

What Most Parents Aren't Telling You

AN ORANGE RESOURCE
PRODUCED WITH PARENT CUE

RESEARCH QUESTION Answer Summary

What's something someone could have done for your parent when you were growing up that would have helped them be a better parent?

My parents needed more, and deeper friendships.
—Charlotte

Tell parents that it's ok to be angry and stressed and upset and provide resources to find a healthy way to express those feelings. —Pittsburgh

Equip them to have awkward conversations better (i.e. sex).
—Kansas City

Trained them on how to handle stress.
—Charlotte

As a child that is the product of divorce, I wish the church would've helped my parents to understand it's okay to struggle and not have it all together instead of hiding their marriage and parenting struggles behind closed doors. —Detroit

My single mother had financial support from the church to send us (three girls) to summer camp, but rarely supported her in the day-to-day life of a single mom. Me and my siblings went hungry many nights and spent many days alone because she was working so hard. I wish someone would have noticed. —Pittsburgh

Someone could have surrounded my parents in love and truth when they failed. Instead, they felt isolated and judged, and unwelcome. —Indianapolis

I wish someone would have taught them how to be empathetic. —Kansas City

Helping, supporting, encouraging parents of kids that have special needs. Having an ADHD son, we got a lot of shame from church for his behavior. Lots of shame for why he wasn't "behaving" - no empathy. Shame has no place in church. —Charlotte

Encouraging my parents to find a way to pray with me and be more involved in my life. —Chicago

If someone could have helped them have the hard conversations about sex, gender roles, adulthood, even the hard questions about Jesus. Guiding them to allow my siblings and I to ask questions instead of avoiding them. —Kansas City

Marriage counseling and anger management for my father. —Chicago

I grew up very fundamental, someone who could have given my parents resources to show me that the world and church is bigger than one perspective. —Chicago

In the Catholic church in New Orleans, my widowed mother was given so many resources to help her succeed. It was like living in a million-person village that helped raise us. I realize that 50 years later, the church has changed considerably. —Charlotte

Encouraging my parents to find a way to pray with me and be more involved in my life. —Chicago

I wish church leaders hadn't given up on them just because they didn't show up on Sunday. —Charlotte

→ With over 500 honest and personal responses from church leaders and volunteers around the country, we found five main categories into which all their responses fell.

Section One: Give Them a Friend

My parents could have won more often if there was an older couple present to model humility. —*Kansas City*

Responses from Kansas City

I wish people had been willing to ask them tough questions, not just help them survive day by day life with kids.

I wish someone would have come along and invest in us (as kids) so my parents weren't the only ones.

My parents would have been better parents if people in the church would have called and just checked in. My family was a huge part of church then stepped away. No one ever checked on us.

If my mom would have had more parenting help and support from my dad she could have been an even better mom.

My parents could have used support in building healthy Godly relationships so it was modeled to us as kids earlier in life. I feel like it's been a journey trying to find friends who share similar interests as me spiritually.

I wish someone could have been available to spend time with my sister and I and speak positively about her (our mom's) dedication to us.

What I wish my parents had is a Godly couple to mentor them and walk alongside them. Sharing hope and wisdom in their parenting journey.

My dad believed that the church was full of hypocrisy. When I came to Christ, he told me he believed in Jesus but had no interest in joining a church. I think along the road he was judged for life choices and never could reconcile the church as a community with his own life.

Responses from Charlotte

I am the product of a broken marriage that ended officially when I was five. If someone besides family would have reached out to her and invited her to dinner, church, or just offered some companionship as she struggled to raise me on a limited income, I think she may have come out of the depression she was in for awhile after. She eventually got there (and found happiness and remarried) but it was a tough four years.

Someone could have invited my parents in and led them without them realizing it. For example they could have invited my mom to go to chorus concerts with them instead of just showing up by themselves. It was nice to have other adults show up, but I know it would have helped for my mom to be included, too.

To let my single mom know she wasn't any less than the "intact" families.

Formed a personal relationship with us as kids but also them as parents.

Taken time to help my split family get along and be on the same team.

My parents needed more and deeper friendships.

Befriend them with love and grace where they were in their brokenness so that they would feel and connect with Jesus in an intimate way like they had never experienced before.

Section One: Give Them a Friend

Friended them; my parents didn't have friends who served or worked for the church
—Pittsburgh

Responses from Charlotte continued

If my parents had positive mentors or examples of loving leaders, that would have possibly helped them. But if those people had taken an interest in me and loved me in the ways that my parents couldn't, it would have definitely made an impact.

In the Catholic church in New Orleans, my widowed mother was given so many resources to help her succeed. It was like living in a million-person village that helped raise us. I realize that 50 years later, the church has changed considerably.

Responses from Pittsburgh

Offer help. I think about the many times we would try church for a week or two and no one ever spoke to me or personally offered my parents the help that would have been so needed. They were evidently in pain, and through it, so was I.

My single mother had financial support from the church to send us (three girls) to summer camp, but rarely supported her in the day-to-day life of a single mom. Me and my siblings went hungry many nights and spent many days alone because she was working so hard. I wish someone would have noticed.

My parents took in three kids who were our neighbors when their mom died. My parents were too tired to go to church. They needed help at home. They needed resources and people to donate their time.

I wish there was a person or couple that would've walked alongside my parents, especially my mom, when my dad stopped coming to church.

I wish someone would have validated the great job they were doing as Christian parents. It mentally wore them down to the point of depression. Sometimes all a parent needs is the confirmation of a job well done to keep going.

Something that could have helped my parents win was feeling like the church is a place they can be most real about our family life—NOT that church was a place to appear the most put together.

Someone could have discipled my parents and cared more about them as parents instead of volunteers when it came to youth ministry.

Listen.

I wish someone had been loving and non-judgemental toward my parent—putting themselves in my parent's shoes and responding with love.

It would have helped if my parents stayed after church to get to know other families so we could have experienced a community of Christ-followers and not just been church attenders.

It would have helped my mom to receive emotional support as a single parent and love and grace for her situation. For her to know that her best was 100% good enough and that she was a great parent.

Friended them; my parents didn't have friends who served or worked for the church.

Ask good questions.

Section One: Give Them a Friend

Be a listening ear since they lost their parents at a young age.
—Pittsburgh

Responses from Pittsburgh continued

My parents went to church, and when my mom cheated on my dad, they banned my mom from the church. When my parents got back together, they obviously couldn't come to church, and it left a sour taste in my whole family's mouths. Judgment needs to be gone. When my mom was banned, my dad felt he couldn't go as a single dad either.

Doing life together (small group). My parents had friends, but not an opportunity to be a part of a group of like-minded people to deepen their faith.

My family was a very dysfunctional family. When they finally found church, it was an abusive church. To reach my family, it would've had to be out in the community and would've needed to support us kids in the community. I am the person I am today because of the positive adults who were in my life as I grew up. It definitely takes a village to raise a child in a positive way!

My mother was part of a large family but grew up with a dysfunctional relationship with her parents and siblings. It was very difficult for her to parent without having ever experienced the joy that can exist in a healthy parent-child relationship. That made it very difficult for me to navigate life in a single-parent household as an only child of a parent who had no idea how to relate to me as I grew and entered each stage of my life. I really wish someone had been there to step in and provide a good example of what a healthy parent-child relationship could look like, and despite how difficult she may have been in receiving that help, to be persistent anyway.

My kindergarten teacher noticed my parents wouldn't come to the parent-teacher conference, so she came to my house, saw what my life was like, and graciously sat with my parents and had a conference. Years later, I connected with her again to find out she was a follower of Christ and prayed for me ever since. Her intentionality helped my parents see a need for me. If they had more people like her in their life, it would have helped them take better steps forward.

As immigrants, my parents may have benefited from other parents explaining cultural norms that weren't easily understood by them. It may have helped navigate conversations between them and their children.

Be a listening ear since they lost their parents at a young age.

To have let my mom know that being divorced didn't mean that she was an outcast or failure in parenting.

