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Apparently, I have holiday amnesia.

My recollection of my last two holiday gatherings—Dan, me, and all five kids—is that they were family bliss. So much so, that I didn't want to tell too many people about it because I worried it would sound like bragging.

So, when it came time to think about sharing my family's holiday story with you, I was a little thrown. I did not want to flaunt how wonderful my recent holidays have been, and I couldn't come up with any horror stories. At a loss, I asked my kids if they had any good stories to share.

One daughter wrote, "The Thanksgiving blow-out this past year (too soon...?)."

Huh? I tried to recall what happened last Thanksgiving. I couldn't remember anything unusual. Oh yeah. I was *really* mad at my husband. Oh, right, I was really mad at my kids. Oh right, I stormed out of the house. I guess I have a full-blown case of holiday amnesia.



It must be contagious because I told my husband what my daughter wrote. "What happened last Thanksgiving?" he responded. "I don't remember anything special from last Thanksgiving."

I mentioned a particular incident. He started to remember. I also reminded him that everyone was playing a game together while I cleaned up the kitchen—all alone. Then I reminded him about the "final straw."

My daughter's car needed the snow tires put on before she returned to college. The appointment was the next morning. Despite my better judgment, I relented and agreed to take the car to the mechanic on the condition that she put the snow tires in the car. After a tense day (most of the ten-

sion was mine), I reminded my daughter that she needed to put the tires in her car, so that I could get up early and take her car in. She argued that point. Couldn't I put tires in the car, too?

I can say with certainty that no one expected my response. I blew my top. I laid into everyone. Loud. Nasty. Disappointed. Hurt. Spoiled. Entitled. And then I got into my car and drove. For a long time. I wanted to drive somewhere. But it turns out that nothing, *nothing*, is open on Thanksgiving evening.

After driving in circles for way too long, I returned home. A few kids ignored me and sent vibes that I was insane. The other kids seemed contrite and remorseful (I love them best).

And that's our truth. Some holidays are perfect, with everyone bringing their A-game. Other holidays are awful with everyone focused on themselves and impatient with everyone else.

Collectively, we're just your average family with both good and bad times. And thanks to selective memory, we can just write out the bad times from our family history. (At least until one of our kids reminds us of *that time when ...*)

We've got so many great articles this issue, including our feature on making the most of this holiday season (page 30), ideas for how much freedom to give your middle schooler (page 52), tips for having tough conversations with your teenagers (pages 36 and 56), and our wonderful Perspectives on adoption (page 20).

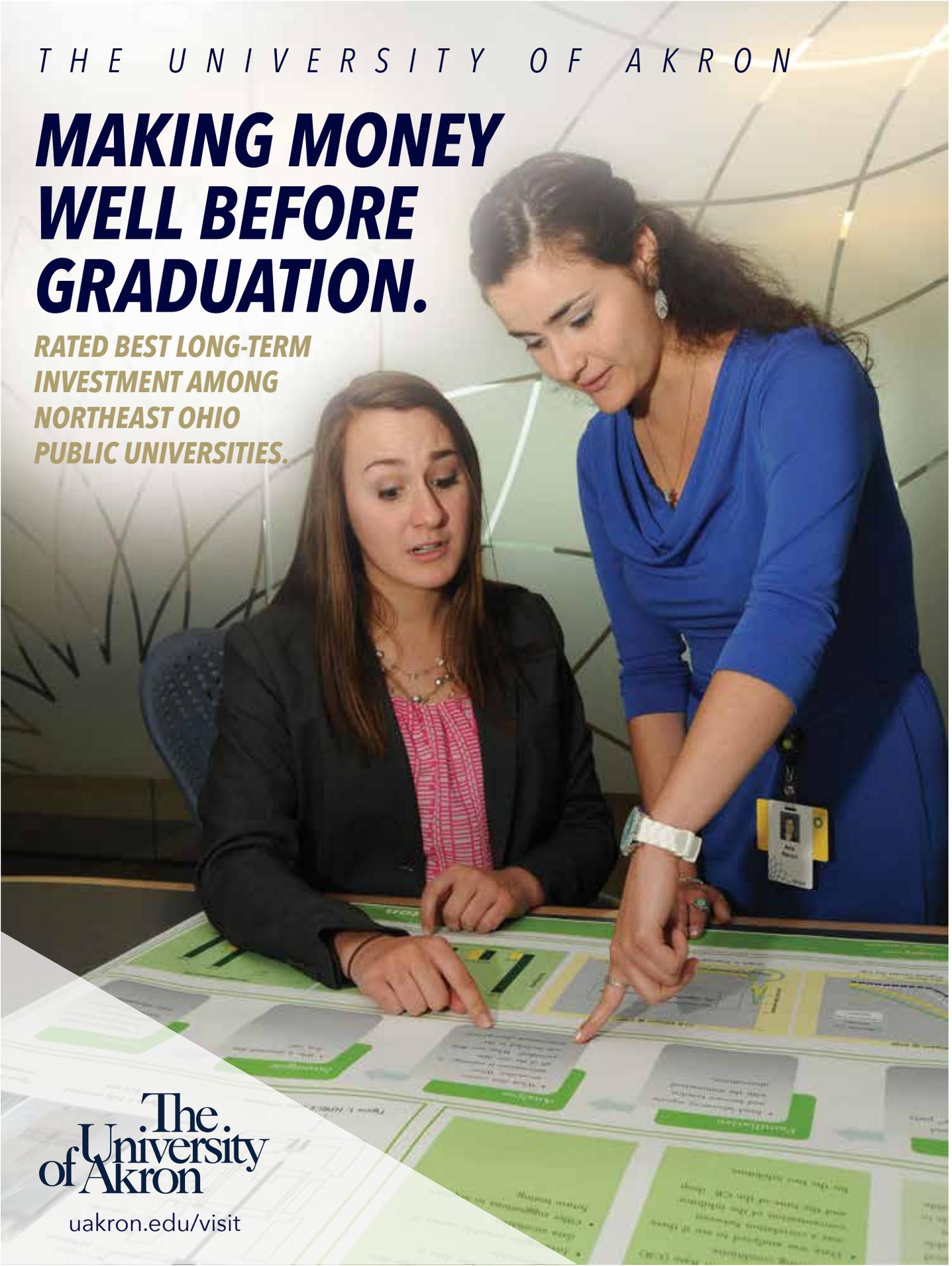
We're also debuting a new section, called Upstanders, in which we highlight ways in which teenagers are standing up for their peers. This issue, we've got a story about how a teenager stepped in when he saw a peer being bullied online. I found it inspiring, and I hope you do too.

Wishing you and yours a wonderful holiday. Enjoy the read.

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LISA DAMOUR

We're delighted to welcome Lisa Damour, Ph.D., back to our pages this issue. Damour is the author of *Untangled: Guiding Teenage Girls Through the Seven Transitions Into Adulthood* and a regular contributor for *CBS News* and the *New York Times* (where she pens the monthly Adolescence column). Turn to page 50 to read her update on what recent research shows can lower a teenager's stress level.



ADOPTION NETWORK CLEVELAND

Our thanks to Adoption Network Cleveland for its help with this issue's Perspectives on adoption (page 20). Founded in 1988 by now executive director Betsie Norris, Adoption Network provides support, education, and advocacy for adoptees, birthparents, adoptive parents, prospective adoptive parents, foster youth and parents, foster care alumni, and professionals. To learn more, visit AdoptionNetwork.org.



ANDREW YANG

We've heard that entrepreneurship is a key skill for the 21st Century, yet how do we cultivate it in our teenagers? To find out, we caught up with Andrew Yang, founder and CEO of Venture for America. The organization runs a fellowship program in which recent college graduates learn first-hand (by working at start-ups) about entrepreneurship. "My single biggest message for parents," says Yang, "is to push your kids to test boundaries."



SOLEDAD O'BRIEN

Soledad O'Brien is an award-winning broadcast journalist, executive producer, and co-founder of the Starfish Foundation, which helps disadvantaged minority women get into, and through, college. She also leads annual PowHERful Summits for women ages 15 to 23 around the country. In other words, she's got a lot going on and we loved talking to her about it for this issue. Flip to our interview with O'Brien on page 54.



They'll always remember girls' night in.

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Underage drinking continues to be a serious public health concern. We hope you'll join us for a presentation on this very important topic, including the impact of alcohol on the developing brain and tips to keep our teens safe. (Funded by SAMHSA.)



SAY – Social Advocates for Youth is a school-based prevention and early intervention program of Bellefaire JCB for students in middle and high school. SAY services are offered in eight east suburban school districts in Cuyahoga County: Beachwood, Chagrin Falls, Cleveland Heights-University Heights, Mayfield, Orange, Shaker Heights, Solon and South Euclid-Lyndhurst.

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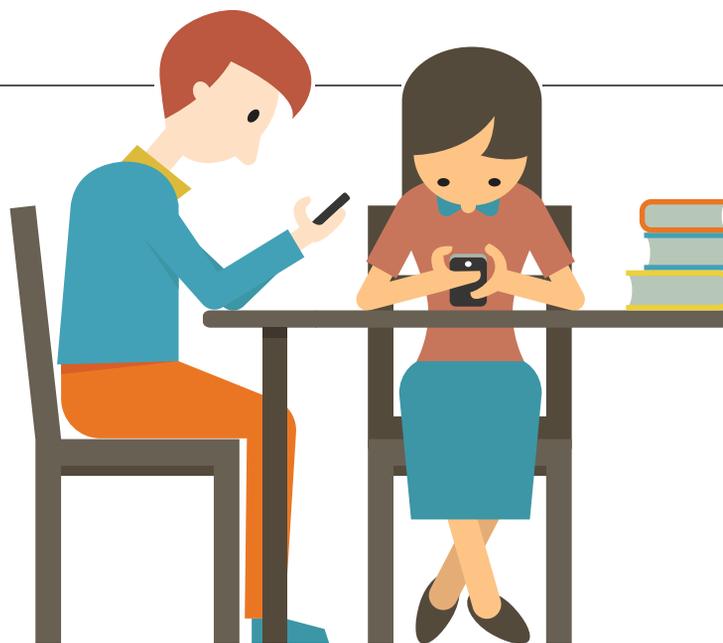
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Sonya Naude @SonyaNaude
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#ParentHack

Sometimes teenagers find themselves in an uncomfortable situation and want to get out of it without telling an obvious lie or making it even more awkward. But how to do it in a way that allows teenagers to save face with a peer? To find out, we asked some creative, tech-savvy teenagers for their tips for making a clean getaway. Pass these on to your teenagers today.

INVENT A CRISIS. "If I'm in a certain situation that makes me uncomfortable," says Haley, "I will try to discreetly gather my things up and tell people that I need to be home at a certain time."

Lillie's a fan of the fake urgent phone call. "I have a code word with my friend Alexis," she reveals. "If I text the code word to her, she'll call me right away—and I can take the phone call and then say I need to leave right away."

TEXT YOURSELF. "When I find myself in an awkward or uncomfortable situation," reveals Sue, "I will change my name in my phone's contact list to 'Mom' then text myself saying 'You need to come home right now' for some made-up reason. That way, I can casually show the text and just say I have to get home."

BLAME YOUR PARENTS. "When I have to get out of an awkward situation," says Tara, "I always blame my parents and make them look like they're being really overprotective so I can get out of something more easily. My favorite excuse? I say I forgot to walk the dog and that my parents will kill me if they find out."

BY THE NUMBERS



25% of teenagers have witnessed a fight or drama between two strangers during Black Friday shopping.

STAGE OF LIFE



74% of teenagers shop online, but **78%** of girls and **75%** of boys said they'd rather go to actual stores.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



\$2 million has been raised for cancer research since 2009 by participants in No-Shave November who grow their facial hair and donate what they saved on grooming expenses for the entire month of November.

NO-SHAVE.ORG



\$79.80 the average amount U.S. consumers spent on gifts for friends in 2015.

STATISTA.COM



37% of millennials say they would rather receive the gift of an experience such as a sporting event or whitewater rafting than a traditional gift.

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Look at You Now

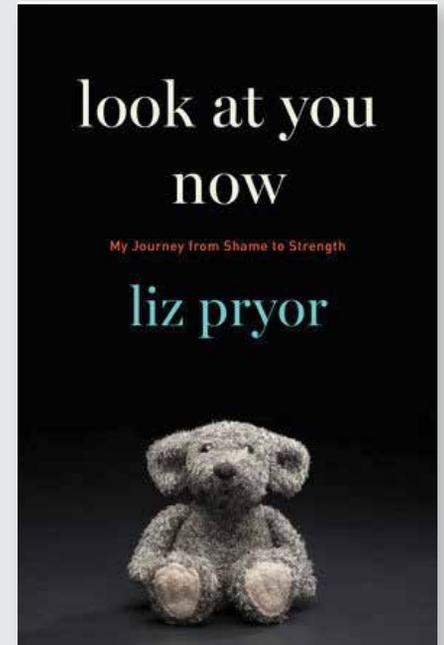
by Liz Pryor

In this beautifully written and brutally honest memoir by Liz Pryor, we learn of a secret that the author has kept since her senior year of high school. Growing up in a large, sheltered, and extremely privileged family, Liz finds herself pregnant at the age of just 17. Her parents

insist that she keep the pregnancy a secret so that it won't ruin the rest of her life. They quickly send her to what she thinks is a Catholic home for unwed mothers.

In reality, it is a locked, government-run facility for delinquent and impoverished teenage girls. Feeling isolated and totally out of her element, Liz learns to get by on her own and to understand people with whom she would never have crossed paths in her old life. How does one live with a secret that so profoundly changes you and the way you see the world?

Liz finds out just how strong she can truly be at some of her lowest points in life. Her impact on the other girls and theirs on her makes for a very moving and compelling read. The author leaves us with this quote by Henry Stanley Haskins: "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." — *Ilene Neides*



Spending Time Together

We asked our readers...

What do you still like to do with your parents?

TEEN ANSWERS

I still enjoy playing sports, going to movies and amusement parks, and working out with my parents.

Amarr M. Wooten, Washington D.C.

Amarr is a teen actor who currently stars as Finch in Disney Channel's Liv and Maddie.



My favorite thing to do with my mom is shop. She tells me what looks good and is completely honest with me, and it's good bonding time to have with her.

Haley, Chardon, OH

I like to go out for dinner and see movies with my parents.

Emma, New York, NY

I like to go to the grocery store with my parents and pick out food for the week together.

