



Love in Human Nature

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IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING TEENS By Rita Bruce

The human values of Truth, Peace, Right Conduct, Non-Violence and Love are the end goal. These values are theoretical and very difficult to teach to children and teenagers. They are abstract. We teach human values whenever applicable in school subjects and stories. The same is true by using their real life experiences, issues and concerns to emphasize the five human values.

Swami says, "The primary responsibility of parents is to mold the character of their children." The same is true for teachers. The objective is character development. This is best accomplished when we help the student explore life situations, in a friendly environment, through communication. We can choose topics that pertain to their lifestyle that will increase their interest.

An important teaching tool is the technique of asking many questions. This method of continual questioning will help to bring out from within the student their thoughts; not ours. This is what the teacher as well as the student's need to discover. The students will give answers and from their answers, you ask more questions until you uncover what is the problem and more importantly how this is affecting them. Once we uncover the reality of a behavior that is not helpful to their character development then we can ask them how this behavior can be changed. Through the use of questions and answers we investigate what behavior is going to give them the self-esteem that is needed for self-confidence. Swami has said many times, experience, experience, experience. This is the best spiritual sadhana. We are simply helping them to learn the technique of self-enquiry.

When teachers impart knowledge in school with subjects such as math, science etc, you need the lecture method. When you teach parenting, spirituality, and character development, we need to emphasize life experiences and experiential learning methods. The role of the teacher is to create for the student or parent an environment that allows them to understand themselves. They need a friendly atmosphere to explore the current issues in their everyday life that are problematic. Once this awareness is present, the solutions are discussed.

SUMMARY

1. It is important that we learn what in society is presenting problems to students instead of telling them what we want them to know. We need to learn what they think. Locate the problem by question investigating. Teachers need to listen.
2. Until we understand their thinking and issues we cannot help them to change.
3. When you discover their issues and concerns, then again through question investigation you ask them, "How does this behavior make you feel?"
4. Teacher and student body seek a solution to changing negative behavior.
5. Give them time to practice, a roadmap for them to chart their improvement.
6. After an extended period of time, have them evaluate and share their ups and downs. Always insure that change is possible in time.

THEMES OR TOPICS FOR TEENS

Select a Theme for the year. Any theme can be chosen. I will use the theme of Communication as an example. Communication has many avenues to discuss and can provide an opportunity to teach unity of thought, word and deed. If we examine our daily life, we will become aware that everything we do is an *act of communication*. We are sending messages or receiving them all day long. So this is a very big subject because it includes as I said before, all our thoughts, words and deeds.

When we begin to have an open discussion it is best to begin with a topic that is not personal until the students are sure that their environment is protected and what is heard or said does not leave the classroom.

If we use communication as a Theme we can begin with the topic, **Media**. Teen-agers will participate in this topic with ease because they know it! Media is a large topic for discussion with movies, television, commercials, famous personalities, fashion etc., etc.

Is this a valid subject? The media is influencing our student's behavior. They model themselves after what they experience. It is easier to talk about their peers and role models than themselves. Nevertheless the self-image will be quietly seen. The role of a teacher is to help them expose the negative influence by analyzing media messages. This is a great technique on teaching the students how to use their discrimination. The skill of asking one question after another, depending on their answers is the most effective teaching aid. You can also have spontaneous role-plays from their answers. Another activity is small discussion groups with a purpose and goal.

A few EXAMPLES but the topics and questions are numerous. We are trying to help them discover whether the media is influencing them, and if so what is happening to their behavior as a result of this media overload. First we discover the problem then seek the solution.

TOPIC – FAMOUS PEOPLE

Select a sport, music, and movie celebrity and ask how are they influencing your age group? Does their behavior get attention? Can you relate your behavior to theirs?

TOPIC – MOVIES/TELEVISION

Do movies or television affect our behavior? Let's analyze a movie or television show to discover what is the message? Give me good and bad examples. How is our thinking affected by these shows?

TOPIC – COMMERCIALS

Do commercials influence us? How? Have the students bring in a commercial they seen on the TV and discuss what the commercial is saying. We need to teach them how to use their discrimination concerning all outside influences because when young we blindly follow what is being brought into our minds without using reasoning and discrimination.

TOPIC – FASHION

Does the way a person dress influence others? Are fashion styles important? Why? Does clothing make a person acceptable? Is brand name clothing important for acceptability? Is there a connection between a person's character and clothing? Can the clothing we wear change our behavior?

After the Media topics, you can select topics of communication with parents, peers, and friends. These are more personal and need to be treated as confidential.

TOPIC – PARENTS

My parents don't understand me because? What prevents us from speaking with our parents about the things that really matter to us? How can I help my parents understand my point of view, through communication with love? Do I ask for help when I really need it or do I hide it? Do I listen to my parents or mostly tune them out?

TOPIC – PEERS

How bad is peer pressure? Give some examples of peer pressure. How do you feel when a peer with words or actions abuses you? Is it painful to feel left out? If you don't want to follow the peer group, because it is not good for you what can you do?

TOPIC – FRIENDS

What are the characteristics of a friend? Do we have the characteristics that you want in a friendship? How can we develop good friendships? Are friends important? Do friends sometimes betray you? How do you feel? If you betray them as a consequence of their action is this helpful?

TOPIC – THINKING and FEELING COMMUNICATION

How do we acquire negative thoughts and feelings? Can we change them? Who do negative thoughts or feelings hurt? Why is positive thinking good? What influences our thoughts?

TOPIC – VERBAL COMMUNICATION

What are some examples of verbal abuse that you have seen or heard? Do angry words injure us? How? What do we do about the hurt? Is it important to speak sweetly to parents and friends? If you are a parent and your children ignore you when you speak to them, how would

you feel? Why is bad language used so profusely today? Does bad language increase our self-importance?

TOPIC – DEED COMMUNICATION

What are some negative actions that you have seen? Are negative actions as harmful as words? When someone speaks to you, do you ignore him or her or remain silent? If you are asked to do something for someone and don't, what happens to your self-esteem?

TOPIC – LISTENING, SPEAKING AND MANAGE CONFRONTATION SKILLS

You can teach the students communication skills by bringing in outside professional teachers. How to become a better listener or speaker? How to handle confrontation?