I wish someone would have helped my mom understand how truly, deeply loved she is, despite her flaws and shortcomings that she can so easily dwell on.

I grew up in a family where my mom took us to church while my dad stayed home. I wish the church had gotten outside of its' four walls and engaged my dad and others like him so he could have seen others outside of the family demonstrating who Jesus is.

Provide a regular source of community and health for her, to help her see the value of her life outside of being a parent.

My parents were pastors—someone could have invested in, celebrated, and encouraged their kids (not just assume we were secure in our faith and place). My parents could have used prayer partners and friends. They needed more people to make meals, buy school supplies, or invite us over.

Section One: Give Them a Friend

Someone could have surrounded my parents in love and truth when they failed. —
Indianapolis

Responses from Pittsburgh continued

My dad was hard of hearing, I am hard of hearing, and my sister had special needs. We couldn't always be at church together as a family, finances were tight, and my parents often went without in order for us kids to have. I wish people had seen my Dad's isolation of self not as being standoffish, but that he couldn't participate. I wish they had raised him up to their level, so that his incredible leadership skills were used. I wish my mother had been equipped as a female leader in the church. She's brilliant, and has such a grasp on Scripture, and she never got to use that outside of the home or with more than us kids. (I am super thankful that we had her!) I wish people had dug below the surface to see the days where there were no electricity or heat. I wish we had truly been seen, embraced, and cared for as we should have been. They could have been more able to be present with us, and pour into us.

The best thing that could have happened is that someone would have mentored my parents. They were both young when they had me and they were just trying to figure it out. Without any help, they made bad calls and I suffered from a lot of those bad decisions. If one person—one couple—could have come along side of them and helped guide them in life it could have changed a lot of things for me and my siblings.

Response from Seattle

Letting them know they are doing a good job and that it's ok to not always know the answer. Every single kid is unique and requires a different set of boundaries.

Responses from Indianapolis

Someone could have surrounded my parents in love and truth when they failed. Instead, they felt isolated, judged, and unwelcome.

My mom needed someone to cheer her on. She needed a friend to be honest more than anything. She had no support in managing a chaotic environment with my dad who was an alcoholic.

The church would have helped me win with my parents by helping me understand that I didn't have to forfeit my belonging with my parents in order to find belonging in the church.

Something someone could have done to help my mom parent her kids: show up. Raised by a single working mom, sometimes my brother and I needed more help than she could give. We needed healthy people to help fill the void, bring us meals, drive us places—just help. We did have seasons where God actually did provide that for us—it was great.

Responses from Detroit

Counsel them! Or come alongside them and walk with them on the journey!

Love them unconditionally.

Section One: Give Them a Friend

I wish someone who have asked my mom why she took me to church and didn't go herself.
—Detroit

Responses from Detroit continued

Someone coming alongside my mom after her divorce and abusive relationship.

My parents would have been better parents if there had been someone to sit with my dad after my parents got divorced to teach him what a loving Christian looked like.

Having other parents who thought differently than our parents to give them a broader view of parenting.

I wish someone would've encouraged my parents and told them that they were doing a good job.

Intentionally cared to listen to my parent's experiences, and connect with them where they were.

My parents would have been better at parenting if they had felt supported and seen. It was always the reality for me as a child that my parents were "on their own" to make things work and to weather all the storms life threw at them with their own strength. There wasn't a sense of community or "it takes a village"-ness to allow them to make time for loving themselves or their children.

Reached out after we left the church, and leaned into a family that was hurting. We were in a tailspin for 15 years as I grew up that left scars my older two brothers carry with them now 30+ years later.

When my family was going through a difficult situation, I wish that the church had been more loving and supportive. They said it was a family problem.

I wish my parents had true friends who cared deeply about them and who they could have told their problems and struggles to.

Listened.

Actively participating in the ministry of "being there."

I wish someone would have asked my mom why she took me to church and didn't go herself.

Meet her (my mom) where she was instead of expecting her to be someone she wasn't or couldn't be.

Helped my mom by supporting her through the divorce and not encourage her hatred. Then she would have liked me—instead of hating me—due to me looking exactly like the one person she hated.

I wish there was follow-up. My parents went to church only on holidays. I wish someone would have called, came by, sent a card... it would have helped so much. They knew of God, but didn't know Him. I truly wish they had known Him.

I wish someone would have mentored my mom on how to be a better mom. She had no role model. I wish someone would have told her to love me where I was and for who I am. I wish my dad would have made more of an effort to build a relationship with me as a daughter.

I wish someone had seen the brokenness and helped my mom with her addiction. If someone had befriended my mom with the love of Christ, she would have found her identity lies in Christ and not in drugs and alcohol.

If someone had loved my mother.

Section One: Give Them a Friend

Not judge my parents when I or my siblings made bad choices.
—Dallas

Responses from Detroit continued

I think if my mom wasn't judged for being a single mom, maybe she would have stayed in church and found her real Savior, instead of jumping from church to church, even different religions trying to find a place where she belonged. She raised me Catholic but I never felt like I belonged in my church. It's been about 2 years since I became a Christian and I just hope my mom one day finds a place that she feels accepted and at home like I feel at my church.

Less judgment over my parents divorce and more kindness and loving our family where we were at that time.

I wish the church had considered my mother's "worldview"—she was abused by her father and others in the church, including an elders son. It shaped who God was for her! She struggled with mental illness, marriage, and just being a mom to my brothers and me.

I don't know if the leaders actually knew me and my name. My mom mostly spoke another language so I'm not sure if they had a conversation about me or ask how they have been. They were still kind to say hi though.

Authentic community coming alongside my parents to encourage internationality in parenting and share truth in love may have kept my parents from walking away from their faith in the midst of an affair with someone at the church. They just left and healing took years.

I didn't grow up in church. My parents divorced when I was very young and my parents (separately) struggled with addiction and mental illness. I think they always felt ashamed to approach the Church or people in the church because they weren't willing to meet them where they were; like they were too far gone or couldn't be seen as part of their ministry right where they were. No one ever knew what was going on in my life because I was a "good kid" so no one asked, but internally I was struggling to keep it together. If someone had simply asked me to share about what was going on at home or in my mind I would have led a very different life. Something that could have helped our family win would have been the Church taking time to empower school teachers in their church to have conversations with kids like me.

Responses from Dallas

Just showing up to be present and transparent with them.

I wish they were more connected in a small group for accountability and encouragement. I watched them struggle a lot without going to the church for help.

Actually get to know them and help them through the hurt they were feeling so they could have loved me better.

Not judge my parents when I or my siblings made bad choices.

Come alongside my mother to be friends with her and lift her up in her struggle.

Community. Not just any community—people you can be real and authentic with. People that would've loved my mom well and made her feel like the real version of her was worthy of being seen (and worked on).

My mom needed someone other than her own children to believe she had good in her.

Section One: Give Them a Friend

My mom needed someone other than her own children to believe she had good in her. —Dallas

Responses from Dallas continued

If someone would have looked at my mom or dad and said “I see you. You’re doing a good job. You’re not alone.” Maybe my parents wouldn’t have allowed the stress and anxiety of trying to be perfect to dominate every single aspect of our families.

Connect with my parents regularly, come alongside them personally, put resources in their hands, and follow up with encouragement and help.

I wish my parents could have had deeper connections with others, so I could have witnessed that and learned from that. I find this very difficult as an adult. I’m emotionally disconnected sometimes.

My parents divorced when I was nine. We did have many people who offered to drive us places and help provide food and clothes we needed and even helped us with school projects. The one thing I wish I could have seen more of was people coming in to check on my mom personally.

I wish someone would have been friends with my mom after my mom and dad split. My mother is a hard person to deal with, but she could have used a friend who really saw her.

Something someone could’ve done that would’ve helped my parents is to pour into them. My parents poured everything into me and my sister but had nothing being poured into them which eventually leaves you empty. Mentoring and discipleship is important to me and my family and if they had someone to care about them and just show them love I think they would’ve had a better marriage and in turn been better parents. Me and my sister are what got our parents into church and I think someone just showing them love and telling them they’re proud of them for how far they’ve come would’ve made a world of difference for my parents.