Mia, Cleveland, OH

I like that my parents support me at my sporting events—



baseball tournaments, swim meets, etc.

Spencer, Cleveland, OH

I like to go on family vacations.

Toby, Madison, WI

My dad and I go on short outings to different towns and walk around or bike, or watch a movie every so often. My mom and I like to watch movies like *Pride and Prejudice* or *Jane Eyre* together.

Jamie, Athens, OH

Go places with my parents, talk with them, and just generally be around them.

Evan, Hamilton, OH

I like to go to the movies with my parents (since they pay for the tickets).

Nate, Dayton, OH

I like going to theme parks with my parents, such as Disney World. I liked going with my parents more than my siblings.

Rachel, Kent, OH

I like to go to basketball games with my dad.

Daniel, Newark, NJ

What do you still like to do with your teens?

PARENT ANSWERS

We bond over old TV shows. Introducing him to *Friends* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* gives us lots of time together watching TV.

Sara, Fairfield, CT

My teen still loves to do family dinners!

Michelle, Raleigh, NC

We still enjoy many things together. One of our favorites is to pick a day and head into New York City for a new museum, restaurant, or store.

Mindy, Jericho, NY

Sitting on the beach. I think because it is a place to be together but not always have to talk.

Karen, Sudbury, MA

One likes to go to New York City with me for the day. My other one likes to go to baseball games. We also like to watch movies and various TV series together.

Liz, Fairfield, CT

Parents and Teens: Enjoying Your Time Together

Sometimes they don't want to be with you, whether it's because they're busy, or would rather spend their free time with friends, or are mortified by being with their parents in public. And sometimes, let's be frank, your teenager isn't the most pleasant person to be around, either. But that doesn't mean you don't both want to spend time together like you did when they were little. How can you make sure your time together is enjoyable for everyone?

"The developmental goal for adolescence is moving from dependence to independence, and that means doing more without parents. But becoming independent doesn't happen overnight," says Dr. Tira Stebbins, clinical psychologist and clinical director at Organization for Psychological Health in Solon, Ohio.

Although teens often seem to only want to spend free time with friends, they usually do value time spent with parents. "It's important to carve out fun time with teens to keep the relationship strong and make it a priority," advises Stebbins. One-on-one time together attending a sporting event or cooking a special dinner is great. "Take an interest in your teen's passions, whether it's the sport she plays, the music he listens to, or the TV shows they're watching."

What is most important, however, is getting your teen's input into what you do. "If they have a say in the plans, teens are much more likely to engage," says Stebbins. -JP

Baked Ziti with Ground Turkey



Based upon Stanford University's renowned and research-based Pediatric Weight Control Program, the team at Kurbo Health has just released a new (and free!) cookbook for the entire family. Kurbo Health is a health coaching program that offers weekly personal health coaching and a mobile app to empower kids and teens to set goals, lose weight, and develop healthy eating and exercise habits. *The Kurbo Cookbook: Family Friendly Recipes* features quick, easy recipes that are specifically designed for children, teens, and their families for school mornings, packed lunches, week-night meals, and more. This entrée is complete with all the components of a healthy meal: veggies, whole grains, and protein. And if you have anything left over, it makes a great packed lunch.

Serves 8

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 lb ground turkey
 - 1 lb whole wheat penne pasta
 - 1 large jar marinara sauce (24 oz)
 - 2 cloves garlic, minced
 - ½ cup fresh, chopped basil or ½ Tbsp Italian seasoning
 - 1½ cups low-fat ricotta cheese
 - 1 cup grated low fat mozzarella cheese
 - ½ bag frozen spinach, thawed (don't forget to squeeze out excess water)
 - Salt and pepper to taste
 - Olive oil spray (to cook the turkey)
3. Spray olive oil spray in a sauté pan and add minced garlic over medium heat. Sauté garlic for about one minute, then add ground turkey. Season with salt and pepper and cook for about 5 minutes.
 4. In a large mixing bowl, toss the pasta, sauce, Italian seasoning or basil, ricotta cheese, ground turkey, and spinach together.
 5. Transfer to a casserole dish, and sprinkle with the mozzarella cheese.
 6. Bake until the cheese is bubbly and brown and the dish is thoroughly heated, about 15 to 20 minutes; bake longer if the dish has been refrigerated.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Bring a gallon pot of salted water to boil. Add the pasta and cook until al dente, about 8 to 10 minutes. Drain and rinse with cold water.

This can be made ahead and stored unbaked in the refrigerator for up to 2 days, or it can be frozen.



Winter Safety Tips for New Drivers

Your first instinct may be to keep teen drivers at home when winter weather hits, but this may not always be possible. Prepare them ahead of time, so they are ready for driving in snow.

1. Get your car ready for winter.

Equipping your car for cold temperatures and snowy conditions can make the difference between getting to your destination safely and getting stuck. Get winter wiper blades, keep your washer fluid full, carry a shovel and an emergency kit, keep an ice scraper/brush in the car, and check your anti-freeze and, most importantly, mount winter tires on all four wheels.

“All-season tires or summer tires are going to harden up at about 45 degrees,” says Kurt Spitzner, an instructor at Bridgestone Winter Driving School in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. “When the rubber hardens up, you lose your grip on the road, even in

the best of conditions.”

Winter tires are designed specifically for the rubber to stay soft and pliable and grip the road, even in extreme temperature conditions where it reaches 20 below zero.

A handy rule of thumb: If the air is cold enough to see your breath, you should have winter tires on your vehicle.

2. Understand winter road conditions.

Everyone must anticipate that less-than-ideal road surfaces will result in reduced grip, and drivers will need to brake earlier. “For a new driver who just got his license in April, that driver has become accustomed to driving on a nice dry surface with perfect grip,” says Spitzner. “Now you may be suddenly faced with less-than-perfect road conditions and grip.”

3. Drive for conditions, not posted speed.

Getting around in winter can take longer, so adjust your speed to conditions instead of

trying to maintain the speed limit. Traction control, stability control, and anti-lock brakes help you control your vehicle, says Spitzner, but these tools “will not help you very much if you are exceeding speed for the conditions.”

4. Learn how to brake on winter roads.

It's important to learn how to use the brakes safely during winter driving conditions. If you feel like you are going too fast, warns Spitzner, adjust your speed gently by taking your foot off the gas—not by slamming on the brakes which may cause the car to skid. When you do use your brakes, do so gently and earlier than you would in non-winter conditions. Driving slowly is important during the winter; drivers can lose control of a car when they hit the brakes hard on an icy road, even on cars equipped with safety features, like anti-lock brakes and stability control.

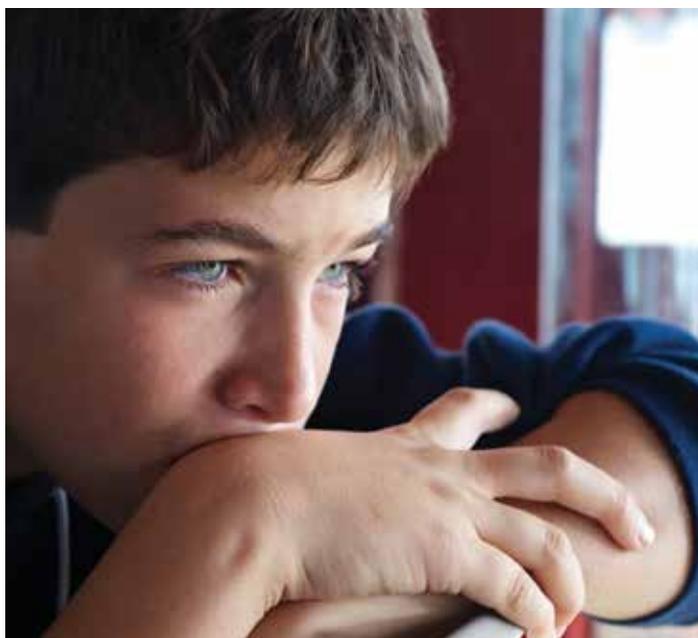
5. Look where you want to go.

Practice situational awareness, especially in adverse driving conditions, and look up over the front of your vehicle instead of down at the road. “Sit back in your seat, with relaxed body language, instead of hunching up over the wheel,” says Spitzner. “Keep your eyes as far down the road as possible, scanning from left to right, so you have as much time as possible to respond.”

6. Practice.

A new driver's first experience with winter driving should not happen during a major blizzard. Under close supervision, let your teen practice slow speed maneuvers and braking on a wide open snow- or ice-covered parking lot. Consider limiting your teen's driving on slippery conditions to daylight hours until your new driver has gained experience.

Got the Winter Blues?



Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) doesn't just plague adults; this form of depression can also affect teens.

SAD—or the “winter blues,” as it is commonly known—is a depressive disorder that typically begins around late October—when the days get shorter and darker—and lifts sometime between March and May with the return of longer days and more sunlight.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, between 10 and 20 percent of Americans feel the effects of SAD every year, and children with a family history of depression may be especially susceptible.

“We know there is a biological component of SAD, and a potential genetic vulnerability,” says John T. Walkup, M.D., program co-director of New York-Presbyterian’s Youth Anxiety Center. “We usually begin to see patients with depressive disorders like this around age 13 to 14,” says Walkup. SAD is more common in colder northern states with shorter days, but “even in

warmer states like Florida—the days are shorter with fewer hours of sunlight.”

Symptoms may include a loss of energy and vitality, inability to concentrate, and difficulty sleeping. The hallmark symptom is anhedonia, which is the pervasive inability to experience pleasure.

“Teens may normally appear lethargic or grumpy, and parents will correctly chalk it up to being a teenager,” says Walkup. “But a teenager with anhedonia doesn’t brighten in mood to questions like, ‘Tell me about a time when you enjoyed yourself?’ or, ‘What would you do today to really enjoy yourself or have fun?’ That incapacity to really enjoy happy memories or anticipate pleasure is the hallmark symptom of depression.”

Parents of teens who experience SAD may feel reassured because it goes away every spring when sunlight returns, “But if this cycle continues for three to four years without treatment, with every episode, the patient falls three to six months behind in academic and social development. These

decrements in function really add up by the end of high school,” says Walkup. Even if an adolescent is functioning at 85-90 percent with a depressive disorder, “the great stuff in life happens in that last 10-15 percent, where you experience curiosity, excitement, intimacy, motivation. You don’t want a teen to miss the best things in life because he wasn’t functioning optimally.”

Getting outside and exercising can be helpful. Some teens may need more daylight than that, in which case light therapy is an effective option. Light boxes, which emit very high lumens of full spectrum light, provide much brighter light than regular indoor lighting. Patients must use them every morning for 30-45 minutes and sit very close to the

light box. “Patients can feel a lift in mood after just a few days of light therapy,” advises Walkup. “Sitting near a window doesn’t provide the same intensity of light.”

Antidepressants can be another effective option. “Some patients can feel a movement in mood as early as two weeks after starting medication,” says Walkup. “I encourage patients who may be reluctant to take daily medication to try 8-12 weeks of medication to see what life can be like before rejecting the use of medication as an option.”

If your adolescent exhibits symptoms of seasonal depression this winter, don’t wait to get help. “Get a good evaluation and take care of it before it catches up with you,” says Walkup.



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Being an Upstander

Teenagers Doing the Right Thing

By Andrew Walker

Recently, a student at my school created a group text for people who want to follow sports and our school's teams. It was completely voluntary, and if you didn't want to do it, you could opt out and leave the group.

There is a student named Ethan at our school. I've known him for a while, but we've never been good friends. He's gay; he came out in middle school, and it's never been a big deal. Everybody knows. Sports aren't really his thing, so he opted out of the group text the first day. Not in a mean way or anything, it just wasn't his thing.

After Ethan opted out, another student wrote something like: "No problem. We don't want fags on here anyway." A few more students piled on with similar comments. I was appalled that anybody would say something like that, especially on such a public forum. I knew it would get back to him, and I felt terrible. I couldn't get it out of my head. So I got his number from a friend and texted him, just to let him know I thought that what those people had said was crappy, and that I was on his side and supported him. I think it bothered me more than it did him. He was almost nonchalant about it, like, "Thanks and everything, but I don't really care. It's not that big a deal."

I think Ethan was surprised to hear from me. We don't have a lot of the same friends and interests, but I wanted him to know that not everybody was like those students. I wasn't the only one, either. I was really happy to see that a lot of other kids felt the same way that I did and also stood up for him. Even after my conversations with Ethan and other students, I still felt like there was some "unfinished business". I had the idea to ask my uncle, Bill Walker, to speak at our school. Bill is gay, and I thought he would have some unique insights that he could share with my fellow students. Bill lives in California and was coming to South Carolina for a family visit. The timing couldn't have been better, and Bill was eager to meet Ethan and speak at our school. His presentation was very well-received because it impacted the hearts of many of my classmates. I am thankful that they were open-minded and willing to respect a different perspective.

I feel that it's important to stand up for what is right, despite any differences between individuals. I did not stand up for Ethan because he was gay, but rather because he was being harassed for being different. It could have been that he was of a different race, of a different ethnicity, or spoke a different language than his bullies.

I never thought when I texted Ethan that night that so much would end up coming out of it, but I am so glad that it has. I think both Ethan's and my eyes have been opened to the world around us, and we now realize how much we can influence our peers simply by being kind to people.

Andrew Walker is a high school senior in Columbia, South Carolina.



Ethan Cash (left)
and Andrew
Walker (right)

By Ethan Cash

I was in fifth grade when I first heard the word "gay." Hearing the word for the first time felt like a moment of clarity, like the light being turned on in a dark room and, finally, for the first time, being able to make sense of everything around you. Up until that point I had never thought about homosexuality as a concept. I knew my cousin was in love with the girl she brought to family events and that they weren't "just really close friends who happen to be raising a child together" like my mother had told me. I also knew I was attracted to boys, so much so that one time in kindergarten I pretended to faint on the playground to catch the attention of one boy in particular. It felt amazing to be able to finally describe what I was feeling; however, when I heard someone call me that same word with a hateful tone, the light was turned back off, and the room went dark again.

I was bullied. In elementary school, students would pull the hood of my sweatshirt over my head, tie it tight, and throw me on the ground and stomp on me. It happened so often that my mother removed the strings from all of my hoodies. On a particularly memorable occasion, I was in a crowded hallway and felt a sudden thud against my head. When I looked down, I saw it was a book with the words "Holy Bible" emblazoned on it.

