



# Parent Newsletter

June 2013

Dear Parents

Teenagers are just like toddlers – they're emotional, irrational and self-absorbed! But they are also awesome, and just like toddlers they continue to need your love, respect and contact. What, I hear you say. No way! Every time I try to make contact I get the shrug or the look.

***Even as kids reach adolescence, they need more than ever for us to watch over them. Adolescence is not about letting go. It's about hanging on during a very bumpy ride.***

Ron Taffel

Between the ages of 12 and 25, although it does not grow much in this period, the brain undergoes vast reorganisation. It remodels and reassembles its network and wiring to become a much faster and more sophisticated machine. Teenagers live through a highly functioning and adaptive phase, which is why they take risks and do dopey things! They are sensation seekers, a phase that starts around the age of 10 and peaks at 15. While we tend to focus on the risky and dangerous behaviours, it is important to see and respect their growing cognitive maturity in conjunction with their changing bodies. We do this by consulting with them and supporting them through their insecurities.

We want our children to be independent yet it is difficult to let them go; it is a fine line we need to draw between giving them

independence and protecting them from immature decisions. Keeping the transition smooth requires maturity on the part of the parent. You need to be open to new ideas, and allow for honest discussions, yet set reasonable, clear and consistent boundaries and behavioural rules. A parent will need to insist on important rules, norms and values, but at the same time must be willing to listen, explain and negotiate. As a parent you must exercise appropriate control over your adolescent's conduct, but not over their sense of self, belief and feelings. (*A Child's World*, pg 484)

Allow them or help them to express their feelings in an appropriate manner. Often we take something they say personally; but believe me it is not a personal attack, but is simply the teen's manner. Be objective and quietly ask for a respectful tone just like you would use. Be there for them – in school, projects, and sports events. Have home routines that are important to the family. We always had the family dinner table which was non-negotiable (no TV or any other interruptions); this was the time of the day that we **listened** to one another, rather than lectured or dominated the conversation, and we shared our successes or failures. My teenage son relished this time and made sure we were all truly present before telling us of an achievement which he could have shared much earlier in the evening, but chose instead to wait to tell the whole family together.

Encourage a large group of friends in seeking positive social interactions. Friendships are intense and important for teens as these become more reciprocal and they are able to confide in others their conflicting emotions and feelings. This helps them to validate their self-worth and identity. Make a space in your home for your teen's friends to be comfortable when they visit.

Involve your children in responsibilities around the home. Ask yourself how involved they are – do they help with the dishes, putting out the rubbish, mowing the lawn, grocery shopping, booking their own appointments, doing the laundry or washing the car? Are they involved and contributing?

Why not start a parent group at school where common issues can be discussed in a supportive environment. A common complaint is "Jane's parents allow...". Meanwhile, Jane's parents are as much in the dark as you are and unless you know exactly what other parents allow or do not allow you will doubt your decisions.

Your Montessori school environments demonstrate respect and responsibility as this is a thread that runs right through, beginning with the toddler group. You are your child's role model, so make sure you model effective and positive behaviour.

"Studies show that when parents engage and guide their teenagers with a light but steady hand, staying connected but allowing independence, their kids generally do much better in life." (*National Geographic* October 2011, pg 59)

Warm regards  
Jacquelyn Price