I wish someone would’ve told my mom that she was doing a good job. Just a “Shirley, you’re doing a good job,” would’ve done it. She always feared that she would be like her own mother. She just wanted better for us but the lack of affirmation left her unsure and anxious.

A role model for nurturing. My mom was a single mom trying to run a business. She treated her kids like employees she didn’t know how to nurture and love. I wish she would have had a role model for nurturing and love.

Pastors and leaders who showed my parents that they were seen and their story with Jesus had purpose! I got a glimpse of this when one of my mentors saw my mom’s story and listened. This ended up having a profound impact on me in return because my mom could process her story to share that with me and how much Jesus has impacted her life!

Accepted my parents, valued them, and offered grace and friendship. They attended church every Sunday.

To have community and encouragement for separated or divorced parents (those remarried as well—any form of divorce). Encouragement in the way to help forgive, communicate healthier, and how to not involve children as much.

It would have helped if my mom knew she wasn’t going to be judged for her past abuser which led to her drinking problem. If the church would have been willing to accept all of her and not feel uncomfortable when she came into the church, maybe she would have known God loved her. Then and wouldn’t have turned to alcohol and turned instead to an inviting church family. I ran from her choices and ran to God by getting on a church bus that came to me, but I wish would have come for her.

Section One: Give Them a Friend

I wish they would have provided small groups of other families that we could do life with; friends for both us and them.
—Lancaster

Responses from Dallas continued

My parents were separated when I was younger and I lived with only my mom for most of my life. I think because of that she felt she had to do everything that two parents could for the longest time. She ended up spreading herself too thin and stressed out about a whole lot. I wish someone had told her that she didn't have to be both parents and could have asked for help. I love her very much and anything she does is enough but I don't know if she always knows that.

I was adopted from Europe when I was two. I would have loved other adoptive parents to walk alongside of mine and give them advice and wisdom. We know so much more about adoption now, but it was never celebrated in my life and that is a huge loss I think.

Responses from Lancaster

If the churches that we attended would have been more intentional about helping one another develop a sincere love for each other and for the children, I believe that my parents would have been able to do a better job of helping us to truly fall in love with Jesus and build our own genuine faith in God.

I wish they would've provided small groups of other families that we could do life with; friends for both us and them.

Provided them with a place to have authentic, vulnerable relationships where they could talk about parenting.

Come alongside them and help them become better Christians and parents. Unfortunately, no one reached out even though they knew that my parents had struggles.

Healthy friendships.

If someone would have stressed to my parents the importance of community, I would have grown up with more people around me to speak into my life.

My parents would have been better parents if our church had been less of an echo chamber for what they wanted to be true, but rather a loving yet challenging environment that promoted growing more like Christ.

My parents have been better parents if others were more intentional with them. My parents are not intentional with friendships which made them feel like they were on an island lost and needing help.

I am a Pastor's kid and I wish someone would have helped my parents win by not condemning my mom. She couldn't do as much as she wanted to at church because she was working a full-time job to support our family and taking care of us while my Dad was out doing ministry. Many of the members of our congregation—even the executive Pastor—looked down on my mom because she always put us first. That ended up discouraging her so much that when we were older and more independent my mom was so hurt it was hard for her to serve.

I wish my parents had more opportunities to be open and honest; a safe space to be vulnerable instead of feeling like we had to keep a "good Christian" facade. My parents struggled to maintain this image and we fell apart inside our four walls. If they just had a safe space to share, be open, not be judged, and given gentle counsel, I think it could have been different. Now, at 41 years old, I'm the only one who is following Jesus in our family.

Section One: Give Them a Friend

Be a friend to my mom (a pastor's wife.) —*Orange County*

Responses from Lancaster continued

Something someone could have done would have been to reach out to my mother to create healthy connection and friendship. She was broken, in pain, and all alone. This translated into more brokenness and pain within the family. If someone was able to join her and love her where she was, there could have been healing—for everyone.

My mom could've used support as a married woman whose husband didn't go to church. It was almost like my dad was ignored by the church in my growing up years and no one knew how to intentionally reach out to my mom, who was doing the best she could. When our pastor and his wife stepped into their lives without any expectations of church attendance, when they loved him, it made a world of difference in our family and I was almost sad I wasn't living at home any more. When that pastor went to be with Jesus, my mom stopped attending in-person services, and I wonder who checks in on her now.

My parents did not have any meaningful friendships who were willing to hang out outside of church, school, or work. This caused me to not be able to model what a good friendship looks like. If someone would have checked in on them—mostly my mom—to pour into her while making sure she was also pouring out to them, it would have been better for everyone.

My mom and dad are still married, but I don't think my mom has ever been happy in her marriage. Part of why is that she moved far away from her family and friends when she started our family with my dad, and I think that she never found anyone to be close with ever again. The church that we were a part of for most of my childhood probably could have done more to change that if they had cared enough to notice.

My mom became a mother at the age of 16 when she had my brother who was born with cerebral palsy. She then had me and my 2 younger sisters. She is the strongest person I know. I just wish she allowed more people to help her. She was so active in the church as my siblings and I grew up, and she has become burnt out. I am hoping to get her more involved again, without her feeling like she's doing all the work.

Responses from Orange County

Physically helped my single mom with friendship, money here or there, helped her not feel alone, be a healthy adult in my sister's and my life, maybe gift my mom a massage or dinner, etc.

Encourage them.

I wished someone would have mentored my father to be a man of God. That way he would've been a better father, leader, and man.

Let them know that everyone feels like they aren't enough. Let them know that no parent is perfect. It is hard . . . and that's okay.

Be a friend to my mom (a pastor's wife.)

Not ask how their kids are, but how they personally were doing. Express interest in their life apart from just being "Julia's mom or dad."

Reached out and let my parents know I was attending their youth group and they were happy I was. I would have hoped it would have encouraged my parents to know more about my life and the importance that I was being seen by a church.

Section One: Give Them a Friend

I would have liked someone to tell my dad that he mattered.
—Orlando

Responses from Orange County continued

Since my dad was a single parent, creating community would have helped my dad because he had no support system. The church left him alone when times were tough.

Letting them know that they are not alone in the struggle of navigating parenthood.

Be their friend.

Believed that they could actually do it and point out what they were doing right instead of what they were doing wrong.

Let them know that they are not alone in the struggle of navigating parenthood.

Responses from Washinton, D.C.

Something someone could have done to help my parents win at being better parents is giving them a safe place to speak into the difficulties of being a parent!

Praying not just for people's physical needs but the things that bother people, which are messy.

Responses from Orlando

I grew up with divorced parents from the age of 4 and was raised primarily by my mom. Something my mom needed was less shame from the church for being divorced, and more support and community surrounding her. I think I would have grown up with a healthier idea of love and lesser fears of abandonment if I had seen my family be surrounded by the church from a young age.

Just see them and encourage them.

Given them a safe space to ask real questions without judgment.

I wish someone had gotten involved. We tend to look at families and think they have it all together when in reality they are just trying to figure it out. Show up, consistently. Hang out with them. Build trust so they can have a moment to be real. Meet practical needs (groceries, car, etc.) so that parents can actually have those hard conversations. Pavlov's hierarchy of needs.

A mentoring couple to walk them through trials and how to handle conflict in the home. Support and love their kids no matter what career they go into or decisions they make—even if they disagreed.

I would have liked someone to tell my dad that he mattered.

I wish the church had stepped up and called out my parent's sin in their marriage and then worked with them to give them tools to reconcile differences. The church knowingly allowed them to live in two different states, eventually leading to divorce and years of mental abuse. They knew my dad had addiction problems with porn and really evil things. They pretended that they were not sins and left my mom to fend for herself thinking she was the problem and that she was going to hell because she divorced my dad.

