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# MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!

## HANDS OF LOVE

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As a parent of grown children, I tend to look back on their teenage years through rose-colored glasses. I remember the cute things, the great times we had, and the many happy moments. Some psychologists say that holding onto our good memories—and leaving the bad ones behind—can help us to deal with unpleasant situations and retain a positive outlook on life.

This doesn’t mean, however, that parenting six children through their adolescent years didn’t have its challenges. In fact, when I specifically think back on each of the children, I remember incidents that made me feel like the article on page 6, “Help! Parenting Teen Issues Has Me Worn Out.”

When my children were young, the reputable information available on raising teenagers was not as abundant and readily available as it is today. When I researched the topic and read through a myriad of articles for this issue of *Motivated*, I realized I most definitely made mistakes, although I tried my best.

Thankfully, they all turned out great and live meaningful lives, each one in their own unique way. I attribute this to the fact that despite the times I failed to handle some of their teen issues correctly, they always knew they were loved.

That, in my humble opinion, is the best thing we can give our children, teenagers, and adolescents—supportive, unconditional, and yes, sometimes tough love. It never fails.

Christina Lane  
For *Motivated*

A young girl with dark hair, wearing a pink dress, is looking up and holding hands with an adult man. The man's hands are visible, and he is wearing a white t-shirt. They are outdoors in a grassy area with blurred greenery in the background.

# Hands of Love

By Héctor Medina, adapted

**M**y grandpa used to say, “If you see well-behaved children, you can be sure that someone is using hands of love in bringing them up.” In the 25 years that I have been a teacher, this maxim has been a cornerstone of my daily interactions with my students. Love shapes and nurtures, and it also provides firm guidance to help children grow and develop.

Perhaps you’ve heard the analogy that likens youngsters to small plants. Plants need water and sunshine, but they also need attention in the form of fertilizing, pruning, fumigating, transplanting to larger pots, etc.—attention that requires work on the part of the gardener, and can be a temporary shock for the plant.

In the case of young people, that means giving them tender loving care first and foremost, while not neglecting the other things that are necessary parts of character building, like providing a healthy environment for their social development and emotional and spiritual growth, setting limits, teaching them to take responsibility for their actions, and allowing them to learn the consequences of their own decisions. These more

difficult aspects of parenting and mentoring are usually also the ones that are the most difficult for young people to accept, especially in the beginning, but we owe it to them.

There is a lot of talk these days about troubled teenagers and the exponential impact they have on society as their influence spreads to their peers, younger children, and eventually their own children. And the same questions keep being asked: How did we get in this state? And how do we get out? Can we steer our ship back on a better course, or is it too late?

It is not too late, when we—parents, teachers, and adults—all do our part in being mentors and role models for our young people. Our part is to buck the trends of passiveness, and a general lack of definite moral standards that sadly at times can be the norms in parenting and education today. If we will each do what we can, with time, our children can become forces for positive change themselves. It starts with us adults. We need to set the example, and take the reins—with hands of love. ■

# 10 Keys to Raising a Great Teenager



By Mark W. Merrill, adapted

**R**aising teenagers is hard. There are many parents that fear the teenage years. That fear may be merited because

these are the years that the relationship between the child and the family is being redefined. The importance of friends rises



for them, while the importance of parents and siblings falls. The fruit of your labor is not as easily seen as it used to be. In some cases, it may even seem like your influence is outright rejected.

If so, hang in there. Your work is not in vain. This period can prove to be the most rewarding and most vibrant phase of parenting. Here are 10 keys to raising your teenager.

**1. Under all the scowls and frowns, your child is still there.** Even when they are dismissing you, there is a place deep down that is relieved you are there looking out for them. They still need your attention and acknowledgment. They may want more space, but they still want you to be there for them.

**2. Let your love show.** All the love and affection they needed when they were younger they still need now. Loving your kid means you need to find ways to express your love through your actions and words. Don't leave your teen wondering where you stand with them. They may reject you, but loving parents keep loving their kids.

**3. Encourage them.** Young people are consistently being told that their worth is determined by how they look and perform. Encourage them that you value them for who they are, not for their achievements or looks.

**4. Don't talk at your teens.** All day they are being lectured by adults, many of whom care more about their own agenda than the kids'. It's exhausting for teens and causes them to not trust adults. When disciplining or giving your teens advice, talk to them as adults. Also, keep it clear and concise.

