitive to the fact that there's a good chance your kids aren't in a traditional family and may be hurting.

OPENER

You may want to start off by showing a few clips of TV shows that portray parents. Videotape some short segments of TV shows or ask your group members to tape a three to four minute clips from their favorite shows. Be sure to preview the clips for appropriateness before you show them. After showing each clip, ask the group to list the characteristics or qualities of the parent(s) who were shown. Make a master list of their ideas on a whiteboard or poster board. In your kids' opinions, was the parent good or bad? Why or why not? What characteristics do they like or dislike about this character?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. How did your kids rate these problems? You may want to rate these as a group and talk about the things that might cause the common problems. How could your kids begin to address or deal with these problems? How about helping a friend with them? Point out that some of the situations listed are very serious (i.e. sexual or verbal abuse)—some of which require professional help. Strongly encourage your kids to find a trusted adult—including you, fellow youth staff, a school counselor, or teacher—to talk with about these situations.
2. The root cause of family problems is sin, which shows itself through all of the problems listed and many more. Talk about these situations with your kids. How does sin have a role in each one? What would be the first step in repairing these situations?
3. This verse promises that God is faithful even when parents aren't. God loves your students—and he can help troubled families. Sometimes he'll change parents or teenage children who need to improve. Sometimes he provides comfort even though parents won't or can't change or improve. Have any of your kids seen God at work in their family situations?

4. What three suggestions does God give to help prevent problems before they start? Students should understand that following God's instructions won't mean they'll see all their problems solved, but they'll be causing fewer problems.

THE CLOSE

You may want to ask your kids to write one or two prayer requests for themselves and their parents on pieces of paper. Their requests should focus on specific problems and can be either anonymous or not. Collect all the slips and pray for them one at a time, or redistribute them for individuals to pray for aloud. Encourage your group to continue praying for each other and their families through the next week.

Be sure to thank your group members for their input on this stressful subject. You might want to remind your students that you're available if they need or want to talk about their family relationships. Pay attention to your group through this discussion—you may need to take the initiative with some students who may not come to you with their problems. For more information on family relationships and abuse, check out the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (www.rainn.org), The Family Violence Prevention Fund (www.fvvpf.org), or www.YouthSpecialties.com for further links and information.

MORE

- How does the media portray parents? How does this differ from the qualities that your kids listed? Challenge your kids to keep an eye out for how parents are portrayed in movies, TV shows, and in advertisements. You may want to show some other clips of movies—or gather some TV or magazine advertisements—in which there are parent-kid relationships. How is the parent portrayed? Is each situation healthy or not? How to these media parents rank in respect to the qualities that your group listed? For ideas on movies and TV shows check your local newspaper or visit Yahoo TV Coverage (<http://tv.yahoo.com/main>) or The Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com).
- You may want to ask your students to brainstorm a list of things the church can do to help families, including parenting seminars, personal counseling, family Bible studies that address the issue of family problems, mother-daughter and father-son activities, special support groups, a mentoring program (like Big Brother or Big Sister) and so on. Then have your group select one idea to put into effect and present the proposal to your minister or planning committee.