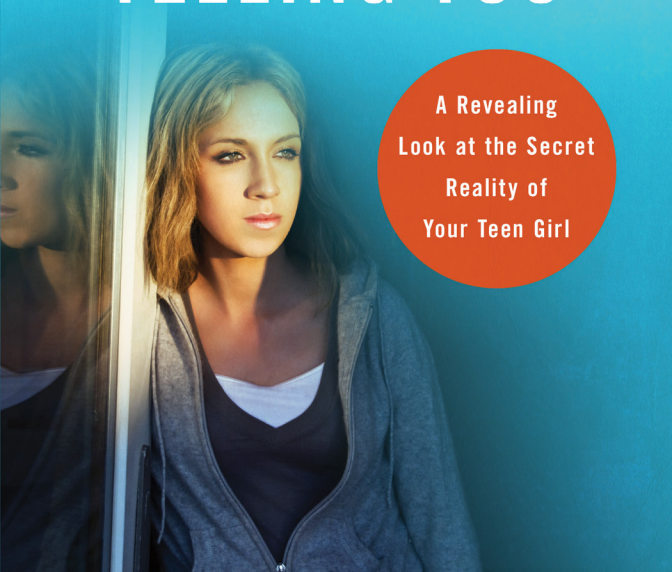


Susie Shellenberger and Kathy Gowler

WHAT YOUR DAUGHTER ISN'T TELLING YOU



A Revealing
Look at the Secret
Reality of
Your Teen Girl

What Your Daughter *Isn't* Telling You



**Expert Insight
Into the World of
Teen Girls**

Susie Shellenberger
& Kathy Gowler



BETHANYHOUSE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

What Your Daughter Isn't Telling You
Copyright © 2007
Susie Shellenberger and Kathy Gowler

Cover design by Susan Browne Design

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations identified NIV are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified TLB are from *The Living Bible* © 1971 owned by assignment by Illinois Regional Bank N.A. (as trustee). Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Printed in the United States of America

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is comprised of 30% post-consumer waste.



Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shellenberger, Susie

What your daughter isn't telling you : expert insight into the world of teen girls /
Susie Shellenberger & Kathy Gowler.

p. cm.

Summary: "Taken from real-life questions submitted by teen girls and by moms, this book guides mothers through their daughters' tough teen years"—Provided by publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7642-0375-6 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-7642-0375-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Mothers and daughters—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Teenage girls—Religious life. 3. Daughters—Religious life. I. Gowler, Kathy. II. Title.

BV4529.18.S533 2007

248.8'45—dc22

2007023751

To my precious little granddaughter

Braelyn

—you are a joy and a blessing to our family.
I look forward to pouring into your life
as you grow older, and I thank God
for the gift of your life.

—Kathy

SUSIE SHELLENBERGER is the founding editor of *Brio* magazine for teen girls, published by Focus on the Family. A former high school teacher and youth pastor, she is in demand as an international speaker and has traveled to every continent in the world.

KATHY GOWLER and her husband, Jeff, have two grown children and live in Cascade, Colorado. Kathy serves as events coordinator for teen ministries at Focus on the Family and has traveled around the world with Susie.

<i>Introduction</i>	9
1. Why Girls Need Moms.....	13
2. “Why Won’t She Talk to Me?”	19
3. Actions Speak Louder Than Words— What Her Silence May Really Mean	27
4. What She Wants You to Know—“I Have Questions I Don’t Know How to Ask You”	43
5. Sex and Dating	53
6. Pornography	69
7. Family Issues.....	77
8. “About Dad . . .”	85
9. “Please Trust Me”	95
10. Cutting and Eating Disorders	105
11. Drinking and Other Self-Destructive Behaviors.....	117
12. What Moms Are Afraid Of	129
13. About God and Stuff	141
14. Relating to Your Teen Stepdaughter or Adopted Daughter	153

15. “You’re Eighteen . . . So What?”	159
16. You Said . . . She Heard	165
Appendix A. Self-Destructing: A Teen’s Battle With Cutting	173
Appendix B. Journey Into Darkness: A Personal Struggle With an Eating Disorder	179



Introduction

We met Augie on a late summer day. Only a few weeks old, he had learned to navigate the pasture, wandering a good distance from his parents and gaining confidence daily in the big new world that lay before him.

We were doing a photo shoot for a girls' magazine, and it required a young pygmy goat. Augie was perfect. Adorable, friendly—as cuddly as a pygmy goat can be—and he instantly captured our hearts.

As his owner walked toward him calling his name, this wobbly little four-footed guy ran eagerly to follow the voice he'd come to know as friendly—the one who fed and cared for all the goats and horses in the pasture.