**5. Remember to actively listen.** This statement ties in with the one above. Few adults respect and listen to teens. When you listen to your teen, they feel empowered. They feel that they have a voice.

**6. Reinforce a standard within teens.** Children aren't born knowing what's right. As they get older, teens face pressure to abandon or experiment outside the moral standards given to them when they were younger. As a general rule, set boundaries together with your teens. Then give teens more independence, dependent on their age and maturity.

**7. Get to know their friends.** Teens want to choose their friends. Ask them questions about their friends, listen, and try to get to know their friends. Create an environment at your house that makes other kids want to gather there. Get to know their friends' parents and family.

**8. Offer your wisdom.** Being a parent, guide your children with compassion, love, firmness, and wisdom. Share your experiences and what you have learned.

**9. Help them stay focused.** Help them find a balance between enjoying the immediate and looking towards the future. It's easy to forget the consequences of our current choices. Teach them the joy of delayed gratification. Everything isn't about the Friday night cricket games or video gaming with friends.

**10. Take them on an adventure.** Nothing earns the right with a teenager like doing something adventurous together. Take them to a high ropes course, go camping, or go on a road trip together. Take them out of their comfort zone and even your own, which will increase the bond between you. ■

# “Help! Parenting Teen Issues Has Me Worn Out.”



By B.J. Foster, adapted

**M**y wife and I met while working with teenagers. I was the trip leader to a summer camp and we desperately needed a female leader. A friend of mine that knew her asked her. She bravely accepted without knowing a single person on the trip. After looking at her resume, I quickly realized that she had the most experience with teenagers by far.

There was a cabin of girls on this particular trip that were in the midst of major drama. Several days before we were to leave, two girls, formerly best friends, got into a major conflict over a guy. Bad decisions were made, trust was broken, and bad feelings grew deeper by the hour. The group of friends chose sides and, by the time we got on the bus,

the situation had escalated into a civil war. I knew this *Lord of the Flies* (Girls Edition) cabin would be the toughest I had ever seen. Unfortunately, I also knew that our new leader who knew no one was the most qualified to lead it.

She still refers to it as the worst week of her life. It's a miracle that we are married. However, over a decade later, some of those girls still seek her out for advice. Teenagers can be exhausting. The drama, bad decisions, and attitude can make you long for that sweet little kid in pajamas. During my many years working with teens, I had many conversations with frustrated parents. If you have ever thought, "*Help! Parenting teen issues has me worn out,*" then here is a game plan to help you.

### **Life Preparation, Not Obedience**

Teenagers feel like no one listens to, understands, or respects them, particularly adults. So they are typically suspicious of authority and annoyed at a call for blind obedience. Listen to them. They need to know the why and practical application behind the things you are asking them to do. Don't just tell them you are preparing them for adulthood, explain how it practically correlates. For example, when they complain or don't complete chores, explain the importance that discipline and reliability play in relationships with both loved ones and employers.

### **Choose Your Battles**

If you try to fight everything, naturally you are going to be exhausted. Even more, battling every issue with your teen will make you a wall of negative white

noise to them. Your words will have less and less meaning and influence. Figure out two or three hills you want to die on, and go after those (i.e. speaking respectfully to you, drinking and drug use, doing chores, etc.). Let the other ones go or, at least, ease up.

### **Set Clear Expectations and Consequences**

Once you have chosen your battle zones, let them know your expectations and the consequences that will follow if they are not met. It is best to decide on the expectations and consequences together. Never lay out a consequence you will not follow-through on (unless, of course, you realize you were wrong, or there is a good reason to relax the rules). Be calm, consistent, and firmly hold your ground.

### **Positive Reinforcement and Bonuses**

Make sure not all of your consequences are negative. Reward them when they honor your requests or show progress. Give them a weekly or monthly bonus. It could be money or simply more freedom. Compliment them on what they did right and how much you appreciate it. Just like adults, they are much more motivated by positive reinforcement than negative.

