



Parenting

'Tweens and Teens

So, your child has finally hit puberty and you're wondering who is this person and what did they do with my child. When just asking, "how are you?" is seemingly too personal and then realizing that the child who used to ask you all sorts of questions now scoffs at your opinions, dismisses your suggestions, seems to make the simplest conversation an argument and is embarrassed to be seen with you in public. But, then out of the blue, will call and tell you he loves you or wants to talk about something really important – NOW!

Welcome to the world of life with a teenager. Your child is now trying to growing up and away. He is testing limits and experimenting with separating from you. During this period of time your child will essentially be trying to "become their own person." This phase can often be painful, annoying and confusing – for everybody. This push-pull cycle will repeat itself many times during their teenage years. Your teenager will seemingly push you away when he feels able to cope on his own but run back when things get too scary. Eventually they will be able to shed their dependency as their confidence increases and they prove to themselves, and you, the parents, that they can make their own decisions and handle responsibility.

Some of the problems that teenagers incur revolve around the fact that their ability to reason, plan, and control themselves is still developing. As a result, when there is a choice or battle between the reasoning side of the brain and the side of the brain that controls emotions – the emotions usually win out. But, there are several things parents can do to help their teenager develop and evolve into responsible and caring adults:

- 1) **Don't take it personally.** This is not a personal assault against you or your parenting skills. Your child is just trying to figure out who he is without you and is in the process shifting their loyalties to their peers.
- 2) **Stay cool.** Behind the rebellion and bravado are a million insecurities. But, never compromise your family values in order to maintain peace. Let your child know when they have crossed the line. Walk away, and calm yourself if necessary, then go back, re-engage, and have a reasonable conversation with your teenager.
- 3) **Be flexible.** This age still needs the security of structure, rules and limits. But, be flexible. There are more extracurricular activities in your child's

life now, and dinner together every night may not be realistic. But, a fun, family activity every week will help to maintain needed contact, continuity and communication. Laughter can really be the best medicine.

- 4) **Value your child's opinion.** Teenagers are very sensitive to your opinion and attitude toward them. Solicit their ideas regularly. This tells him that you value his opinions and judgment as well as take his concerns seriously. Those fights are not about when and if he did his homework but do you trust him to manage his own responsibilities. Peer pressure to smoke, drink, engage in sexual activity or do drugs are part of their daily life. Talk through scenarios about the choices they will be faced with. This will help him to get in the habit of thinking through risks and encourage him to be accountable for his actions and decisions. Keeping those lines of communication open is your greatest tool in maintaining a growing, albeit, changing relationship with your teenager. Let him know he can talk to you about anything that concerns him no matter how uncomfortable it is for you.
- 5) **Stay close to your teenager;** condone the behavior – you still love them. Tell them that you love them – often. And sneak in that (non-public display) little hug. don't let them push you away. They need you more than ever now. Let them know that while you may not
- 6) **Encourage your tween or teen to build relationships** with trustworthy adults who share your values. Grandparents, other relatives, friends or teachers can help too!. Oftentimes they can act as a mediator in parent child-disputes because they carry less emotional baggage and a different perspective.



And remember, **this too will pass**, your sanity will remain intact and the child you thought you lost is just growing up.