Section One: Give Them a Friend

Exposed us to different stories, world views, and life experiences. —*Orlando*

Responses from Orlando continued

I think my parents would have benefitted from a leader or pastor checking in with them. They didn't have relationships to lean into and were silo parenting though they had each other.

More help for single moms, blended, and broken families would have been helpful for my mother. Most parent resourcing by church is built for a world where parents are on first marriage.

My mum and step-dad became Christians when I was eight. Being immigrants, divorced, remarried, and dealing with all the mess of blended-family in a church climate that didn't know how to make space for that wasn't easy. I wish someone had helped them know how to navigate their reality instead of judging it.

Follow up and show up not in a "churchy" way but in a real, relatable and raw way.

My parents were in ministry and it would have been helpful for them to have space to share their parenting struggles. My mom had that with a group she prayed with but I don't know that my dad did. We need spaces of no judgment where we can talk about how hard parenting is.

Someone could have led them spiritually so they would have been equipped to lead me.

I wish someone would have given my parents encouragement. I often felt their burdens of not feeling good enough. They were young and thought they needed to have it all together, but they showed us so much love and encouragement. I wish someone would have given them encouragement back.

Exposed us to different stories, world views, and life experiences.

The church dropped me when my parents got divorced because they didn't think divorce was acceptable. It was too messy, so the church walked away. I wish the church had been willing to step into the mess instead of running away.

Shown them forgiveness when they messed up. More grace, less judgment. More love, less shame.

I wish someone would've validated or affirmed my parents. Instead the church condemned them and gave me a challenging view of the Church. My brother and I attended church every time the doors were open, but my parents did not. Instead they usually spent Sundays serving—not because they were being "good Christians." My mom spent most Sundays doing hair at nursing homes for free. My Dad worked with drug addicts or men that had just gotten out of jail, and he would teach them how to fix cars so they could get work. But I was always told at "church" that they weren't good enough.

I wish someone would have taken a genuine interest in building a friendship and relationship with my mom. She worked nonstop to support us and church was a luxury we couldn't afford. I wish the church we had connected with would have come to her.

Section One: Give Them a Friend

Kept pursuing her. We were marginally connected to churches but never really part of a faith family. —*Orlando*

Responses from Orlando continued

Community of other parents who might be struggling with similar problems and issues. A church that would make it feel like home because they don't have it all together might have prevented them from leaving the church time and time again, disconnecting with the church, and taking us away as well.

I wish that someone had given my mom a safe space to talk authentically about her struggles. About her alcoholism. About her pain. If she had had a place like that, maybe she would have been able to deal with the anger and the fear that weighed her down and often spilled over onto us. Maybe she would have had someone to help her carry the burden that nearly crushed her and threatened to take us all out with her.

Kept pursuing her. We were marginally connected to churches but never really part of a faith family.

Section Two: Help Them Deal with Their Stuff

Teach my parents how to fight fair. How to communicate to each other, without hurting when offended. —*Charlotte*

Responses from Kansas City

Knowing how to recognize and manage trauma.

My parents needed counseling—or counseling-type—environments and to understand the importance of counseling so they could have resonated with me sooner.

Someone to teach them anger management skills. How we treat our children sticks with them for a lifetime.

If my dad had been more willing to show his emotions to my mom and us kids he would have been a better dad.

What someone could have done for my parents that would have made them better parents was to help them love each other and how to invest in their marriage.

Responses from Charlotte

Trained them on how to handle stress.

Teach my parents how to fight fair. How to communicate to each other, without hurting when offended.

Responses from Pittsburgh

Tell parents that it's ok to be angry and stressed and upset. And provide resources to find a healthy way to express those feelings.

Someone could have taken my parents under their wing and mentored them. Also connected them to counseling to help each of them deal with their own issues instead of just surviving and trying their best in their brokenness to be a good parent.

I think if someone would have invested in the men in the church it would have helped my parents. It seemed like women led everything and men sat on the sidelines. My dad left the church and left my family feeling split.

I wish someone could've helped my parents realize that they didn't have to live in their addictions and mental health issues.

Responses from Chicago

I often felt unseen and unloved in my family. There was trauma in my childhood, but as I have gotten older and in my career path as a trauma therapist, I also know my mom had trauma in her childhood. She was just parenting out of trauma. So being able to help parents understand and learn breaking the cycle of trauma or abuse and how to really connect with their child allows a child to feel known, seen, and loved. And I had positive people outside my family that invested in me that helped me on my journey.

Marriage counseling and anger management for my father.

Section Two: Help Them Deal with Their Stuff

That taking care of their own mental, spiritual and physical health, is taking care of me.
—Columbus

Responses from Chicago continued

Provide stress management counseling.

Growing up in a small church 45+ years ago, I wish someone would have had the boldness to step into our family mess and stop the cycle of abuse. Not just turn and look away.

To understand that failure is ok.

Recognize the signs of anxiety in kid family members earlier to help them cope and/or at least make it ok to discuss openly.

To unhook my mom from addiction. To unhook my father from work.

Prioritize the healing of the wounds from their own childhood before trying to give me a good childhood.

Responses from Columbus

That taking care of their own mental, spiritual and physical health, is taking care of me.

Give them tools to see and heal from the abuse and neglect they themselves experienced as kids.

Teach them that the words they speak over themselves will be planted into their kid's life. For example, my mom would always say how fat and ugly she is, so I grew up thinking I was fat and ugly, and then tried to find my worth in my looks.

I would have loved if my parents knew more of their identity or purpose. I feel I was lost. I found and fell in love with God on my own but had to endure a lot of heartache and bad choices to get there.

Had anyone ever reinforced purpose, worth, and identity and that it's okay to change the way things have always been done, big wins would've happened. Family counseling. Life coaches.

Teach parents that it's ok to ask for help, to reach out. Know that "what happens in my house stays in my house" is toxic and hurts in the long run.

Responses from Seattle

Someone could've paid for their couples counseling.

Focused more on the health of their marriage.

Help them find space and resources to invest in and strengthen their marriage.

My parents would have benefitted from teaching about grace—so they would've understood that living under shame is not holier.

Section Two: Help Them Deal with Their Stuff

My parents who have won if they would have dealt with their own childhood trauma before they repeated the cycle.
—*Indianapolis*

Responses from Seattle continued

Someone could have helped Mom and Dad by truly teaching them about OCD. Someone also could have taught them to ask me more questions about what I think instead of just telling me what they believe. I felt that if I disagreed with them they would have been disappointed. I also wish they wouldn't have worried so much about what society thought about us kids.

If someone would have helped my parents deal with stress in a nonviolent way, through training, being a real friend, or having authentic conversations, it may have helped us see their service at church seem more genuine.

Responses from Indianapolis

Been our (the kids') advocate and strongly encouraging seeking help with mental health.

Process your pain so I don't have to process it for you.

My parents would have won if they would have dealt with their own childhood trauma before they repeated the cycle.

Normalize the fact that all parents are learning.

Helped them with their addiction. If they were sober, I wouldn't have been raped growing up. I would have a better understanding of unconditional love. But everyone turned a blind eye to their addictions.

Talked about the role of anger and discipline with practical examples.

Responses from Detroit

As a child that is the product of divorce, I wish the church would've helped my parents to understand it's okay to struggle and not have it all together instead of hiding their marriage and parenting struggles behind closed doors.

My parents could have used messages about how authenticity and vulnerability are not weakness but a strength and a way to create community and connection.

To help my parents to win at being better parents, someone could have come alongside them by inviting them to more than just work to get their needs fulfilled or a project done. To let them know that Jesus wanted a relationship with them as they are not as the church perceived them so they could have raised us younger on knowing Him.

Allowed them to question their faith. Allowed them to understand real forgiveness.

Responses from Austin

If someone had taught my parents to apologize to their children, I may have had more compassion on them as an adult instead of fighting with a bitter heart towards them.

Section Two: Help Them Deal with Their Stuff

I would have loved it if my parents were taught how to forgive and that forgiveness is a process. —Austin

Responses from Austin continued

I wish my mom and dad would have had resources on how to deal with conflict in a way that led them to Jesus.

