

Helping teens with acceptance, positive psychology and growth strategies

#1 Testing out adult behaviour

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Feeling stuck as a parent?

Parents and their teens are often caught in big battles, with many arguments and daily hassles. We worry that our teenagers are acting out, not cooperating, or even engaging in socially unacceptable ways. Often parents have tried everything to discipline their teen and they are fed up.

Understandably, parents often ask for tips on discipline and preventing their teen from getting into trouble outside the home. Then they are often perplexed when I calmly ask, “**How are you getting along together?**”

I often tell parents we will start here - with their relationship.

Why? Because the most important piece of information I can share is that **the key ingredient to parenting teens is having a solid relationship.**



Return to the relationship value

Fifty years of research, including my own, shows that **teens with a good relationship with their parents do better in all areas of adolescence**, and they are more likely to grow into well-adjusted adults.

Sometimes as a parent the last thing you want is to be asked to spend time together. If that's the case, think of it like this, all the things you want like respect, following rules, meeting curfews etc, all work better when you have the foundation of a kind relationship.

No matter what is going on at home, we need to secure our relationship foundation with our teens first.



They're practicing.....

Your once agreeable child is now a teen and they seem to disagree with everything you say and do. Sometimes even a sideways glance can start an argument.

Why?

The answer lies in the purpose of adolescence, which is to learn how to become an adult, and to do this they need to practice. Learning only happens with mistakes, trying and failing, and trying again.

Just as your toddler had to struggle to learn to walk by falling over all the time, your teen now needs to try adult behaviour, and fall over too. Their attempts might include expressing an adult opinion - too rudely perhaps; or speaking up - as if they know everything; or asserting themselves by demanding. When it goes pear shaped, they often retreat into child like behaviours or emotional outbursts. This switch from adult like behaviour to childishness can happen in the blink of an eye and leave parents very confused.

It can be annoying but think about it like this, how else will they learn to do these adults things except by practicing on you?

TEEN-AGE MOUSE



Animals studies teach us about adolescence

Animal studies can help us understand a lot about what's going on in adolescence. In adolescent animals, the common characteristics seen are love of novelty, seeking out new sensations, taking more risks and being in conflict with parents and peers. Sounds familiar to human adolescents doesn't it?

In animals, researchers say the purpose of adolescence is a biological drive to drive them out of the nest so they explore the world, find a mate, and reproduce.

In humans the purpose is similar but on a much more complicated scale. Your adolescent needs to test out independence so that one day they can leave home as strong independent young adults, develop their own love relationships and have the ability to care for themselves.



Practical tips you can use everyday

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Allow trial and error

Keep in mind this underlying purpose of the changes in your teenager. And remember they are learning through trial and error. So they will need to:

try their own voice - speak out passionately for what they care about, even disagree and debate with adults

try being independent - go out with friends, want to do things without you

try their own style - they'll want to test different hair, clothes, and fashion styles

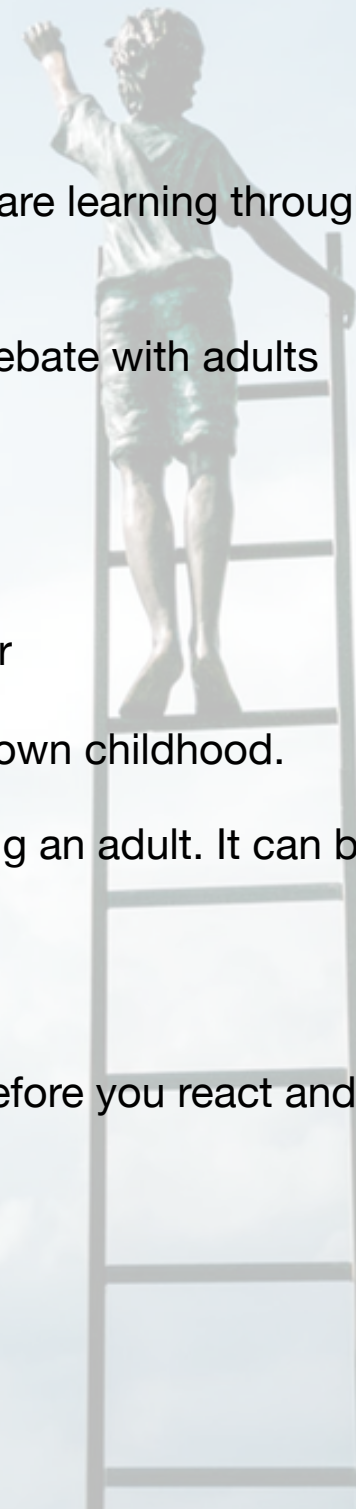
try new behaviours - they'll explore new things, wanting to try being faster, longer, or louder

sometimes be a child - when it all gets too much, they can also return to the safety of a known childhood.

Each time they try, they risk success or failure, and over time this builds practice at becoming an adult. It can be scary to watch as a parent, but it is necessary for them to do this.

Remember, without practice they are unlikely to become strong adults.

If you want your young person to become a strong adult, let them test themselves. Pause before you react and consider if it is time to be their anchor.



Practical tips you can use everyday

Be their anchor

Through all these changes it can feel like your teen doesn't really need you any more. Perhaps they seem so disagreeable that you feel they don't value your opinions, or that their friends matter more than you. Don't be fooled. Parents continue to matter — a lot.

Research shows that adolescents still turn to parents for important decisions (providing you have a good relationship). Their peers will be called on for matters of style, but their parents will be called on for important life choices.

You are the anchor through the storm. When it is difficult, ask, “Do you want my help?” Then try to be ok if the answer is no.

Build relationships in stormy times

- Find ways to be together each day — to just be.
- Avoid quizzing and questioning during these times, just be peacefully in the same space.
- Avoid too much eye contact, especially for males.
- If they talk during these times, try to listen, save your judgments, questions and rules for another time.
- Time is everywhere if you look, here are some ideas:
- Watch their favourite TV show, you may not even like it, but sit on the couch and watch together.
- Drive them somewhere, many parents will attest that they find out more information in the car than anywhere else.
- Do chores together, peel the veggies, load the dishwasher, walk the dog - anything as long as it's peacefully together.
- Take them out for coffee, go to the sporting game, etc

Practical tips you can use everyday

Find a reminding prompt

Parents often assume professionals find parenting easy. Not so. Even if I am supposed to know better, I often get it wrong and mess up my parenting. I mess up a lot.

My son once said he would walk the dog with me, “Only on the condition that you don’t use it as time to grill me about school work.” Oops...

That was my wake up call to shut up. Even though things had been tough for us, and I was trying to help, I was risking losing him altogether with constant questions. For a long time after I would have to remind myself of the ‘shut up and walk the dog’ rule.

Perhaps you have your own way of remembering how to re-engage with your teen?

To wrap up:

Build your relationship as parent and maturing young person, it is a critical factor that will help your teen survive this period and grow into a strong adult.