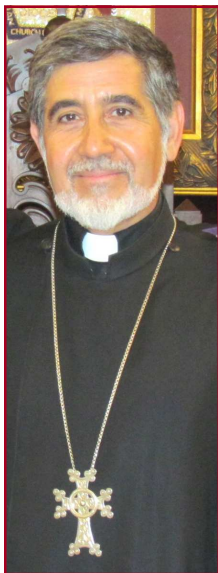


Teens Growing Through Anxiety

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Anxiety is common for all of us when we face a new or uncertain situation or decision. When adults face anxiety, they can fall back on their previous experiences and mentally work through what to do and how to proceed forward. Adults also have the opportunity to give shape to their emotions and share it with others in order to relieve some of the stress caused by the anxiety.

Teens have it much more difficult. First, they have so many new and uncertain situations that they cannot help but feel anxious. Second, because they have no previous experience of dealing with their anxiety, they become very frustrated and angry. Third, teens tend to think that something must be wrong with them if they are anxious. They fail to see that it is something natural, that everyone has to grow through anxiety in order to emotionally and spiritually mature. Fourth, this makes the teen even more self-conscious, develops a sense of guilt, and makes him or her push back at those around with a sense of anger. It is no surprise that teens could become emotionally, spiritually and eventually physically very isolated.

Of course, parents can help their teen and most do. Yet the teen's anxiety is difficult for the parents as well. To start off, the parents are often surprised, angered, and offended by what they consider their teen's disrespectful behavior. Soon parents begin developing a sense of guilt, wondering if they had done something wrong in raising and guiding their teen. Eventually though, parents also develop a sense of frustration and guilt because they come in touch with the issues that they faced when they were teens. This makes parenting the teen extremely challenging, even though it could also be extremely fulfilling.

Teens eventually have to grow. Time does not stand still. Some teens are able to overcome their anxiety and discover that having uncertainties and discoveries in life, and working towards them could be very exciting and invigorating. Unfortunately, most teenagers do not have the opportunity to turn that anxiety into a joyful experience, and instead, they suppress it. As they grow older, those anxieties surface again and without them even knowing, start causing problems in their relationships, especially with their spouse and their own children.

Parents have a golden opportunity to help their teen deal with anxiety - not to ignore it, and yet not be overwhelmed by it. Parents are crucial in helping their teen express the emotional anxiety, and gradually learn to give shape and direction to it for greater understanding, growth, and trust in relationships. When this interrelatedness takes place in the family, it is then that the family becomes a living unit where truly love, trust, sharing, dialogue, and happiness prevail.