I felt so distant and alienated from my peers. I was depressed, and my grades really suffered.

By middle school, I had had enough. I embraced my sexuality, coming out to everyone. It didn't change much at the time. Late in tenth grade, however, I finally found friends who accepted me, and not just my sexuality but everything about me. My grades improved, and I found a renewed interest in academics.

These past couple of weeks have been an incredibly touching and meaningful time. The outpouring of support from my peers after the texting incident, especially from Andrew, has been so surprising and comforting.

A few years ago, I never would have imagined something like this could happen, except maybe in a teen movie most likely set in Canada. This has given me a renewed faith in others, and I have Andrew to thank for that. He has done so much more than I expected. When seeing how incensed he was (in contrast to my generally unaffected nature), I realized how horribly desensitized I had become, and that I shouldn't allow these sorts of homophobic comments to be acceptable.

Ethan Cash is a high school senior in Columbia, South Carolina

We're All Distracted

Turns out, teenagers are also annoyed when loved ones are distracted by their devices.

PARENT

My parents don't have devices, and yet they still manage to have lives. At 91, my dad still mows the lawn, plays golf, and slays his daily crossword. Though my mom no longer paints, at 89 she's still a go-go-goer who gardens, cooks, and always has new plans for the house ("I'm turning my art studio into an office!"). More than anything, my parents love spending time with their eight grandchildren. None live close by, so my parents treasure their hours together.

Lately, technology has changed all that. I've watched the mute, pained expressions that have begun to creep across my parents' faces as their grandchildren isolate themselves in plain sight, on sofas and chairs, texting, playing Minecraft, scrolling through Instagram and Snapchat. Their message is unintentional, but hard to miss: "Love you, Mimi and Pop, but my screen is more important, more interesting, and more worth my time than you." Last year, I asked my parents to tell my kids how that feels. They did, with great sensitivity, wisdom, and love. Their words were far more powerful and effective than anything I could have said.

We instituted a new rule: time with Mimi and Pop is golden, so all devices stay in bedrooms. That's where I left mine the day my dad drove us into the mountains to glory in the autumn leaves. I was a little taken aback when he asked me to GPS directions on my phone so we could get back home, but I was proud to say, "I left it back at the house." That's how we got lost. And saw lots more leaves than we bargained for, while my dad cursed under his breath. It was golden.

— William Lucas Walker writes a column for The Huffington Post ("Spilled Milk") and has written for the sitcoms *Frasier*, *Will & Grace*, and *Roseanne*.



TEEN



I am guilty of being on my device when talking to another individual. Almost every teenager is. But, we are also hypocrites. When I am talking to a friend and they choose to ignore me, it gets me a little heated. When I am talking to a parent and they are on their phone, I know they don't have the same multitasking capability my generation has in listening and engaging in a conversation at the same time as checking Facebook.

No one likes being cast aside when you are trying to get a point across, but it bothers me that devices have really screwed with people's mindsets. It seems like no one has the consciousness to understand how to interact with each other offline.

My dad, out of everyone in our family, is on his phone the most. For example, he will ask me a question like, "How was volleyball practice?" As much as I don't feel like responding, I know he will get mad at me if I don't. But while answering, he decides that he should check his email and then add to his grocery list. He then proceeds to say, "Oh, fun," without taking his eyes off his phone. Then, I will plug in and listen to music because I know he didn't hear any of my answer, and then he will say, "Could you get off your phone for just five minutes?"

Every person with a phone, tablet, or computer is lying if they say that they've never done this, and I hope that this changes in the future because even my generation, full of technology, can't stand it.

— Elizabeth Walker-Ziegler, 15, is a sophomore at Immaculate Heart High School in Los Angeles, where she enjoys playing volleyball.



ADVICE FROM AN EXPERT



You can't "two-time" your attention. When you do, your family knows. Kids hate when they get in the car with a parent who absently asks a question and then doesn't listen to the answer. In my workshops with

kids, most teens and tweens have stories about their parents not really hearing them when they are talking, texting while they are driving, or having their kids text for them so they can drive. A few even reported resorting to hiding their parents' phones while they are cooking or otherwise distracted so that they can talk with them. Other teens told stories of having to repeat entire stories about their day as parents drive, text, and attempt to check in with their kids.

As a parent myself, I empathize with parents who feel pressured by work, elder care, and other demands (Words with Friends, Facebook) to check their phones frequently. But if we want our kids to turn over the tablet or pocket the phone when we're talking with them, we need to model that behavior. It isn't always realistic to just stop doing whatever you're doing—but if you can do this enough of the time, and make eye contact, your child will feel heard and it will be easier to uphold the expectation that your teen will stop texting when you need their attention, too.

— Deborah Heitner, Ph.D., is the author of *Screenwise: Helping Kids Thrive (and Survive) In Their Digital World*.

Andrew Yang Talks Venture for America



Going to college, graduating, and getting a great job looks a lot different for today's generation of college grads. How can young adults find work that is meaningful and satisfying if corporate life isn't the best fit for them? To find out, we recently caught up with Andrew Yang—founder and president of Venture for America, a fellowship program that places college graduates at start-ups in low-cost U.S. cities to train the next generation of entrepreneurs. Yang appeared at the 8th annual Celebration of Youth Entrepreneurship at University School in Hunting Valley, Ohio and spoke to over 600 middle school and high school students from 20 Northeast Ohio schools.

Is the traditional pipeline from college to work an easy transition for current college grads?

I work with so many young people, and the natural thing to do is to compare them to yourself when you were their age, but you quickly realize that it's a different era and the experiences that we had are quite different from the experiences that teenagers are having. There is a real struggle to transition into larger organizations for many young people, and a lot of early professionals and organizations are trying to adapt.

Why do you think young adults today struggle to fit into the traditional corporate world?

It's very hard for a smart 23-year-old to figure out what making a positive contribution means in real life. There are these big companies that recruit you out of school, and you may find working for a ginormous company unsatisfying. It's tempting to say, "Young people should just put their heads down the way I did when I was young." But a lot

of organizations really aren't designed to serve and cultivate the ambitions of the people that work there. Virtually no corporation is designed to provide maximal fulfillment to its employees—that isn't a corporation's purpose. We can send out whatever cultural messages we want, but the reality is defined by what concrete options a young person has in front of him or her. Young people need more concrete paths to different types of organizations that are better fits for their ambitions.

How does your nonprofit solve this problem?

At Venture for America, our goal is to connect young people to dynamic early-stage organizations that really need their talents and can help them grow in positive directions. We want to help them channel that energy and their ambitions to help build businesses and organizations that are going to provide jobs and make positive contributions to their communities, and to society as a whole. We're trying to create a middle-ground option between a huge cor-

poration and having to start their own company immediately after college: Finding a small dynamic growth organization and helping it develop.

What are the predictors of success that you look for in your fellows?

Things like grit and character. We can put applicants in a few different settings and see how they respond, but some of the things we rely on are quite conventional, like past performance in academic contexts or what sort of job opportunities they've had. One thing that we think is a fantastic indicator is athletic performance because it's virtually impossible to be an athlete without learning to take feedback and experiencing failure and adversity.

How can parents of young teens cultivate these characteristics?

The single biggest message for parents is to push your kids to test boundaries and develop. Give them the occasion to learn and fail. The young people we place in small company settings typically do not receive a lot of

management and structure. What carries them through is having confidence and self-determination, even when they're not sure what they're supposed to be doing. Put your kids into positions where they have to figure things out for themselves, and where it's okay for them to fail.

I think sports are super handy because no team succeeds all the time and you also learn to balance peer dynamics. Work is probably more like team sports than it is like school. Sports have failure baked in—it's unavoidable.

What if your teenager isn't athletic or is uninterested in sports?

It's really important for them to have a sense of struggle, so they're really good at some things and bad at others. Push them to try and find some positives in the things they're bad at. When I was

young, I did all sorts of things that I was bad at, and that served me really well in adulthood.

How are alums of your non-profit performing?

Beyond any real expectations. A quarter of Venture for America alums have founded or co-founded a business, which means that they're starting businesses at the age of 24, 25, which is remarkable. They've started multi-million-dollar businesses. The companies that they've worked with have rated 80 percent of them as either top one percent or top ten of employees.

You mentioned something about attitude exercise. What is that?

It's very easy to get bogged down in whatever issues you're facing each day, so I have a file on my phone of things

for which I am grateful. Whenever I'm having a tough day, I add three things to the list. Looking at that list helps. I read once that as soon as you start focusing on positive things, your endorphins kick in and your brain wiring shifts. It might all be in my head, but I certainly feel like that's true.

How do you figure out what you want to do in life, if your first job doesn't work out?

I have lived that. It's hard. Things aren't as fast and immediate as people want them to be. It's messy, time-consuming, costly, all of the above. People hate that stuff, but in all honesty, that's the way progress goes. ■

Interview by Susan Borison



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Tuesdays with Morrie

by Mitch Albom

PARENT REVIEW

By **Ellen Weeren**

Imagine counting your breaths to figure out how much life you have left in you. A healthy adult can exhale while counting to about 70. A dying man may not be able to get much past 15. That is one of the many things Mitch Albom learned on his Tuesday visits with his former professor Morrie, who had been diagnosed with ALS.

I've unfortunately watched more than one person I love suffer through a terminal illness. It's hard, partly because there really isn't anything you can do to help them and partly because you can't truly imagine what they are going through. It's difficult to get a firm grasp on what "the end" feels and looks like.

Tuesdays with Morrie gives a glimpse into that world. Morrie shares with Albom that "ALS is like a lit candle: it melts your nerves and leaves your body a pile of wax."

Throughout the book, Morrie shares many valuable insights. One of his philosophies is, "Accept what you are able to do and what you are not able to do. Accept the past as past, without denying it or discarding it."

Morrie admits to crying about his situation, but only allowing himself a few moments each day to lament. Then he turned his attention to the people and activities he loved most, often giving comfort to those who visited him rather than receiving it.

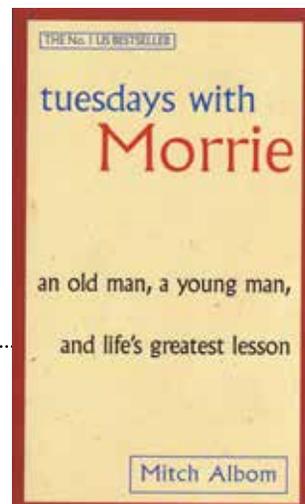
People might stay away from sharing this book with younger readers. On the surface it seems to be only about death. But it's truly about living. Morrie says, "Dying is only one thing to be sad over, Mitch. Living unhappily is something else."

The question of Morrie's that sticks with me the most is, "Are you trying to

be as human as you can be?"

Sometimes it feels easier, and safer, to be quick with our words and reserved with our kindness. *Tuesdays with Morrie* reminds us to slow down and appreciate each other. Morrie cautions that at the end of our lives, we will miss our relationships with people the most. They will matter much more than the things that seem so important to us. People are always worthy of our time and energy.

Ellen Weeren is a writer and teacher, and an MFA (fiction) candidate at George Mason University in Virginia.



TEEN REVIEW

By **Alexis Weeren**

Before reading *Tuesdays with Morrie*, I hadn't read anything by Mitch Albom. Actually, I hadn't read much non-fiction (at least not much that wasn't in a textbook), so I wasn't sure what to expect.

But the story drew me in very quickly. Mitch Albom spent each Tuesday with Morrie, his former professor, who was very ill. As I read about these visits, I realized that this book was really about how we spend our time.

Teenagers often think they have all the time in the world. We focus on things that benefit mostly ourselves: enjoying our favorite hobbies, spending time with our friends, and trying to get into a good college. Even our community service can be more beneficial to us than to those we

are meant to be helping. But this book reminded me that time is precious, and we ought to pay more attention to how we choose to spend it.

Albom had taken his relationship with his favorite professor for granted, assuming he would always be around. It wasn't until he saw a news story featuring Morrie that Albom realized his mentor was not only sick, but dying. He decided to visit Morrie and ended up getting the most important lessons of his life.

In the book, Morrie says, "Love is the only rational answer." That really resonated with me. He also says, "The most important thing in life is to learn how to give out love, and to let it come in." These statements reminded me of the

importance of how we treat each other. As Morrie says, "Love Wins."

Albom says that the thing he misses most about Morrie is his "belief in humanity." It seems like Morrie took nothing for granted. He loved people fully and gave them his undivided attention.

This book's message has really stayed with me. I pay more attention to the moments and people in front of me. I enjoyed *Tuesdays with Morrie* so much that I went on to read several of Mitch Albom's other books. Each one has been better than the one before it.

Alexis Weeren is a senior at Chantilly High School in Chantilly, Virginia. She loves playing soccer, reading Mitch Albom books, and hanging with her friends.

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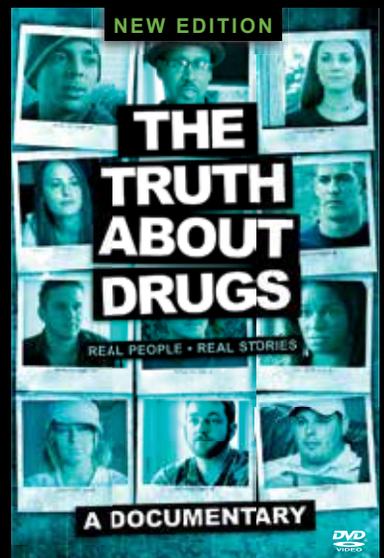
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Adoption

Teen

Reilly Spencer-Trueman

If I had the choice of changing everything, I would not change a thing.

I was adopted when I was a baby. My birth mother had my older brother when she was 13 and she parented him. Then, when she was 15, she had me and she made an adoption plan for me. Finally, when she was 17, she had my younger sister, married my sister's father and parented my sister, too.

I had an open adoption. I kept in contact with my birth mother until I was 15 years old. That's when I met my birth father for the first time. This upset my birth mother, and she closed our adoption.

When I met my birth father, I also met my little brother for the first time; he was two years old. I was so happy. I always knew I had another sibling. I almost cried when I met him. That was the best day of my life. He is the best thing that has ever happened to me. I love him so much.

I miss my older brother and younger sister. When I stopped talking to my birth mother, I stopped talking to my other siblings, too. When I turn 18, I hope I can talk to them. It makes me sad not to see them any more. I love them a lot.