I attended a private Christian school and my parents too easily handed over my discipleship training to them. They needed a school and church ministry willing to equip them and not just take over for them.

I wish someone would have shown my parents how to be emotionally healthy and model how to process feelings with their kids. I wish someone would have raised the bar and showed them what godly parenting looked like instead of letting them settle for “better than their parents”. I think it would have saved my siblings and I a lot of hurt and abuse. My parents are still unhealthy people, and still taking it out on their (now) adult kids.

Taught them to navigate through their anger to not project it into me.

I would have loved it if my parents were taught how to forgive and that forgiveness is a process.

Taught them the Bible more so that they could teach it to me better.

Help my parents with ways to help them have faith in their marriage. To help us be better children.

I wish someone would have helped my parents conquer their addictions. If they had pictures of healthier lives, they would have been healthier parents and my childhood would not have been as traumatic.

What would have helped my parents was a discipleship group that focused on parenting in the context of marriage.

My parents would have been better if my church growing up believed us when we said my mom was sick and I was struggling with depression and instead of causing pain for my whole family. I wish they had given us resources and support.

Responses from Dallas

My parents needed help to know Jesus and to have a healthy and thriving marriage. They needed more places to grow and learn together.

My parents could have used someone to help them know that my sister being gay was not their “fault”—nor was it hers. She was not something to be fixed and neither was I. My parents needed someone to walk with them step by step in a way that the pastor may not have had time for. But my parents needed someone to help them know how to parent me as the only child left at home while my sister's struggles overwhelmed our family and changed my whole paradigm while I was living at home. Oftentimes when one child is in crisis, parents forget to help their other children go through something when they are dealing with their own grief.

Instead of turning their backs, seeing my mom's deteriorating mental health so she could get help and stop the cycle of verbal and emotional abuse for me and my siblings.

My parents stopped going to church after their mentor left the city. If their mentor could help them to find another mentor or fellowship, it probably would not take us 20 years to go back to church. And I hope someone could tell my dad he didn't need to be the one that's in control.

Section Two: Help Them Deal with Their Stuff

I wish someone would have told my parents that their words were building my inner voice so be careful. —Orange County

Responses from Dallas continued

That it was ok to be honest and real with your kids! Parents aren't perfect and make mistakes too! Saying sorry is important!

Access to divorce resources.

Let my parents know they can't protect me from absolutely everything.

Responses from Lancaster

My mom raised me and my younger siblings as a single, very emotionally unhinged parent. If she had ever been offered emotional support of any kind, I think our family could have avoided a lot of the lasting trauma we experienced.

If they could have had someone help them with mental health and alcohol abuse. They only had friends who encouraged the behaviors. If anyone saw me, they didn't notice that I was on my own and drowning because they were so involved in their dysfunction.

I wish someone would have come alongside my mom to know how to help navigate helping my brother and I through the trauma of my dad leaving, and then the blending of our family when my mom got remarried. My mom just seemed to not know what to do and it weighed on her a lot, especially being a stepmom to a teenage girl.

My parents could have both been validated and encouraged to prioritize their marriage first, and see value in counseling.

My parents needed someone to encourage them to work through their own issues so they would not leak out onto their kids.

Conflict management.

My parents needed substance abuse services.

Responses from Orange County

I wish someone would have told my parents that their words were building my inner voice so be careful.

Putting God first could help resolve other issues in our home.

I think it would have helped my parents win if someone had helped my parents restore their relationship and guided them in their marriage. Helped them understand how to have a relationship with God. How to love and forgive one another. If someone could help model to them what a healthy Christian marriage looks like so that they can model it to their kids.

Someone to offer marriage counseling for parents to help with conflict resolution, anger management.

I was raised by a phenomenal single mom who always brought me to church, who loves me unconditionally but I wish so much that she told me no and had boundaries for herself and the kids.

Section Two: Help Them Deal with Their Stuff

My parents could have been better parents if someone would have told them there was another way to do it beyond how they were raised. —*Washington D.C.*

Responses from Orange County continued

Disciple them in the various areas of their lives and encourage them to seek healing emotionally.

Meet with them and help them to remember why they got married and why they had children together.

Responses from Washington D.C.

Someone could have provided resources for my parents to educate themselves on things like healing from their own childhood trauma, how to have difficult conversations with your children, how to talk about race and discrimination with your kids so that we (my siblings and I) aren't trying to heal ourselves while attempting to end transgenerational trauma and being woke about social injustice around us.

I wish someone could have helped my single mom be a mom and not try to fill both roles. I know she felt the "need" to do that but she wasn't designed to do that. The hardships in our relationship all came in areas in which she was trying to be someone she wasn't designed to be.

Something someone could have done to help my parents win at parenting is teaching how to manage their anger, and how to speak kindly to a kid with big emotions.

My parents could have been better parents if someone would have told them there was another way to do it beyond how they were raised.

Responses from Orlando

Giving them the opportunity to share, process, and validate their emotions when they were younger instead of denying them.

Offer family counseling resources.

Someone could have helped my parents by suggesting therapy to them. They are both very damaged people that were so focused on their own issues they neglected us. The damage they had turned to anger which was taken out on us. Therapy is the only thing I would think might have helped them.

Something someone could have done that would have helped my parents be better parents is provide them mental health counseling so they could have the tools to handle their life stressors, make their lives better, and mirror to their kids those tools as well.

Parenting classes. My parents were both abused as children and they would have benefitted from seeing and learning a different way of parenting than what they knew. You don't know what you don't know and I truly believe they would have tried a different approach if they only were shown how.

Helped them learn how to process challenging emotions.

Section Two: Help Them Deal with Their Stuff

Helped them see that grieving the loss of one child shouldn't increase pressure on the other.
—Orlando

Responses from Orlando continued

Help my mom see a counselor to deal with her previous hurts and pains.

My mom was a single parent raising three boys. I remember her struggling to afford counseling for my older brothers who were experiencing an array of challenges, anger, violence, and drug use. She couldn't afford counseling services in the long run, only being able to go a few times. If she would have had access to consistent counseling—even for herself—it would have been a game changer. She felt alone, like no one was hearing her.

Helped them see that grieving the loss of one child shouldn't increase the pressure on the other.

Creating a safe space to be honest about the hurt and brokenness in their own lives. Not relying so heavily on biblical knowledge to solve trauma and encouraging them to see us kids as image bearers—not just sin filled souls to be corrected.

Addressed their hurt from the church and their church experience. I feel as if my parents were forced to go to church and experienced pain but never got a chance to heal from those those things.

Helped their marriage win.

Letting them know that taking care of themselves shouldn't be an afterthought. You can only give your best when you are at your best.

My parents had major mental health issues. I had a brother who dropped out of school in 8th grade. To help them parent would be offering free or scholarshiped events for us to attend. The other would be to encourage them to pursue counseling and psychiatric help.

Someone could have helped my parents see a Jesus that wasn't offended by a non-linear path of faith.

I wish someone would have helped my mom learn how to budget and handle her finances better, so we didn't have to move so much.

Someone could have helped them love each other more.

Normalizing the conversation around mental health and therapy sooner for them and then for their children.

Section Three: Help Them Show Up for Me

My Dad was a minister. I wish leadership would require my Dad to take time off to spend with his family. He would always put church before family—always! —*Columbus*

Responses from Charlotte

I wish my parents had spent more time simply investing time in me. Reading with me, encouraging me to get into the Word, taking walks, etc. They always told me they were there for me, but rarely showed me. As a result, I had an unidentified distrust with them that I didn't arrive at until early adulthood.

Spoke up to my dad about the importance of being present in the different activities I was involved in. We missed out on so many memories that could have been made.

If someone could have helped them protect "white space" for our family better. I may have gotten to know my parents better as a kid. Maybe it would have impacted my own family now.

Response from Pittsburgh

Respite care in the form of parents' night out. For them to have the opportunity to refill their own cups, date each other, without the worry of cost of a babysitter.

