

This 15-page package is excerpted from the Christian Leader's Guide and Program Manual for *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* parent discussion groups. In it we've included the complete *Introduction* which provides useful information for your evaluative purposes. In addition, we provide the Leader's Guide for Chapter 3, which you should examine in conjunction with Chapter 3 from *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!*

A note from Dr. Linda Beattie Inlow, Pastor and Family Therapist: A Christian Commentary on Raising Teenagers

The church can play a vital role in assisting and supporting the family on what, for some, can be a wild ride. Christian parents will find *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* a valuable resource and tool to help them improve communication within their families, as well as to connect Christian parents as they explore, discuss issues, and learn together. This program is as powerful as it is flexible, and church communities will be well advised to engage new parents in this exploration year after year.

Scripture addresses the blessed job of parenting in both the new and old testaments. Scripturally, "discipline" means "to teach," not "to punish" as the contemporary term is often used.

Jesus and his followers encouraged the absence of painful discipline as reflected in II Timothy 2:25¹; the Lord's servant corrects opponents with gentleness. Christian education in the home is pictured in Ephesians 6:4, "*..do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*" Education is by act, example and work -- not painful discipline. We must treat our children as precious gifts (Psalm 127:1-3²; 128:3-4³). If you are participating in this program you will be doing that – treating your child as a precious gift who is forever changing.

One-third of the Book of Proverbs is dedicated to education. Proverbs stresses the importance of instruction as the utmost necessity for the good life. The beginning of Proverbs – the proem – indicates the purpose of education is so men may receive instruction in righteousness, justice and equity as well as in wise dealing, prudence, and discretion. Continuity of learning – the fact that their study is an ongoing, lifelong process is also emphasized; the man of wisdom and understanding can always increase his learning and skill (1:5⁴). I applaud all persons who enter this course of study for you have taken this passage to heart.

The reader will note many of the biblical references in this Christian Leader's Guide are from the Old Testament. Some may ask why. These were the rules, culture and societal references Jesus lived by and adhered to throughout his ministry. He encouraged his disciples to live within this familiar discipline. Parents will forever be learning, and teaching, as they journey through their lives. Christian parents will find guidance and wisdom from the Scriptures, from churches and fellow congregants, and in prayer. God be with you.

¹ ..correcting opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth. II Timothy 2:25

² Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved. Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Psalm 127:1-3

³ Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. Psalm 128:3-4

⁴ Let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire skill. Proverbs 1:5

Program Overview

Parenting teenagers today is a challenge! Parents must manage new issues, knowledge and choices, as well as new stresses, dangers and fears. There is a lot that parents need to consider and learn.

Welcome to ***Please Stop the Rollercoaster! How Parents of Teenagers Can Smooth Out the Ride*** for Christians. This program not only teaches parents about adolescence, it helps parents develop and grow as persons of faith. We'll show you how to create and run discussion groups that can profoundly and positively impact parents' confidence in their important, and evolving, role.

We're not going to tell parents how to parent. This program respects their beliefs and values. We believe that most parents, especially those with a strong faith background, are well equipped for the job. We base this program on the premise that parents need to be engaged in their teenager's life—now more than ever. We'll help parents navigate their way through the changes that occur during adolescence so they can provide the support teens need.

This is a **learning and discussion** program that encourages parents to discuss issues while they learn together. It asks parents to be respectful of differing views, and to offer support to one another. This is not a therapy group. Parents are not required or expected to share private information about their teens. However, in case sensitive or confidential topics are addressed, we want you to define and agree upon rules for confidentiality.

- Program Objectives:** Participants will:
- Examine the most important issues they will face as they raise their teenagers.
 - Discuss differing points of view and learn from the experiences of other parents.
 - Explore specific ways to improve communication.
 - Learn from the experts about adolescent development—what's normal and why.
 - Understand the important influence parents, especially Christian parents, have on their teen's engagement in risky behaviors.
 - Learn about character type and temperament and apply it to improve communication and understanding.
 - Identify ways in which they can be appropriately helpful in their teenager's school life.
 - Create a specific plan of action that enables them to apply what they learn to improve their family's dynamics.

