

Teens Dodging “Bullets”

Equipping Teens to Survive Mass Shootings, Bullying, Suicide, and More

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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 the teens who have lost their lives due to senseless school shootings, peer pressure, bullying, suicide and so much more.

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Preface

Our evening news is full of stories. Crimes committed by teens are on the rise. Crimes such as school shootings, bullying, car invasions, burglaries and many others. What has our world come to? We are sending our kids to school with backpacks and tablet covers that are bulletproof. How did we get here?

The pressure on our teenagers is too much for many of them to handle. The teen years are a time of confusion and upheaval for both teens and parents. This is due to intense physical and intellectual growth.

How do you feel when you hear about a teenager struggling to fit in who decides to give up on life and 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's considered *normal*.

Preadolescent children between the ages of 10-13 are "tweens." Tweens are more advanced in their social skills. This is due to exposure of "adult content" much earlier in life than in previous years.

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, many teens are not ready for the change.

Adults struggle with the tween and teen years. This is due to the importance of parental involvement. We know kids don't want to be shielded from the realities of life and tough choices. Yet, we still want to protect them the best we can. How easy or difficult the transition will be, depends on your parenting style and how you were raised.

I remember when my children went through the tween and teen years. It seemed so different from what I had experienced. Most parents face, or have faced, this situation as well. Times change. People change. Situations change. But the love for a child never changes. This is the reason why it is hard for parents to let go. Now more than ever, it is important for parents to get involved in their kids' lives. Parents need to ask the hard questions. We need to encourage our children to answer these questions without harsh consequences.

It is my goal to inform teens and parents about the obstacles faced during teenhood and how to survive them. If both tweens/teens and parents understand the journey, perhaps the outcome will be positive. What is normal for one, is not the normal for all. We need to be able to recognize when our kids are in trouble and be ready to act on it.

I no longer want the word *teenager* to be something people dread or fear. I want everyone to look forward to those years with hope and understanding.

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

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who has supported my writing. If it weren't for your faith in me, I would not have been challenged to write more self-help books. I know the long hours of research and fact checking were totally 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 to my husband and children for their love and support. My family has been a vital part and huge inspiration for writing the series. Providing the information to everyone, through our experiences, has been rewarding.

It is my hope that this book will help to save lives. Join me in the fight to save our children and future generations.

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:

- School shootings
- Drugs
- Crime
- Pregnancy
- Peer pressure
- Sex
- Puberty
- Driving
- Attitudes
- Relationships
- Irresponsible
- Messy

Those about to go through the teen years might think:

- Independence
- First job
- Fun
- Sports
- Adventure
- Dating
- Invincible
- Driving

What is a tween? A tween is a preadolescent child between the ages of 10 and 13. What is a teenager? A teenager is a person between 13 and 19 years old. These individuals are between the protection of childhood and the responsibility of adulthood. The teen years are also known as the adolescent years. Don't confuse puberty and adolescence. Puberty has visible signs such as breasts, menstrual periods, pubic hair, and facial hair. But, there are also invisible signs. These invisible changes are preadolescence and adolescence.

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. He 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 others think 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 point out those who have not completed their studies. They will wonder if they should keep up their own standards or follow other's behaviors.

Compared to prior generations, our teens are in need of more protection. It is far more difficult to protect today's teens from dangers presented to them. They experience 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. Are our teens struggling by having to grow up too fast? How prepared are they to take on adult responsibilities? This is why we must take action.

At this stage in life, teens are responsible for their choices. Yet, parents are 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. This offers an opportunity to define a youth's unusual style as individual. It can also be viewed as positive exploration and a harmless search for identity.

Communication is important in the teenage years. Are we talking too much about "back in our day" when we should be listening to what's happening in our kid's day? Your teen may begin to pull away from you. This should not take away from the fact that 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. Make sure to watch for clues, which we will discuss later. The most important part of communication is being able to hear what *isn't* being said.

