

Introduction



This book is written to accompany the teen version, *Relate: Self-Esteem & Body Image*. Much of the information in the two books is the same and they are designed so that they may be used together. We will explain to you what your teen is going through and what she might be experiencing on a daily basis and provide some tips on how to parent your teen through this issue. In the teen version, we have provided many written exercises for your teen to participate in to help her explore this important topic. These were created as a tool to help discussions between you and your teen. Your interest and involvement in these exercises may help your teen learn more about herself and draw closer to you. Although we did not provide a lot of space for you to do these exercises yourself, you may decide to answer them to provide for more discussion, to compare perspectives and to be able to better relate to your teen. Feel free to get creative and use these books in any way that is beneficial to your family. And please share your experiences with us! We want to hear all about how these books have helped you and your teen.

Some Things to Consider

Realize that the teen years are extremely emotional for teen girls. As they are shifting from children to women, there is a lot going on physically that effects their emotions just as much as their outward appearance. Hormones are out of whack and will likely cause your teen to seem unreasonable and oversensitive many times. Understand that much of this is out of her control. Be sensitive to where she is at and don't expect her to be rational at all times. She may also be feeling insecure and self-conscious about her body's changes. While some girls love their new curves, others feel uncomfortable with the attention it creates. Look for the signs of how your teen is reacting to her body's changes. If she is self-conscious, don't try to talk about it or make comments about it. Act as though you notice nothing. The last thing she wants is someone making a big deal out of something she doesn't want people to notice. The new rush of hormones may also cause your teen to gain weight and put on more fat in her hips, thighs and bottom. Do not, I repeat, do not comment on it ever! If she talks about getting fat, reassure her that her new curves are beautiful and that they are a real part of every woman's body. Finally, these hormones may cause your teen to have acne, which leaves anyone feeling self-conscious. If you can, invest in a product like Proactiv or take her to a dermatologist. She will have a much easier time being confident with clear skin and there are too many solutions out there for her to have to just deal with it. Realize that it is a very big deal to her and expecting her to wait it out is not fair.

Apart from the physical changes, your teen is going from being totally dependent to being independent. While much of this is welcomed from your teen, you need to change your parenting style to fit this shift.

You must shift from being the protector and making decisions for them, to teaching them how to make decisions and allowing them to make mistakes. It is hard for a parent to shift from total protector and provider to more of an independent influencer, but God has wired you to be able to get through it and, with effort, you will succeed.

It is important to set some realistic thoughts and expectations as you prepare for these teen years. Some of the most basic guidelines can save you hours of fighting and battle:

- Never discuss deep issues when emotions are high
- Pay attention to emotions without attacking
- Listen to your teen without solving problems for her-sometimes she just wants to be heard
- Ask your teen for help on how to parent her
- Admit to your teen that you don't know everything and that you are going to make mistakes and ask for forgiveness
- Always be looking for opportunities to compliment and build your teen's view of herself, making her feel important at appropriate times
- Give your teen respect and trust that she can make good decisions for herself
- Provide opportunities for your teen to have private time
- Keep a balance of fun time and serious time and work them together
- Always be looking for tender moments in your teen's life when you can love on her and have open discussions, without judgment or criticism.

Keep in mind that when talking about parenting, we are talking about a relationship. As a parent, it is your role to strengthen this relationship. The foundation

for this relationship is establishing trust, love, respect (both for your teen and from your teen) and honest communication. It doesn't need to be dictating (and it shouldn't be). With these foundations, as your child goes into the world, she will always know that she has a safe place she can go—a place of comfort, where she won't be talked bad about and where bad things won't happen. Her comfort zone can come back to you, which is exactly where you want it. The teen years are a unique time when everything in life is confusing and different. You will find that you have to use different methods to get your teen's attention. Take an interest in what she likes and spend time with her doing what she likes to do. Go for something slow pace that allows you to actually talk and do it regularly. If you work on the relationship piece, the topics you want to discuss will come up naturally.

It is essential to establish communication with your teen. Tell her what is important to you and find out what is important to her. Let her know what you care and worry about and why so she can understand where you are coming from. Ask her to help you understand things, but establish that you are still the parent. Although you can establish a friendship with your teen, it is not the same kind of friendship she has with her teen friends. You are still responsible to guide and provide for her. But, that doesn't mean you can't establish guidelines and rules that respect her and will help her think through things. In the past, you might have given her things to do "because you said so," but now it's important for her to understand the foundations and reasons behind them.

At all times remember that God gave your child to you as a gift. He has called you to do the best you can, but knows that you will not be perfect. If you are reading this book, we commend you for caring and encourage you to continue trying to understand and help your teen.