

Seven Ways to Tell if Your Child is Rejecting Your Values

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Absolutely shocking! Reading a recent study, I learned that 61% of young adults who were church-ed as teenagers are now spiritually disengaged.

How did this happen? Were the parents of these teenagers aware that “values rejection” was on the agenda?

Parents recognize open opposition when a child talks back and sticks out his tongue.¹ Scripture identifies the tell-tale marks of this rebellion:

“...Their speech and their actions are against the LORD...the expression of their faces bears witness against them.”²

Is your child telling you in their behavior, words, and/or attitudes that they are rejecting your values?

Parenting is a 24/7 vigil, a leadership position like no other. Most leaders do not get their followers at birth and take responsibility for every morsel they are fed, physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually! Parents do. It is a monumental undertaking. Recognizing signs of rebellion and correcting attitudes while a child is young, goes a long way toward having your children respect and keep your values into adulthood.

Rebellion can be obvious—or subtle. Jesus poses the question about a father who asked his two sons to go work in the vineyard³. The first son said, “I will, sir”; and he did not go. The second son answered “I will not”; but he reconsidered and went. Jesus asked, “Which of the two did the will of his father?” The listeners replied, “The latter.”

1. This “actions speak louder than words” test is one way a child reveals himself. So, right here, you can ask yourself, “Am I only listening to my child’s words, or do I follow through and inspect his actions?” Observing behavior is key.

A friend’s son was to put away his laundry. The boy was very quick with the task and reported that he was done. His mother went with

¹ Isaiah 57:4

² Isaiah 3:8-9

³ Matthew 21: 28-32

him to inspect and found the clothes on the floor by the dresser, not really put away.

Jesus talks about knowing people by their fruits.⁴ One of the “fruits” is our character. Character development is absolutely influenced by the way we parent.

How do we understand the “fruit” Jesus spoke of? No need to guess. We’re told.

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...”⁵

Again, observation is essential. 2. Is your child demonstrating these qualities both in and out of the home? My daughter was babysitting, and asked the young boy to help pick up the toys. He replied in a lilting voice, “No, thank you. I don’t want to.” The politeness lesson was in play; the obedience lesson still needed some work.

3. What kind of stories do you hear about your child from his peers and other adults who work with him? These can tell you if your values are sticking. The fruit of the developing character can be seen very early, and requires almost constant pruning.

As we think about the story Jesus told of the father and two sons, we may see a parallel to our own children. Sometimes our children openly oppose us, and we may agonize, pray, and take steps to win a child over. The situation that is more likely to blindside us, is the quiet, compliant child who rejects our values after they leave our household. Are there any signs of this silent rebellion?

Yes, there are. And again, it is a matter of observation. The signs of silent rebellion are most often found in body language.

4. Does your child avoid eye contact or avert their eyes when you talk to him? This is an indicator of disagreement. Ask yourself what your child is hiding, that he can’t look you in the eye. Is it guilt? Is it fear? Is something bothering him that he can’t entrust to you?

My two-year old granddaughter likes to climb, and has been told to stay off my desk and out of the post-it notes. When I see her headed

⁴ Matthew 7:20

⁵ Galatians 5: 22-23

that direction and intervene, she works hard at avoiding my eyes, even as I say, "Look at me." Parents have to train their children to see "eye-to-eye" on their values.

5. Rolling the eyes is an indicator of a seriously bad attitude.⁶ This carries with it not only disagreement with what you are telling your child, but also an attitude that the child thinks you are a fool. This contempt leads the child to despise your values.⁷ Sadly, this is a behavior most likely learned by observing the parents. Perhaps the mother disagrees with the father and does not say anything, but the children observe that she rolls her eyes.

6. A negative interpretation of life will cause a child to reject your values. The words of your child is often where this tendency shows up. Grumbling, finding fault, answering "Yes, but," misinterpreting neutral comments to be negative, or being defensive are all indicators that your child is rejecting your values. A parent may let a child get away with these attitudes because they are not hurting anyone else. The challenge here is to recognize and correct the rebellion.

The stated goals at our household were to have our children be able to run the household by the time they were 12, and to be able to go out on their own by age 18. One daughter left for college when she was 18, but came back and asked me why we didn't kick her sisters out when they were 18. We had said, "be able to" and she had interpreted, "You're out of here." I didn't recognize her misinterpretation until years later.

7. Limited interaction is possibly the most difficult sign of rebellion to recognize. This calls for observing verbal and body language responses—or lack thereof--when you talk with the child. Is the child interacting by nodding, adding comments, or asking questions when you're together? That's healthy. If your child says nothing, you may think they're agreeing, when in fact they are giving you no feedback. They may give you a blank stare, or make it more interesting, by looking thoughtful, but they likely have their own thoughts, which are not in agreement with yours.

Parents, these signs of rebellion are representative of the way children reveal themselves. As you seek to instill your values in the lives of

⁶ Malcolm Gladwell, Blink (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 2005) 32.

⁷ Proverbs 1:7

your children, “values rejection” is on the agenda, and you are now more prepared to recognize it.

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