We were captivated.

His tiny bleating was an obvious response to the voice he knew. As he ran across the field to meet us, his mother continued grazing, oblivious to us or where her youngster was headed. The grass was tall and sweet. She too knew the voice that was calling her young one away and felt secure.

It didn't take long for Augie to notice that his master wasn't alone—there were six more of us in the pasture that day.

Although he was confident in his newfound independence around his owner, he began to get jittery among the strangers. He allowed us to pet and cuddle him, but before long he began to get nervous and squirmy.

It was obvious he was scared, and he began crying out for his safety net, his *mama*.

What happened next was precious.

Although she was enjoying the delicious grass and peaceful grazing, the instant that mother goat heard her baby bleating, her head popped up and she came *running* in our direction, straight toward her young one calling out for her.

She didn't take time to analyze the situation for danger; she just came running. Her mother-instinct told her Augie needed her *now*, and she was headed to his rescue.

What a beautiful realization that was for me. Even animals need their mamas! And what's more beautiful, our Creator gave animal mothers the instinct to care for their young—to protect them and know the difference between a playful cry and one that pleads, "Help! Mama, I need you!"

As Daisy ran toward her young one that day, we found it interesting that Augie didn't run right to her; it was enough for him to know she was there. He wasn't in danger—just got spooked and needed the reassurance that his mother, his source of protection, was nearby.

Our experience in the pasture that August afternoon reminded me once again of the importance of mothers. Our children depend on us; *need* us.

They count on us to teach, protect, and look after their well-being in a very big, frightening world.

Obviously we can't carry our daughters around with us forever or be with them every minute of every day. They need to learn to walk and talk and navigate the world on their own.

We wouldn't *want* them tethered to us for life. The natural progression of letting go begins the day we leave them with their first baby-sitter.

It's the way it must be—otherwise they'd be crippled for life, depending on us for their every need. Our children must learn to gradually move away from us to function on their own.

But they need to be prepared for that day.

That's what parents are for.

Reality

In a perfect world, mothers would have nothing more on their minds than what's going on with their children. The truth is, today's culture has many moms working outside the home, running carpools, chairing committees—juggling far more than the hours in a day can handle.

By the end of a busy day, it's all they can do to put dinner on the table, throw in a load of laundry, and make sure homework is done.

Through our CLOSER events and working with moms and teen girls around the world, we get more than a thousand emails and letters every month from teen girls desperate to talk to someone about what's on their minds.

They're asking us questions they feel uncomfortable asking their moms, but we wonder, *Why aren't they asking their moms?*

Sometimes the questions are as simple as "What's a training bra?" or "How do I use a tampon?" or "If I use a tampon, will I still be a virgin?"

We're grateful to be in a position of trust where teen girls feel they *can* ask us anything and receive an honest answer.

But wouldn't it be great if these girls could take their most intimate questions to the ones who love them more than anyone else in the world—their mothers?

Why Don't They?

Many girls don't think they can talk to their moms about certain issues. They're afraid they'll be laughed at, lectured, or belittled for their curiosity, so they go to someone else for the answers they're looking for.

What follows in this book are real questions and comments from teen girls who felt they couldn't go to their moms for whatever reason. Instead they chose to ask us—the people behind the pages of a magazine—whom they've come to know as women who will give them the truth—straight up.

There's no beating around the bush.

They write to us because they feel *safe* writing to us.

No question is too silly or embarrassing.

No one's going to laugh at them.

They know they'll get the truth—plain and simple—wrapped in love.

If you have a teen daughter, chances are good she's had many of these same questions. Maybe she asked you, maybe she asked a friend, or maybe she even wrote to us.

Whatever the case, these are questions teen girls are asking, things they're dying to talk about with someone they can trust.

These are the things your daughter isn't telling you.



Chapter 1

Why Girls Need Moms

God made men and women different on purpose. Both are essential to a healthy family. He created the male to be the protector and provider for the family. Man was created to process his decisions logically.

The female—whom God designed to bear children—is emotionally wired.

She's the “heart” of the home.

The nurturer.

The caretaker.

Mothers give life and are *life-giving* to their children.

They're the ones who wake up in the middle of the night to check on a fevered child; every whine or whimper penetrates the deepest sleep.

They're created with antennae that flash at the first sign of danger or pain in their children's lives—by God's design.

The same-sex parent is the most influential person in a child's life. Although mothers are the first to bond with their

children even before birth, little boys quickly gravitate to their fathers, imitating and striving to be like them.

Little girls, on the other hand, emulate their mommies—cuddling and singing to their baby dolls because that's what mommy does.