Program Benefits

This program helps parents:

- Build their confidence as they parent their teens.
- Gain clarity on their positions as they create their own “rule book.”
- Develop a support network of peers and strengthen their sense of community in, and out of, their church.
- Expand their viewpoints as they learn from others.
- Examine their own role and influences on their teen so they can be more intentional in their words and actions.
- Become more knowledgeable about current research and information about raising teenagers today.
- Enhance their relationship with their teens as they improve their communication and understanding.

How the Program Works

- The program consists of 8 meetings, which correspond to the chapters in *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!*
- Meetings are generally 2 hours in length, but can be adjusted according to your group’s needs.
- If possible, meet in one central location like the church rather than rotate in people’s homes.
- Participants read one chapter in preparation for their meeting, answering the reflective exercises.
- We recommend that you meet about every 2 weeks. (Monthly meetings are not recommended because groups tend to lose valuable momentum.)
- Try to organize groups with similar ages of teenagers. Teens in 7th grade are very different than teens in 10th.
- The ideal size for a group is 6 to 12 people.
- Be flexible. The curriculum is designed for flexibility. If a community emergency arises, for instance, take the time to address it. However, don’t allow meetings to become so loose they are simply chat, or gossip, sessions.
- The facilitator will lead the discussions, but should play a decreasing role as the program progresses. The more the participants get involved in the program and discussions, the more they benefit.
- A copy of *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* is required for each participant. Books are available from book stores; groups discounts are available from the publisher.
- Our web site offers tools and support information to help you promote, organize and run your group program. See the “tools” section at www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com

What Group Leaders Need to Know

Begin by reading *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* The introduction will familiarize you with the program objectives and approach. Review each chapter so that you gain a sense of the flow of the program, and the content.

This *Christian Leader's Guide and Program Manual* provides all the instruction you will need to organize and run this parenting discussion group program in your Christian faith community. Additionally, we provide up-to-date materials and tools on our website (www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com) that are free for you to download and customize. These tools include promotional materials (a press release, newsletter ad and article, program flyer, and sign-up form) as well as hand-outs about group behavior and a confidentiality agreement for participants to sign. We encourage you to check in with this website periodically as we constantly work to improve this program.

You will need this *Christian Leader's Guide and Program Manual* for facilitated programs. As described in the meeting instructions, each meeting is likely to have its own dynamic depending on the topic and the group's comfort levels. You'll see we define the objectives for each meeting, and outline the materials you will need. Be sure to review each session completely before you go to the meeting; often there is something for which you must prepare.

We've left lots of room for your notes and encourage you to customize this program. Encourage group participants to also share magazine articles and other information with one another.

As a facilitator, know that you are walking on delicate and emotional ground. Parents of teenagers, regardless of their faith, are often a mixture of strength and weakness, vulnerability and sensitivity. They view parenting in a highly emotional context because their love, hopes, and worries about their child run deep. Being mindful of this will enable you to provide the necessary support, and to keep the conversations in the right tone.

It is important that parents maintain their teenager's trust. They need to be sensitive throughout this program not to reveal private information about their teenagers that their teens would not want revealed. Although teenagers may be suspicious of their parents' participation in this program at the beginning, we've found that once they are reassured that their parents are not talking about them inappropriately at the meetings, they often become big supporters. What teens see is their parents investing time and energy in their relationship and improving their parenting skills – and this can yield very positive results.

Note that the program progresses from fairly benign topics to ones that are more personal in nature. This way, as trust develops in the group, participants are more likely to feel comfortable sharing with one another.

