

## The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

### Parenting A Teenager Made Easier

from the American Counseling Association

Yes, being the parent of a teen can be made "easier," but sorry, it's probably never going to be "easy." The teenage years are a difficult time in the life of a young person and, unfortunately, that usually makes for a difficult time in the life of the parents.

Teens don't consciously mean to be non-communicative, withdrawn and perhaps even hostile when it comes to a relationship with parents. In reality, teens are more often confused, scared and simply unsure of themselves, but instead of wanting to let others, especially those in charge, see those "weaknesses," the defense mechanism is to try and keep as much information as possible from the parental units.

What makes the teen years so difficult are the personal changes and situations facing your child. School is probably more challenging than it was a few years before. At the same time, the teen is dealing with a body that is maturing, hormonal changes, and increased pressure about unknowns like college or a career.

Meanwhile, your role is as the authority figure, setting rules and limits. The result is your teen is more likely to talk and share feelings with friends than with you. Why? Friends are usually less critical, less judgmental and more likely facing the same issues. And friends don't try to parent, but you do.

The cure isn't to give up your parenting role, but simply to soften it a bit. Invest some time in the things that interest your teen -- friends, food, TV, video games and other favorite activities. Encourage your teen to invite friends to the house and spend some time listening to your child's favorite music. Your goal isn't to like any of your teen's choices, but rather to demonstrate that you understand and respect your teen's decisions.

Teen parenting frustration can also be lessened by simply offering communication opportunities. Be available to your teen and learn to ask questions and really listen non-critically to any responses. Don't immediately offer advice or criticism. Giving your opinion or suggestion without being asked is a sure-fire way to shut down communication.

Your goal is for your teen to see you not just as a parent, but also as someone who respects him or her and is willing to listen without giving instant advice or judgments. Achieve that and the teenage years may indeed seem easier, at least from the parent's side.

*Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).*

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words: 399