Response from Chicago

Encouraging my parents to find a way to pray with me and be more involved in my life.

Responses from Columbus

My Dad was a minister. I wish leadership would require my Dad to take time off to spend time with his family. He would always put church before family—always!

Someone could've helped my parents by telling them that going to their kids sporting games should be a higher priority instead of just going to church services.

I wish someone would have helped teach my parents how to nurture my spiritual growth.

Responses from Seattle

If someone would've taught my parents to the importance of Sabbath. Rest and time with God and your own family would've prevented parents from "burning out" and it affecting their kids.

Practice the real presence of God every day! Invite them to a small group from church which helped them talk about teaching children faith at home.

I wish someone would have told them our time was short and that all I wanted was more of it with them.

Section Three: Help Them Show Up for Me

Telling parents how to just be present. —Dallas

Responses from Indianapolis

Tell my dad to be around more than working all the time.

It would have been so meaningful if someone could have provided my parents with meaningful respite opportunities where they could invest in one another. I think their attitudes and strength could have been inspired and replenished by having more spiritual opportunist together without their kids present.

Responses from Austin

Telling my mom spending one on one time with me was important, despite have six kids—that each kids' identity is not in our outward appearance or what others think, but in being a child of God.

Something someone could have done that would have helped my parents win at being a better parent is helping them see my craving for a deep relationship with them and my need for their presence in what I was active in.

They could have taught my parents that living in the moment with your kids is far greater and more impactful than living in the moment with everyday distractions. Their desires superseded my attention. But they just didn't know better. They now live in regret for it.

Responses from Dallas

More time to spend with family, instead of having to work so much.

Telling parents how to just be present.

Teach them to slow down and listen.

My parents handed responsibility for discipleship to the church, but I never saw it lived out at home. I'm not sure they knew how to do it, or even that they were supposed to do it.

Someone to show my dad how to be present in our (his kids) life after he left my mom. My mom was too busy being a single parent and didn't have time to go to our events—it would have been nice to have someone there.

I was raised by a children's minister/school guidance counselor and corporate leader/deacon/church tech guy. They were all things to all people and didn't have anything left to give at home. I wish someone would've come alongside them and not labeled me as the PK and moved on.

The church could have created an intentional opportunity to step out of our normal busy schedules to put away life and distractions to have intentional conversation—a checkup that isn't just a daily "How are you?" but an overview on how we are actually doing. Mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually.

Section Three: Help Them Show Up for Me

My parents could have found a way to keep me in church or in a faith-based atmosphere despite their divorce.
—Lancaster

Responses from Dallas continued

My story and my ministry are all based on a horrible experience I had at a church—the first I ever walked into. The children's ministry was not a priority to the church and as a result was unfriendly, unkept, and definitely not for the unchurched. I wish someone would have told my parents that children's ministry matters in selecting a church and to find one that prioritizes the next generation!

Responses from Lancaster

My parents could have found a way to keep me in church or in a faith-based atmosphere despite their divorce.

Given them time "off" from parenting for date nights and reset meetings to invest in their marriage.

If someone could have reminded my parents that our family was their priority, then our church.

Response from Orange County

I wish my parents had other voices in their lives that could have helped them reshape their priorities away from managing their own lives and help them prioritize their kids and be present for us.

Responses from Washington D.C.

It would have helped my parents win at parenting if we emphasized to them the importance of spending quality time with each child separately to build a relationship individually and help each child connect to Christ.

Someone could have told my parents to slow down.

Responses from Orlando

Tell them to spend more time with me.

I wish someone would've encouraged my parents to push me to go to church in middle and in high school. My parents let me stay home most Sundays and I regret it. I wish I would've gone even on days I didn't feel like it.

Let my mom know she didn't have to take care of every traditional female responsibility in our home. It would have been healthier to see my parents doing some of it together.

Help them to learn to say no and not get burned out by church. They lead others but neglected their family.

What Most Parents Aren't Telling You

Section Three: Help Them Show Up for Me

Someone to encourage them it was okay to slow down and simply be present with us kids. I longed for those unstructured "being" moments.
—Orlando

Responses from Orlando continued

Mentor them about being more intentional about the time that we spent as a family.

Someone to encourage them it was okay to slow down and simply be present with us kids. I longed for those unstructured "being" moments.

Section Four: Help Them Notice Me

By encouraging them to think less about what society thinks of their family and more about how our hearts were actually doing. —Charlotte

Responses from Kansas City

Helping my parents understand how a child develops emotionally as well as physically.

I wish someone would have taught them how to be empathetic.

Responses from Charlotte

Helping, supporting, encouraging parents of kids that have special needs. Having an ADHD son, we got a lot of shame from church for his behavior. Lots of shame for why he wasn't "behaving"—no empathy. Shame has no place in church.

I wish someone could have shown my parents that we needed their help and support even when we were in our late teens. Parenting does not stop when a child turns 16 or 18 or graduates high school.

By encouraging them to think less about what society thinks of their family and more about how our hearts were actually doing.

Responses from Pittsburgh

I was a child who struggled behavior-wise. My negative behavior was magnified and focused on. There was one lady who focused on the gifts that were in me. I wish the church would have helped my mom help me to tap into my gifts early!

Understanding a child's thinking would help them approach the issue differently.

Responses from Chicago

When your child is a teenager, don't think they are grown and don't need you to encourage them and spend time with them and help guide them.

Help them see their identity in Jesus instead of as "good Christian" rule followers. This would have then helped them raise me to love Jesus and his ways rather than being terrified of making mistakes and having an identity in what I produce.

Responses from Columbus

I wish that someone would have helped my parents with their mindset—wondering what my child is going through and how to check in and see how my child is doing and what they might need because of what is happening in their life.

How to show appreciation for their children. Teaching them to build up rather than constant correction.

Section Four: Help Them Notice Me

Someone could have told my parents two sentences is all we needed. "I love you" and "I'm proud of you." We felt the love but we rarely heard it. —Dallas

Response from Seattle

They could have reminded parents to focus on where we are now—phases—instead of always preparing or pushing for the next steps.

Response from Indianapolis

I wish someone would've taught my parents the power of their words and how to do more than just keep us alive.

Response from Detroit

Disengaged from ministering to others so they could be there for me.

Responses from Austin

Encourage parents to not give further space as I aged.

They could have encouraged my parents to understand that I will fail.

Responses from Dallas

Someone could have told my parents to listen and be patient with me.

Understand that each child is different—different personalities and interests.

Someone to see me, and help my parents see me.

Someone could have told my parents two sentences is all we needed. "I love you" and "I'm proud of you." We felt the love, but we rarely heard it.

I wish my parents would have really seen me as a person outside of just being their child. Someone could have helped them know how to love and accept me where I was during the seasons of my life.

I have faced more trauma than I'd like to admit and just recently I had a breakthrough in my therapy that maybe I am not able to accept and feel the love of God that is talked about and promised so often because my parents couldn't and didn't know how to show me the love that I needed. I think if someone could have taught my parents how to love me through my trauma I might just feel the love that Christ offers a little bit deeper and find that I love myself. I also think if that person taught my parents a little bit about empathy and validation I would have been able to express what was happening and how I felt about it.

Section Four: Help Them Notice Me

It would have been nice to have someone tell my mom I was good enough the way I was without constantly judging me as a kid. —*Orange County*

Responses from Lancaster

If someone would have let my parents know that each child is different and unique, and the importance of listening instead of just telling, I would have had a more stable childhood.

I was very lonely growing up and my parents didn't care about my faith. I was the one to push my own growth and maybe it was that they didn't know how to relate to me. But no one showed them how to relate.

Responses from Orange County

It would have been nice to have someone tell my mom I was good enough the way I was without constantly judging me as a kid.

When I was younger it seemed like my youth pastor knew why I acted or thought the way I did and I feel like if my parents would have met with my youth pastor, they may have understood me a little better.

