

# PARENT transition

## 13th Birthday Blessing

Cultures around the world have recognized the importance of rite of passage experiences. These celebrations provide students with distinctive markers to point to as the moments they started on the road to adulthood. Here you will find some useful tools to help you construct a rite of passage experience in the form of a formal blessing on your student's 13th birthday.

Remember these tips for better conversations with middle schoolers:

### Don't Freak:

Panic shuts down conversations. Don't act shocked by what they tell you (even though you may be). Try answering with, "Me too. I remember that 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 meaningful conversation in the future.

### Begin with the end in mind:

This transition in your relationship is a long process. They are not going to be mature adults for a number of years. However, you need to start cultivating your relationship now so that it will thrive later.

### *A Blessing Letter*

Your teenager will receive a letter from you with a written blessing. This will be for only him or her to enjoy. Your teenager might be shy or introverted, so this option may fit 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 teenager might be an extrovert who would love the idea of a party for his or her "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 to guide you as you prepare. It is perfectly okay to read your blessing. It works just the same.

It is important that you tell your student that he has no choice whether he gets your blessing. But he does have a choice in how he receives it. That is why before you do the “Blessing Ceremony,” you should probably talk to your teenager. Teenagers typically don’t like to be publicly surprised, so let your student know what you are planning to do.

## HOW TO GIVE YOUR BLESSING

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

### Share your dream for him or her in 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 or her in the coming year. Here are some examples:

*My dream for you in 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.*

*In the coming year, I am so excited to watch you take your strong 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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The key is to keep these “dreams” very encouraging and general. Don’t bring up specific examples, but give students 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 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 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 your student knows and admires. Don't just use examples of people you like; make sure they will be inspirational figures to your teenager. Here are some examples:

*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 world threatened 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 man 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 life of your teenager. We have seen teenagers receive blessings like this, and the people they were compared to often become their heroes.

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## 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 or she can have your approval as long as he or she 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 simply what they have done. Here are some examples of how to bless teenagers' identities:

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

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

When you bless teenagers' 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 teenager, you are likely experiencing parental fatigue. There are seasons of so much fighting and angst that drain your parenting batteries. 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 others with whom your teenager interacts. They will give you additional perspectives of your student that you can share. It is great to quote other people and what they have said about your teenager as part of the blessing.

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.