Mommy's the one who models to her daughter what it means to be female. Her daughter learns from her how to love and nurture a family, how to respect her husband and care for her home, how to view her role in society and find her God-given purpose. Without these two very different role models to bring balance in the home, children can easily become confused about gender issues and their own sexuality. By *God's design*, they were created male and female, both essential to raising healthy, well-established children.

Because this book is written for mothers and daughters, our focus will be on the importance of the role moms have in the lives of their daughters, particularly teen daughters.

The mother-daughter relationship can be wonderfully close *and* full of tension and high emotion. You love each other fiercely, but there are also days you just may not like each other much.

Guess what—that's *normal*! You're both wired to be emotional and verbal creatures! Throw into the mix the raging hormones of adolescent girls and middle-aged moms, and you have the makings for one emotionally charged altercation after another.

Mothers often get blamed for any and every malfunction in their children's lives. Why is that? If you don't adjust socially, it's your mother's fault. She must have secluded you at a young age, and you didn't learn how to socialize with your peers.

If you're prone to getting into trouble for misbehaving in class or sassing adults, your mother must not have trained and disciplined you to behave properly.

Mothers play a critical role in the emotional and psychological development of their children. Early bonding with his or her mother, or lack of it, has a direct impact on a child's life and emotional stability. It's our relationships with our mothers—the primary caretakers in those early years of our lives—that largely determine our self-worth and how we see ourselves in relation to others as we mature.

When everyone else in the world lets us down, we all need *someone* to be there for us, cheering us on and picking us up when we fall; someone we can go to with our problems and questions who will love us no matter what. Wouldn't it be great if that person was our mom?

God Handpicked the Mother of His Son

So important is the role of motherhood that God handpicked the woman who would give birth to and raise His own Son. Scripture tells us Mary was favored not for her physical beauty or IQ, but because she was a willing servant, available to her Lord. (See Luke 1:26–38.)

She was selected by God because of her heart, her strength, and her desire to serve Him.

God knew she would have to be a special woman—someone able to endure the rumors and raised eyebrows for being a pregnant unwed teen.

He knew she needed to be strong enough to endure all that Jesus would face during His short lifetime.

He knew she would have to trust Him with her child's future, not knowing where that would lead.

She'd have to be tender enough to sing lullabies to the King of Kings—dry His tears and bandage His scraped knees—yet be strong enough to watch Him be tortured and die simply for

who He was, the Messiah. Yes, God the Father knew exactly what kind of mother His Son needed to teach Him about life and prepare Him for death. He would be different from her other children, yet He needed to be treated equal to them. It would take a special woman indeed.

God also chose a special woman to raise your daughter. He gave her just the mother she would need—you.

Back to the Basics

It's important now and then to take a good look at our lives and evaluate how we're doing with raising our children. Hectic schedules may need to be adjusted, priorities realigned, and our role of caretaker and nurturer put back in its proper place on the totem pole of our lives.

We all know how important it is for young children to be with their mothers during the formative years. The truth is, that need doesn't change as they get older. In fact, teenagers need their moms in their lives perhaps more now than ever.

They're being bombarded with cultural issues and peer pressure that often we parents aren't even aware of. They live in a world far different than the one you experienced during your teen years.

They're confused about many things—from gender issues to what's expected of them by parents, teachers, and friends. They have questions they need honest answers to but may not know who to ask.

Whom can I trust?

What if my teacher's gay?

Will I be safe at school today?

Will terrorists destroy my world?

What if I'm date-raped?

Will I even reach adulthood?

What do I do about my friend who's suicidal?

Teen girls today deal with far different issues and bigger fears than their parents did growing up. Now, more than ever, our girls need someone they can go to with their questions without being laughed at, shrugged off, or ignored. Many tell us they have no one with whom they can talk about the things that concern them.

Ironically, this is the time they stop talking about their problems and close up to the adults in their lives, feeling no one cares or would understand anyway.

Young girls who used to tell their mothers everything now shut themselves up in their rooms, no longer talking about what's on their minds.

What happened to stop the communication that once flowed so freely?

Why are so many teen girls writing to virtual strangers about their most personal thoughts and feelings instead of talking to their mothers?

Here's what they're telling us about that. . . .

☒ I feel as though my whole life is falling apart. I can't make my mom happy. Everything I do only makes her mad. I try to apologize, but she doesn't take me seriously. All I want to do is cry and cry and cry.

☒ I want to get closer to my mom, but I don't have much money. Got any ideas that don't cost a lot?

☒ I'm from a big family, so I don't get much alone time with my mom. I want us to be really close, but how can we make that happen with so many others in the house? I admit, I haven't

always been obedient, but I want things to change. I want us to be close.