My other two siblings are awesome. They are both adopted, just like me. I'm glad my parents adopted them. Though on most days they get on my nerves, I still love them. I know they love me, too.

I'm so happy that I met my birth dad. He is one of the best people in my life. He makes me happy because he's so silly and makes me laugh. I don't

know where I would be without him. He has made such a big impact on my life. Before I met him, I used to be so sad because I felt like I was missing a piece of myself. Now I have found my piece. I love him to death.

Adoption has changed my life, and I would not change it for anything. I'm happy with my life. I think everyone should adopt. I know I will adopt kids when I find a great wife.

Being adopted has its up and downs. I love how my family is bigger and how I have more siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins.

But sometimes it's hard because I wish I could see all my siblings every day. Even though I miss them, I love each moment I do get to see them.

I'm glad my parents adopted me. Without them I would not be the woman I am today. Family is family, no matter what its biological, adopted, surrogate, or friendship status is.

Reilly Spencer-Trueman, an aspiring Medical Aesthetician, is in her last year of high school and enjoys art, her cat Opal, and skating on a Jr. Roller Derby Team, the Crooked River Roller Girls.

Parent

By George R. Graham

This evening we set the table for eight people rather than the usual four. This happens nearly every weekend at our

CONTRIBUTORS

Teen



Reilly Spencer-Trueman

Parent



George R. Graham

Professional



Ayanna Abi-Kyles

Professional



Betsie Norris



house when our kids' friends come over to eat with us. I love hearing their banter and seeing faces in a variety of hues gathered around our kitchen table.

Meal times like this one make me feel like any other family, though we do not look like many other families. My husband and I are two middle-aged white guys; our son (13) and our daughter (9) are African American. Both kids came to our family as infants, and it has always been obvious that our family was formed by adoption.

As parents of a teenager and a tween-er, we deal with the typical issues of adolescence like any other parents. Layered in with those typical teen issues, however, are additional ones related to race and adoption.

Like most teens, our son would more likely choose to spend time with friends than with us, and our daughter is headed in that direction as well. Our son is beginning to think about dating and what he wants his life to be like after he grows up. Like most parents, we struggle to make sure the kids get their homework done and argue about whether they need to be in front of a screen every waking moment.

Racial Identity

Our son was conscious of race by the time he was three years old, when he began to comment on people's skin tones. While our discussions about race might have started with skin color, they have grown

more complex, exploring ways that race intersects with other issues, such as class. After the death of Trayvon Martin, we started having conversations with our son about what he needs to do to keep himself safe. The death of Tamir Rice, who was nearly the same age as our son and who was killed less than two miles from our house, hit even closer to home.

Raising an African-American boy or girl in this age can feel daunting. It can be especially challenging because we don't share the same racial background as our children—though I know that African-American friends of ours whose adoptive children share their race struggle with it, too. We look for opportunities to nurture friendships with other African-American families and seek their advice, and we feel fortunate that our children have had African-American teachers, physicians, and pastors who can serve as role models.

Adoption Issues

We chose the community we live in partly because of its diversity. We hoped our kids would see that there are many kinds of families and not feel ostracized. Still, even though there are a number of interracial families in our community, far fewer were formed by transracial adoption or were headed by same-sex parents.

To make sure our kids did not feel alone, I helped form a Transracial Adoptive Family Group through Adoption Network Cleveland, an orga-

nization that supports anyone touched by adoption. We meet monthly in people's homes or for activities. The kids play, the parents talk, and everyone eats. It helps both kids and adults feel less isolated. In addition, every summer our family goes to an LGBT Family Week in Provincetown, Mass. Many of the families there were formed by adoption, and some are transracial. Surrounded by other families like ours, we feel a special sense of belonging.

As adoptees, our children naturally long for connection with their birth families. Our daughter's adoption has been open from the beginning, and we see her mother and sisters quarterly. Shortly after our son started school, he said that it wasn't fair that his sister got to visit with her birth mother and that he didn't get to see his. That led us to make a connection with his birth family—something we had not had previously.

Organizing visits with both kids' birth families requires a lot of work, but we are willing to put in the effort because we know how important the visits are to our kids' sense of well-being.

We could not imagine what parenthood would require when our children first arrived. Though it is the most challenging thing we have ever done, it is also rewarding. Watching our son and daughter form friendships and enjoy normal activities like having friends over for dinner gives us confidence that they both will be able to successfully navigate

“While you want to do so in age-appropriate ways and be sensitive to your child’s needs, you never want to be in the position of keeping a secret from your child. Being open will help build trust and lessen the child’s fantasies and anxieties.”

through adolescence—as well as through the complex issues of race and adoption.

George R. Graham is a Development Officer with University Hospitals Seidman Cancer Center in Cleveland.

Professionals

By Ayanna Abi-Kyles and Betsie Norris

The teen years can be difficult ones for any family, and families built through adoption are no exception. Adoption-related issues can bring some specific challenges during these years. The developmental task of the teen years centers on identity, and the loss of one family and subsequent adoption into another complicates identity formation. It can be tricky to tease out what is a normal teen challenge and what is impacted by the overlay of adoption.

“Who am I like?” “Why did this happen?” “Where do I fit?” Questions of identity are core in the teen years. Teens who are adopted have even more reasons to struggle.

In addition, many children who are adopted were not well cared for earlier in their lives, or suffered trauma, often leaving scars to be healed.

Of course, all kids are different and there are many types of adoption—infant/older child; private/foster care; open/closed; domestic/international; and more. While some of the nuances may be different, a common thread is that all adoptees have experienced a loss.

Ideas for Parents

Communicate. Don’t be afraid to talk about adoption. In fact, it can be help-

ful to be the one who brings it up. Some parents think that their children don’t want to talk about it if they don’t initiate the conversation, but children may feel that broaching the subject will be hurtful to their parents.

Make it clear that the subject is an open one—and that your child asking questions or expressing feelings about adoption and their past is okay.

Talking about your child’s past doesn’t always need to be a heavy subject. Even if you don’t know a lot about your child’s birth family members, you can make positive comments such as, “You have such beautiful eyes. I bet your birth mother has pretty eyes.” Or, “You are so artistic, I bet you inherited your talents from someone in your birth family.”

This lets your child know you think about these things and feel positively about their heritage, and at the same time it doesn’t demand a response. Also, point out ways that your child is like you and others in their adoptive family.

Share information that you have. While you want to do so in age-appropriate ways and be sensitive to your child’s needs, you never want to be in the position of keeping a secret from your child. Being open will help build trust and lessen the child’s fantasies and anxieties. While there might be information that feels difficult to share—such as a birth parent with a criminal history, or a situation where your child has a sibling who is being raised with their birth family—there are ways to explain it, and it is important that you do.

If your child has gaps in information about why they were adopted, they are likely to imagine something worse than what actually happened—

or on the flipside, wonder why they are not with their birth family and fantasize about how perfect their birth family must be. Help them make sense of what happened.

Provide opportunities for your child to interact with others who are also adopted. This normalizes their experience. Look for an adoption support group, and attend meetings and social activities with other adoptive families.

Normalizing your child’s experience could be as simple as attending social activities that interest you and your child. Do not just send them to events: Go with them and make a record of new memories. With their permission, and when appropriate, you may want to share photos of activities with family and friends—especially if you’ve adopted an older child and they don’t have many pictures of themselves from the past.

Even though your child may resist your involvement, attend their extracurricular activities and be involved and visible in your child’s school. Knowing that you are there will certainly encourage them, even though they may not tell you. Taking an interest in programs and volunteer activities will show your child that you care and provide lasting rewards for everyone.

Ayanna Abi-Kyles is a program coordinator at Adoption Network Cleveland, working with adoptive families. Betsie Norris is the founder and executive director of Adoption Network Cleveland. Both are adoptees and have lived their own adoption journeys.

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There's No Perfect Holiday

Here's how to make the best of it

BY CATHIE ERICSON





It's the most wonderful time of the year. Or so they say. Holidays can also be a time of ramped-up stress, from dealing with blended families or your overbearing mother-in-law, to having to break the news to your teen that he's not getting a new gaming system like all of his buddies.

We've identified five sticky holiday situations and asked the experts for some advice to help you deal with them.

SITUATION 1:

Santa doesn't live here anymore.

Teens often have iPhone tastes with a flip-phone budget. When my kids were little, they would ask for something outlandish and then add, "It's okay if you can't afford it; I'll just ask Santa!"

Fortunately, teens usually have a more realistic picture of their parents' budgets, so not having to contend with that "miracle worker" certainly removes some of the pressure.

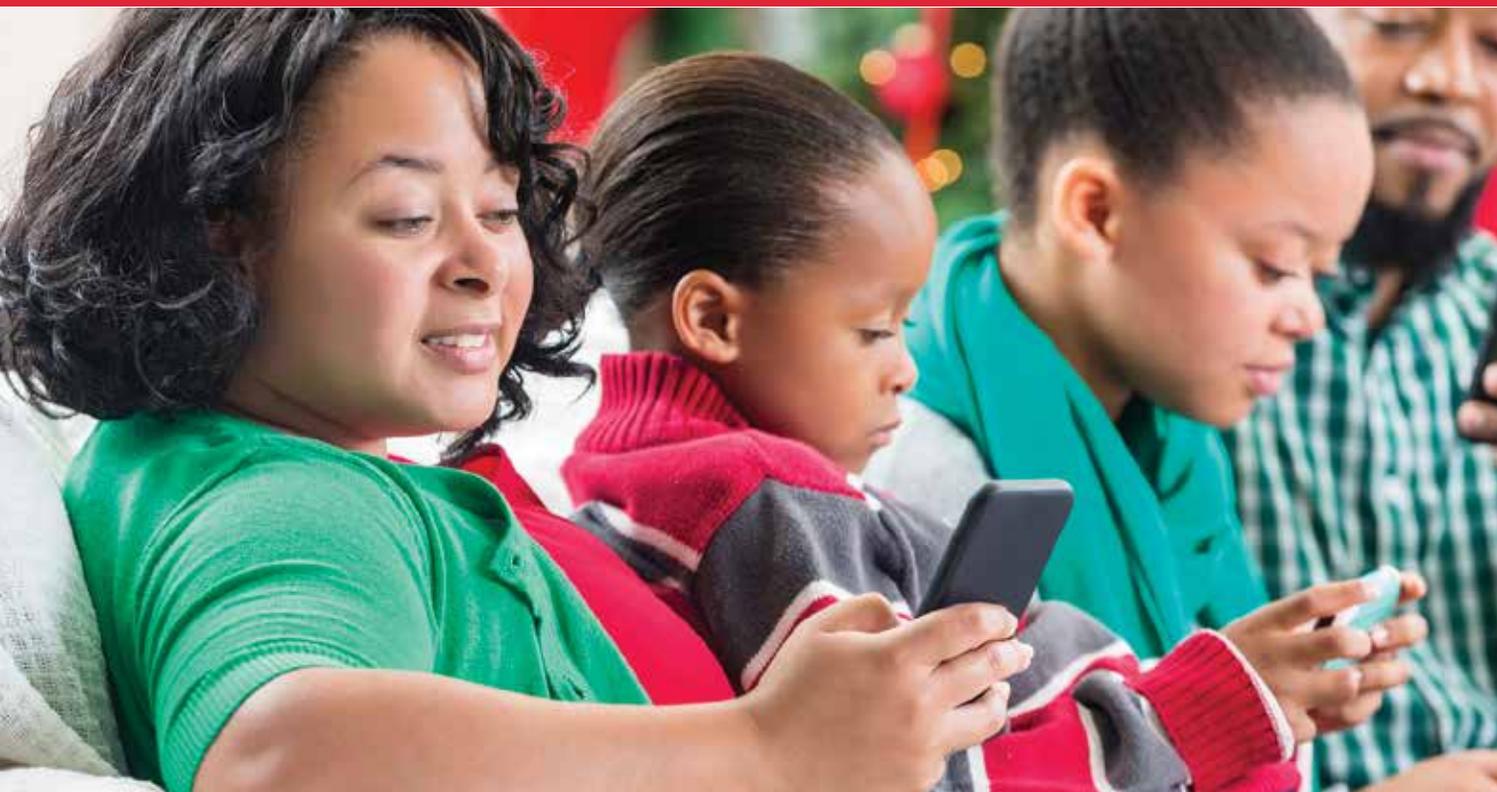
Still, it can be challenging when teens have their hearts set on a marquee gift—or even just want to keep up with friends who might have more means or parents with more lavish gift-giving norms, says Stephen Gray Wallace, an adolescent counselor and director of the Center for Adolescent Research and Education (CARE).

He recommends setting expectations early on, and finding a compromise if there's something they really want that you can't afford or don't want to buy. "Suggest they earn the money to cover some of the expense, whether through an after-school job or by doing extra chores around the house," he says.

Another option is to spend money on a family adventure everyone can enjoy together, which can help take the sting out of a gift pile less glittery than their friends'.

Consider holding a family meeting to choose the outing or destination, suggests Wallace.

"People tend to support what they create, and teens are at an age where they want to have control and help make decisions," he says. If they've helped plan the beach weekend or day at the local amusement park, you can remind them of the joint decision when they feel frustrated they're not getting a coveted smartphone upgrade.

**SITUATION 2:**

You're not the perfect family.

The judgmental mother-in-law who can't stop criticizing your teen's (or your!) hairstyle and wardrobe. The boorish uncle who launches into a political tirade at every gathering.

It's no secret that we can't pick our families, and sometimes they can make our holidays anything but happy. On the flip side, there might be beloved relatives who live across the country whom you just can't visit this year.

Forget trying to hide the issues. Instead, talk to your teen about situations that aren't ideal, says Wallace. For example, you can warn your daughter that Grandma is likely to make a remark about what a shame it is she gave up piano lessons, but that's her cue to practice nodding politely and responding positively.

"In many ways, the pressure is off as your kids age, because you are no longer going to feel that you have to create a Norman Rockwell-style perfect holiday as you might have tried to in the past," says Nancy Shah, a psychologist in Solana Beach, Calif. "Let go of expectations and find something to be grateful for, no matter what the situation."

One technique she recommends is to imagine yourself in a bubble that is impermeable to other people's toxic energy. Picture the insults or offensive remarks bouncing off, while you stay calm and serene in the center of your bubble.

You can also set boundaries by making a joke or creating some other diversion. For example, duck a political firestorm by joking, "I'm on a political fast, sorry. What do you think of the upcoming college football bowl schedule?" or asking your aunt for her pie recipe.

