

# Three Tips for Raising Resilient Teens

The teen years are tumultuous, but as adolescents test boundaries and become a bit defiant, it also lays the groundwork for a sense of purpose and individuality. Here's how parents can help teens thrive.

October 19, 2016



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The school year is well underway. You may find yourself

already embroiled in a frenzy scheduling, activities, and demands, leading to tense after-school battles and “wars of wills” with your teens. Beyond their reluctance to do homework and chores, a teenager’s constant quest to assert themselves and carve out a personal identity can make things difficult for the whole family. If you’ve found yourself constantly chiding your children or spouting the usual “no going out until you finish your homework,” “clean up your room, ” and “did you do the dishes?” you’re certainly not the only one. Unfortunately, getting swept up in a firestorm of do’s and don’ts only increases the stress level at home. Rather than add to the pressure, you can help your teens learn to deal with routines and demands in a healthier way.

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If your teen's general response to discussing rules and goal-setting is less than enthusiastic, you're not alone. It is 100% normal for adolescents to be moody, uncommunicative, and somewhat defiant. Dan Siegel, child psychiatrist and author of *New York Times* bestseller [\*Brainstorm\*](#), explains that an adolescent's testing of boundaries and seemingly passionate drive to explore the exciting and unknown is a key part of the developmental process. Often times it is the "work of adolescence" that helps a teen's core character and personality traits emerge and develop, and end up enabling them to lead lives of adventure and purpose throughout adulthood.

This is not to say that teens shouldn't have goals and expectations—they should. Having something to work toward is both fulfilling and important, but the goals you set together should speak to the reality of who your children are and what they value. If your teen isn't an athlete, he/she doesn't need to make varsity, (even if all your friend's children are on the team, or you think it'd look good on a college application). First of all, if he/she isn't a good player it's unlikely that making varsity is in the realm of possibility. Secondly, why not focus on a more suitable goal that aligns with your children's abilities? Your children's goals should be

about them. What will inspire them?

Charting a successful path for the future comes from teaching your teens to achieve out of a sense of purpose, not a sense of duty or a fear of disappointment. Ideally, you want your children to look within and discover their unique talents and gifts. You want them to explore who they are and what they want to become. Rather than demanding and imposing your wants and desires onto your children, open a dialogue and get a sense of how they're feeling. What do they want out of their own lives? How can you inspire them to think twice about their personal worldview, confront pleasant and unpleasant experiences, broaden their horizons, discover inherent strengths and carve out more independence? After all, as adults, we know that sometimes, even when dreams go up in flames, among the ashes a seed of new opportunity lies waiting to be nurtured.

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**How to Help Your Teen Thrive**

**Be a better listener.** Listen with the intention to learn. Let go of your desire to convince or impose your opinions onto your teen. Your conversation should provide space for them to express their ideas, explore new frontiers, form an identity, and remain open to constant change. If we can teach our teens to be curious and refrain from viewing experiences through a binary lens of black or white, good or bad, success or failure, they'll begin to explore everyday experiences more fully. This more open mindset allows them to experiment, falter, and change their minds when something is not going according to plan and enables them to hear and appreciate diverse perspectives. The ability to adapt well to *all* circumstances builds [resilience](#).

**Empathize.** Be a source of support. Life is full of painful moments—friends move away, university applications are turned down, parents separate, and sometimes the road gets bumpy. Whether they're experiencing excitement, anxiety, disappointment, or failure, let them know that you're always there. The more you're able to demonstrate a willingness to see life through their eyes, the closer you'll become. A strong and trusting relationship makes the admission of defeat, disappointment, and achievement easier and the emotions that course through these moments will begin to unite you rather than divide you.

**Talk honestly.** Ask questions that get the whole family to

share about who they are, what they like, and how they interact with the world. Having their feelings validated gives teens the encouragement they need to feel accepted, admit defeat, and re-adjust. Often times the simple act of showing you care is enough to strengthen connections and build meaningful conversations that last a lifetime.

**Theo Koffler, founder of [Mindfulness Without Borders](#), has just launched [RETHINK](#), it's first-ever digital kit for educators and parents with over 100 classroom tested activities, video clips, and focused attention practices to enhance social and emotional intelligence and well-being in youth, enabling them to transition into the next phase of their young adult lives as strong leaders and valuable community members. Look inside, or pass it forward as together we can make a difference and help our youth thrive.**