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Tips For Parenting Teens

Parenting teens has always been an art and a science, with a bit of luck thrown in. Although frustrating and stressful for many, parenting teens can still be fun, exciting, and fulfilling. Here are a few tips to consider. None are designed to "control" the adolescent or guarantee stress-free parenting, but they can give you a head start at influencing a healthy, happy, and safe adolescent journey to adulthood.

10 Tips for Parenting Teens

1. Identity. Respect that teenagers seek to discover a positive identity that expresses his/her individuality. Peers, movie and music stars, and other persons they value, can influence their decisions. Changes in personal appearance are hallmarks of normal experimentation in identity by teens. Monitoring and some rule setting may be required, but ignore smaller battles in favor of bigger ones that affect health, safety, and well being.

2. Parent Communication. Making changes in your communication style or speaking habits, if necessary, can be tough, but will improve your teenager's ability to listen. Not effective and likely to reap negative returns are: preaching, sarcasm in correcting behavior, ridicule, put-downs, yelling and screaming, comparing the teen's behavior with more successful peers, and not being able to admit when you are wrong or say you are sorry.

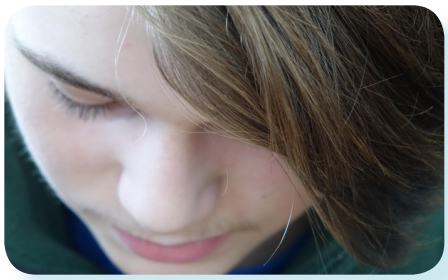
3. Peers. Feeling accepted and part of a peer group are crucial to teens. They feel abnormal when they are different from their peers. But all peer groups are not equal. Some may experiment with antisocial behavior, alcohol and drug use, or seek to dominate members' beliefs. Talk about peer pressure early to help teens evaluate peer groups later and make choices that match their values.

4. Sex. It is normal for teens to begin showing interest in the opposite sex. Sex education, and giving the right information to teens is important. Starting early to communicate your values and concerns about dating and sexual activities in an open and honest way is better than keeping silent hoping for the best.