### **Let Go of Control**

Finally, let go. Many times they have to learn through experience or even the hard way. Watching our children fail or in pain is probably the most difficult thing in the world. They want some space and freedom without always worrying about what their parents are going to say. Give them room to find their own way, and to learn from their own experiences. ■

# Why Your Teen's Life Is More Stressful Than Your Own

By John Nicholls

I am the father of four very patient teenagers, two still living at home. They indulge my stream of dad jokes with a wry, sympathetic smile. My unfavorable comparison of their music tastes to the golden age of late '70s classic rock is generally tolerated, perhaps with the occasional eye roll.

But one day, their patience finally snapped after I delivered a particularly eloquent rant on how easy their lives were compared with my stress-filled adult existence. I wanted to swap! My daughter and son staged what can only be described as an intervention. They sat me down at the dining table and explained just how stressful their lives were.

It was an eye-opening experience. Despite living with these young people, I had still failed to grasp many of the sometimes subtle pressures—biological, social, and psychological—that make being a 21st-century teenager so complicated.

Here are just a few of the reasons your teenager's life just might be more stressful than yours:

## **Teenage sleep deprivation is real.**

According to a recent study, ninth- and tenth-grade students should get nine hours of sleep each night to maintain optimal alertness. However, after surveying 3,000 high school students, on average, students managed only about 7.5 hours of sleep on a school night. This sleep deprivation can lead to a decline in performance, memory lapses and mood swings, as well as behavioral problems.

**Hormones, anxiety and depression are on the rise.** I admit that teenage hormones (and the strong emotions they create) can be stressful for the adults around them. However, imagine carrying around that bundle of emotions with you 24/7. It's an exhausting prospect. And it's not just the hormones: rapid growth



spurts, periods, acne, and unreliable vocal cords can all add to a feeling of being out of control, which can trigger a cycle of anxiety and depression in teens. So what is causing the increased rates of depression in teens—and why are girls more strongly affected? Researchers aren't entirely sure. However, they note that cyberbullying has increased more dramatically among girls than boys. Also, girls tend to use texting applications more intensively, which has been linked to an increased likelihood of depressed moods. So, external pressures coupled with surging hormones can lead to a lot of distress for the average teen.

**Teens' lives are not their own.** In traditional schooling, many aspects of a student's life are decided for them—from what subjects they study to what they wear at school and what schedules they follow. This lack of control can lead to stress. Adults have the autonomy to do as they please, but if teenagers try, it is called rebellion. Researchers found that students tend to try harder and enjoy school more when they work toward their own ideals of perfectionism. In other words, when students set their own expectations for themselves and try to achieve them—effectively directing their own destiny—they are usually happier and more motivated.

**You have one boss, your teenager has six.** Imagine having six bosses, all with large amounts of power over your daily life and future. Each boss has different expectations, ways of working, levels of competency and degrees of emotional intelligence. And if you don't satisfy each one, your career is on the line. A teenager will typically have to deal with

six different teachers who are effectively their “bosses”—not to mention parents or guardians. If an adult has a poor boss, they have the means and ability to move to another job. A typical teenager doesn't have such options.

**The dilemma of standing out while fitting in.** The struggle for identity is hard. Teenagers like to be different, but at the same time they want to fit in. Because of this, they often face pressure from peers, parents, and society to behave a certain way to feel accepted and valued by those around them. Examples of stressful events include everything from a friend dying to physical fights to not being invited to a party—anything that could undermine their social security and identity. Girls tend to be more affected by these kinds of social setbacks, as they put a greater emphasis on interpersonal connectedness, and are more sensitive to peer stress and negative self-evaluation.

**The uncertain future of job security.** The global economic downturn, job automation, globalization and an increasingly competitive job market are causing great anxiety among young people. There is uncertainty about career opportunities, and that adds a lot of pressure.

These are just a few of the typical teenage stressors that my daughter and son outlined that day. Overall, I am amazed at how resilient, “gritty” and good-humored they are, considering the pressures and uncertainties they juggle on a daily basis. If I were to revisit my offer to swap places, I'm now inclined to say, “No, thanks. My adult stresses are just fine.” ■

# Letting Go When Your Teen Heads for College

By Dr. Laura Markham, adapted



I recently had an *Aha!* parenting moment about letting our kids take the lead. This is my son’s first month at college. We email back and forth several times a week about logistical stuff—”Mom, will you mail me something I forgot?”—so we’re in touch, but he doesn’t seem to want to chat on the phone. He never calls us. When I call him, he handles the logistical part of the discussion well, but when I ask “What are you doing tonight?” or “Who are you hanging out with?” or even “What’s your first paper on?” he tells me he’s too busy to talk.