Encourage parents to listen to my growing sense of identity rather than forcing me to adopt identity structures they thought fit my personality.

Remind them that their kids need their attention and involvement just as much in junior high and high school as when they were younger.

Stopped telling them the teen years were the worst and to just "get through it."

One thing that would've helped my parents win at being better parents would have been for someone to explain that parenting isn't a competition. You don't "win" when your child gets better grades, or "lose" when your child is getting a third place medal and you're sitting next to the parents of the gold medalists. My parent's love seemed transactional; if I did well, I earned it, if I failed, it was taken away. But I think they were under immense pressure from other parents to prove I really was as good as they knew I could be.

Responses from Washinton D.C.

Celebrate my accomplishments rather than telling me I wasn't doing enough.

Encourage them to slow down and value their kids.

Responses from Orlando

Tell them to support me and give me the opportunity to try, even if I fail, instead of being so overprotective.

How to listen and connect better and to believe your kid if they haven't given you a reason not to.

Do not use church and youth group as a punishment tool for not doing well in school.

Section Four: Help Them Notice Me

I wish leaders could have told my parents I was a good kid. That I could be trusted.
—Orlando

Responses from Orlando continued

Listening and taking me seriously.

I wish leaders could have told my parents I was a good kid. That I could be trusted.

My mom would have loved help dealing with bullying. I was bullied often and in various ways. She was always the “turn the other cheek” type, but I could tell she wasn’t sure how to approach it. Perhaps a cohort or resources would have been helpful to her.

My parents would have benefited from knowing how to vet my friends.

Help them to understand that just because one kid seems to be doing okay, they still need you as much as the child with difficulty.

I wish someone would have told and modeled for my parents to not only allow your kids to fail. But to address the failure, and walk with me through my failure. Rather than remaining silent.

I was disciplined. But not disciplined. They never walked with me and talked about the hard things.

I know I was in sin, but their passiveness only taught me to live in shame, and not grow out of my hurt and pain.

I grew up in a white, middle-class home that was big on high expectations and having a “good standing” in the community. While I know my parents led that way out of their desire to be better parents and set me up for success, I have found that I have spent a lot of my adult life deconstructing that belief. The idea that you have to produce something in order to be enough, and that you have to do whatever it takes to be a good citizen and have people “like” you is difficult to live with. Resources to help parents recognize the reality of “enough” balanced with expectations along with how to teach their kids to live authentically and be real with others would be big.

Someone could have challenged my parents to think of the end in mind with their children . “Who do you want them to be one day? What truth do you want them to stand firm on in the future?” Someone that would have encouraged them to ask the tough questions. Had I experienced parents who weren’t afraid to ask the tough questions I wouldn’t have fallen into deception seeking my own answers. I needed healthy boundaries and they wanted to be my friend.

I wish someone could have helped my Dad see that Jesus is bigger than the box my Dad constructed for me. His image of me didn’t match the person God designed me to be.

Help my parents communicate that they were proud of me even when I failed to meet their expectations and even when I failed to meet my own expectations that I put on myself to prove myself to them.

I would have loved for someone to have prepared my parents for having adult children and building healthy relationships and boundaries after they left home.

I wish someone had shared with my parents that it is okay I’m a different person. We all believe in Jesus; it’s okay if my belief in Him looks different than theirs.

Section Five: Help Them Talk to Me

Shared faith experiences to help my parents lean into the vulnerability of faith conversations. In other words: practice. —Charlotte

Responses from Kansas City

Taught them how to study the Bible and have Bible conversations as a family.

Equip them to have awkward conversations better (i.e. sex.)

Parents miss the mark on many hot topics that turn their kids off to faith because, historically, a church that missed the mark told them to talk about it, but not how to talk about it.

If someone could have helped them have the hard conversations about sex, gender roles, adulthood, even the hard questions about Jesus. Guiding them to allow my siblings and I to ask questions instead of avoiding them.

Responses from Charlotte

Shared faith experiences to help my parents lean into the vulnerability of faith conversations. In other words: practice.

One thing someone could have done to help my parents win, would be to have shown my parents how to have open conversations about sexuality, porn, and why God sets certain parameters.

I wish my dad would have had better friends. Friends that helped him be more comfortable with everyday conversations. My Dad didn't know how to talk to me. So he was silent. His silence made me feel unimportant and insignificant.

Teaching parents that it is ok to communicate even when they do not know what to say or have the answers. And to talk about the hard subjects. To let their children know it's going to be ok if you fail.

Responses from Pittsburgh

I've never heard my mom apologize. She never understood that it was okay, as a parent, to be wrong sometimes. Caused a lot of hurt my sister and I still deal with.

I wish someone could have told my parents to be more open and honest with their feelings. I grew up never really knowing if my parents enjoyed us and were proud of us. I know they had expectations that we didn't always meet. I often felt like a disappointment to them. I wish someone could have helped them open up and have discussions.

Responses from Chicago

Help my parents learn how to allow us all to be more real and transparent. As a kid of the 70's we just were told to keep a stiff upper lip through the hard stuff.

Allow mistakes to be something that is discussed and not just reprimanded. My fear of my punishments prevented me from having honest conversations with my parents.

Section Five: Help Them Talk to Me

That not talking about issues does NOT make it go away. That we can act, that it's ok to lean into the mess. —*Chicago*

Responses from Chicago continued

Someone could've helped my parents be more transparent about their wisdom journey. To be honest with me. To value truth over appearance. I often pretended to be happy at social gatherings but I saw the truth behind closed doors.)

Mentorship for parents—I was raised Catholic, so much secrecy never discussed feelings or healthy conversations.

Teach them early on how to talk to me about my personal relationship and experience with God. While we were very active in church and open about our faith, I remember the first time my dad asked what God had been doing in my life. I was 19 and was so angry that they had never asked before I only answered, "I don't know." To this day, I regret my answer, but I vividly remember the anger at realizing that they had never asked. So, when I take my students on trips, I tell them to form a one-sentence answer to tell their parents about what God did in their life. I tell them I will tell their parents to ask because I so firmly believe this question matters.

I wish my parents could have been empowered and equipped to have open and honest conversations about "taboo" or difficult subjects instead of just bypassing, ignoring, and avoiding them. I think even having the permission for them to say, "I don't know, but let's find someone who can help," would have been good, too.

That not talking about issues does NOT make it go away. That we can act, that it's ok to lean into the mess.

To be more transparent about their struggles and generational curses.

Responses from Columbus

Teaching them how to have conversations about big issues: career, college, money, and future.

Encouraged open and honest conversation about how my siblings and I were doing over what we were doing.

Help parents help us communicate and manage conflict in a healthier way that preserves love, belonging, and identity.

It would have helped if my parents remembered to pause their busy lives to check in with me more than "did you get your homework done?" I would have appreciated conversations about their experience going through things, being real with emotions, life lessons, and so on.

Response from Seattle

Teach them how to engage and foster faith conversations between parents and kids. Both myself and my brother are in ministry for our full time jobs but we hardly talked about our faith at home.

Response from Indianapolis

Taught them to expose me to diversity and to think inclusively. Then coached them how to prioritize communicating and relating in ways that made them a safe place to come with mistakes, sin, difficult questions, doubts, etc.

Section Five: Help Them Talk to Me

That they would not have put so much pressure on sexual purity. It caused a lot of damage to me. —*Detroit*

Responses from Detroit

Have better tools to have hard conversations where we can disagree and we all know we still love each other.

Teach them how to ask pertinent questions and listen lovingly to their children.

That they would not have put so much pressure on sexual purity. It caused a lot of damage to me.

For someone to share with my parents that they can apologize and admit that they were wrong in situations. That it doesn't make them bad parents, but authentic ones. I struggle to this day with bitterness and hurt, wishing they could show that they are a human just like me.

If my parents had been resourced with answers for my brother and my questions in middle school about God and faith we wouldn't have sought those answers elsewhere.

I wish someone in church would have said to my parents to listen more to what me and my siblings were saying to them, and help us feel we could share our feelings.

