



## Raising a Teen? The 3 Parenting Fundamentals for Creating a Calm and Connected Household

In my 20 years' experience working with teens and parents, I see some common stumbling blocks where parents struggle to keep their connection with their teen and maintain a calm and stable household.

When I see parents that struggle, it's rarely due to a lack of caring or effort. If anything, the parents I see tend to be so invested and are trying so hard they end up exhausted, strung out, and often resentful or disheartened. And yet their relationship with their teen is still strained, charged, distant, or out of control.

### What's Missing?

What's missing is a solid grasp of the fundamentals of parenting which center around where parents are coming from. While it can appear as though parents are at the mercy of their teen's emotional states, in fact **parents have the potential to have a huge impact on the household and their relationship with their teen.** It doesn't matter whether your teenager is depressed, impulsive, withdrawn, suicidal, negative, explosive, self-centered, unmotivated, or rebellious. Your goal as a parent is the same.

**It comes down to how you, the parent, are doing inside yourself when your teenager goes going off the rails.** To help you see what I'm talking about, below are the three parenting fundamentals that will transform your relationship with your teen, your well-being as a parent, and in turn, the well-being of your teen.

### 1. Keep Your Own Stability When your Teen Loses His

When your teenager has one of his 'episodes' and is doing badly, maybe he gets depressed, negative, or anxious, the last thing he needs is a parent that freaks out. Parents often react with an episode of their own when they see their kid get symptomatic.

I frequently see parents react by getting fed up, angry, or start worrying about worst-case scenarios (“My kid is going to become a negative person” or “what if he gets so anxious he can’t function in life?”). Parents can get intense, controlling, get in their kids’ face, or start blaming themselves or their spouse for causing their kids’ symptoms. And in that debilitated state of urgency, they try to fix, change or parent their kid. They attempt to address problems when, quite frankly, at that point they’re no better off in terms of their mental fitness than their teenager. It just creates more drama with no gain whatsoever.

When you’re doing badly yourself, you want people around you that are calm and stable. If there are parenting issues that come up, those issues need to wait until you’ve gotten yourself together. We often follow that logic in our working lives or in other areas, yet somehow we can lose our heads when it comes to our kids.

As a parent, you’re in a leadership role. **When your teen has gone off the rails, to the degree you can keep your own bearings and composure, and remain neutral, you’ll be able to create a calmer, more orderly environment.** You’ll not only avoid escalating the situation with your own outbursts, but having a stable presence around your teen will help him to stabilize faster.

## 2. Don't Let Parenting Shame Creep into Your Head

One of the biggest epidemics I see among parents is a sense of shame or disappointment in their parenting because of the their kids’ difficulties. They take it personally that their kid isn’t doing better. They scrutinize how they’ve handled things, assuming that their failures and mistakes single-handedly caused their kid’s struggles. They scrutinize and compare their parenting to those around them, and feel like a failure.

I worked with the dad of a very troubled girl. He said parenting was by far the most difficult thing he’s ever done, even in his job. His job? He diffuses bombs.

Raising kids requires levels of patience, empathy, stick-with-it-ness, and stamina we never knew we had. Then they become teenagers, and overnight they go from being open and sweet to being hostile, defensive, emotional, angry, and consumed by

insecurity. And randomly that troubled person will disappear, and they become a completely different person -- upbeat, thoughtful, and mature. And then within minutes or hours, they flip back over to the dark side to someone we no longer recognize.

On top of that, they're living at the effects of the cruel social world composed of other teens that are just as unpredictable and chaotic as they are. They'll barely keep it together all day, and when they come home after school, the buildup of tension, angst and emotion will explode, and you'll be standing there in the line of fire.

So cut yourself some slack. I'm sure we've all contributed to our kids' struggles, in good ways and bad. **We're human, we're not perfect.** But remember that they're human too, so struggle and frailty is part of the package. It doesn't have to mean anything is wrong or anyone is to blame. They'll find their way through it just like we did.