While most family dynamics involve relatively minor issues, remember that if there's a situation that's truly untenable—where you or your teen feels unsafe or attacked—it's wise to remove yourselves from the scene, Wallace says.

SITUATION 3:

You're facing a silent night.

Divorced parents have an extra set of challenging circumstances to deal with, as they have to remake family traditions. Although usually childcare divisions are carefully and legally worked out, it's vital that both parents be on the same page to provide a united front to teens, Wallace says.

Shah knows first-hand how it feels to deal with a holiday sans kids, since she has an ex who has since moved to India. Although she dreaded sending her kids overseas for the entire holiday break last year, she agreed because she knew it would be good for their relationship with their dad and their extended family in India.

Instead of wallowing, she moved their joint celebration to Dec. 19 before they left, and then focused on creating a fun experience for herself without her kids. "My parents came to town, and we planned a big adult party so that I was doing something completely different," she says. It didn't make her miss her kids less, but it helped her cope with their absence.

SITUATION 4:

Your teen wants that Elf off the Shelf.

In some houses, Mom might still want to move that elf around, while the teen wants to rip it to shreds.

It can be hard on parents to give up traditions. I was crushed the year that my kids didn't want to help arrange our lighted holiday houses or eagerly page

Handling the Holiday Blues

For many people, the holidays can be anything but wonderful. Many of us actually come down with a case of the holiday blues.

So we asked Dr. Molly McVoy, program director of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Cleveland's UH Case Medical Center, for ideas to help.

1. Manage expectations. "There are so many expectations around the holidays and it's hard to meet all of them, which can be disappointing," says McVoy, noting that a key preventive for the holiday blues is to set realistic expectations in advance. "Look at what's happened in years past, and match your expectations to your prior reality," recommends McVoy. So if your mother-in-law tends to complain about everything, then she's going to complain about everything this year too. Don't let it ruin your day.

2. Note to self: there is no "ideal" family. "Anyone who is not in the 'ideal' family may feel more down around the holidays," says McVoy. "It's more obvious around this time of year because the ideal is splashed everywhere." This can be particularly true for families dealing with divorce, illness, or other difficulties. Remember that the perfect nuclear family enjoying each and every moment of the holiday season is

more marketing myth than actual reality (despite what you see on social media).

3. Stick to a schedule (as much as possible). Staying up too late. Eating too much rich food. Not getting to the gym. The toll the holidays take on our physical well-being can lead to crankiness. McVoy recommends families stick with their regular routines as much as possible.

4. Take your vitamin D. The lack of sunlight during the winter can cause some people to feel down. Add in the stress of the holidays, and it just makes matters worse. "If you have a hard time in the winter in general, it can be helpful to take vitamin D supplements or do light box therapy," suggests McVoy. (Also, see our story on Seasonal Affective Disorder on page 13.)

5. Give yourself a break. "We have a lot of 'shoulds' for our holidays," notes McVoy. "It should go this way. It should go that way. The more of those you have in your head, the more stressful it will be because it probably won't go that way."

So this year, why not change up some of your shoulds? The world will keep turning and you may just enjoy yourself.

—Diana Simeon



through the extensive library of holiday books that we had collected over the years.

This might be the time to make a new tradition that everyone can approve of, suggests Wallace. Maybe you've always gone out to dinner after the candle-lighting service, but your teen wants to get together with friends. See if you can find a compromise, like eating a big brunch before the service and then letting her head out with her friends after the service.

"Traditions are important, but they are going to change as your kids age," he says.

Of course, some traditions may be non-negotiable, but your kids are more apt to buy in if you explain why, Shah advises. "Tell them you will forgo the obligatory Santa picture if your teen will join you at the Nutcracker without complaining because it reminds you of seeing it with your grandma when you were her age."

Pre-planning is vital. Hold a family meeting in October to go over what traditions your kids are still enthusiastic about this year, recommends Shah.

"Parents should be objective and willing to let go of their own needs. Some moments are going to be better than others, but no mat-



ter what your holidays look like, there will be something to be grateful for and happy about," she says. "Actively look for what is working, and let go of what is not satisfactory."

SITUATION 5:

You or your teen is feeling *ho-ho-ho-verwhelmed*.

We all picture our teens moving effortlessly through holiday parties and rituals, but it's important to respect and acknowledge different personality types, Wallace says. Your teen might be more introverted and need more downtime than others.

So, when you're scheduling activities, consider offering your teen the chance to opt out of something that won't be enjoyable for him. The key is to come up with the schedule ahead of time, so he feels as though his voice has been heard.



And that goes for you, too, Shah adds, reminding parents also to commit to getting enough exercise, alone time, and sleep to take care of their own mental health.

"Try not to fall into the trap that overtakes the world this time of year," she says. "Slow down and enjoy because that's what the holidays are really supposed to be about ... aren't they?"

Will the holiday season always present some challenges? Of course, this is real life we're talking about. But with the words of our experts ringing in your ears, we hope you will stress less and enjoy more this year. After all, before you know it, your teenagers will grow up, leave home, and be the favorite guests at your holiday table. ■



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It's Not Perfect, But I Can't Wait to Get Home for the Holidays

By Lauren Rubenstein

It's time for the holidays—the happiest time of year! Well, not exactly—at least for someone in my shoes.

With the stress of cramming for exams, planning a trip back home, wanting to avoid certain family members, and trying to visit high school friends comes lots and lots of anxiety.

Family especially can be tough around the holidays. There's the family I look forward to seeing—especially my mom, dad, and siblings—and the ones I'd rather not have to spend much, if any, time with.

I am in college now, not too far away from home, but far enough that I don't see my family every day. It's been quite a while since I've had time to have a real chat with my favorite older cousins, or even see them. They have their own lives, they left home for college, too, and are now out in their respective careers,

some even starting families.

The sad reality of the holidays is that sometimes you have to spend time with people you secretly despise. And you don't always get to be around the ones you love either. For me, I'll miss the cousins I was punished with when we were too noisy at the Thanksgiving dinner table, some of the aunts and uncles who ran around with me in the yard after we had eaten until we couldn't eat any more, and many of my high school friends.

But those relatives I'd rather not spend another holiday with will be there, probably asking too many questions.

And then there's me.

When I was little, I looked up to the few older cousins I saw briefly around the holidays. They were older, they had more freedom, they appeared to be happier, and most of all, they got to stay out

past 9:00 p.m. The older kids had more fun, or so it seemed. Nobody ever mentioned to little me that with growing older comes responsibility, sacrifice, and most of all, nostalgia for how the holidays were when I was younger.

I do have a choice: go home and be comforted by family that shows up at the dinner table, the people who love you from the bottom of their heart, or stay at school with my friends sleeping away the sadness that accompanies the holiday blues.

Ultimately, I'm going home, because it's home—and how can I not be drawn back to home-cooked meals and mom's famous hugs? ■

Lauren Rubenstein is a freshman at the University of Texas at Austin.



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DO YOU EVER NEED TO TALK ABOUT WEIGHT?

By Diana Simeon

When a teenager is overweight, it's only natural for parents to want to talk about it. Isn't it better to encourage a teenager to lose weight before it becomes a health issue?

Turns out, it's not. Experts stress that while it may seem counterintuitive, it's best for parents to avoid comments on a teenager's weight altogether.

"What we know from research is when parents talk to their adolescent about losing weight, the teenager is more likely to engage in unhealthy dieting and weight control behaviors like binging," explains Rebecca Puhl, Ph.D., deputy director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut.

A study recently published in the journal *Eating & Weight Disorders* is just the latest to show the negative and lasting impact of weight-related remarks. The study of more than 500 women in their 20s and 30s found that when the women recalled their parents as having talked about their weight (even infrequently) they were more likely to believe they needed to lose 10 or 20 pounds, regardless of whether they were overweight.

"Parental comments about a child's weight, even if the comments

are well-intentioned, even if they are expressed out of concern, can induce feelings of shame in a child," says Puhl, who's also a professor in UConn's Department of Human Development & Family Studies. "This can have a lasting impact on their child's emotional well-being, their body esteem, and their eating behaviors."

So, instead of talking about weight, what should parents be doing? Here's what experts like Puhl recommend.

1. FOCUS ON BEHAVIOR, NOT NUMBERS.

"If parents don't talk about weight or the number on the scale, but instead really focus the conversation on healthy behavior—like eating nutritious foods, cutting out sugar-sweetened beverages, exercise—then the teenager is less likely to turn to unhealthy behaviors," says Puhl.

Pediatrician Dr. Jennifer Trachtenberg agrees: "I always approach it in terms of the adolescent's health," she says. "I

never specifically speak about their weight. I don't talk about fat. I don't talk about thin. It's more important to talk about health." Even if Trachtenberg believes a teenager should lose weight, she still doesn't talk numbers (and neither should parents, she says).

Instead, Trachtenberg stresses, parents should focus on helping everyone in the family eat well and exercise, regardless of whether a family member needs to lose weight. And never set different rules for an overweight teenager. For example, if you'd rather your teenager didn't drink soda, then don't buy soda for anyone in your house.

"The same thing with exercise," says Trachtenberg, who's also an assistant clinical professor of pediatrics at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. "You can't force your teenager to do it if no one else in the family is. So, do the family walks. Go on a bicycle ride. It's more the doing than the saying that is going to make the difference because when you single a teenag-

er out for being overweight, then they just feel badly.”

2. DOWNPLAY APPEARANCE.

Adolescents worry (often excessively) about what they look like. As such, they’re especially vulnerable to toxic messages—from family, from friends, from the broader culture—about appearance. “It’s too easy for teenagers to think that their self worth and their value depends on their appearance,” says Puhl. “Parents need to be the voice that really challenges the damaging, unhealthy messages about appearance that often target adolescents.”

This should include being mindful of the messages you allow inside your home. “For example, girls often gravitate toward fashion and celebrity magazines. A lot of these magazines promote unhealthy ideals of thinness. Keep those out of the home,” notes Puhl, adding that boys, likewise, can be inundated with toxic messages (think, six-pack abs). If your teenager wants a magazine subscription, Puhl

suggests looking for one that lines up with an interest, like a sport or hobby.

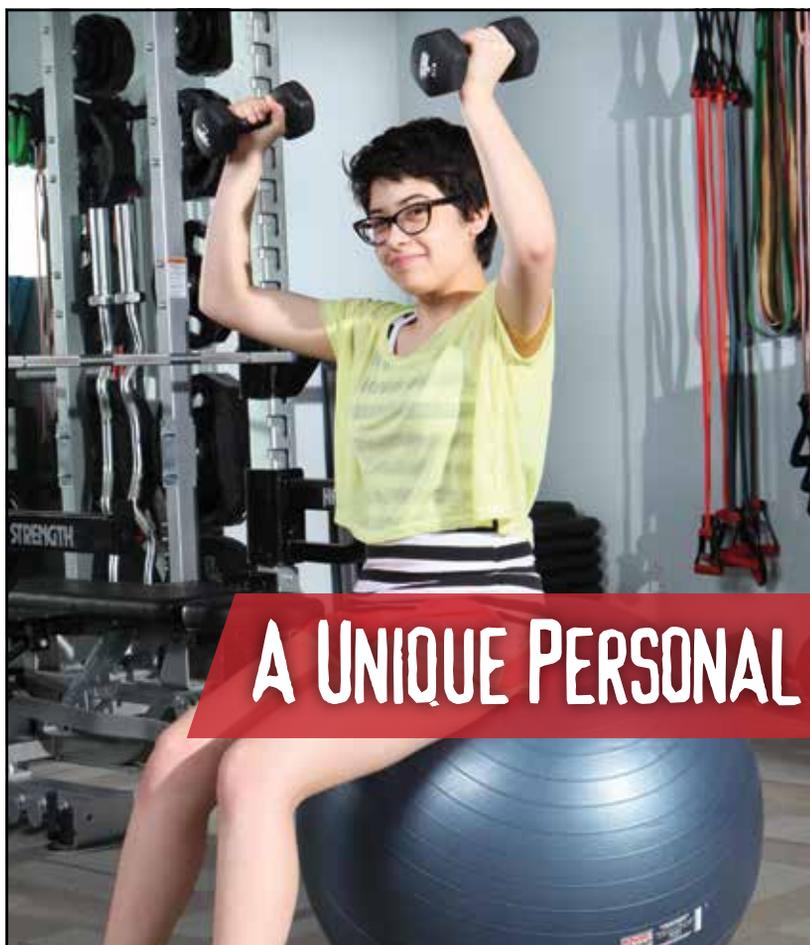
Above all, practice helping your teenager build a sense of self that is not tied to what she looks like. Instead of complimenting your teenager’s appearance (“You’re so pretty”), focus instead on what you love about your teenager’s character (“You’re so kind”), personality (“You make me laugh”), effort (“You worked hard for that grade”), athleticism (“I love watching you play”), or talents (“You’re such a good cook”). “Parents have an important job to do, which is to help foster their teenager’s self-esteem from more important and meaningful sources,” stresses Puhl.

3. BE MINDFUL OF HOW YOU TALK ABOUT WEIGHT.

Last, but hardly least, no “fat talk,” i.e., comments like *I look so fat in this outfit* or *I can’t believe she is wearing those jeans*. “When you are critical of your own weight or another person’s weight in front of your child, not only is that unhelpful, it can reinforce this

idea that what’s important is physical appearance,” explains Puhl. “You want to think about how you talk about weight, and you want to model acceptance of people of diverse body sizes. Especially if you have a child who is overweight, it’s really important that they see their parents accepting people and praising people for their talents, abilities, and accomplishments, regardless of body size.”

What about when your own teenager engages in fat talk? The dreaded, *Mom, do I look fat in these jeans?* “Take the conversation in a different direction,” recommends Trachtenberg. “You could say, ‘Oh, that’s a cool-looking outfit. It looks great with your eyes.’ It’s more listening and trying to figure out why your teenager is asking. Mostly, they are looking for reassurance. They want your acceptance and approval that they are okay while they are going through this tumultuous time in their life.” ■



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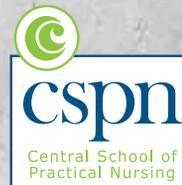
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Angela J. Lamb, M.D., is a board-certified dermatologist and Assistant Professor of Dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City.