Often, it’s because I’ve caught him in the dining hall or on the way to class, but sometimes he’s just reading in his dorm room. So I know that he actually could sit and chat with me. Before he left for college, we talked all the time, although he’s never been much for talking on the phone.

I remind myself that if he started talking with me, he would miss me more. It’s easier for him not to go near those

feelings that might lead to homesickness. Of course, I’m missing him, so I’d love to hear what’s going on in his life. I console myself that he really is caught up in a whirlwind of new experiences, and I can hear in his voice that he’s happy.

One evening I found myself on the subway train that my son took to school for six years. I reminisced about how he would call me every day as he got off the train, to let me know that he would be home in ten minutes. He started this at age 12, but continued right through until he left for college. I wondered how he felt now, on campus, on his way home to his dorm room, with no one to call. Did it make him feel alone, abandoned? I decided he probably felt liberated.

Until that night at 2:30 in the morning, when the phone rang:

“Eli? Are you ok?”

“I’m fine, Mom. I was just on my way home from hanging with my friends, and I thought I would call to tell you I love you.”

He didn't seem to realize that there was anything inappropriate about calling at 2am. But I didn't care. I was so happy for that call. I don't expect him to repeat it often, but anytime he wants to call us at 2am, that's fine with me. I'll even try to wake up enough to chat for a bit if he wants to.

When Eli was a baby, I let him take the lead on separations. If he seemed comfortable, I let someone else hold him. If he reached out for me, I took him back. When he wanted to "do it myself" as a toddler and climb to the top of the monkey bars, I let him, just spotting in case he fell. I've been following his lead ever since, letting him start sleepovers at 5, commute on the subway for an hour each way at 12, go on a group trip to Spain for a month at 16, come home without a defined curfew in the wee hours of the morning at 17.

I think navigating these separations is always harder for the parent. Kids need to exercise their wings, but it's hard for parents. I suspect this is at the heart of much of the dramatic fallout that often happens between teens and their parents. We worry, we can't let them go, and we even feel hurt that we're no longer needed—so we fight with them about stuff that doesn't actually matter.

Because the truth is, letting go of our kids is really hard. As my child, he's central to me, to my life. But as his parent, I'm peripheral to him. It doesn't mean they don't love us. It's not something to take personally, or to be offended by. But it can be a wrenching realization.

You know that Kahil Gibran poem? I don't think I ever really understood it until now.

*Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing  
for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you, yet they belong  
not to you.  
You may give them your love but not your  
thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them,  
but seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor carries with  
yesterday.  
You are the bows from which your children  
as living arrows are sent forth.  
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the  
infinite,  
and He bends you with His might  
that His arrows may go swift and far.  
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for  
gladness;  
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,  
so He loves also the bow that is stable.*

So we're supposed to raise our kids to move into the future without us, in gladness. To the bow, the arrow is its purpose. To the arrow, the bow is just a launching pad. Of course, that's a basic truth of life that all parents eventually accept. And I guess I will too. It's just that it happens so fast. Except, if we let them take the lead in navigating separations, and we're lucky. Then we might just get that occasional 2am phone call, just to tell us they love us. ■



# Parenting

At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents.

—Jane D. Hull

Parents who are afraid to put their foot down usually have children who step on their toes.—**Chinese Proverb**

Hugs can do great amounts of good—especially for children.—**Princess Diana**

Don't worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.—**Robert Fulghum**

Parenting is not giving your child everything they want. Parenting is not being your child's friend. Parenting is about preparing your child to be a useful and respectful person in society.

—Glo Zell

There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots, the other, wings.

—**Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**

There are times as a parent when you realize that your job is not to be the parent you always imagined you'd be, the parent you always wished you had. Your job is to be the parent your child needs, given the particulars of his or her own life and nature.—**Ayelet Waldman**

I'm not a parenting expert. In fact, I'm not sure that I even believe in the idea of 'parenting experts.' I'm an engaged, imperfect parent, and a passionate researcher. I'm an experienced mapmaker and a stumbling traveler. Like many of you, parenting is by far my boldest and most daring adventure.—**Brene Brown**

