

11th Grade: Guide for Planning your Family Tree Dinner

Your influence lasts three to four generations.

That means you are a spiritual patriarch or matriarch all the way down to your great-great-grandchildren.

That means that what you do today as a parent matters. It also means that you have a responsibility to your teenager to help them understand where they come from.

The story of our family is the story of us. It is what we belong to, and it has a say in who we are. One of the best ways you can help your 11th grader discover their identity is to lead them to discover their family heritage.

Whether the story of your family is a page-turning novel or a comedy sketch or even if it reads like a police report, your teenager needs to hear the good, the bad, and the ugly of your family.

As parents in your home, you also develop the mission statement for your family. Does your teenager know the mission of your family? Do you know it? How does faith fit into that mission? What a great time to write the mission and story of your family and teach it to your 11th grader!

When your 11th grader is given the Family Interview Questions that your student ministry has provided, they will be sent out like a reporter from a newspaper. Their mission consists of learning the heart of their family members and sharing their story with the rest of the family.

Here are some tips to help you plan a wonderful Family Tree Dinner with your family:

Download the "Family Interview Questions" resource and assign your 11th grader the task of contacting and interviewing at least three family members outside of the immediate family. They will need to write down the answers so they can share them during the Family Tree Dinner.

Prior to the Family Tree Dinner, sit down with your 11th grader and let them share with you what they learned in their family member interviews. Help them "edit" their interviews so that they can be shared publicly in front of other family members. They may have learned some things that would not be healthy to share in that environment.

During the time prior to the Family Tree Dinner, when it is just you and your teenager, you can discuss with them any negative things they might have discovered. You also might take advantage of this time to talk to them about "family secrets" or stuff from the past that you have been waiting for them to be old enough

to understand before you shared the information with them. That is not fun, but it is a part of them learning the story of their family.

Invite family members to join you for this dinner, where your 11th grader can share what they have learned in the interviews with family members.

If you have family members that live out of town, consider using videoconference technology or, at least, let them listen via speaker phone. Just be sure to give them the opportunity to be a part of the gathering, if they would like.

Another idea for out-of-town family members is to record the event with a video camera and send a copy of it to them.

Finally, invite out-of-town family members to write a note that can be read at the dinner, so that they can participate in sharing with your teenager the story of their family tree.

You can begin the Family Tree Dinner by giving your very own “State of the Family Address,” where you remind your family of who they are and what their mission is. If you aren’t comfortable speaking in front of people, just write it down and then read it out loud.

Another element to the evening is to let your 11th grader share the results of their family interviews.

Please work with your teenager to ensure that what they share at the Family Tree Dinner is positive and that they avoid sharing embarrassing information that they have learned.

After your teenager shares what they learned in the interviews, you can open the floor to other family members to share their own memories, encourage your 11th grader, or simply share their heart. This has the potential to be a powerful moment in the life of your family and in the life of your 11th grader.

Take time to present to your 11th grader a family heirloom. This may be something significant that was passed down to you from your ancestors. However, if you do not have a family heirloom that was given to you, then you have a great opportunity to start this tradition in your family.

If you are looking for ideas for a family heirloom to pass down, it might help to answer these questions: What do I own that has special meaning to me? What can I give that is durable enough to last for many years? What would be a great symbol for the mission of our family? What symbol can I give that would demonstrate my family’s emphasis on faith? What budget do I have for a family heirloom?

You might want to go to your older family members and ask them for ideas concerning the family heirloom. They might surprise you with something that you didn’t even know existed.

Consider closing the Family Tree Dinner with a prayer time.