ASK THE DOC

No Need to Suffer Through Acne

Acne is one of the many challenges of being an adolescent. What should your teenager know about basic skin care, and what's the best way to treat acne? *Your Teen* turned to Dr. Angela Lamb, Director of the Mount Sinai Hospital Dermatology Practice, to get some answers.

At what age does acne typically begin to surface?

Generally, acne begins with the onset of puberty. In girls, it begins usually within 6-12 months of their first period—which is generally around age 11-12, but I will occasionally see patients as young as 9. With boys, it is usually a little later. We know through research that acne has a very strong genetic component. Studies indicate that over 90 percent of acne is inherited, meaning that one of the patient's parents had acne as

an adolescent. It is very unusual to see a patient with severe acne whose parents did not also have acne when they were younger.

When should a patient with acne see a dermatologist?

We recommend seeing a dermatologist as soon as possible. The biggest danger posed by acne is scarring. Some patients are more susceptible to scarring than others, depending upon genetics and the level of collagen and fiber in

the skin. Certain racial groups are also more susceptible to developing pitting in the skin. Once you develop those indented scars or pits, there is very little that we can do to erase them.

What is the normal course of treatment for acne?

I will begin with gentle cleansers and work up to stronger options. I will prescribe topical antibiotics and retinoids to prevent oil from building up in the pores. If a patient does not respond within 2-3 months,

then we may try a low-dose oral antibiotic.

For severe cases of acne, which can be devastating to a patient's self-esteem, there are medications such as Accutane that are very effective and life-changing. People are sometimes scared by the warnings of depression as a potential side effect, but in my experience severe acne can cause depression, too, and Accutane can actually help with depression because it clears the acne.



Photo: Beth Segal

What is the best way to wash your face?

With consistency—once in the morning and once at night. Use cleanser on the face and water on the hands. I'm not a big fan of washcloths because they can trap dirt and bacteria and re-introduce it onto the skin. Motorized brush

heads such as Clarisonic can also be very effective and keep you from exposing your skin again to bacteria, if you rinse the brushes after use.

As for specific cleansers, the products you use should vary with your skin type. For oily or acne-prone skin, I recommend using a foam-

ing cleanser. CeraVe makes a very nice oil-control foaming cleanser for normal to oily skin. For dryer skin, use a more lotion-based cleansing product to add moisture. CeraVe also makes a hydrating facial cleanser that I recommend for dry skin. Cetaphil also makes a good moisturizing cleanser for those with dry skin.

Do you recommend exfoliants or toners in addition to a cleanser?

You want to avoid layering too many products on your skin. In an effort to combat oil, some teens with oily or acne-prone skin will use a cleanser, some kind of exfoliant with beads or scrubbing action, and then a toner or astringent on top of that. All of those products in combination are much too harsh. Your skin needs some natural oils to function as a barrier and to retain moisture. If you strip too much of the skin's natural oils, your skin will actually overcompensate by producing even more oil. If you have that tight feeling, you may be using too harsh of a product.

Do you recommend using a moisturizer with sunscreen?

If you have oily skin, be very careful about using any heavy moisturizers on your face. Nothing cream-based because it is too heavy. Instead, use a light lotion-based product made specifically for the face. Never use products made for anything below the neck on your face.

By the time you are 12 or 13, you are old enough to make wearing sunscreen part of your daily routine (without

your parent doing it for you) if you are going to be outside for more than 5 or 10 minutes. Again, make sure you are using a lotion formulated for the face, not the thicker lotions for use on the rest of your body. Find a facial moisturizer that is oil-free and has sunscreen. Cetaphil makes a facial moisturizer that is oil-free and has an SPF of 30 that works well.

Do you recommend birth control pills for teen girls to treat acne?

The pill can be useful in some cases, but it really isn't a panacea.

It can be tempting to pop your pimples. Should you?

You should really try to leave it alone. Apply a topical medication with benzoyl peroxide or salicylic acid.

What should a teen do for back-ne?

I recommend the same medications as for facial acne. It's also very important to change out of your sweaty exercise clothes and shower as soon as possible.

Does your diet or nutrition cause acne?

There is research to indicate that two food groups may impact acne: (1) low fat dairy and (2) high-glycemic foods such as white bread or white pasta, or foods with high sugar content. But I have seen dairy-free vegans with terrible skin, and junk-food-only kids with beautiful skin. As I mentioned before, acne has a very strong genetic component. ■

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Don't Be Turned Off By a College's Sticker Price



Research the costs of private colleges these days, and you'll end up with a bad case of sticker shock. In fact, the average sticker price (tuition, room and board, books, etc.) at private colleges is now around \$32,000 a year, according to the College Board. And the sticker price at more selective private colleges is often \$50,000 and up.

But here's the thing. Most students don't pay the sticker price, so before you cross a private college off your list as too expensive, it's worth taking the time to understand what it will really cost your student to attend. We caught up with Lindajeane Heller Western, vice president for enrollment at Ohio's Hiram College, to find out more.

1. Most Students Don't Pay Sticker Price.

The average family actually pays about half the \$32,000 sticker price at private colleges: \$14,890, according to the College Board. Heller Western recommends that families start their research on college costs at the U.S. Department of Education's CollegeScorecard.com, where you can browse data on average costs, graduation rates, earnings after graduation, and lots more for thousands of insti-

tutions. "It has data for every accredited college and university," says Western, "so you can make a real apples-to-apples comparison between schools you're interested in."

2. How to Better Understand Your Family's Actual Cost of Attendance.

The costs published on CollegeScorecard.com are just averages. Some students pay less; some pay more. To get a better understanding of your actual costs (called your net price), it can be helpful to fill out a college's Net Price Calculator (NPC). Western notes that every college and university is now required by the Department of Education to have an NPC on its website. The NPC asks questions about your family's financial situation (you'll need your tax returns and some other financial documents) and provides an estimate of your family's net price for that institution.

3. Research Graduation Rates.

An important consideration, when it comes to costs: How long will you be in school? "Look at the data," Western advises. "Can you graduate from that particular school in four years with that degree? For example, while a state school

might be lower in terms of annual costs, if you have to go to that school for a fifth year, then a school with a higher annual cost may actually be less expensive overall because you will graduate in four years."

4. Don't Forget Merit Aid.

Merit aid is scholarship money awarded to students based on academics and other accomplishments. That's different than financial, or need-based, aid, which is awarded based on your family's financial circumstances. Families with higher incomes will want to find schools that are generous with merit aid (not all schools offer it), as they will not be eligible for much, if any, need-based aid. Note that net price calculators tend not to include merit awards, so Western recommends students do research on a college's website. "We publish the different merit scholarships we offer at Hiram on our website," she says. "We like that to be easily accessible for our prospective students."

5. Consider Other Ways to Cut Costs.

If the cost of college still looks prohibitive for your family, don't lose hope, says Western. "There are a lot of options out there." That includes community college. At Hiram, for example, students who start their college degree at Lakeland Community College or Cuyahoga Community College and maintain a certain grade point average will be automatically accepted to Hiram as juniors. "So that's two years of college at community college tuition," notes Western.

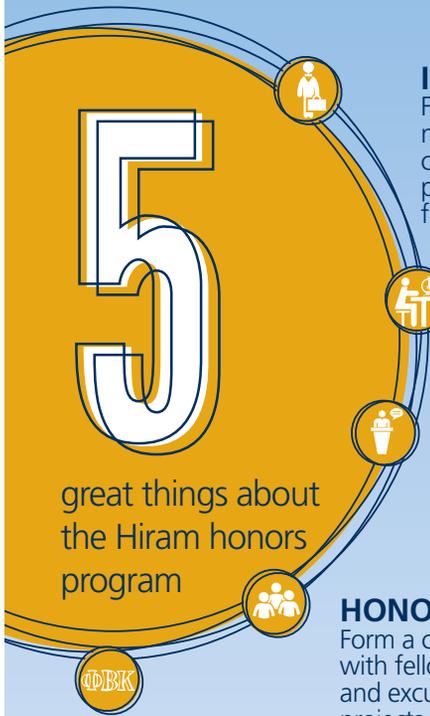
Another option: dual enrollment programs, which allow high-school students to enroll for free in college classes while still in high school. "Students can complete college courses in high school that can transfer to the college they are going to," explains Western. "That is also a wonderful way to save money." ■

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What Do You Need Beyond Academics?

By Mary Helen Berg

Maybe your student has excellent study skills—he scores solid grades and aces standardized tests. But does he work well with others? Does he communicate effectively? Is he dependable? These are just some of the so-called “soft” skills that teenagers will need to thrive outside the classroom.

Soft skills are attributes that help determine how we approach our work and also how we work with others. (See our sidebar on page 48 for specific examples.) Many students, even those with great transcripts, leave high school without understanding the importance of such skills, which experts say can make life easier in college and lead to more success in the workplace.

For instance, they may not know how to communicate effectively in any format outside their favorite social media platform, says Cecilia Castellano, vice

provost for strategic enrollment planning at Bowling Green State University.

“They don’t like to pick up the phone or answer a phone call,” says Castellano. “You can’t communicate everything in a text message or a Snapchat.”

Soft skills take practice, but a lack of them can make success harder to come by, says Dru Tomlin of the Association of Middle Level Education.

“They may have a great idea, but if they don’t have project management skills and time management skills, then their wonderful team-based idea will never get off the ground,” he says.

Most employers value soft skills as much as concrete skills like research or computer programming, according to a 2014 Harris Poll for the employment site Careerbuilder. In the survey, soft and hard skills were equally important to 77 percent of employers, while 16 percent said they prized soft skills even more highly than the tangible talents

that commonly pack a resumé.

Schools can help or hinder students when it comes to mastering soft skills, Tomlin says.

“If a student is forced to sit in a desk all day in isolation, doing repetitive worksheets that merely focus on rote memory or fact regurgitation, then his or her ability to learn soft skills is greatly inhibited,” Tomlin says. “That kind of learning, which is sometimes done in the name of rigor and high test scores, does not help students acquire soft skills.”

By contrast, programs that encourage collaboration, project-based learning, interdisciplinary instruction, and service learning often boost soft skills.

So, how can you help your teen develop the soft skills to succeed on a college campus and beyond?

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE.

Talk about soft skills you use every day, like time management or problem

solving, when working with a boss or client. Discuss your challenges as well as successes, advises Tomlin. With guidance, young teens can practice skills like collaboration and communication with siblings, friends, and teammates.

STEP BACK.

Let your teen advocate for herself beginning in middle school. By high school, she should connect independently with her teachers, be responsible for assignments, and try to resolve any conflicts that arise with her school work.

So, if the printer runs out of ink when a term paper is due, resist the urge to send an excuse to the teacher. If you let your teen handle it, she'll learn responsibility, communication, and negotiation skills, Castellano says.

"I think sometimes as parents we want to go ahead and take care of everything and fix it, but the parents

aren't going to be there when the student is in college."

OFFER OPPORTUNITIES.

"Teens can also learn these soft skills through a team, organization, club, or activity where there's personal interaction, you're held accountable, and you're part of a unit," says Castellano.

And don't underestimate part-time and summer jobs that build skills like time management, punctuality, and customer service.

Answering to a boss also forces teens to practice these important skills with an authority figure who isn't a parent, adds Tomlin. Even a first job in a hardware store or fast food joint offers opportunities to learn many soft skills.

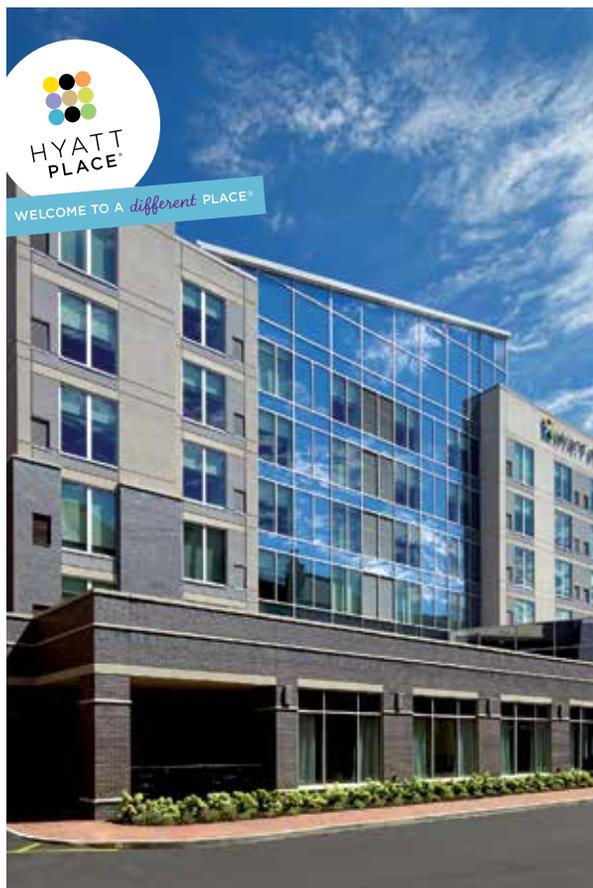
"When they go to do a job, they're not just punching the time clock and getting paid," says Tomlin. "They're developing great tools for life." ■

TOP 10

SOFT SKILLS
EMPLOYERS WANT

1. Excellent work ethic
2. Dependable
3. Positive attitude
4. Self motivated
5. Team oriented
6. Organized
7. Works well under pressure
8. Effective communicator
9. Flexible and adaptable
10. Confidence

Source: CareerBuilder (Survey of 2300-plus human resource professionals)



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Does Social Media Foster Narcissism?

By Audrey Mann Cronin

It's a rare day that I look in the mirror—or take the odd selfie—and think, “Wow, this girl is hot!” But, then again, I don't know the right poses or the requisite fish face. I was born many, many years before the rise of the internet.

Welcome to the selfie era.

Selfies are the currency of our digital natives. With millions of teens sending out Snapchat stories and posting everything they do on YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, the potential repercussions are often concerning.

But should parents worry? Is there evidence that technology is producing a generation of narcissistic individuals? Or is this obsession just a harmless part of growing up digital and social?

Pop-culture provides cues and insights. We have the Kardashians' relentless self-promotion on social media of their airbrushed, sexualized selves. And, how about this summer's Justin Bieber hit, *Love Yourself*? Bieber sings, “Cause if you like the way you look that much, oh baby, you should go and love yourself,” a kiss-off to a narcissistic girlfriend.

It sounds like something you'd say about someone who incessantly takes selfies and posts them to the internet, right? But then again, isn't it a good thing to love yourself?