Important notes:

- The eight meetings have been designed with the expectation that participants will have received their copy of *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* and read the Introduction and Chapter One prior to the first group meeting. A helpful “Overview Handout” is downloadable from the “Tools” section of our website which outlines these expectations for group participants and addresses parents’ concerns about confidentiality.
- The order of topics is intentional. In the first and second chapters we cover adolescent development and parenting roles and strategies. This is a good, safe start as participants learn to know one another.
- Communication (Chapter 3) is always a key area of concern for parents of teens. This chapter contains skill building exercises.
- Chapter 4, on risky behavior, can be a highly sensitive area for parents. It is by design that parents don’t focus on risky behavior until they have met as a group four times, and have established some trust.
- Chapter 5 is one of the most popular because it covers character type and temperament by using a short instrument. This gives participants concrete information they can apply directly in their family interactions. It requires a little extra preparation time, and it includes the participation of family members - which is often a very positive thing!
- Chapter 6 covers supporting teenagers in school. This is sometimes an area in which parents are confused, and perhaps even intimidated. Facilitators need to be careful to understand possible insecurities that parents may have in this area, and appreciate and support them.
- Chapter 7, The Myth of Perfection, is where we ask participants to focus on themselves. This can be one of the most insight-producing segments of the program, but it is also intensely personal work. The trust that has developed will impact the degree to which participants will share openly.
- Chapter 8 provides an overview, and the opportunity to focus on what parents have learned in this process.

Necessary materials:

- All participants will need their own copy of *Please Stop the Rollercoaster! How Parents of Teenagers Can Smooth Out the Ride*.
- Facilitators will need their own copy of the Christian Leaders Guide as well as a copy of *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!*
- Additional materials are available for free download from our website. Visit the “Tools” section of www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com

About the Authors:

Sue Blaney is the author of *Please Stop the Rollercoaster! How Parents of Teenagers Can Smooth Out the Ride!*, and *Practical Tips for Parents of Young Teens*. A Certified Professional Behavior Analyst, she is a graduate of Northwestern University with a degree in communications. She specializes in improving team performance and managing the human side of change, and has spent over 25 years in training and development, marketing and sales.

Sue observes that many parents of teenagers are bombarded with conflicting messages and feel unsure about their changing role. As the parent of two teenagers, she uses her personal and professional experience to provide tools that connect parents of teens while helping them prepare for the range of issues they are likely to face. She's a communications expert and speaks frequently to parents, educators and other professionals about parenting issues, improving communication, increasing parent involvement, and creating parent discussion groups.

Sue Blaney and her family reside in the greater Boston area.

A former Lutheran pastor, **Linda Beattie Inlow** is now a family therapist, author, and mother of two teenagers. She has spent nearly 30 years sharing her message via the pulpit, workshops, the classroom, in national magazines, on radio and television, and now in her book, *Becoming Me*.

Dr Beattie Inlow feels compelled to encourage others to make the best of their life choices. She believes everyone is in a state of *becoming* a.k.a. maturation, thus offering hope in the present and promise for a better future. Discouragement over her clients' lack of self-knowledge and self-esteem in her family therapy practice prompted her to write *Becoming Me: A Journey Towards Self-Discovery for the Child, Adolescent and Adult*. ISBN 09619634-4-1

Dr. Beattie Inlow and her family live in southwest Washington.

NOTE: The Please Stop the Rollercoaster! parent discussion group program can also run in self-directed groups that run like book groups. Complete instructions are provided in the book/workbook Please Stop the Rollercoaster! However, for use in a church-oriented environment, the facilitated model, using this Christian Leader's Guide and Program Manual, will provide the Christian context for faith-based discussions, and is the recommended model.

Please Stop the Rollercoaster! How Parents of Teenagers Can Smooth Out the Ride
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Alternative Format Options

If an 8-meeting program is just too long...

While this program is best delivered in its entire 8-meeting format, our busy culture makes this time commitment a challenge for many parents. It is possible, while not recommended, to provide shorter alternatives.