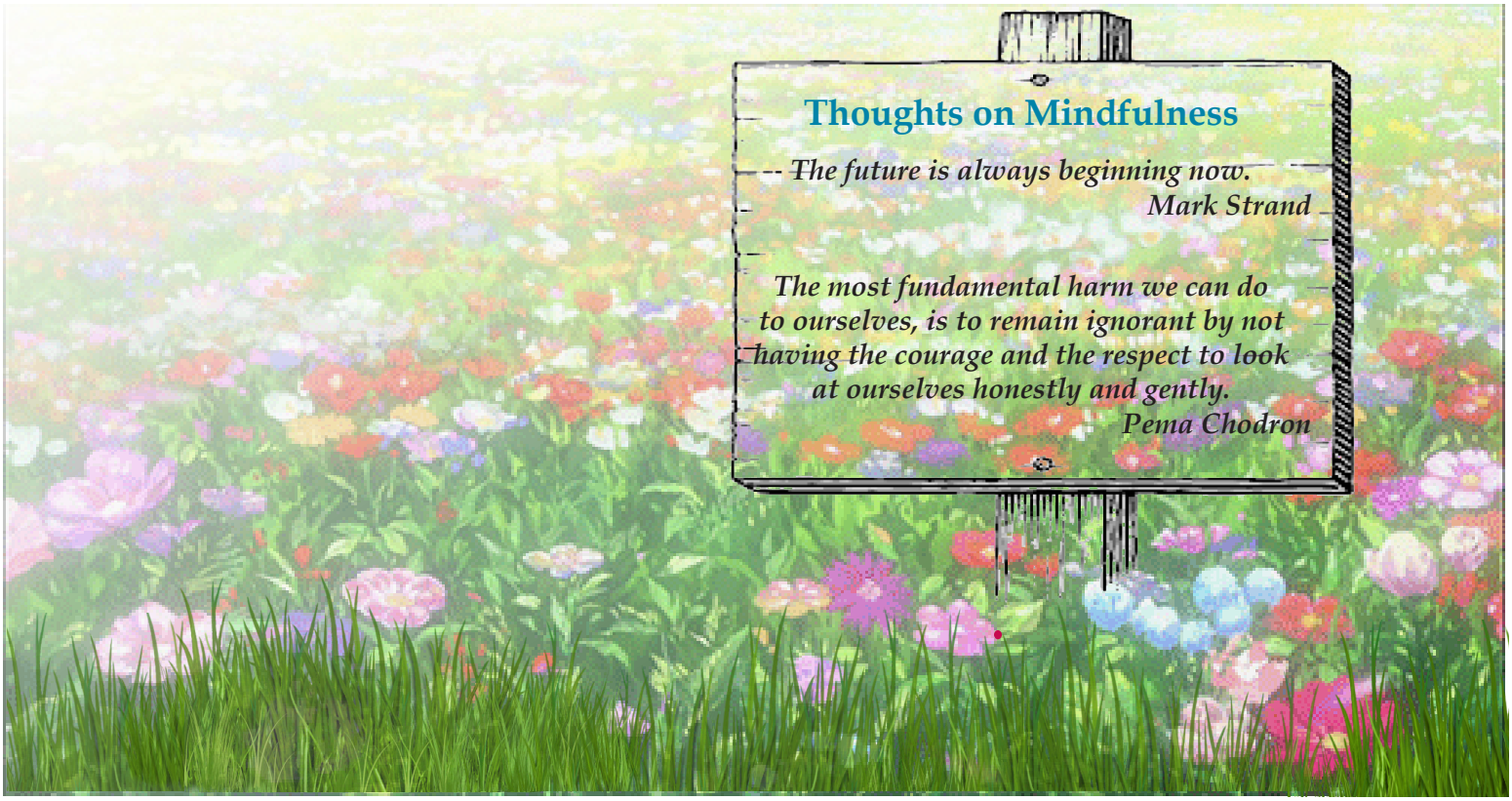
5. Self-esteem. Some teens may struggle with their self-esteem. An over-valuation of what peers think and lack of confidence in their ability to do well in their home, school, or social life can adversely affect the teenager. Encourage their good decisions with your time, praise, and monetary support. Most importantly, avoid negative comments that can prey easily on a fragile sense of self.

6. Freedom and Limits. Begin treating your teenager like an adult, but do not always expect adult behavior. You will need to set limits and establish boundaries. Look for the balance of what you can accept and what the teen wants. Monitor, and let the teen know you are aware of activities. Be reasonable, practice "letting go," and decide what are safe risks that promote independence.

7. Emotions. Emotional ups and downs make teen years difficult. Teenagers may struggle with controlling their emotions and be unable to verbalize how they feel. Your expressions of empathy - the ability to acknowledge your teenager feelings, listening, and offering support - are important. Avoid statements that send a message to ***snap out of it,*** such as "***everyone feels that way***." Learning about symptoms of depression can help you determine whether your teen suffers from this illness.



8. Health and Fitness. Irregular meal patterns, skipping breakfast and fasting to lose weight are not uncommon with teenagers. Eating disorders frequently begin at this age. Awareness about substance abuse and eating disorders can alert you to signs and symptoms. Act early with professional guidance if you suspect problems. Lack of rest is also a hazard of teenage living and contributes to moodiness and irritability. Help make sure your teen eats a well-balanced diet and gets adequate rest.

9. Thinking About Life. Teens experience new ways of looking at the world. They apply abstract thinking to values, morals, issues of authority, empathy, relationships, and justice. They try new philosophies and ***think about thinking***. Questioning familiar values may cause distress for parents. Express your personal position about social, political, moral, and spiritual issues, but maintain your established traditions of family, cultural, or religious rituals. Support the positive aspects of intellectual growth.

10. What the EAP Can Do. Every parent's experience of raising a teenager is different. More parents probably need support than ask for it. If you have concerns about your teenager's behavior, the EAP can help. Resources for specific issues that teenagers face are available, as well as general parenting information. The Employee Assistance Program can help you find the answers you seek.