

# PARENT transition

## On Their 13th Birthday

Cultures around the world have recognized the importance of *rite of passage* experiences. They provide students with distinctive markers to point to as the moments they started on the road to adulthood. Here you will find some materials to help you construct a *rite of passage* experience in the form of a formal blessing on their 13<sup>th</sup> birthdays.

Remember these tips for better conversations with middle schoolers:

**Don't Freak:** Panic shuts down conversations. Don't show shock at what they tell you (even though you may be!). Always try answering with, "Me too. I remember when I experienced something similar when...."

**Be Real:** You'll have to model vulnerability. Students have a highly sensitive phony detector.

**Go with the flow:** Never force conversation. Quantity time leads to quality time. The great conversation might not come in the next few days, but you're laying the groundwork for a great conversation in the future (probably when he/she is avoiding doing homework one night).

**Begin with the end in mind:** This transition in your relationship is a long, long process. They are not going to be fully mature adults for a number of years. However, you need to start prepping your relationship now so that it will thrive later.

Options on how to do this:

### *A Blessing Letter*

Your teenager will receive a letter from you with a written blessing. This will be for them only to enjoy. Your teenagers might be shy or extremely introverted, and this option may fit them perfectly.

### *A Family Dinner*

The family will come together for a special dinner. Your teenager's favorite food will be served. During the dinner, you will give a public blessing and offer the family members a chance to do the same.

### *A Big Party*

Your teenagers might be party animals/extroverts and love the idea of a party for their "Blessing Ceremony." It might be terrifying for you to speak publicly about anything. Remember, it is worse for your teenager to miss out on a blessing. So, gather as much strength as you can and rise to the occasion! Also, we will have some written blessings for you to use to prepare. It is perfectly okay to read your blessing. It works just the same.

It is important that you tell your students that they have no choice whether they get your blessings. But they do have a choice of how they receive them. That is why before you do the “Blessing Ceremony,” you should probably talk to your teenagers. Teenagers typically don't like to be surprised publicly; so let them know what you are planning to do.

## HOW TO GIVE YOUR BLESSING

When you finally get up the courage to unleash your blessing so you can unleash your teenager, what do you say?

### Share your dream for him/her for the coming year . . .

There is a fine line between controlling your teenager and guiding your teenager. Hidden within each blessing is a golden opportunity to guide your teenager with love. Take some time in the blessing to share your dream for him/her for the coming year. Here are some examples:

*My dream for you for the coming year is that you will continue to grow in your love for others . . . that you would find ways to serve those around you . . . and that you would use your ability to make others smile.*

*My dream for you is that you will be a peacemaker. You have a calming presence about you that can be a great attribute to your friends who are in conflict.*

*I am so excited to watch you throughout this next year take your hard work ethic and apply it to your life through school, sports, and other activities. There is no telling what will happen when you put such extraordinary effort into all you do. I am so proud of you.*

*My dream for you this year is that you will find ways to use your gift of leadership that is so evident.*

The key is to keep these “dreams” very encouraging and general. Don't bring up specific examples, but in general give them practical ways they can live out the character traits you have highlighted. If you say, “*My dream for you this year is that you will use your brains to actually pass biology class for once,*” you have brought a negative scenario into what is meant to be an uplifting moment. There will be plenty of opportunities to discuss the poor biology grade, but the blessing is not that time.

Make sure your tone is positive and your words are inspiring. You can't *guilt* your students into changing; you can *inspire* them to change. A blessing is an opportunity to help them believe something about themselves that they might have otherwise never noticed.

### Give an example of someone he or she reminds you of . . .

Younger teenagers especially will receive your blessing when you compare them to people they admire. This should be a clear, concrete comparison of the attributes you are trying to ascribe to them.

If you do this, you will want to make sure these are people that your students know and admire. Don't just use examples of people *you* like, but make sure they will be inspirational figures to your teenagers. Here are some examples...



*I am so excited to watch you throughout this next year take your hard work ethic and apply it to your life through school, sports, and other activities. There is no telling what will happen when you put such extraordinary effort into all you do. I am so proud of you.*

*My dream for you this year is that you will find ways to use your gift of leadership that is so evident.*

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*You remind me of your grandfather. He was one of the kindest men I have ever met. I sometimes have to do a double take when I see the way you treat people. It looks so much like the way he treated people.*

*I am sure you have heard of Martin Luther King Jr. He was a man of peace. When the whole world wanted to respond to racism with violence, he taught a nation to respond with love. I see his spirit in you.*

*Your natural beauty is something I have seen before in the face of your mother. She is beautiful inside and out and you were given that same gift.*

*In the Bible, a named Joshua is described as a man of great courage. I often look at you and see that same kind of courage. You remind me of Joshua.*

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These comparisons can be so powerful in the lives of your teenagers. I have seen teenagers receive blessings like this and the people they were compared to become their heroes.



## TIPS ON THINGS TO AVOID

*"I love you because you scored 32 points in the game last night. I am proud of your success as an athlete and I encourage you to score 33 points in the next game. Keep getting better."*

Some of you may be thinking, What's wrong with that? When you bless your teenager's performance, you are saying that he can have your approval as long as he does something.

The beauty of receiving a blessing is that it is not about what you do, but who you are. As parents, you know the hearts of your teenagers better than anyone. The blessings are times for you to hold up mirrors to their souls and explain to them who they are, not just

*I know you to be a kind person who takes care of those in need.*

*I marvel at how patient you are. I want you to know that I see you are slow to become angry and I admire that.*

*One of the things I respect the most is a hard worker, and when I watch you, I see a very hard worker.*

*You have a natural beauty that no make-up or outfit could ever enhance. You are truly beautiful.*

*When you walk into a room, you light it up. You have been given the gift of charisma—you shine from your soul for others to see.*

*I appreciate how you think before you speak. You are a deep thinker and that is going to serve you well in life.*

These kinds of statements cut to the heart of who your teenagers really are, not what they can do. These kinds of statements are the bricks and mortar by which your teenagers will build their self-images.

I don't want you to be afraid to brag on their accomplishments, but if that is the extent of the blessing, you might be sending the wrong message.

When you bless their identities, rather than their performances, they won't need to earn your approval. They will know they already have it.



## IF YOU GET STUCK

If you don't have anything nice to say to your teenagers, it is most likely because you are experiencing *parental fatigue*. There are seasons of so much fighting and angst that your parenting batteries will be drained. This is nothing to feel guilty about, but it is something to take action on.

If this describes how you're feeling right now, we encourage you to interview friends, teachers, and other folks with whom they interact. They will give you other perspectives of your teenagers that you can share. It is great to quote other people and what they have said about your teenagers as part of the blessings.

Congratulations! You are now ready to write your blessing for your teenager. Here is a quick worksheet to help you get started.

Who are you blessing?

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When will the blessing take place?

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Will it be a public or private blessing?

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### BLESSING SCRIPT

[Student's Name],

I wanted to take a few moments today to tell you how important you are to me. I am so proud of the person you have become. You are so \_\_\_\_\_ (character trait you want to affirm). In fact, you remind me of \_\_\_\_\_ (person who embodies the character trait).

My dream for you for the next year of your life is \_\_\_\_\_. I wanted to give you this symbol that represents \_\_\_\_\_. When you look at it, I want you to always remember what I believe to be true about who you are. I love you. I am proud of you.

