

Parents of Teens: Keep Your Focus on the Relationship

by: Nicole Schwarz

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5 ways to have a strong relationship with your teen.

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Parents and teenagers.

Seems like a disaster in the making.

Teens are going through a period of uncertainty and radical growth and change. They are struggling to find their own identity and make their own decisions; while still wanting to be the little child, babied by their parents.

Parents are also going through a period of uncertainty. They struggle to figure out their role with their teen. No longer are they needed to help with zippers, tying shoes, or multiplication tables. What is their role now?

It's no wonder parents dread this stage.

Thankfully, it doesn't have to be a horrible experience for you or your child.

Let's simplify.

Your goal is to **stay focused on building or maintaining the relationship with your child.**

This may not be the easiest piece of advice, but research shows positive outcomes for teens who report having a good relationship with their parent. So, next time your teen comes in late or starts whining, "Awww mom, you're so MEAN," focus on the relationship.

Five Tips to Keep You Focused on the Relationship

- **Don't go with your first reaction.** More than likely, your first reaction will be yelling, lecturing, or giving a consequence you cannot enforce. Instead, take a deep breath, stop for a few seconds before you respond.
- **Listen more than you talk.** It's tempting to go on and on about the foolishness of your teen's choice or get wrapped up in an argument about what is "fair." Instead, [talk less](#). Work to understand your teens perspective rather than forcing yours.
- **Be the adult.** Take charge of your own feelings and triggers before you try to "fix" your child. Respond with [empathy](#), "Hmm, I can hear that you are frustrated by that decision." Or "I want to hear your concern, but let's talk about this later after we've had time to calm down."
- **Engage in problem-solving together.** You may have the "perfect" solution, but your teen needs a chance to explore options and create a plan for making things right. Instead of lecturing, say "Failing that test was a bummer; it's disappointing that you can't play in Friday's game. What is your plan to improve your grade in English so you can play next week?"
- **Repair as needed.** You don't have to be the perfect parent 100% of the time, it's natural to slip back into old patterns. If your reactions or behavior is causing a ridge

between you and your teen, it is up to you to make an effort to [repair the relationship](#).

It is not easy to maintain your cool and know the right thing to say at all times.

Teens can change their mind – and their attitude – multiple times an hour. It's ok to admit that you didn't handle things well previously or [apologize for yelling](#) when you should have listened.

What is important is salvaging the relationship.

It is about learning to communicate with your child in a way that is respectful, and that says – either verbally or in so many words – “I love you. And I'm here to support you through this time of excitement and uncertainty.”