

Q&A WITH KARA POWELL & STEVEN ARGUE

*Authors of **Growing With***

Q: What led you two to write a new book for parents of teenagers and young adults?

A: We have found that parents of teenagers and young adults experience a tremendous fear of growing apart from their kids as they're growing up. On one hand, some separation is both natural and developmentally appropriate as our maturing kids are becoming more independent. Yet as kids grow older, parenting doesn't end; it just evolves. Teenagers and young adults want access to their parents in new ways, which requires parents to recognize that their kids are growing while simultaneously remaining committed to growing themselves. This is why out of both our research and our own experience as parents, we invite parents to "grow with" their kids.

Q: What does the Growing With parenting vision promise?

A: While we recognize that every parent-child relationship is different, we want to communicate 1) that there is always hope that your relationship with your kid can get better; 2) that parenting is not only about seeking the best for our kids but also becoming the best version of ourselves; and 3) that parents like you can move past guesswork thanks to the help of research-based insights and ideas. Ultimately, we define *Growing With* parenting as a mutual journey of intentional growth for both ourselves and our children that trusts God to transform us all.

Q: What are the sources of angst that parents of teenagers and young adults feel today?

A: It's not that hard for us to describe parental angst because we confront it every day in our own families. As parents of young people, we know the feelings of peer pressure that emerge as parents watch their kids compete for coveted slots on the court, in the classroom, in the concert hall, and eventually maybe on the college campus and career ladder. We have wrestled with the tension of pushing our kids too hard while preparing them for a competitive world. We have encountered the excitement and lament of navigating a world that fails to see what we see in our kids while still demanding so much from them. We have aspired to raise strong and compassionate girls and boys in the midst of the plethora of voices that caution us not to make them too masculine or feminine. We are convinced that most parents share similar experiences. Together, we parents can encourage each other to keep learning about our kids to better love and support them, and keep growing ourselves.

Q: Is adolescence and young adulthood today really that different than when we grew up?

A: Teenagers today in the US face life choices that many of us didn't experience until our mid-twenties. Often in our formal and informal discussions with youth pastors and parents, we ask them to name the biggest struggle of teenagers. Their number one response? Busyness. By far. In one study, 13- to 17-year-olds were more likely to report feeling "extreme stress" than adults. Even more appalling is the gap between teenagers' anxiety and parents' recognition of their kids' stress. Approximately 20 percent of teenagers confess that they worry "a great deal" about current and future life events. But only 8 percent of the parents of these same teenagers are aware that their child is experiencing such stress. Because young people face so much pressure so early, we believe that "14 is the new 24." Yet in the midst of this acceleration of our kids' sophistication, young people simultaneously also feel less mature. The typical markers of adulthood like marriage, parenthood, a stable career, and financial independence are happening five or more years later for today's young adults. That's why we also believe that "28 is the new 18." So young people today have one foot on the gas pedal and one foot on the brake pedal, which makes their journey toward adulthood both confusing and challenging.

Q: How have mobile devices affected teenagers, young adults, and parenting?

A: In the midst of a lot of finger-pointing about the ills of technology, we do not want to insinuate that technology is the culprit for disintegrating child-parent relationships. Many parents, including us, find that our devices actually help us stay in closer contact with our maturing kids. Perhaps a better way to think about technology is as an *extension* of the relationships we have with our kids that reveals our connections and disconnections. Certainly, there are ways we must help our kids (especially during adolescence) navigate and limit their technology usage, but we should also self-reflect on our own usage as adults! *Growing With* offers a framework to address everyday pressing family topics like technology, relationships, faith, friends, and vocation.

Q: You suggest that teenagers and young adults need to develop their "withing" skills. What does that mean?

A: "Withing" is a term we coined to describe a family's growth in supporting each other as children grow more independent. We find that parents often give up on connecting with their growing kids because their teenagers and young adults are increasingly busy and more interested in their friends than their family. Parents frequently mistake their kids' quest for independence as rejection of their family. Withing emphasizes that young people long for connection but in ways that keep pace with their development. *Growing With* parents seek out connections with their maturing kids that complement their child's development and nurture their ever-changing parent-child relationship.

Q: Why is it important to you to describe teenagers' and young adults' spiritual quest as "faithing"?

A: It's easy to only think of faith as a noun or assume that faith is merely something we have or don't have. Theologically, faith is also a verb; it is something we exercise so that it continues to grow. The goal for *Growing With* families is "faithing," which means we as parents empower our child's ongoing growth in owning and embodying their own journey with God as they encounter new experiences and information. "Faithing" is a better term for young people's spiritual quest because it is big enough to handle their struggles and doubts. In our research, we have found that it's not doubt that is toxic to faith, it's silence. The good news for families is that small attempts to keep faith-related topics connected with everyday conversations prove to be helpful for teenagers, young adults, and their parents. *Growing With* provides practical ways to take these first and next steps.

Q: Some of us have heard the term "adulting" and you've adopted it for your book. What can you tell us about it?

A: While "adulting" has been a trending Twitter hashtag for almost a decade, we believe that this concept is rooted in two crucial points of reference for young people—relational adulting and vocational adulting. In a world filled with more opportunities and even more ambiguity, young people seek guidance for pursuing significant relationships and investing in their passions. Our kids' relational and vocational trajectories will twist and turn and they'll need their parents to give age-appropriate input along the way. *Growing With* reminds families that as teenagers and young adults develop their own agency, parents can offer a careful balance of support and challenge.

Q: Bottom line—what's your *Growing With* elevator pitch advice for parents of teenagers and young adults?

A: Being a *Growing With* parent means that we remind each other that in spite of our past parenting wins and misses, each day starts with new possibilities with our kids. We call each other to have courage, rooted in the hope that yesterday's fails do not disqualify us from being the best parents we can be today. And we believe that we are called to play significant, yet changing, roles in our maturing child's relationships with family, faith, and the future. There is a hopeful way forward for parents to grow with their growing kids. You can do it. We can do it together.

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Contact Jana Muntsinger, McClure Muntsinger Public Relations, 832-247-9308 or jana@mmpublicrelations.com