Shorter format suggestions:

- You could offer the program in 6 meetings, rather than 8 meetings. While participants would still be expected to read and do the exercises in all eight chapters, you could eliminate the discussion for chapter 5 as that work and discussion can be done with family members. Additionally, you could combine the discussion for chapters 7 and 8 in one meeting.
- Condensing the program into 4 two-hour sessions is also possible. For the greatest benefit, consider the following chapter combinations:
 - Meeting 1: Chapters 1 and 2
 - Meeting 2: Chapters 3 and 6
 - Meeting 3: Chapters 4 and 5 (or skip the chapter 5 discussion)
 - Meeting 4: Chapters 7 and 8
- Rather than 2 hour meetings, you could use a 90 minute format.

Additional recommendations:

- Taking the 5 minutes at the close of each meeting for participants to articulate and write down their take-aways is a key element of this program. Even if you shorten the meetings, continue to take this important time to reflect and write. Applying this discipline helps participants to get the most actionable learning and outcomes.
- Encourage participants to be diligent to complete the reading and the exercises; they will have to do more of the work on their own.
- Encourage participants to meet outside of class for discussion.

Risks/disadvantages of a shortened program:

This program embodies a growth process; so you do run the risk of diminishing participants' value and experience in a shorter program. Participants will have less time to develop an atmosphere of friendship and trust with one another. This may not only impact the relationships in the group, but the experience of participants. Trust is essential in participants' willingness to suspend judgment, develop their openness to new ideas, and experience the areas they have in common with their peers. However, a skilled facilitator who is aware of this up front can work to enhance the group dynamic. And it's better to run a shortened program than no program at all!

Many groups actually continue beyond 8 meetings and some ask for guidance in continuing their discussions. One simple way to continue is to go through the discussion questions again, spending time on those that were not discussed. Also, please visit www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com for new material and topics to discuss.

Table of Contents

Introduction & Chapter 1	Introduction to Program & Adolescent Development	1
Chapter 2	Parenting: Our Changing Roles and Relationships	8
Chapter 3	Improving Communication	15
Chapter 4	Friends, Culture, and Risk Behavior	20
Chapter 5	Personality Type and Brain Development	26
Chapter 6	School, Parental Support, and Self-Esteem	33
Chapter 7	The Myth of Perfection	39
Chapter 8	Reflections	43

Chapter 3 – PREPARATION

Improving Communication

Time: 2 Hours

What to Expect:

Improved communication is what just about every parent of a teenager wishes for and this chapter provides hands-on learning opportunities. In order to get the most out of the chapter, it will require that parents be very honest in their own self-evaluation.

Objectives: Participants will:

- Take a brief look at what good communication looks like in a Christian family setting.
- Learn about communication by highlighting obstacles and examining elements that are inherent in good communication.
- Study several different strategies to enhance communication with their adolescent.
- Examine the recommendations of two experts with regard to setting limits and consequences.

Materials:

- Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* (PSR)
- Christian Leader's Guide and Program Manual

Preparation:



- Read PSR, Chapter 3, and complete the exercises; familiarize yourself with the Group Discussion Questions on page 97.
- Read Leader's Guide, Chapter 3.
- Communication is a very important topic, and parents know it. Try and help parents improve their skills by being specific and concrete as you lead the discussions.




Chapter 3 – PREPARATION cont.




Preparation, cont.


- Try to develop a role play to demonstrate active listening.
- Think of a personal story or experience that provides humor or poignancy that you can share to open the meeting.

