

insights

Teen Time

by Michael Grose



Teenagers need their parents more than at any other stage, yet too often they are left to their own devices.

‘The younger the child, the more they need their parents’ has been traditional wisdom for some time. Many parents respond to this mantra by spending as much time as they can with babies and toddlers, then ramping up their careers as their kids move into school age. The older the children, the less time is put aside for them appears to be the current practice.

The Twists And Turns of Development

This notion assumes that child development and children’s independence is a linear process where parents can increasingly step back as kids get older. BUT this is wrong!

A child’s development is full of twists, turns and reversals so that a 10-year-old who is beginning to experience the confusion that can come with early adolescence has a far greater need of her parents than she did at eight.

While toddlers are very adaptable and can be satisfied with attention from caring adults, teenagers are far more in need of the special care and supervision that their parents provide.

The age between 10 and 14 is a particularly needy time. Friendships become complex and the challenges of school can overwhelm children at this stage. They benefit a lot from late afternoon and evening chats with a parent. Mornings are too rushed for the types of conversations they need.

The Myth of ‘I don’t need you’



Ken and Margaret Mellor, in their wonderful book *Teen Stages*, dispel the myth that teenagers don’t need their parents. The authors state that teenagers need their parents, but they won’t let on.

My experience raising three teenagers supports the fact that teenagers want their parents to succeed in managing, guiding, nurturing and supporting them. Adolescence is too hard for them to go through on their own. They benefit from the close physical presence of a parent – not in a smothering way – but someone who is monitoring their wellbeing and supervising their behaviour.

This can’t be done by mobile phone. Yet most teens won’t show their gratitude if you provide the close parenting they need. It’s not until they reach their early to mid twenties that they come clean and deliver a sort of belated

apology to their parents. In the meantime, you need to hang in there.

Parenting Teens Is Tiring

While parenting toddlers can be physically tiring, responding to the mental and emotional demands of teenage children is equally if not more exhausting. If you come home totally fried by the demands of work, the last thing you want to engage in is mind games with a tricky but needy teenager. You've got to be fit and focused (on them) to parent teens well!

Minimise Being Home Alone

Late afternoon is a recognised danger zone for adolescence. Toddlers stay in long daycare and primary-aged kids use after-school care or are happy to be picked up by others. However, for teenagers who are testing their independence this is a tricky time.

Teens who are left to their own devices are more prone to engage in risk-taking behaviours, lose themselves online or in some cases become addicted to computer games. The world is trickier than when we grew up. Cyber-bullying, self-harm and depression are now part of the adolescent landscape.

Teenagers still need supervision, whether it's through structured activities such as sports training or after-school or holiday programs. They also need parents who check up on them, make sure homework is completed and ensure that they have fulfilled their family obligations including completing their chore list.

Turn Conventional Wisdom On Its Head

It's time to turn conventional wisdom on its head and start dedicating more rather than less time to raising teens. That way we'll go a long way to giving them what they need, that is, parental guidance, management, nurturance and support to help them safely negotiate the twists and turns of the developmental journey from childhood into adulthood.



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