✉ Whenever I try to talk with Mom or Dad about stuff in my life, they go wacko. I want to be able to share my problems with them, but I need them to stay calm when I tell them things. Because of the way they react to me, it's just much easier not to talk with them at all. Can you help me?



Chapter 2

“Why Won’t She Talk to Me?”

Many moms feel as though their teen daughters are shutting them out, and they don’t understand why. The little girl who used to tell her everything is now quiet and distant. The relationship that used to be close is now strained. What happened?

Sometimes it’s just a normal stage teen girls go through—separating themselves from their mothers to find their own identities. That’s completely normal. They want a measure of privacy and sometimes just need to sort things out for themselves.

Other times, though, the lines of communication have been broken and the teen daughter simply gives up and stops talking to her mom about personal things.

Some tension between a daughter and her mother as she transitions from girlhood to womanhood is inevitable. Hormones rage and emotions run high.

What's the difference between normal mom-daughter relational stress and a complete breakdown in communication? What makes a teen girl suddenly stop talking to her mom?

We'll let some of them tell you. . . .

☒ Okay, here's the deal: My mom and I never see eye-to-eye on anything. I'd love to talk with her about things — you know, questions I have, stuff I'm struggling with, relationships. I really want her to understand where I'm coming from. And I want to understand her point of view; I really do! I just long for a real mom-daughter relationship like some of my friends have. I can't imagine how cool it would be to feel close to my mom. Can you tell me how to get that?

☒ I'm the oldest in my family, and I'm twelve. My mom and I used to spend all kinds of time together — before my third sister was born. We read together, and we'd just sit on the couch and snuggle and talk. But we don't do that anymore. I felt so special when she spent alone time with me. Now I don't feel loved at all. I want us to get back to where we used to be. Is it possible?

☒ I wasn't going to tell my mom what was bothering me, because I knew how hurt she'd be. But she knew something was up. For an entire month, she kept putting pressure on me to open up with her. I admitted I was afraid she'd no longer love me when she found out what I'm dealing with. She laughed and said that wasn't possible.

So I told her.

I'm a lesbian and I have a girlfriend.

Just as I thought, she started crying. Now I wish I'd never told her the truth. She's very distant with me. We used to be so tight. I miss the mom I used to have. I want our closeness back, but I don't know what to do.

“Why Won't She Talk to Me?”

☒ Ugh! I'm so angry at my mom and dad. They've planned out my entire life — even which college I'll attend. This is my life, and they're not even asking what I think!

☒ Whenever I start to open up with my mom, I get so nervous and chicken out. I've lied, and I want to come clean with her about it. I also need to tell her about my boyfriend. But we just can't communicate. How can I change things between us?

☒ I'm TIRED. I'm tired of my sister, my mom, and life in general. Sigh. Mom doesn't listen to me when I try to talk with her. I'll start, but she changes the subject to herself. Because of that, I've just stopped talking with her. Yeah, this is selfish, but I need my mom to listen to ME and hear MY problems!

☒ I love my boyfriend; I really do. And whenever my mom gets mad at me, she threatens to break us up. So that tells me I shouldn't talk with her. Why does she use him against me to get me to do what she wants? I feel manipulated.

I also think I'm depressed. I'm borderline anorexic. I eat in front of my folks, but I never eat very much. They read my diary, so they found out I'm struggling with anorexia . . . and again, they threatened to break up my boyfriend and me if I don't start eating more.

I wish so badly I had someone to talk to! After my last fight with Mom, I started cutting myself. I feel so alone.

These precious girls have two things in common: they feel empty and lonely in their relationships with their moms, and they want better relationships but feel helpless and don't know how to fix it.

Lonely is a dangerous place for a teen girl to be, regardless of the reasons why.

If she feels she can't talk to her mom about what she's feeling without being laughed at or ignored, she'll find someone

else to talk to—or more frightening, another way to deal with her pain.

For some it becomes an eating disorder—when the rest of her life seems out of her control, she controls the only thing she can: what she does or doesn't put into her body.

Others turn to Internet relationships and find strangers who show interest in them and don't judge them. There's always someone online available to listen, comfort, and make a lonely girl feel loved.

Too many lonely teen girls will give themselves to the first boy who looks their way, simply because they long to feel cared for and accepted.

We're not saying that every girl who gets involved in these kinds of behaviors does it because of her mom. There are many godly women who are heartbroken and pray daily for their daughters who may be involved in a harmful relationship or behavior; there can be a multitude of reasons for a young girl to make unhealthy choices.

