

## How Teenagers Learn from their Parents

Rev. Dr. Fr. Stépanos Dingilian © 2011

“Valued Priorities,” as the name suggests, are our most important priorities in life. They are the most essential goals and visions that we strive towards and accomplish. These priorities are not what we tell others or preach; rather, they are what we actually do and work for --- *regardless* of what we say. These values are illustrated and evidenced by our actions and not merely by our lips. Our young people see our valued priorities and try to categorize them in one of the following ways:

A. *They try to reproduce that which they perceive as successful in us, their parents.* This means that our teenager looks at our successes and tries to reproduce them in his or her life: “I want to be like my parents,” says the young person silently. One of our achievements may seem trivial to us, but may seem like a heroic act by our teen.

B. *They try to remedy that which they perceive as unsuccessful in our life -* Although our teenager wants to reproduce our successes, he or she also wants to correct the ‘perceived mistakes’ in our life: “Yes, my parents are successful, but you know, they didn’t spend much time with us as children. When I have my family and become successful, I will spend a lot more time with my children!” It is important to note that this is what the young person ‘perceives’ as a mistake or a shortcoming in his or her parents’ life. In reality it may not be so; it may only be the young person’s impression. Yet we must realize that whether ‘real’ or ‘perceived,’ the teenager believes them to be mistakes. Again, we need to be insightful enough to recognize our teen’s perspective, and wise enough to discuss and clarify the situation.

C. *They seek to attain something unique beyond their parents’ accomplishments -* As a sign of personal accomplishment and independence, a young person attempts to go beyond what his or her parents have accomplished: “They were successful business people in this town, but I will expand the business through the Internet. I think there is a lot more potential globally!” This view reveals two important aspects of a teenager’s thought process that we need to recognize and guide. First, our teenager wants to accomplish something that he or she considers ‘unique’ to himself or herself. This ‘unique’ accomplishment is something that the parents have not done. Second, our teen wants to achieve something greater than we have. It does not matter how accomplished we are, they still want to go beyond us. So our teenager, by natural disposition, already wants to be different from us. We cannot deny our teenager this opportunity, nor should we even try to. We *can* however, guide how he or she will express this uniqueness in a positive and productive manner, and be happy because of are part in it.