

The 4-1-1 on Surviving Teenhood

Essential Tips for Parents: *Teenage Temptations; Teachable Moments; and More!*

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Smashwords Edition

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This book is not intended to serve as professional tax or legal advice. If you need specific advice, you should always consult a suitably qualified professional.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to those starting their teenage years and to their parents who will be by their side every step of the way—even if from a distance.

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Preface

Turn on the news or pick up the newspaper and most likely the stories you read will include bullying, sexting, car accidents, burglaries, and/or other types of acts being committed by teenagers. The pressure on our teenagers is too much for many of them to handle. When you consider the teen years are a period of intense physical and intellectual growth, it is understandable that it is a time of confusion and upheaval for both teens and parents.

It saddens me to read about a teenager struggling to fit in who decides it isn't worth sticking around to try anything else and then commits suicide. I want to be able to send this message to our youth: "Everybody's different, and it's OK." Some teens develop early, some late, and other teens are slow-but-steady. In other words, there is a wide range of what is considered *normal*.

The primary goal of the teen years is to achieve independence. For this to occur, teens will start pulling away from their parents. They will pull away from the parent they are closest to first. Teens are between the sweet innocence of childhood and the responsible maturity of adulthood. Although capable of making decisions, a number of teens are not ready for the adjustment.

Adults struggle with the teen years, in part, because of the importance of parental involvement. Although we know teens don't want to be shielded from the realities of life and tough choices, we still want to protect them the best we can. Depending on the type of parenting style you use, or were raised with, this style will contribute to how easy or how difficult this transition will be.

I remember when my children were teenagers. It seemed so different from what I had experienced during my teen years. Most parents face, or have faced, this situation as well. Times change, people change, and situations change, but the love for a child never changes, and this is the reason why it is hard for parents to let go.

It is my goal to let all teens and their parents know about the situations presented during teenhood and how to survive these obstacles. If both teens and parents understand what one another may be experiencing, it will make for a better journey. I no longer want the word *teenager* to be something people dread. I want everyone to look forward to those years with hope and understanding.

Although this book is directed to parents, I encourage both teens and parents to read the entire book. It's important for teens and parents to understand each other's feelings and what is "normal."

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who has supported *The 4-1-1 on Life Skills* and *The 4-1-1 on Step Parenting*. If it weren't for your faith in me, I would not have been challenged to write more "4-1-1" books. I know the long hours of research and fact checking will prove worth the time and effort so that I might enlighten the lives of others.

Thank you to my parents for being there for me during my teenage years. Thank you also to my husband and children for their love and support. My family has been a vital part and inspiration for writing the series. Providing the information to everyone, through our experiences, has been rewarding.

Introduction

When I say the word teenager what comes to mind? If you are like most people, the words *rebellion*, *trouble*, and *stubborn* come to mind. You might also think: drugs, crime, pregnancy, peer pressure, sex, puberty, driving, attitudes, relationships, irresponsible, and messy. Those about to go through the teen years might think: independence, first job, fun, sports, adventure, dating, invincible, and driving.

What is a teenager? A teenager is a person between thirteen and nineteen years old. These individuals are between the protection of childhood and the responsibility of adulthood. The teen years are also known as the adolescence years. Don't confuse puberty and adolescence. Most of us think of puberty as the development of adult sexual characteristics: breasts, menstrual periods, pubic hair, and facial hair. Although you can see the visible signs of puberty and impending adulthood, there are invisible signs, too. Kids showing physical changes, usually between the ages of eight and fourteen, can be going through a bunch of changes not readily visible. These are the changes of adolescence.

As a young person, those nights leading up to turning thirteen and becoming a teenager can be exhausting. For years, he was a kid, your child. Your new teen now wants to know if he is supposed to automatically look or feel different, and your teen will wonder if he will enter the cool set of teens in the neighborhood—the teenhood. He or she will realize every piece of clothing is critical and will wonder what everyone else thinks about him or her. Believe it or not, your teen may wonder if you will still love, approve of, and accept him or her. Teens may want to explore dangerous things, painful things, silly things, and illegal things. What about school? Teens will start to notice people who have not completed their studies and wonder if they should keep up their own standards or follow other's behaviors.

Compared to prior generations, today's adults feel their teens are more in need of protection than ever before, but it is far more difficult, if not impossible, to protect today's teens from dangers presented to them. More young teens are confronted with stresses younger children do not face, such as sex, drugs, and violence. Yet teens do not have to shoulder the responsibility of adulthood such as jobs, bills, and family. This struggle between having to grow up too fast and not yet being ready to take on adult responsibilities is why adults worry.

At this stage in life, teens are responsible for their choices and a parent is in part to blame when a teen makes a mistake. People will make quick assessments of teens when they make mistakes. People will also make a quick assessment of a teen by their appearance. Appearance can serve as a clue to a teen's character and upbringing. It can be confusing when the most colorful dressers come from good families. Appearance may also signal whether your teen is a troublemaker, what type of work ethic he or she has, if there is parental involvement, and whether they have solid morals or values. Today there is a general, but limited, acceptance of a teen's unique appearance, offering an opportunity to redefine a youth's unusual style as individual, positive exploration and a harmless search

for identity.

Communication is important in the teenage years. Although your teen may pull away from you, he or she still needs direction and discipline. Even the most responsible teen will still need help from his or her parents or caregivers. Your teenager may not be able to express the need for help, so make sure to watch for clues, which we will discuss later.

It is time to change the way adults see teenagers. Teens today are faced with drugs, teen pregnancy, texting or sexting, alcohol, peer pressure, bullying, and other dangers. Why do our teens use drugs and alcohol, gamble, or fall prey to other destructive behaviors such as eating disorders or cutting? We will walk through these and other scenarios, and I will offer guidance on how to get through it.