What is the difference be-

tween narcissism and self-confidence?

“Narcissists believe they are better than others, lack emotionally warm and caring relationships, constantly seek attention, and treasure material wealth and physical appearance,” according to Jean M. Twenge, Ph.D. and W. Keith Campbell, Ph.D., authors of *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*.

Does this sound like your teen?

“Endlessly taking selfies is not a worry, says Dr. Michele Borba, author of *Unselfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World*. “After all, everyone wants to preserve memories. The concern is the actual image—what is the teen focusing on? Is the shot trying to impress others, display themselves in a certain dress size, show off a new brand-name pair of shoes?”

If a teen is taking selfies with a group of friends or working at a food bank, those selfies are less worrisome—they focus on the *we*, not the *me*.

Lauren Galley, teen mentor and president of the empowerment group Girls Above Society, does not believe that her generation is more narcissistic than past generations.

“To stereotype an entire generation as being narcissistic seems unfair to me,” Galley says. “My generation just has social media at our fingertips,



so we now have a way to display everything we do on a worldwide scale. This international reach is something that has never existed before.”

Elias Aboujaoude, a professor of psychiatry at Stanford, notes that our ability to tailor the internet experience to our every need is making us all more narcissistic. He observes, “As we get accustomed to having even our most minor needs accommodated to this degree, we are growing more needy and more entitled. In other words, more narcissistic.”

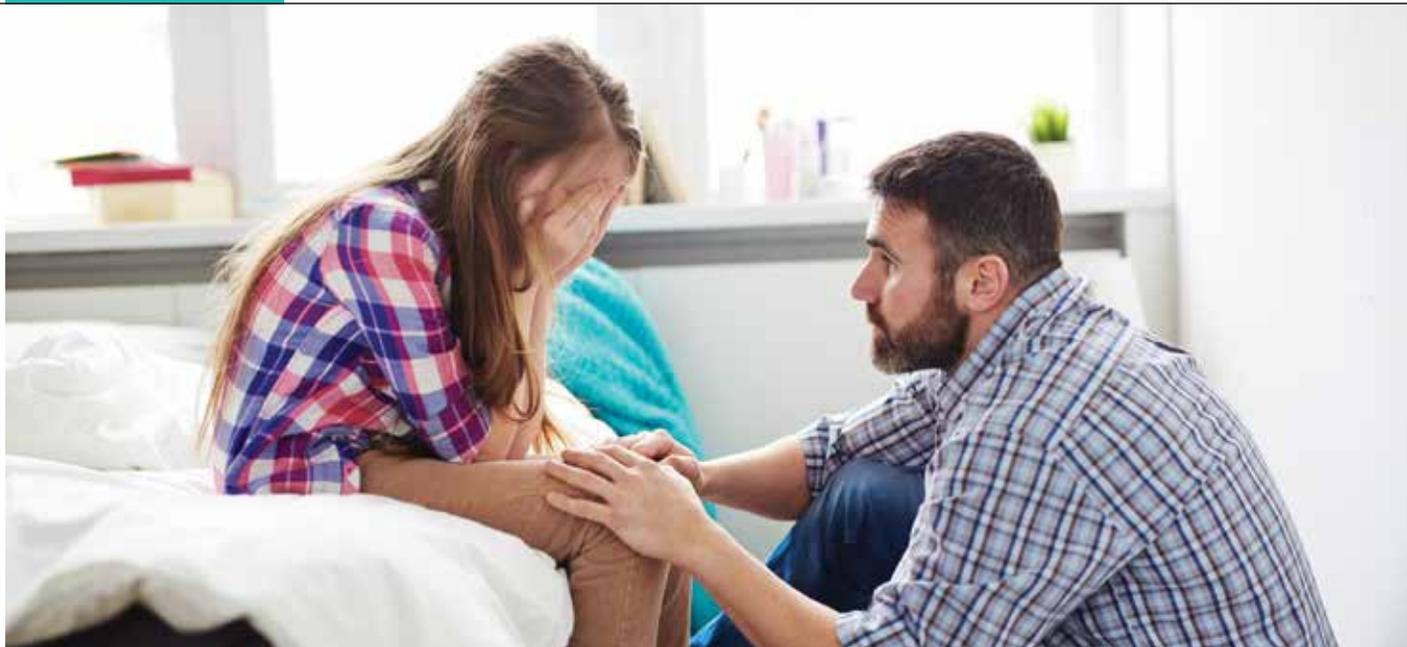
Yes, with the internet, we all have the potential to be more narcissistic. But it is our teens who are spending hours in front of their iPhone cameras just to get the right post-able pose. In the documentary *Screenagers: Growing Up in the Digital Age*, we meet a mother who is both fascinated by and concerned

about her daughter who spends hours on end in her room posing in front of an expensive camera and tripod. This can't be healthy behavior.

What is a parent to do? Talk to your teens. Keep those channels of communication open and let them know you are concerned.

“Tune in closer to the context,” says Dr. Borba. “What is the child focusing on? Is he always looking at a screen so he's missing out on the opportunity to practice face-to-face conversations or identify emotions in voice tone, body posture, or facial expressions? Those are the answers that will tell you whether you should worry or smile.” ■

Audrey Mann Cronin is a digital culture entrepreneur, a communications consultant, founder of Our Digital Daughters, and creator of mobile app LikeSo: Your Personal Speech Coach.



One Change Can Help Your Teen Stress Less

By Lisa Damour

What should you do if your teenage daughter becomes upset because she tangled with a respected teacher? Or was teased by the girls in her gym class? Or perhaps your son spectacularly bombed his chemistry test? Reminding teenagers that they and their peers are still growing and changing might be surprisingly helpful.

Psychologists have long known that personality develops and matures throughout adolescence, and research finds that teenagers feel less anxious when we point this out. Take, for example, a new study on adolescent stress led by psychologist David Yeager.

Two groups of adolescents were asked to complete a task that almost anyone would find socially stressful: give a five-minute speech on high school popularity to an unfamiliar audience of teenagers. To make the situation even more awkward, the teenagers in the audience were told to sigh rudely, frown, and cross their arms as they listened.

One group of presenters was told that personality develops and matures over time; the other group was told

nothing about personality.

Remarkably, the study found that the teenagers who had learned about the flexibility of personality traits weren't unduly stressed by their hostile audience. In contrast, stress levels soared in the adolescents who had not received the lesson on the plasticity of personal traits. (In case you're wondering, experts generally agree that personality becomes quite stable by age 30.)

In order to confirm that these results translated to real life, the research team brought a modified version of the experiment to school.

For several days in a row, ninth graders took time out of their algebra class to offer up saliva samples (which can be used to detect stress hormone levels) and diary accounts of every negative event that occurred that day. Again, the researchers found that the teenagers who received the lesson that people grow and change were less bothered by daily stressors than their unenlightened peers.

How do we account for the stress-busting power of such a simple intervention? There are a couple of

explanations to consider. As a psychologist in my third decade of practice, I've learned that shame and helplessness are particularly excruciating emotions. Perhaps reminding teenagers that they are still very much under construction—that they can develop new qualities and tweak old ones—helps defuse both of these painful feelings.

Even the most insightful adolescents can have difficulty maintaining perspective on bad days. Indeed, most parents have struggled to support a teenager who is collapsing under the certainty that a short-lived crisis guarantees a future of misery. This new study suggests that at these moments, parents can help by saying, “You might have blown it today; that doesn't mean that you can't learn from your mistake and make a change tomorrow,” or “Yes, those kids are acting like jerks—they're probably feeling insecure about something and might get to a better place in time.”

It's worth noting that the research team also tracked the grades of the adolescents participating in the study. After accounting for where students stood academically when the research started,

they found that seven months later, the teenagers who learned that people can change had higher grade point averages than the students who didn't receive that lesson.

Why would learning that people can change boost a teenager's grades? A key factor appears to be the drop in psychological stress, which, as we'd expect, improves concentration. Indeed, the research team asked the teenagers to perform an intellectual task (counting down from 996 in steps of seven) immediately after they presented to the unfriendly audience. They found that the adolescents who held a flexible view of personality outperformed the teenagers who didn't.

Put another way, a run-in with a buddy at lunch might distract a student all afternoon if he's worried that the friendship is doomed. But a student who feels confident that he and his friend have room to grow might set the squabble aside until it can be resolved after school.

So much of what stresses our teenagers cannot be controlled. Daily hassles are here to stay—as are hard classes, social friction, and heavy homework loads. When adolescents can't avoid or alter the things that bother them, they may find it helpful to know that they, and their peers, can still change for the better. ■

Lisa Damour is the author of the New York Times bestseller Untangled: Guiding Teenage Girls Through the Seven Transitions Into Adulthood, writes a monthly online Adolescence column for the New York Times, and is a regular contributor at CBS News. Follow her on Twitter @LDamour.

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Photo: Beth Segal

How Much Freedom to Give Your Middle Schooler?

By Michelle Icard

I grew up just outside of Boston. One Saturday when I was in fifth grade, my parents wanted to go into the city. They would be gone the entire day. I insisted that I did not want to go. I could take care of myself for the day, no problem. Unexpectedly, a thunderstorm came through, and I freaked out. This was before cell phones, and I had no way to reach my parents. I spent the afternoon crying on my neighbor's couch, where I'd gone to seek refuge. It was as much embarrassing as it was traumatic.

It's hard to know how much independence to give a middle-schooler. Because they don't mature in a linear way—it often feels like two steps forward, one step back—your tween may

be perfectly competent at an independent task one day, and a ball of tears the next. Keep trying. Just because your child wasn't ready on Monday doesn't mean he won't be on Friday.

Of course, sometimes your tween is overconfident to a fault. Your daughter promises she won't lose that phone she's been begging for, but she can't even keep track of her homework. Your son thinks you're crazy for not letting him ride his bike to the store, but you've seen him pull out in traffic without looking. Sometimes kids really do rise to the occasion of more independence, but they ought to be able to demonstrate a proficiency in safety, planning, and emergency response before you test those waters.

I would worry less about safety from

a *Law & Order: SVU* perspective and more from a practical perspective. Does your kid understand traffic rules? Is he willing to call for help as needed? Does he know how to ask adults for feedback?

In her book *Free Range Kids*, Lenore Skenazy researched how safe kids really are in the world. Surprisingly, Skenazy discovered that America is no less safe than when we were young. Yes, there are bad people in the world, but the chances of your kid encountering them are incredibly low.

Parents often lament, "I wish I could give my kids the kind of carefree childhood I had, but it's not as safe as when we were kids." That's nostalgia talking, not facts. We hear about rare and terrifying news stories so often, with such

drama and repetition, it feels like a less safe world. But the fact is that the chance of your child being abducted by a stranger is 0.00007 percent. Violent crimes, including sex crimes against children, are on a steady decline.

Some of you are thinking, “That’s fine, but I couldn’t live with myself even on the 0.00007 percent chance that my child would be a victim.” Even at such a low rate, you think, it’s not worth the risk. But, as Skenazy points out and I often remind myself, my kids are in greater danger when I drive them to the dentist than when they walk around the mall without me. I fear most for kids who are swaddled through middle school and never get to experience the thrill or the lessons that come from trying to be independent.

There are lots of reasons older kids need time away from their parents. The tween years are all about devel-

oping an identity apart from parents. This is hard to do when you have a set of watchful eyes on you all the time. Too much oversight leads to feeling that your every decision is being evaluated and judged. Have you ever been micro-managed? It makes it hard to be successful. Kids need time apart to figure out who they are when no one is watching, and that’s critical to developing a strong sense of self.

Also, independence builds competency. Kids naturally do better at things when they don’t feel parental pressure. Not surprisingly, they become better problem solvers when they actually get to practice solving problems. I heard an interesting anecdote from Michael Thompson, a parenting author, who surveyed 500 parents on the proudest moments from their childhood. Everyone answered with a time when their parents *weren’t there*. Kids need and

want to overcome challenges so that they can feel successful and capable of taking care of themselves. This is what we want, right?

So while there is no magic answer to when and to what degree you should let your middle schooler do things alone, in general, it’s a good idea to begin offering many varied opportunities to try. You know your tween best. If she can make a plan, react responsibly to unexpected changes, and communicate openly with you about her experiences, you’re off to a great start. ■

Michelle Icard is the author of Middle School Makeover: Improving the Way You and Your Child Experience the Middle School Years. Learn more about her work with middle schoolers and their parents at MichelleintheMiddle.com.



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Meet Soledad O'Brien

Soledad O'Brien is an award-winning broadcast journalist, executive producer, and founder, with her husband, Brad Raymond, of the Starfish Foundation, which helps disadvantaged minority women get into, and through, college. She also leads annual PowHERful Summits, free day-long empowerment events for women ages 15 to 23 throughout the country. We caught up with her at the PowHERful Summit at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.

What exactly is PowHERful?

PowHERful gives high school and college-age girls an opportunity to explore career options, receive useful guidance, and interact with successful professionals. It's for young women who are serious about their future and looking for ways to enhance the journey.

Speaking of girls, you have two, ages 14 and 15, as well as 12-year-old twin boys. How are the teen years going?

They're great! My older daughter was really tough as a baby, she was a very difficult two-year-old, but every year she gets more wonderful. She's grown into this lovely, sweet, kind child with amazing skills. I don't cook at all, and she makes these elaborate, intricate dinners. I haven't had any of the teenage terrors that some of my girlfriends describe. I can't tell you why, but mine are just very pleasant.

How do you think your experience as a parent has differed from that of your own parents when they were raising you?

My parents were solidly middle class. They never had financial struggles, but

there were things they were never going to pay for. I loved horseback riding, but they had six kids, so it was never going to happen. I think the challenge that I have now, because I make multiples of what my parents made, is how do you not create obnoxious kids, because they have access to so many things. That's one of the reasons that I always try to drag my kids into understanding the things I care about.

In addition, I make it very clear to them that this money is my money; there is nothing to inherit, zero. Go do whatever you want to do to support yourself with the passion that you have. It's not something I'm underwriting for you. I think that really lets them think about 'what do I want to be, what do I really want to do,' not that 'someone will do this or do that for me.' We will help them pay for college. It's very hard to burden your kids with a lot of post-graduate debt.

Knowing how difficult it is for a child to pay for college, how do you decide which girls to sponsor through your foundation?

It's really hard. They have to write a lot. We know them inside and out before

we accept them. These are really great, hard-working kids. They need to have the stamina to be successful in a challenging environment.