Notes:

<h2>Chapter 3</h2> <p>CONDUCTING THE LESSON</p>	Est. Time	Reference
<p>Welcome</p> <p><i>Welcome</i> participants back.</p> <p>Prayer: <i>Lord God, tonight we enter into the area of communication. For some of us, learning to listen as well as to speak has been hard. Let us be open and accepting as we again strive to be better parents for and with our teens. AMEN.</i></p>	--	
<p>Review of Chapter 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer participants to “take-aways” from Chapter 2 on page 68. • Ask them to share with the group how they were able to put into action what they learned at the last meeting. 	10 min.	PSR, p. 68
<p> Group Discussion</p> <p>Explain that we’ve listed several elements (in PSR on pages 76- 78) that make up good family communication: give and take, respect and honesty, trust, and humor. Ask the group what other elements they would add to this list.</p>	10 min.	PSR, pp, 76-78
<p> Group Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the list of obstacles to communication found on page 79. • Ask participants to share which obstacles impact their communication. • Discuss why praising and diagnosing appear on the list of obstacles. 	10 min.	PSR, p. 79

Chapter 3, cont.	<i>Est. Time</i>	<i>Reference</i>
 Group Discussion Ask participants to share which communication guidelines they identified in the exercise on page 75. [If they did not complete the exercise, ask them to re-examine the obstacles discussed on pages 79 – 81 and write their guidelines now.]	15 min.	PSR, p. 75
 Group Discussion Discuss the various techniques presented in PSR on pages 82 – 87. Ask for input as to how each approach can improve communication in a family. Ask participants to identify which approach holds the most promise for them.	10 min.	PSR, pp. 82-87
<p>[Choose <u>one</u> of the following options.]</p>		
 Option 1 - Role Play Exercise [In order to make this learning as concrete as possible, it is helpful to facilitate some role playing, or other hands-on application of the techniques described on pages 82 – 87. Depending on the group dynamic and your facilitation skills, a role play can be very helpful.] If you can, model a role play to demonstrate active listening skills. Review the techniques on page 84, and ask two members of the group to create a role play based on a realistic situation with their teenager. Coach them to improve their active listening skills; ask group participants to come up with additional open-ended questions. <i>Continued on the next page</i>	15 min.	PSR, pp. 82-87

Chapter 3, cont.	Est. Time	Reference
 <p>Option 2 – Group Discussion</p> <p>Discuss the quote on page 72 from A. Rae Simpson. Try and encourage parents to see how important it is that they take the “emotional high ground.”</p> <p>[To improve communication in their families, it is important for parents to see that they must be willing to change themselves.]</p>	15 min.	PSR, p. 72
 <p>Group Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer participants to page 82 and read the teen quote aloud. • Discuss: How can parents approach serious topics without making a “Big Deal” about it? • Develop some strategies for this together. 	5 min.	PSR, p. 82
 <p>Group Discussion</p> <p>Discuss the difference between natural consequences and punishment, using the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When might each be an appropriate response for parents? • Does this change depending on the age of the teenager? • Do you and your teen’s other parent agree on issues of discipline? If not, encourage them to engage in an open discussion about the topic <u>before</u> the next meeting. • How do single parents cope as the <i>only</i> decision maker? Who do you go to for advice or support when it comes to discipline? • Does the church, or can the church, assist in raising teenagers when one is a single parent? 	15 min.	

Chapter 3, cont.	Est. Time	Reference
 <p>Group Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the two communication techniques shared on page 96. <p>Brainstorm as a group to come up with several other good ideas that you can share with one another to improve communication with your teenagers.</p>	15 min.	PSR, p. 96
<p>Take-aways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer participants to page 98. • Ask them to spend 5 minutes writing about their observations and what they learned based on the reading and discussion today <u>and</u> what they intend to do differently as a result. <p>Ask them to share their take-aways and plans with the group.</p>	10 min.	PSR, p. 98
<p>Wrap Up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce the time and place for the next meeting. • Provide a brief preview of Chapter 4 • Announce their assignment: Read Chapter 4 and complete the reflective exercises in the chapter. <p>Prayer: Lord God we communicate with you, trusting you hear us and understand every word we say and don't say. In the days ahead, open our ears to hear others and let the words we speak truly convey we understand - or at least are attempting to understand- one another. In Your Name we pray. AMEN.</p> <p>Thank participants for their commitment to the group.</p>	5 min.	