Take note! If you're turning a deaf or critical ear when your daughter is trying to talk to you, she may easily feel rejected and look elsewhere for the comfort she's seeking. Teen girls are in an emotional, turbulent time of life. All too often it's easy for adults to simply shrug off what to a teen is a heartbreaking, life-or-death situation. They desperately need someone to listen to their sometimes not-so-obvious cries for attention.

✉ I love my mom to pieces, but it's really tough to talk about girl things with her. I've tried asking her advice about makeup and dating, but she just looks at me like it's not important. It hurts when she laughs at my questions. I'd give anything in the world to have someone in my life who could give me good advice and who would just love me in spite of the fact that I have so many questions.

✉ I'm the only girl in my family, and I'm also the oldest child. It seems my mom and I can't get along anymore. Somehow we always end up in a fight. I've tried to get advice from my dad, but he won't even listen to me.

So I started writing notes to my mom. I've even apologized to her. But when I tell her I love her, she just says, “Yeah,” and then walks away. I don't know what else to do!

What Kind of Mom Are You?

In the busyness of life, you may think you're in tune with your daughter, but are you really? It may surprise you to discover that from her perspective you don't have a clue about what's going on in her life.

How can you tell if you're doing a good enough job of being there for her? Start by asking yourself these questions:

When your daughter talks to you, do you really listen, or are you distracted?

God gave moms the amazing ability to do ten things at once. You can be cooking dinner, feeding the dog, ironing a blouse, and making a mental grocery list all at the same time your daughter is telling you about her most horrible day at school.

Make a point to stop what you're doing and look her in the eye when she's talking to you. Let her see that you are really listening to her. Give her your full attention. If you appear distracted she'll feel she might as well be talking to a tree. Tune in to her when she talks to you—let her know that what matters to her is important to you.

Can your daughter trust you?

☒ Know why I don't talk to my mom anymore? She goes right to her church friends and tells them everything I've told her!

Mom, your daughter needs a safe place to share her heart. You're blessed if she feels comfortable doing that with you. If that trust is broken, it can sometimes be irreparable. It's sacred and worth protecting.

You see, it takes more than just *saying* she can tell you anything. You also need to *prove* to your daughter that you *are* a safe place to share her innermost feelings. If you've ever blown it in this area, you know it can take months to rebuild that trust.

Vulnerable young girls will quickly clam up if they find their private talks haven't been kept private. Be careful not to betray her confidence when she tells you something personal.

Remember when you were her age? It's not easy for young girls to talk about intimate things with their parents, and they can be easily embarrassed. Take extreme caution to protect her confidentiality. It will either encourage your daughter to be more open with you, or it will slam the door of communication shut.

How are you doing?

Take a moment to reflect on the level of communication you have with your daughter. Maybe it's not all her fault if there's stress between you. Be honest.

- *I encourage my daughter to bring her questions to me, and she knows I'll give her honest answers.*
_____ True _____ False

“Why Won't She Talk to Me?”

- *My daughter knows she can trust me and is comfortable sharing personal things with me.*
_____ True _____ False
- *This is a weak area for me. I sometimes share with others things she's told me in confidence.*
_____ True _____ False
- *We don't keep secrets in our family. She should know that anything she tells me I'll tell her dad.*
_____ True _____ False

Probably the best way to find out how you're doing in the area of trustworthiness is to ask your daughter! And when you do, encourage her honesty. She'll let you know if you're a safe place for her.

Tell Her You're There for Her

To develop or maintain open communication with your daughter:

- Assure her that *no* question is too embarrassing, off-limits, or dirty. She needs *someone* whom she can ask her questions to and receive honest answers. Let her know you're there for her and want to be that person.
- Don't assume she knows you invite her questions if you haven't told her so. Make it clear that she can come to you with anything at any time.
- Make sure she knows that no matter who else lets her down or doesn't seem to care, you are always there for her—that she can always come to you for help, guidance, or just a lap to lay her head on and cry if she needs to.

You are your daughter's only mother—she needs you to be that person in her life.

Which describes you?

A. My daughter knows I'm her biggest cheerleader and am always there for her.

B. I want to be an approachable mother and need to make some changes to be sure my daughter knows I'm available for her.

C. I'm already too busy and don't have time to baby her. She's a teenager and should be more responsible for herself and solving her own problems.

It's easy to assume our daughters know things we haven't really told them. Make sure your daughter knows beyond all doubt that you're there for her. If you aren't comfortable saying it verbally, write her a letter and leave it on her pillow, or send her an email telling her how you feel.

Again, the more you let her know that you care about what she's going through, the easier it will be for her to open up and talk to you. It may be awkward at first, but it will get easier, and the payoff will be worth all the effort!