

Taking Time
by
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Tension with Teens
In the last few weeks, our local communities have been shattered by the news of multiple murders in two local families. In both cases, the suspects are teen sons. Although the cases are still unfolding, the shock wave quickly touched all of us—parents and children alike. How could such a thing happen? How could it happen to my neighbor, my classmate, my co-worker, my friend, my grandchild?

As a parent educator, I find myself wondering what I can say to parents and families who are dealing with this violence. The primary message that I want all parents to hear is that they should do the very best job they can as parents, but that they are not solely responsible for the way their child grows up. A child's genetics, temperament, home and community environment, parents, other family members, friends, other adult role models, societal messages all have an influence on how a child develops and the decisions a child makes.

You can do some positive things, though, as a parent to decrease the chances that your

child will choose a violent approach to dealing with tension or conflicts. First, be available to listen. Listen more than you talk. Discussing these recent news stories with your own children opens the doors to positive conversation. Dr. Ronald Slaby, a developmental psychologist and lecturer at Harvard, is an expert on juvenile violence and violence prevention. He cites research that documents the differences between youth who choose to deal with conflicts violently and those who do not.

One difference that he has found is that the teens who choose violence can come up with few solutions to a problem. Believe it or not, violence is not their first alternative, but they just don't know of other possible alternatives. He also discovered that these individuals have a very weak understanding of the victim's point of view. As a parent, you can help your child to deal with tension simply by discussing "what if" scenarios and together coming up with as many possible solutions as you can think of. Role play with your kids confrontations with peers.

Sometimes it's easier to talk

about an issue if it's framed as "suppose one of your friends..." rather than "what if you...". Speaking about an issue in third person makes the discussion less intense. This approach may help your teen to feel less defensive as you brainstorm solutions to a problem. Be VERY slow to offer a black-and-white answer or unsolicited advice. Listen first without interrupting. Later, if they continue to seek your input, share your advice beginning with a phrase like, "One thing that worked for me when I was your age was..." or "One idea that you might try is...let me know how it goes."

Another strategy that may help your teen make positive choices is involvement in activities like sports, community volunteering, hobbies, and clubs. These activities build skills and provide opportunities for interaction with and support from peers and other adults. But make sure that your teen is not so involved that you never have any relaxed time together. Also, remember that teens will also need time alone.

Supervise your child's time. Know where she is and what she is doing. Welcome their friends in your home. Recognize the extremely influential role friends play. From an early age, encourage relationships with children who hold similar values. Parents should stand by teens, but not over them as they make choices. Remember too that teens can be fun. Don't get so lost in monitoring and supervising that you never laugh or have fun together.

Never let your love for your child be doubted. Continue to speak about things that your son has done well or that make him special. And remember, no person, teen or adult, is perfect.

Accept the fact that each of your children is different than you are now and that things have changed. But don't be afraid to speak up when you're concerned. You can't force your values and your choices on your child. You can share with her where you stand on an issue and why. This will help her as she makes her future decisions.

As a parent you should respect and advocate for your child's needs. Know what services are available and how to access them.

Those people who work with parents of teens know that it is also critical that the parents take care of themselves, too. If you

have a teen (or for that matter a child of any age), make sure to regularly take time away from parenting to recharge your batteries. Finally, be willing to ask for help. Ask for it early and often. Ask for help from friends and from professionals. None of us was trained to be a parent. Sometimes we need help in knowing what to do or how to do it. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness—it's a sign of strength and wisdom.

All of this takes time and energy, but your family and your community will be better because of your investment in your teen's life.

Quilters Heritage Celebration Set

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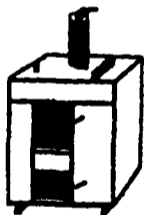
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