I came from a broken marriage and my mom turned to God and volunteered with such a passion that was contagious for us as kids. We grew up loving to serve God, but at the same time, my mom is so fixed in her view of things that still today there are things she cannot see my way. Engaging in a discussion of it will not have a positive outcome, so there are so many things I just don't talk with her about, and sadly my kids won't, either. So I guess I'm saying that keeping the communication channels open is the most powerful tool that we have as parents.

Having someone come alongside my parents and explain how to have conversations with us past the age of six. It was like they didn't know how to hold conversations with us. Our dinner table was always silent. I didn't know how to navigate through middle or high school, despite being in a Christian school my whole life. I really believe if they had the tools to start those conversations, I would've felt I had a safe place to process those years.

My parents could have used more resources on how to teach us to set healthy boundaries. For example, instead of saying "don't have sex until marriage" they could have said "here is how to set boundaries in your relationships."

Responses from Austin

Give them three easy things to do each week to bring the faith conversation to our home.

I wish someone would have encouraged my single parent mom to ask deeper questions when I communicated about something I wrestled with, and then listen to answers I gave.

Taught them how to engage in conversation with us without inserting their opinions.

I wish someone would have been able to walk through how to have tough conversations with my parents. I was supported greatly and loved fiercely, but screaming for help on the inside about boundaries with relationships, struggling with emptiness, and the need to be wanted. If someone could have helped my parents ask me hard questions and ask how they could pray for me, what I was struggling with, how they can help me—I might have been able to get out of some really hard situations and we could have walked through healing together.

Section Five: Help Them Talk to Me

Someone could have shown them how to give me a safe place to question and wrestle with scripture. Not just agree that it's correct. —Dallas

Responses from Dallas

Talk more about the deep stuff.

I wish someone would have taught my parents how to have daily faith conversations with us without being weird about it—and not just around Easter or Christmas.

Teach them that big conversations don't have to be a "big thing". I was never comfortable having necessary conversations. I was just desperate for someone to just listen and let me be me and feel the things I needed to feel and not feel like I was wrong.

Someone could have shown them how to give me a safe place to question and wrestle with scripture. Not just agree that it's correct.

Responses from Lancaster

Explained to them how to talk about faith even if they do not live a life for God.

Maybe my parents would've been better parents, or the divorce would've been easier, if people who loved God taught my parents how to communicate a "why" to their kids.

Response from Orange County

A youth leader to reach out to help parents navigate talking about hard subjects.

Responses from Orlando

Tell them to explain the "why."

Being honest and open (age-appropriately) to trials and hard times as parents. For example, my dad was addicted to drugs, but the majority of my childhood, I had no idea. I just thought he was gone. Or work was more important than us kids.

Someone could have helped my parents win at being better parents by providing tools to help them engage in conversation during my teenage years.

My dad did a great job taking my brother and I on adventure trips that solidified our relationship. However, I could tell he struggled to figure out how to bring up tough topics and ask big questions at the right times. I'm sure he would have loved some help with this.

I grew up in a family setting where we didn't 'talk' or 'acknowledge' issues or challenges. Someone noticing, or having the insight or intuition to recognize that and find a way to start a conversation about it would have been huge—for me, my parents, family and so many others.

Section Five: Help Them Talk to Me

My church was the primary discipler and we didn't have conversations about faith at home though my parents were Christians. —*Orlando*

Responses from Orlando continued

My parents struggled with explaining the why behind what they believed, and why we did what we did as a family. It was just, "this is what we do." I think they needed leaders to help them understand, you don't lose control by engaging in conversation. I think it hinges on their insecurity with their own faith foundation. They needed to know you don't have to be a church staff member to handle faith conversations.

My dad was always working and was always gone for days at a time. So, my mom was forced to have excruciating conversations with an adolescent male and she flew blind a lot. She did her best but it was difficult. She needed coaching on how to have these conversations and encouragement on how she was doing.

My church was the primary discipler and we didn't have conversations about faith at home though my parents were Christians.

Equipped them to talk with their kids about life—all the stuff.

I think help with how to create safe conversations where I could challenge or discuss things without being shut down. I've always been willing to challenge things (I'm an enneagram 8.) and my father especially saw this as a challenge to his authority. When all I was doing was wanting him to see my perspective. I just wanted to be heard.

I wish our family had had more conversations about why church was important and why serving was important.

Section Six: Other

If my parents had constant good spiritual discipleship. —*Charlotte*

Responses from Charlotte

I wish church leaders hadn't given up on them just because they didn't show up on Sunday.

Teaching the parents that their kids don't just need to go to church, but they need to understand that they have gifts and they can be the church!

I needed someone to remind my parents to love Jesus first, so that love could then be poured into me. I was saved before my parents.

If my parents had constant good spiritual discipleship.

Share biblical truth without being preachy or hypocritical.

Responses from Pittsburgh

Given them a Godly example. Show them how to model reading scripture. Model how to pray together. Explain the importance of a family rooted in Christ.

Grabbed a hold of them when they were younger (figuratively speaking) and helped them develop their own faith and taught them how to parent their kids (before they had them) when it comes to faith.

My parents were never poured into or informed of the love of Jesus. So, in turn, they could not offer that to myself or my siblings.

Responses from Chicago

Just having another adult investing in me. I didn't have that until adulthood. My parents did their best, but I truly believe my confidence would have been established earlier in life had I had that.

Someone who could have given my parents resources to show me that the world and church is bigger than one perspective.

Responses from Columbus

I wish someone could have helped them see the value of faith, or just know God.

Raise them up to truly know Jesus and show them how important a relationship with Jesus is instead of living so strictly on religion. Some parents go wrong by pushing their religion on kids instead of teaching about a deep friendship with our Heavenly Father!

Section Six: Other

Apologize for church hurt. —*Dallas*

Responses from Columbus continued

If someone could do one thing to help my parents win it would be encouraging them to be a team. As well as telling my mom to invest in the lives of her kids (all five of us). My parents divorced when I was 16. My dad always cared for us but my mom is narcissistic and I've never truly felt loved by her. But I wish someone would have encouraged her that her kids were not the enemy. We needed her and she walked away. What my church did for me in the middle of my parents' divorce was give me a place to lead in children's ministry. They loved me. But they didn't seek out my siblings. And they were only there for me for a season.

Responses from Seattle

Low cost after school care.

Admit when they were wrong, hurt me, or someone else. Just want to talk and spend time with me, and not just have an agenda. Teach me, don't just do it for me. Even when it takes time and patience.

Response from Detroit

I'm the youngest of three raised in church and the only one still living for Jesus. Our church believed that our fellowship was the only way to do church and have a relationship with Jesus and be saved. Out of the best intentions and heart to protect us, my parents sheltered us from anything worldly that didn't agree with that system. I think if there was someone that had helped my parents filter the world through a biblical or gospel lens instead of eliminating it completely from our experience, my siblings may not be so turned off to church and Jesus.

Responses from Austin

I wish someone would have invited my dad to Church.

I had very much a white picket fence childhood. My parents are still married and celebrating their 60th anniversary. But I never saw them argue, fight, or disagree, and I never saw them makeup. I didn't know how to disagree in the context of a marriage because they never modeled that for me. Had they displayed this in a healthy way I would have likely had a higher degree of resilience earlier in my marriage and probably in my life.

My parents would have been better parents if someone would have disciplined them and taught them how to truly have a relationship with Christ. And the confidence and boldness to teach me.

Response from Dallas

Apologize for church hurt.

Section Six: Other

My parents could have benefitted from a church who truly pulled them in and helped them to live that out at home. —*Lancaster*

Responses from Lancaster

My parents could have benefited from a church who truly pulled them in and helped them to live that out at home.

All the programs available to children and their families. If it weren't for friends, we would have never known.

Fortunately (during the early 70s) my mother had established relationships with Sunday school and youth leaders that reinforced the need for God in my life.

Response from Orlando

I wish someone would have created an inviting space for my parents to attend church and want to attend church with me.