It is time to change the way adults see teenagers. Teens today face horrible violence, drugs, teen pregnancy, and other dangers. Why do our teens use drugs and alcohol? Gamble? Fall prey to other destructive behaviors such as eating disorders or cutting? Why do they think it's OK to kill another individual? What are they dealing with that is so bad that they self-destruct? Why do we think it's someone else's responsibility to fix our kids?

We will walk through these and other scenarios, and I will offer guidance on how to get through it.

Throughout the book I will refer to "teens" but the information applies to our tweens as well.

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.

Growth and Development

Our tweens and teens 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.

Chapters hidden...

Today it's not a matter of *whether* a teen will own a phone, but *when* a teen will own a phone. Cell phones have come a long way. You can text, take and send pictures, record videos, play games, listen to music, track people's locations, surf the Internet, and so much more. Along with cell phones comes great responsibility. Parents have given their teens cell phones for emergency purposes and have forgotten to put restrictions on the usage. Text messaging and sexting is popular with the younger teens now, so it is important to limit what your teen can do on his or her cell phone.

Sexting

Sexting is the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, primarily between cell phones. Sexting that involves a minor who sends an explicit photograph of himself to others has led to a legal gray area in the United States. Teenagers who have texted photographs of themselves, or of their friends or partners, have been charged with distribution of child pornography, while those who have received the images have been charged with possession of child pornography; in some cases, the possession charge has been applied to school administrators who have investigated sexting incidents as well.

Talk with your teen and explain what should be considered before pressing "send."

- Don't assume anything you send or post on social media will remain private. Messages and photos get passed around, even if you think they were sent in private.
- There are no "take backs" from cyberspace. Anything you post or send will never truly go away. Potential employers, college recruiters, teachers, coaches, friends, enemies, parents, or strangers may find past posts, even if you think you have deleted them. Even if you have second thoughts about your post and delete it, you have no idea who has already copied and reposted it. It is important to remember that even if someone only knows your screen name, online profile, or email address, anyone can find you.
- Never give into the pressure of doing something uncomfortable. For teen girls, pressure from guys is the reason they send and post sexually suggestive messages and photos. For guys, pressure from friends is why they post sexually suggestive messages and photos.
- Consider the reaction of those receiving the text or photo. Although a message is meant to be fun, it doesn't mean the person who gets it will see it as fun. It's easy to be more provocative or outgoing online, but whatever you write, post, or send will contribute to the real-life impression you make.

It is important when you purchase a cell phone to review the parental block options available. Set these parental blocks ahead of time, and let your teen know what capability comes with his or her new phone. Be prepared, as you *will* meet resistance. You may also save them a lifetime of embarrassment should they decide to send certain personal photos to others.

If you don't feel parental blocks are necessary, you may want to go through your teen's phone periodically to make sure he isn't compromising his future. Research studies have proven that

parents who monitor cell phone usage have teens with a lower likelihood of sexting and/or regretting a text message.

Most teens prefer to text than to talk on the phone. The studies are inconclusive as to whether this has an effect on their social abilities to communicate. Most think it is an added layer of communication.

Today, many parents have adopted a cell phone usage contract that both the parents and teens sign and abide by. (See Appendix A) If the rules are broken, it is not a surprise that you take the phone away as a punishment.

Health Risks

Teenagers who excessively use their cell phones are more prone to disrupted sleep, restlessness, stress, and fatigue. Addiction to cell phones has become so common that teens rely on their cell phones to boost their moods. Teens feel pressure to remain connected and reachable around the clock. When not in contact with others, teens can become restless and agitated.

Children start to use mobile phones at an early stage of their life. There's a connection between intensive use of cell phones and health-compromising behavior, such as smoking and use of alcohol or drugs. Other issues that are of concern are attention and cognitive problems. Therefore, it is best to limit cell phone usage to certain hours. Like computers, cell phones are considered a stimulant and should not be used within an hour of bedtime.