

Tricky Teens

**How to create a great relationship
with your teen ... without going crazy!**

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Tricky Teens: How to create a great relationship with your teen... without going crazy!

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Pledge to my teenager

Dear Teen,

I am your parent. I am *not* your friend, pal, bestie, mate or BFF. I repeat, I am your parent.

This means there are times that I will use the word 'No'.

This means what it sounds like. You will not like it when I use this word.

Toughen up and get over it. There will be times that you will think you hate me. There will be times that you think I am the worst parent on earth. There may be times that you are right even though you won't hear me admit it.

As a parent I am responsible for raising you to be a decent successful human being who treats themselves and others with tolerance and respect.

That is my job and I take it on willingly because I love you and want the best for you. This means that I will watch you with a level of surveillance that most intelligence agencies would envy. I will track you like a bloodhound. I will detect illicit or mind-altering substances with the intensity of a customs officer. I will scrutinise your love interests. I will check whether you have schoolwork to do and whether you are doing it to the best of your ability.

I will speak to your teachers without asking your permission. In fact, I will talk to whomsoever I please without your agreement.

I will call the parents of your friends at times, especially when there are parties.

In the house that I work to pay for, there will be rules. You will not like all of these rules. These rules are in place so I do not go crazy while raising you.

You have the right to argue with me. You do not have the right to remain silent or brush me off with vague comments like 'don't know', 'as if' or 'that is so random'.

I'm sure we are going to get along just fine. Through all this, please know that I love you for who you are and will continue to do so even if you screw up.

Love,

Your parent

Introduction

Teenagers are, essentially, mad.

Whether you call it ‘not enough sheep in the top paddock’ or ‘all the pigeons aren’t fluttering in the loft’ or ‘the lift doesn’t always arrive at the top floor’, there are times during the adolescent years when teens aren’t the sharpest tools in the shed.

Don’t get me wrong. I also think they are wonderful, but sheesh, they have their moments. The sooner you face this, the better. Realise that you are handling a privacy obsessed, hormonally erratic, mood-swinging, temperamentally unstable, planning-deficient creature on an emotional roller coaster and you have made the first step towards saving your sanity.

Of course, successful parenting is about love, warmth and positive regard. It is also about swashbuckling, feigning, acting and swaying the crowd. It’d be enough to make your average pirate pale and run in the other direction.

This book is about doing less with more. It is a compilation of ideas that I have collected, nicked, purloined and borrowed over the years. It is the secret knowledge of survival in a business that buries its martyrs.

As one mother described it, ‘After years of being a helicopter parent, my rotors finally stopped whirring and I crashed to the ground. I looked at my children and said to myself, “You’re all old enough to make your own mistakes, it’s up to you now,” and if I’m honest, I should have done it years before.’ ‘Black-hawk-down parenting’ was her term for it.

The art of raising tricky teens and remaining sane is curiously elusive in today’s embattled world. I hope this book gives you some nifty tricks to have up your sleeve.

Signs you might be stuck

Do you ever feel like you are going over the same old ground and getting nowhere fast?

Are you arguing with your teenager about the same issue over and over again?

Are you leaving for work in the morning feeling dejected and agitated?

Are you coming home dawdling and taking the scenic route rather than facing the inevitable evening battles?

Are you a single parent juggling roles, schedules, demands and requests but coping with none of them completely?

Are you a step-parent who feels like every time you try to parent, your new partner and their teen gangs up against you?

Your teen complains to you that you love their younger brother or sister more than them and you secretly think they might be right?

You offer to take your teen on a holiday with the private, never-to-be-spoken-out-loud wish that they will say, 'No I'd prefer to stay at a friend's place.'

Do you sometimes wonder whether the old Chinese proverb that you either marry or give birth to your worst enemy from a past life is actually true in your case?

Whether your family is traditionally nuclear, single parent, step-blended or even tribal, these issues apply to you. If any of these ring true for you, you are caught in a grindingly exhausting dance that lurches through painful old routines. This book is designed to help you to change the patterns and create a new dance with your tricky teen.

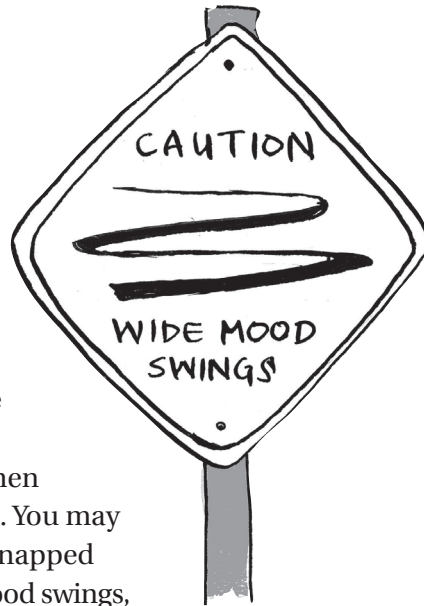
Resilient parenting

It is highly likely that your tricky teen will survive your parenting. The really important question is, 'Will your lovely personality and temperament remain in place throughout the journey?'