We take our children through childhood, into teenhood, and then onto adulthood. Remember: if you go into the adventure together, you will come out of it together.

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Growth and Development

Our teenagers will go through physical, mental, social, and emotional changes. The biggest change is puberty, or the process of sexual maturing. It happens between the ages of ten and fourteen for girls, and ages twelve and sixteen for boys. The changes in the body (hormonal changes) can sometimes be confusing, depending on the age. Since the teen years are defined as between the ages of thirteen and nineteen years old, if the body begins changing before that, they may feel different from other kids the same age. What is normal for one person can be different for another, and that's OK.

Physical Changes

Girls:

- * Girls may begin to develop breast buds as early as eight years old. Breasts develop fully between ages twelve and eighteen.
- * Girls have a rapid growth in height between ages nine and fourteen, peaking around age twelve.
- * Pubic hair, armpit and leg hair begin to grow at about age nine or ten and reach adult patterns at about thirteen to fourteen years old.
- * The beginning of menstrual periods (menarche) typically occurs about two years after early breast development and the first appearance of pubic hair. It may occur as early as age ten, or as late as age fifteen. The average age of menstruation is about twelve years old.

Boys:

- * Boys may begin to notice their testicles and scrotum grows as early as age nine. Soon after, the penis begins to lengthen. By age sixteen or seventeen, their genitals reach their adult size and shape.
- * Boys' voices change at the same time as the penis grows. Nocturnal emissions, or wet dreams, occur with the peak of the height spurt.
- * Pubic hair, armpit, leg, chest, and facial hair growth begins at about age twelve and reaches adult patterns at about fifteen or sixteen years.
- * Boys do not start puberty with a sudden incident, like the beginning of menstrual periods in girls. Having regular nocturnal emissions, or wet dreams, marks the beginning of puberty in boys. These nocturnal emissions start between ages thirteen and seventeen, with the average at about fourteen years.

Emotional and Social Changes

The emotional and social changes of teenagers will vary from teen to teen, but the majority of them will experience the following:

- * Concerns about body image, looks, and clothes
- * A focus on themselves; going back and forth between high expectations and lack of confidence
- * Increased moodiness
- * More interest in the opposite sex
- * A deeper capacity for caring, sharing, and for developing more intimate relationships
- * Feel stress from more challenging schoolwork
- * May develop eating problems
- * Show more interest in, and influence by, a peer group
- * Express less affection toward parents; sometimes might seem rude or short-tempered
- * Spend less time with parents and more time with friends
- * Feel sadness or depression, which can lead to poor grades at school, alcohol or drug use, unsafe sex, and other problems.

Thinking and Learning Changes

- * Teens will learn more defined work habits.
- * They will show more concern about future school and work plans.
- * They will be better able to give reasons for their choices, including what is right or wrong.
- * They will have more ability for complex thought.
- * They will be better able to express feelings through talking.

Normal growth and development is supported by good nutrition, adequate sleep, and regular exercise. Despite data collected for growth and development charts, normal heights and weights are difficult to define. Growth patterns, in most cases, are determined by genetics. Shorter parents may tend to have shorter kids, and taller parents may have taller kids.

It is normal for girls to be critical of their weight. But doing so can sometimes lead to unhealthy body image concerns and dieting practices. Boys tend to be more concerned with their height and muscle development, but this can also lead to unhealthy practices, like using steroids and protein supplements. Teens worry about being different from their peers and about anything that causes them to feel like they don't fit in with others or don't feel normal. Take your concerns to your physician. Your doctor can provide reassurance that other kids have the same concerns about their size as your child does.

Discipline

We are all thankful when our child ages out of the toddler tantrums, but the tantrums aren't over yet. You now have the teen terror and teen mean. The teen years aren't unlike toddlerhood; your teen will test his boundaries. Adolescents thrive on the balance of caring and positive discipline. Teens have difficulty respecting a parent's authority.

Suggestions on discipline:

- * Set clear rules and put them in writing.
- * Go easy on first offenses. Remember, you were a teen once.
- * Talk about it. Verbal communication is an important aspect of discipline.
- * Avoid hands-on discipline. Discipline should always be lighter for teenagers than for younger children. Allow consequences to be as natural as possible. Let them demonstrate what he or she learned.
- * Do not scold. Voicing disapproval does not work. Teens are not dumb. Teenagers know what will happen if they do not study or do whatever is required of them. Show your child the respect of letting him make his own decisions, and live with the consequences as long as no one is in physical danger.
- * Be firm and consistent. Teens are master manipulators.
- * Take away cell phones, iPods, iPads, and other communication devices for a specified period of time.

Before you come down hard on your teen for misbehaving, try to understand what's driving the action. Could there be trouble in school, with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or bullying? Get your kids to open up to you about their problems by creating an environment of honesty and respect. Let them know you're always available to talk about anything. Even sensitive subjects like sex and drug use shouldn't be off-limits. Let your teens know you will always love and support them, no matter what.

Temptations

Kids are exposed to the temptations of sex, drugs, and alcohol everywhere, at all ages. By the time your child is thirteen, he may have decided whether to become involved with chemical substances. Sex rears its head early, too. As your teenager evolves, it may shock you what he is like, what he is into, and to what he is exposed. Get familiar with what is out there. Know the risks and the dangers.

Here are the realities:

- * Adolescence is a time of stress, and, yes, your teen may be awful and cruel sometimes.
- * Adolescents can be charming, warm, caring, and interesting. It is a joy to watch them come into their own selves.
- * Teenagers do not want an adversarial relationship any more than parents do.
- * Rebellion is a trait of a teenager, and your teen isn't any more messed up than other teenagers.
- * What matters is not the structure of the family but the quality of it.

We will further discuss teenage temptations in coming chapters.