

INSIGHTS

How to change your parenting for the teenage years



Parenting teenagers is traditionally seen as the most difficult parenting stage. However, many parents have discovered that raising teenagers is a lot easier than raising younger children. For this to be the case, there are three changes parents make to survive their kids' adolescence.

Step up the coaching

When kids are young it's common for parents to take over many aspects of their lives. They establish bedtimes, cook meals and make doctor's appointments. Parents decide where they will go to school, if they go to camp and where the family will take a holiday. Children are content with this approach and will enjoy having their days organised by loving adults.

Teenagers, on the other hand, need to start managing their own lives, which can put them at odds with over-protective or over-controlling parents. Wise parents will aim for redundancy well before the teenage years so handing over control isn't so foreign.

Psychologists William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, authors of *The self-driven child* believe parents need to hand over a great deal of decision-making to adolescents. Not straight away and not in a way that negates their need to take responsibility for their actions. They advise parents to gradually involve teens in creating rules that govern their own behaviour, keep challenging their choices and provide emotional support when they make poor decisions. A parent gives up being a manager and takes up the role of life coach.

Influence teens differently

Most parents would like to download all their knowledge of the world into their teenage children's brains so that they could always make good decisions. Giving teenagers information doesn't guarantee that you can influence them as you did in childhood. Teenagers are highly attuned to status and hypervigilant to the way they are treated by adults. If you talk down to them, they will turn off as you are talking to the low status or child-like part of the brain. Talk to them as if they are autonomous young adults and they are more likely to listen, as you are talking to the high-status part of their brains. If you wish to discuss topics such as respectful relationships, the use of alcohol or preparing for life after school, avoid talking to them as if they are children. Speak to them as you would to someone with the highest possible status – someone you respect, and they are more likely to engage with you.

Have hard chats

Conversations with preschool and early primary school years are comparatively easy compared to many conversations you have with tweens and teens that revolve around hot topics such as sexuality, school performance and the future. Avoidance of hard chats and the emotional minefields they lead to becomes the easiest option. Teenagers are dealing with some difficult issues, so parents need to create safe opportunities to talk about the hard issues.

parenting * ideas

Christine Carter, author of *The New Adolescence* believes that parents should think beyond having a “big talk” about difficult topics and bring up these topics using short observations and simple questions. She writes, “Even when we have lots to say, it’s more important to give them a chance to speak, and to work out what they are thinking in a low-risk environment.” Practise staying calm despite your discomfort. Welcome it if your kids sense your discomfort as it reveals your human side.

In closing

Young children and teenagers have very different needs. Effective parents adapt their parenting style to meet the developmental and emotional needs of their children at each stage of growing up. Teens need greater autonomy, skilled guidance and plenty of chances to talk about the issues that bother them and worry their parents. That may mean that you need to shift your parenting gears a little to meet their needs in the teenage years.

Michael Grose presents: Changing parenting gears for the teenage years

Our school has a membership with Parenting Ideas. As part of this membership, you can attend the upcoming webinar ‘Changing parenting gears for the teenage years’ at no cost.

About

In this webinar, Michael Grose discusses the importance of changing parenting gears during the teenage years. He shares the critical shifts parents need to make when raising teenagers.

When

Wednesday 31 August 2022 8:00pm AEST

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Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia’s leading parenting educators. He’s an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.