

Parenting Teenagers

This is a transitional time. Your child is changing and we need to change the way we parent. We don't need to be the perfect parent (they don't exist). We just need to be 'good enough'.

REMEMBER

- **It's not personal**
 - **It will pass**
 - **Be patient**
 - **Keep the end in mind. This is just a temporary phase.**
- They will grow up to be responsible citizens,. if guided, supported and nurtured**

Teenage Brain Development

Hormones and puberty affect moods and the ability of your teen to manage their emotions. Also, the brain is going through huge changes. Around the ages of 11 in girls and 12 in boys,

Part of the brain called the frontal cortex is going through a growth spurt producing millions of extra neurons. The connections get confused for a while. This is rather like what happens around the age of 2, and produces similar behaviours, so teenagers often act like two year olds, with emotions all over the place.

They are unable to control their tempers and to make sound judgements. They cannot help being unreasonable!

They are very impulsive, and unable to predict what will happen or to think ahead.

Teen Self Esteem and Self Image

Teens can come across as arrogant, egotistical, selfish and full of themselves. They can put you down and make you feel small, so it is difficult to imagine that they have low self esteem, but most teenagers do. They are in between being an adult and a child, so they have a drive to become independent, but don't have the means, or the experience to do so. They need you but resent needing you.

They don't know who they are yet. They are trying to find an identity. They want to be seen as 'cool', and influences outside the family are becoming stronger. It becomes extremely important for them to be accepted into a group, and if they are not in, they are outside the group, which is not a good place to be. They feel huge peer pressure from their friends and school mates. They begin to push the boundaries at home, and become critical of their own family life. This is normal!

Reconnect. Sometimes the place to start is to rebuild a few bridges. Have some **fun family time together**, days out, and take the pressure off. Special time together can build trust and start rebuilding bonds that have broken down. It's a good place to start building a respectful relationship between parents and teens. Family holidays and trips out are very important times to create family traditions and make teens feel they belong.

Keep them busy. Help them develop interests in the things they enjoy doing, things they feel they are good at, activities that can give them an identity, and a social group with similar interests to them. Encourage, praise and support them in their interest. This will give them SELF-WORTH. High self esteem will give them resilience, to withstand peer pressure. Sometimes they can feel they are failing at everything. They need to feel good at something.

Notice all the good stuff they do, and comment on it. PRAISE IS MAGIC. Praise boosts their self esteem, and 'What you pay attention to, you get more of' (even in teenagers!) They may not know how to take it at first. It can look like it bounces off them, but in fact it does go in. Sometimes talking positively about them to someone else, in their earshot is a way of it filtering in.

Praise them for being who they are, not just for doing stuff. Teens need to feel valued and loved even if they believe they are unlovable.

Love Language

They need to know they are valued and loved by their family. Think about how you communicate this. Each teen appreciates a different "love language"

- Time (1 to 1)
- Words (spoken, written, texted, facebooked?)
- Touch
- Presents, small gifts - things that show you think about them when you are not with them.
- Actions

Which one meets their needs best?

Avoid comparing them with siblings or friends. This can have a negative effect on their self esteem, as they may feel they can never be as good.

Have appropriate expectations. Are you expecting too much? Are you not giving them enough responsibility? Could you trust them more?

Limits and Boundaries

Pick your battles

Say NO to things that really matter. **Then stick to the rule.** These rules are 'None Negotiables'

Say YES to everything else!

Be Consistent. Inconsistency leads to confusion, stress and battles of wills.

It is important to have limits and boundaries and teens will test you to see where they are. Be clear on what they are and why they are there, Rules have to be seen to be fair, and necessary, or they will be questioned ('Because I said so', won't wash now!).

Involve your teen in decision making. You will have more chance of him following rules that he has had an input in.

Negotiating

When a problem occurs, and you can't agree, rather than ending up with a stale mate where you are at logger heads, try negotiating. This is the beginning of diplomacy. Here are some steps for negotiating successfully.

1. Work out that there is a difference of opinion.
2. Invite the other person to give their point of view.
3. Reflect the other person's view back to make sure you have really understood it.
4. Give your point of view
5. Ask the other person to reflect back your point of view, to make sure they have understood it.
6. Offer a compromise that takes both views into account.
7. If your compromise isn't acceptable, invite the other person to suggest one.
8. Continue to negotiate until a compromise is agreed

Ignoring

Ignoring minor attention-seeking behaviour is best ignored, unless it is dangerous or harmful to people or property.

WHAT WE PAY ATTENTION TO, WE GET MORE OF

Use Choices and Consequences

Gradually allow your teen more choice over decisions as they become more capable of taking on responsibility. Point out the choices and the consequences of their actions. Allow them to learn from their own mistakes (within a safe environment).

Change your parenting style from Controller to Consultant

Control

When people feel out of control they feel stressed and this is what causes a lot of conflict between parents and teens. We feel we are losing control, and they feel they are being controlled so they try to take more control back. If we act as consultant and allow them to see the choices available, quite often they make the right choice for themselves.

Dealing with Anger and difficult emotions

Try not to meet anger with anger.

It is always best not to engage in heated conversations with an angry teen. If you are at logger heads, bite your tongue. Avoid criticising, and hurtful put-downs, This will only make matters worse.

If emotions are high, **Press the 'PAUSE' button.** Walk out of the room – count to ten.

Model how to deal with anger

Allow them to verbalise anger and show them how to use I statements

Model how to take a time-out to calm down.

Use Empathy to show you understand their frustration. (This does not mean giving in to their requests or demands)

Apologise if you get it wrong sometimes. This shows respect and models to them how to apologise.

Communication

- Get on their wave length – show an interest in their world
- Listen – Use reflective listening
- Empathise – think about the emotions behind the behaviour
- Use 'I statements' rather than blaming 'YOU statements', when you need to express your feelings!
- Allow them a point of view and agree to disagree sometimes
- Problem solve and Negotiate
- Find good times to talk – at the dinner table – in the car
- Speak to them like young adults
- Speak WITH them not AT them.

**CONNECT, COMMUNICATE, CONSULT, CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES,
CREATE FAMILY TRADITIONS, CELEBRATE,**