For people that are used to being good at whatever they put their minds to -- their jobs, managing a household, or keeping a marriage together, it can be very unsettling to have no idea how to parent your kid, no answers, and no control over how bad things get. It's a part of your life you're invested in more than any other, and you feel responsible for it.

And maybe in your mind, your teen is out there in the world representing you and your parenting failures. So it can be uncomfortable. The self-consciousness and second-guessing yourself, the sense of chaos -- being forced to get comfortable with all that discomfort is what growing pains feel like. **If you can learn to lean back a little, roll with the punches, not have all the answers and just take it a day at a time, that will bring you a level of humility that will serve you well in life.** And you'll have your teenager to thank.

### 3. Get Interested in Your Teens' Strengths and Resilience

Comedian Steven Wright (one of my heros) has a saying that perfectly explains why raising teenagers can be so nerve-wracking for parents: "Experience is something you don't get until just after you need it." Teenagers are at that point in their lives where they have nearly full independence, and yet their experience level is the lowest it'll

ever be. Their learning comes mostly from mistakes, trial, and error, and because we're standing right there, we see so much of the fall-out.

The trap parents fall into is getting caught in the horror of the mistakes or struggles. For example, maybe your son fails a test or gets dumped and feels worthless. Suddenly, within your mind, in 10 minutes he'll be dropping out of school or dying alone. If you fixate on mistakes and struggles, your teen will look unfit to face this world, fragile, vulnerable, and simply not ready.

**But what parents miss is the secret life their teen handles alone every single day when we're not watching** (which is the majority of their daily lives). Whether your kid is social or a loner, he's out there, finding his way through the most complicated and unpredictable social environment he'll ever face, navigating things like friendships, dating, drugs, and social media, on top of managing full-time academics. In addition, he's getting constantly hijacked by feelings of extreme insecurity, self-consciousness, isolation, anger, and sadness. He's getting those feelings in amounts he's never had, with zero warning.

**Teenagers have more grit than any other age group I work with.** The problem is, parents aren't looking for the moments when their kids are graceful and handling things.

If you live in fear or concern about your teen, I'd bet my house that you're only paying attention to their struggles and mistakes. That's what you're tracking. Just like you only notice the admirable qualities in a friend or mentor, and hardly notice the qualities that other people have a problem with. If you look for the moments or parts of your kids' life in which he was responsible, thoughtful, or handled something difficult, you'll see them. They're EVERYWHERE. I guarantee you his friends see them. But you can't take my word for it, you have to look for yourself.

If you really want to help your teen, especially if he struggles more than most, look for reasons to have faith in him and get interested in what he has going for him, instead of what he lacks.

You can't live his life for him, and frankly, we'd never survive his world. At this point, he's running his own life whether you think he's ready or not. Having faith in him is the only card you have to play.

### **A New Direction to Point Yourself**

These parenting fundamentals, 1. keeping your own personal stability, 2. steering away from shame and disappointment, and 3. getting more interested in your kids' strengths than mistakes are the best things you can do for you and your teen. Ultimately, you can't control your teen, but you can control where you're coming from inside yourself in the face of parenting challenges. That's your sphere of influence.

**But you're not going for perfection here.** These three fundamentals represent a new direction in which to point yourself. The good news is that the moment that you change your direction in any of these ways, your parenting will transform. Your own well-being will improve, which will empower your parenting skills. and that will flow down directly to your teen. And over time you'll get better at it.

Parents that focus on these three fundamentals as their number one priority are able to find a stronger connection with their teen, have a bigger influence on their teen, and navigate their teen's emotional life more gracefully. In my work with parents, that's my primary focus because that's what makes the biggest and most lasting difference.



#### **About Me**

I work with parents and teens from all over the world both virtually and in-person. I offer 4-day individual or family intensives outside Seattle, Washington as well as phone- and video-coaching for teens, young adults, and parents.

Contact me if you'd like to find out more.

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