



## **When your child becomes a teen...**

### **By, Lisa Greenberg, PhD**

For many families, the transition to becoming a family with teenage children, rather than one with pre-teens, is a difficult one. Parents, used to reasonably cheerful and compliant children, may be surprised to find themselves having to deal with offspring who suddenly challenge the rules and routines they have lived with comfortably for years. The adults may realize that their old parenting techniques are no longer effective, but they are uncertain about what and how to change now that their family has reached a new life stage. Below are some tips about how to think about raising teens which are designed to help parents to nurture strong and positive relationships with their new teenagers, while also supporting their kids' increasing maturity.

- Value the inside, not the outside. Your teenagers need and deserve to feel valued for who they are; none of us are simply a collection of our achievements and our mistakes. You are raising a human being, not a human doing. You are helping to develop a person, not a resume.
- Work to embrace and support the kid you have, not the one you were, the one you wish you were, the one you wish you had, or the one you believe will become a success. Though it can be hard, it is often important to let go of the expectations you brought to parenting about who you would raise, and to see the joy and value in the actual person in front of you.
- Respect the kid you have today, while helping the adult of tomorrow develop. Try to have one foot in the present and one in the future.
- View your kid, and yourself, as works in progress, with the capacity to improve and develop, rather than as reliant only on inborn talent. Value self-control and hard work, not merely outcomes like grades. Empathize with effort, frustration, and failure, but don't prevent them.
- Goals are helpful to people, but these should be goals you and your teen share, not yours alone. If you want your teen to work on changing or developing in some way, keep in mind that you are much more likely to see the change you want if your teen wants the same outcome. Work to get buy-in, even if it's on only a small part of what you'd like. If you can't agree on a goal, let it go, wait awhile and (gently) try again at another time. Consider that your goals may not be the right ones for your teen.
- Discuss problems in collaborative ways. Everyone's voice should be heard: everyone's view counts, and, ideally, solutions should be acceptable to everyone. Parenting is seldom about imposing your will.
- Spend time with your teenager in non-task focused, nonjudgmental, enjoyable ways. Talk to each other about lots of things – serious and important and not. Support a positive social life and positive activities, without communicating that it's necessary to be busy every moment or that activities exist to build a college resume. Let your kid know you enjoy and value him/her.
- Remember that parenting teenagers is often difficult. Be gentle with yourself and with your kids. Try to maintain your sense of humor. Hang in there and GOOD LUCK!

*Dr. Greenberg is a licensed psychologist in private practice in Madison, NJ. She can be reached at 973-765-0313 or by email at [Lisa.R.Greenberg@gmail.com](mailto:Lisa.R.Greenberg@gmail.com). Please visit Dr. Greenberg's website at [www.LisaGreenberg.com](http://www.LisaGreenberg.com)*

Lisa Greenberg, PhD is a licensed psychologist in practice in Madison, New Jersey. She has many years of experience in treating people from early adolescence through old age. Dr. Greenberg has a particular interest in working with adolescents and their parents. She is frequently quoted in the media on issues involving teens and families, and also enjoys speaking to community groups about these topics. For more information about Dr. Greenberg, please visit her website, at [www.lisargreenberg.com](http://www.lisargreenberg.com).