

# Forging a Strong Mother-Daughter Bond

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Beyond Manipulation and Control

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Carla<sup>1</sup> stared at the caller ID, though she already knew who was calling. It was her mother . . . again. She wanted Carla and her family to travel home for the holidays. But Carla and her husband had decided to stay home this year, and she knew her mother would not accept her refusal without protest. Her stomach turned flip-flops as she answered the phone. Once more Carla tried to explain to her mother why she and her husband Bill thought it best to stay home this Christmas: The kids were getting older and wanted to do things over the holidays with friends. She and Bill wanted to start some of their own family traditions. Plus, it was a long drive, and they were both exhausted from work. It was no use; Carla felt like she was speaking to the wall.

“It just wouldn’t be the same without you and the grandchildren here with us,” Carla’s mother sighed. “You just have to come home. I won’t hear anymore about it.” This wasn’t the first time her mom cranked up the pressure to push Carla to give in. Carla remembered dreading her own wedding. All her ideas had to take a backseat to what Mom thought best—or there was a price to pay. Carla also regretted not attending the college of her choice because her mother felt it was too far from home. While she was growing up, Mom always demanded—and got—what she wanted.

Carla started feeling furious—both at herself for always giving in and at her mother for not freeing her to be her own person. But her fury was quickly masked over by guilt and anxiety. Maybe she was being selfish. She wouldn’t always have her parents with her, and maybe her mother was right; she and Bill should

put them first. Carla loved her mother and father and wanted to be a good daughter. She was a Christian and wanted to obey God by honoring her parents.

But did that mean she had no choices? Does being a good Christian mean she must always go along with whatever her mom wants or demands in order to honor her, keep the peace, or have a good relationship with her? Carla wanted a close relationship with her mom, but she feared that they could only be close if Carla did exactly what her mom wanted. Was there another way?

It's not just daughters who don't know how to build an honest, close relationship with their moms; moms struggle with their daughters too. Lydia loves her family and wants to make them happy. During the years her daughter Kim was growing up, Lydia gave and gave, never looking for anything in return. She thought that was God's way. Now that her daughter is grown, she's beginning to feel taken advantage of. For example, Kim accepted a full-time job, assuming Lydia would babysit her three children. Lydia didn't feel like she could say no, even though she had already told Kim how excited she was to finally have the chance to return to college. To top it off, her husband Steve and Kim both forgot her fiftieth birthday. When she mentioned how hurt she felt, they just laughed and made lame apologies.

Lydia was beginning to realize that her family wasn't as close as she had thought. She saw that the more she gave, the more Steve and Kim expected, with little concern for her. Although Lydia didn't intend this, her actions allowed her family to become more and more self-centered, self-absorbed, and selfish. Lydia didn't