How do you balance your career, marriage, and parenting?

I think life is a bit of a juggle. I'm always running through the day because I'm always overbooked. But I get a lot done so I'm okay with that. I'm at PowHERful now because if I can spend the time with a group of young women who can really use this kind of day, then my family can survive a weekend without me. I don't mind these decisions. My husband is there. He jumps in for me, and I jump in for him. What makes us a good couple is that we pick up the slack for one another. Also, we have a family Twitter account, so everyone knows what everyone else is doing. My son sent me a virtual hug recently when I had a bad head cold while on the road. We also use it to check in with everyone's schoolwork and tests. It's not our primary way of communicating, but I really like technology.

Do you enforce any rules around technology in your family?

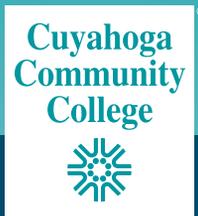
I like to empower people to do the right thing rather than constantly give them punishments for the wrong thing. Everyone has cellphones, but we have very clear strict rules, and anyone who doesn't abide by them loses their phone immediately. No using your cellphones before homework is done, no cellphones in bed. My daughters are on Snapchat because everyone's on Snapchat. So I know what they're doing, what their

friends are doing, and I know the tone of their conversation. The way I manage it is not to say, 'You can't be on Snapchat,' but to help them be intelligent about it.

Any advice to new parents of teens?

I haven't really made it through yet, so I shouldn't be the person giving advice, I should be taking advice. Though one thing that's really important, and my husband is much better about this than I am, is that you have to have a sense of humor. When my daughter was four,

she was always telling me about her friend Samantha. Her mom walked Samantha to school every day, and made her lunch every day, and was there every day, and when I was complaining about the Samantha situation to my husband, his supportive response was that maybe Samantha's mom should get a job. His point was that I can't compare myself to other moms because at the end of the day, we all have our own way of doing things. ■



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How Do You Feel About PDA?

By Rebecca Meiser



When Melissa Graham's son, Eric, was a junior in high school, he and his girlfriend would occasionally join Melissa and her husband in the family room for movie nights. But instead of sitting upright on the couch—preferably with a bowl of popcorn and two sodas between them—the two would often lie together, spooning. It made Melissa deeply uncomfortable. “I am a big proponent of no big public displays of affection by anyone,” the Ohio mom explains. “It’s a beautiful thing—to be shared by two people, not the world.”

Melissa responded to the situation by doing what she jokingly called the “strong, mature parent thing.” She did nothing.

Many parents can identify with her response. We would rather run through a pile of hot coals than have a conversation with our kids about sex and intimacy. “This is tricky stuff,” says John Duffy, Ph.D., a Chicago-based clinical psychologist and host of the *Dr. John Duffy* podcast on iTunes. “It comes up earlier than most parents are ready for.”

Part of the hesitation comes from parents not feeling confident in their own beliefs, experts say. Like Graham, they may be uncomfortable with PDA—but wonder if they are being old-fashioned. Or they don’t like the idea of their child hooking up, but rationalize that all the other kids are doing it, too.

Some parents worry that if they talk to their kids about sex, then they are giving them tacit permission to have it. The impulse, then, is to just

keep putting the conversation off.

But silence has consequences, experts say. “If your voice isn’t in the mix, your kid is going to make decisions independent of you,” says Duffy. “In actuality, we have a lot of say over our kids’ behavior when it comes to sex and intimacy. But if you don’t weigh in, then they’ll just write you off and sometimes they’ll act almost to spite you.”

In order to have a conversation with your child about sex and intimacy, parents first need to come to an understanding about what your own beliefs and stances are when it comes to issues of sex and what is acceptable behavior in their home.

The key, say experts, is not to worry about what other parents are doing or saying. Kristin Carothers, a clinical psychologist specializing in children and adolescents at the Child Mind Institute in New York, for instance, would not let her own children sit in a bedroom alone with a boyfriend or girlfriend. But she also recognizes that the parents of her kids’ partners might have different rules. When in doubt, Carothers says, “Trust your gut. You have to do what makes it easy for you to sleep at night.”

And while parents may still dread broaching the topic with their kids, it’s helpful to know teens are much more open and comfortable with the conversation than we often imagine them to be.

“It’s true almost across the board that it is harder for us to talk about it than it is for them,” Duffy says. In these conversations (and yes, there should be more than one

conversation), it is ok—and even advisable—to be direct with your children.

“You don’t have to soft-pedal,” Duffy says. You can tell them: “We’d prefer you not to be alone with your boyfriend in the house,” or, “We would prefer that you wait to have sex until you are 18 for these reasons.” Duffy, by the way, encourages all of his teenaged clients to avoid having sex—though he knows not everyone will listen. “Honestly, I would argue that no one under 18 is sophisticated enough intellectually and emotionally to really be involved in a sexual relationship,” he says.

But if your child does engage in activity counter to your beliefs, the most important thing you can do as a parent is to avoid shaming, experts say. The child can’t undo the behavior, and teens who feel shamed are more likely to engage in other risky activities.

The best thing you can do, at that point, is to make sure your child is armed with great information about consent and safety. “You might be a little disappointed or scared at first, or think that you didn’t do a good job as a parent, but that is not what this means,” Dr. Carothers says. “It’s natural for our kids to eventually grow up and have sex.”

And no matter how conservative or liberal you are as a parent, most everyone wants their children to eventually have healthy, safe, happy experiences with their future partners or spouses. These teenage romances are important training grounds, so it’s important to treat them as such—and to respect your teen enough to talk about them. ■



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Sleep on It

By Christine Walker

In addition to being a full-time mom and freelance writer, I can spend 30-plus hours a week at the baseball field. This is where a large part of my life with four sons takes place. And for the most part, it's worth it. My boys have fun and learn life lessons about respect, teamwork, discipline, grit, and perseverance. But every so often, something happens that makes my maternal instincts flare up.

Last week was one of those times. My son's team played a doubleheader and lost both games, badly. The boys on the other team were bigger and had clearly been playing together for years. They worked together seamlessly, like a single organism. Our team tried, but they got flustered, made errors, and almost everyone struck out.

The next day at practice, one of the coaches decided to use my son as an example in front of the team. He called my son's name and said, "Instead of staying in there, you pulled your head out and missed a lot of good, hittable pitches." Then he growled for good measure.

What he was saying might have been true, but his method of delivery went completely counter to my beliefs about leading—which is to praise in public, criticize in private.

I was angry, but I knew offending my son's coach would impact my son in the future, so I chose to do some research before deciding what to do.

I learned that for some people, this type of interaction is harmful. People with pessimistic ways of talking to themselves might hear the coach say, "You missed a good pitch because you pulled your head out," and say to themselves, "That's because I'm a terrible baseball player." That kind of shame is hard to recover from—especially for people who keep it bottled up inside.

People with more optimistic ways of talking to themselves, on the other hand, might hear, "You missed a good pitch because you pulled your head out," and say to themselves, "Dang, I guess I need to get back into the batting cages and work out that kink." They are able to use the experience as motivation to improve.

So which type was my son? Did I need to follow my instincts and have a talk with

the coach? Or would he use this experience as motivation to grow?

I wasn't certain, but as I observed his behavior, I didn't see any outward signs that my son was struggling to recover. He didn't yell at his brothers or isolate himself in front of a digital device—two things he commonly does when he's upset. In fact, 10 minutes after we got home, he asked my husband if they could practice hitting together in the backyard.

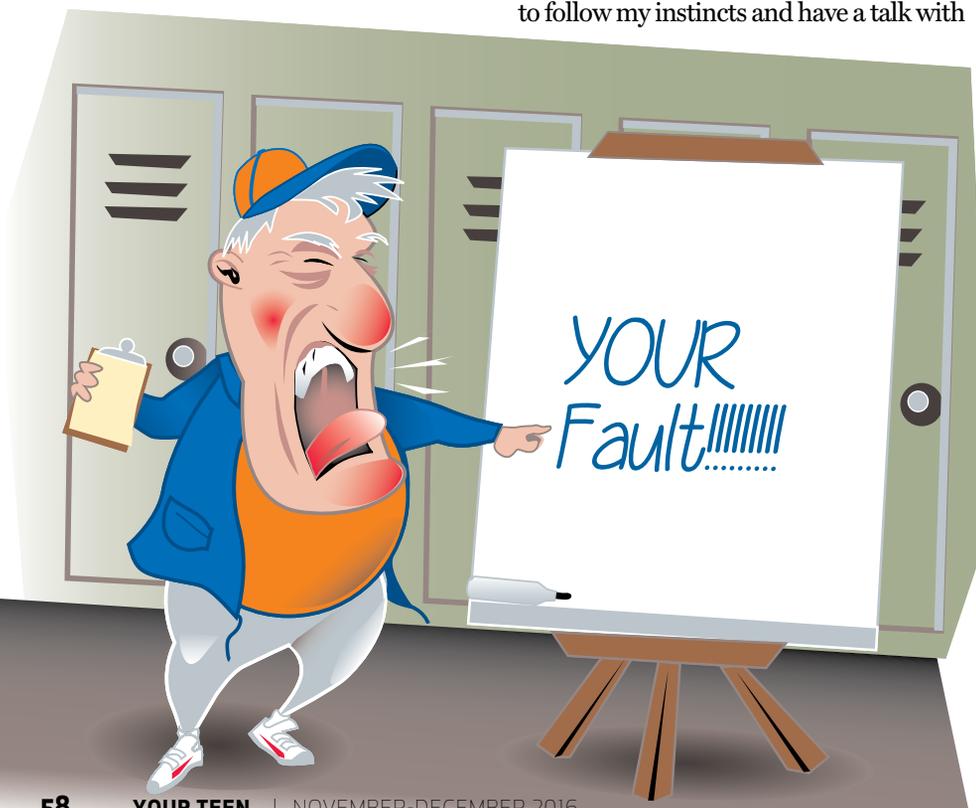
He seemed to be using the experience as incentive to sharpen his skills. I wanted to be sure though, so I asked him if he wanted me to talk to his coach. He thought about it for a minute and said, "Nah, I'm good. You can leave it alone."

So I did.

I learned through this experience that I shouldn't assume alternate leadership styles are harmful. It's okay to take a breath before I intervene in my son's behalf. By watching what he does when I know he's hurt, I can learn his signals. If an interaction with a coach triggers those types of behaviors, I can use those opportunities to help him learn to be more optimistic by putting the criticism in context and showing him how to use the opposition to grow rather than wilt. Depending on how deep the wound, I might also suggest that my son could benefit from speaking with the coach one-on-one. Following this pattern will not only empower my son, but it will also help me relax knowing that I don't need to intervene except in the case of an egregious offense.

It comes down to being present for your children when they are at risk. Pay attention to how they talk to themselves, and work with them to build emotional resilience. These skills will act as a protective barrier throughout their lives—including during those times when you miss signals or aren't able to intervene on their behalf. ■

Christine Walker is a freelance writer, certified teacher, and mother of four boys. She uses scientific research and expert strategies to help parents develop parenting styles that complement their unique family circumstances. Connect with Christine on Facebook, Twitter and christiwalk.com.



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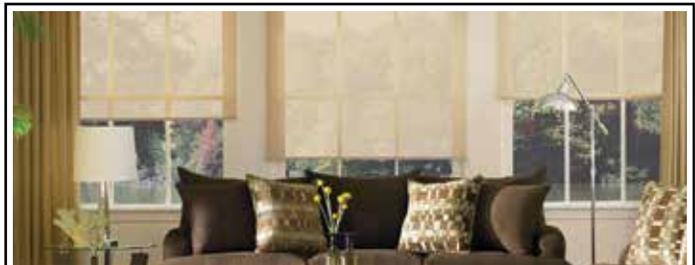


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Must it always be about them? All About Me is a chance to talk about something other than your teen—finally.

The New Family Math

By Stephanie Schaeffer Silverman



It's that time of year again.

Kids coming and going. School supplies filling the dining room. Old habits returning and new habits forming. The dishwasher, comfortable in its summer-time energy-saving mode, is in full force again. But what's *in* the dishwasher has changed.

My husband noticed it last week after my son left for his sophomore year of college.

"What's up with *all* of the spoons being dirty?" he asked one morning, searching for a clean spoon for his cereal.

"No idea—just grab a teaspoon," I offer.

"No—not even a teaspoon is clean. All 20 spoons are dirty. I swear I just unloaded the dishwasher last night."

Muttering something about how can that be, I rise and search the drawer. Hmmm not a spoon in sight.

It sounds ridiculous, but he's right.

"You know, this is all because Zach is gone. We used forks and knives all the time. Now everyone's grabbing the spoons and doing their own thing," I grumble. My family had fallen apart.

With all five of us home, there was a lot of talk about the family meal. In a world that is so busy, I took great comfort in knowing we would be together as a unit at the end of the day. I claimed a victory when kids' activities fell on the same night since it left the remaining nights free.

You're probably still confused. Wouldn't the "spoon consumption" be the same whether he was here or not? Why would there be *more* dirtied spoons and not just *fewer* dirtied forks and knives?

How could one child leaving home cause the carefully created ecosystem to crumble?

That's when I remember the New Family Math. I discovered it last fall when Zach went to college, and our household settled into some new (note I didn't say better) routines.

The remaining kids love cereal, ice cream, yogurt, soup, a second bowl of cereal, a third bowl of cereal. You get the point.

Five of us in the household. One leaves for college. *Old* math says we have four people left to use a combination of utensils. *New* math says the following:

One child leaves for college. One child has a tennis match. One child would

prefer a bowl of cereal to "chicken *again*?" The yield is lots of spoons to scoop the cereal, soup, yogurt—the new family dinner "entrees". Forks and knives remain clean in the drawer.

Another scenario:

One child leaves for college. Two children leave for dinner with Grandma. One parent is too tired to eat, and the other hasn't missed a meal since 1984. *New* math leaves a spoon for the heated up soup and a knife for the leftover bagel. Chips and salsa don't require utensils. Forks all remain clean in the drawer.

And yet another:

Five of us in the household. One child leaves for college. One child has to work. One parent has a meeting. How many spoons are used?

The answer is one. The two remaining family members went to Chipotle, and the parent who had the meeting used a spoon to eat ice cream right out of the carton at 10:00 p.m. post-meeting. No time for a meal. Again, one spoon used, no forks or knives.

And *this* is why I can never do my kids' math homework. ■



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