There may be moments when you feel like you are a hostage. You may feel like your life has been kidnapped by a dramatist with erratic mood swings, unpredictable demands and a temper that would match Genghis Khan on one of his more tetchy days. Of course you love them. Of course you want the best for them. Of course you want them to be happy. None of this means you have to sacrifice your life to become a quivering shadow of your former self.

The question is not whether your teen will grow up and thrive, that's the easy bit. The big question is, will you survive their upbringing with your sanity, looks and good humour intact.

Here are a few life-preserving pointers to begin with.



Be a thief!

Steal, borrow, pinch and pilfer ideas and strategies from other parents. Give credit where credit is due but steal all the same. People have great ideas. Use them. Don't ever be accused of re-inventing the wheel. Good parents borrow books and ideas, great parents use them to create changes. This book is based on the guerilla tactics used by thousands of parents.

Rituals

One of the strongest predictors of good mental health is the presence of positive rituals in people's lives. The small regular things that we do to keep our lives sane don't have to cost much, and they don't have to take up much time, but they make a huge difference.

Have some rituals in your life each week that bring you and your family together. It doesn't matter whether it's the Friday night pizza or the Wednesday evening swim or the Sunday movie. Putting them in your diary at the start of the year and sticking to them is what matters.

Ask your teen for help

This is really hard to do. Often, it seems far easier to just do it yourself than to explain how something should be done. Teens can be a valuable time-saving resource, but only if you take the time to train them and ask them. People can only feel involved if you give them something to be involved in.

Parenting is an impossible job

Recognise it! Face facts. No one can be on top of everything all the time. Even the best parent, on their best day, under ideal conditions, is only going to be switched on about 20 per cent of the time.

Some tricky teens have a powerful investment in announcing that you are the worst parent on earth and that no one else's parents are anywhere near as bad as you are. Most parents of teens will confess that there are times when it doesn't matter what they did, it was wrong in the eyes of their teenager.

Generally, parents enjoy raising a family but look back and think, 'Phew, we all got through that relatively unscathed.' Parenting is the biggest, the best and at times, the toughest job going. For most parents, raising one family is enough. Perhaps this is why we see so many smiling grandparents with a twinkle in their eyes. Knowing that parenting is an impossible job may help you to throw away the guilt.

It's only an emergency if you have to call a crisis line

There is a growing trend to treat everything as if it is important, essential and an emergency. This leads some people to run their family in the same manner as they would run a psychiatric crisis clinic. We're there to raise children. What is urgent is not always what is most important.

Taking a 'steady as she goes' long-term perspective on things is important. This is especially true with tricky teens. When an issue arises ask yourself, 'Will this matter twelve months from

now?’ If the answer truly is ‘Yes’, do something about it. At other times it may be better to do nothing at all.

Grab an advisor

Some parents I know have a few people they regularly share the dilemmas of parenting with and chat with on a reasonably regular basis throughout the year. In some cases, these people are also known as drinking buddies. While soaking yourself in alcohol won’t solve the issues, adding a support team will. Parenting is so complex that no one person has all the answers.

Give up ‘busy’ and ‘not bad’

The busy world we live in leads people to sink into a quagmire of brief, dull interactions. For example:

‘How are you?’

‘All right’ or ‘OK’ or
‘Not bad.’

‘What did you do on the weekend?’

‘Nothing.’

‘What did you learn at school today?’

‘Nothing.’

Tricky teens are often the masters of the non-committal understatement – shrugging, mumbling and evading. Parents can counteract this by talking their world up and being positive.

Even worse is the discussion where everyone agrees they are busy. ‘How are you?’ ‘Busy.’ You’ve been busy too. We are all busy. You have as much time as everyone else. One hundred and sixty-eight hours every week. The same as everyone else. Pretend that

it's enough. Don't fall into the self-fulfilling trap of saying to yourself and others, 'I'm too busy.' When you say, 'I'm busy' what you are really saying is, 'I am too busy for you.'

Keep a blue day book

There are days for all of us when we feel fed up. Having a book of good memories reminds us of the good moments and helps us get through the hard times.

Whenever something delightful happens, keep a record of it in your blue day book. If your children write you a card or give you a drawing, keep it in the book. For all of us there are moments when we feel our children don't appreciate us and it is really useful to be able to pick up those moments of good times and remind ourselves that it is all worth it.

Make a life calendar

Find an old calendar that you like. Don't buy a new one unless you have to. On the page that is the current month, put copies (or originals if you prefer) of good things that have happened in your family's history during that month. Hang the calendar in a prominent position in your house. The kitchen is often a good place. Then, as each month passes, make a small commitment to add good things that have happened in that month to the calendar.

By the end of twelve months you will have a calendar that represents and reminds you of the best of life. If your family is like every other family I have done this with, you will find there is one month when not much has happened. There will be one

month that has been dull. Use this to inspire you to do something positive in that month.

Life calendar

Jumping January	Fantastic February	Marvellous March
Amazing April	Magnificent May	Joyous June
Jam-packed July	Awesome August	Sensational September
Outstanding October	Notable November	Dynamic December