

GET OUT OF MY LIFE...  
BUT FIRST COULD YOU DRIVE ME AND CHERYL TO THE MALL?

This is the title Anthony Wolf, Ph.D. used for his very insightful book on teens. Often the analogy of a yo-yo is very fitting for adolescents. Prior to adolescence, we do the teaching and preaching, helping our children build their values. At approximately 12 to 13 years of age we begin to lose our influence. Now parents know nothing. Friends and peers know everything.

We only hope that the values we have taught them carry them through these years when they begin to make their own choices and decisions. As parents, we must be prepared to be there when they need us and out of sight when they want to be independent. In addition, we have to engage in the ability to read their minds. Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking teens no longer need us. The truth is they need us now more than ever, just in a different capacity.

### **Prepared by Janell Weeks, LPC**

After the very unfortunate school shootings around the country, the question was raised, "Where were the parents? How could they not have known what their kids were doing?" These are very good illustrations of kids pushing their parents away, yet desperately needing them. I advise parents of teens to be involved in several ways.

First of all, know your kid's friends. It is okay to ask to meet your teen's friends, their parents, and to get phone numbers of where your teen will be "hanging out." Don't be embarrassed to check out the situation so that you can be guaranteed that your child is where they say they are and that they are supervised by an adult.

Secondly, be involved in school and social activities. You will get to know the teachers, other parents, and many of your child's friends. Attend school functions. It is amazing how often you get the "scoop" on kids by being around other parents. This can avoid the "50-Question Game" that most adolescents truly detest.

Another option is to make your home teenager-friendly. Encourage your child to invite his or her friends over. You would be surprised how much you learn from observation alone. Finally, plan family activities. Your child is not too old to attend events periodically with the family and to be part of a family meal. It is a good idea to plan events with family friends of other teens. It eases the "pain" of being with the family, yet allows you to play together.

The most common questions asked regarding teens relates to what John Rosemond in *Teen Proofing* calls the six C's of Parenting. These are Curfew, Cash, Car, Cohorts, Conflict, and Consequences. It is important to have pretty firm ideas on what you expect from your teen prior to conflicts. In other words curfew, cash, and cars are attached to responsibility as well as freedom. Remind yourself of two things: First, you are working your way out of a job. Secondly, kids want to succeed and be liked. Therefore, it is not the rules that keep kids out of trouble. It is their sense of responsibility and respect for self and family that help them make good choices. Give them plenty of reins to make mistakes but don't let go! Your child earns freedom by demonstrating responsibility. You do not have to be a parent cop if you keep these two points in mind. Regarding cohorts or peers, you can not pick them. But remember that how your teen chooses friends is going to be directly related to how much your teen likes himself/herself. Allow them to realize that certain friends may not be

desirable. Remember that they have the reins but you are still holding on. When your child breaks rules that go against values, you step in and enforce consequences. The absence of conflict is the absence of power struggles. Do not be afraid to let your child have the "last word."

However, the consequences, enforced via "strategic parenting," are never welcomed by your teen. Example: A teen refuses to mow the lawn and the parent refuses to argue. However, when an opportunity to go to the movies with some friends arises, the teen is reminded that they made a bad choice and is not allowed to go.

The moral of the story: teens respect parents who have strong values and who expect their child to follow rules. They know there will be consequences for bad choices, but they also know that they can make mistakes and reclaim their freedom. Providing that your child is not totally defiant, the greatest sense of security and love comes from a parent being there through their mistakes. Parenting your teen can actually be a very fun and rewarding challenge.

Books for suggested reading:

Teen Proofing, John Rosemond

Get Out Of My Life..., Anthony Wolf, Ph.D.

Parents, Teens and Boundaries, Jane Bluestein, Ph.D.