

Good News about Teens

IN the 4th century BC even the usually open-minded Plato clutched his proverbial pearls in despair: “What is happening to our young people?

“They disrespect their elders, they disobey their parents. They ignore the law. They riot in the streets inflamed with wild notions. Their morals are decaying. What is to become of them?”

Today, thanks to the online world, our lamentations and judgments provide a running commentary not only to, but on the lives of many young people.

And yet what strikes me is that apart from being unhelpful (has there ever been a young person who has behaved more positively as a result of being shamed?) The discourse about teens often bears little resemblance to what the young people I meet are actually like.

I’m a teen educator who has worked with adolescents for the past 25 years. And I’m a mother to two teens. Far from being obsessed with selfies, sexting and sponging off their parents, this may well be our hardest-working and most civic-minded generation ever.

If we look beyond the media-fueled stereotypes, shibboleths and anecdotes, what does the actual data show?

School retention and the progression on to higher education courses continues to increase (eight out of 10 young people aged 15 to 19 are enrolled in education and training).

Despite these academic pressures, young people also do almost twice the volunteer work that adults do.



More young people are giving up their already limited time to help others.

They are having less unprotected sex, taking fewer drugs and smoking less than their parents did, and many are far more aware of the risks of alcohol consumption.

And while the one percent who make headlines (and sell parenting guides drumming up fear of a generation desperately in need of a firmer hand) the 99 percent who are doing their best in a culture that often doesn't seem to like them very much are often largely ignored.

The latter is the group who have to get up early every day even when they feel exhausted (biology dictates that many teens do feel sleepy early in the day, more active late at night). Drag themselves off to school to sit through classes which may or may not interest them, with people that they may or may not like. They then come home not to switch off for the day, but rather to ramp up again and do homework or prepare for the next round of state-mandated testing.

All while dealing with pimples, pubes, images of beauty and masculinity that don't look anything like them and coping with crushes.



Let's put more focus on the positive attributes of our teens.
(Pic: iStock)

We seem to suffer from a collective amnesia about what we were like ourselves at this age. Case in point?

The successful, dedicated dad who attended one of my parenting seminars recently and tearfully asked me how he could bond with his daughter who he was worried was becoming withdrawn and snarly.

Before offering strategies to help offer him some perspective, I first asked what he was like as a teen. “Oh, I was a real piece of shit,” he laughingly replied.

There are numerous very real issues teens (and many adults) struggle with that we do need to address: body image angst, dealing with stress and anxiety, navigating technology safely, developing and maintaining respectful relationships, just to name a few.

But while stereotypes might be easy to relate to, they are rarely helpful.

The one thing I know for sure is that the way forward lies in sharing positive stories about teens and in connecting with them, not in spreading moral panic, or in policing and patronizing them.

And the way forward lies in reminding ourselves that even the one per cent who do act out deserve our compassion too.

A school I worked in recently had a sign in the staffroom that struck me as a timely reminder to us all: “The kids who need the most love will ask for it in the most unloving of ways.”

Dannielle Miller is a best-selling parenting author and CEO of Enlighten Education.

Homelanders: The Next Generation

What can we expect from the new generation of kids born after the Millennials?

Already, I meet [parents](#) and teachers who ask the question: What can we expect from the Homelanders, the new generation of kids born after the Millennial Generation or Generation Y?

According to most social scientists, Generation Y births ended between 2000 and 2002. This means that kids in elementary [school](#) now are from a new generation. Two leading generational experts, Howe and Strauss, have already coined the term: Homelanders. They are earth's newest generation. This name seems to fit since their first year (2003) was about the same time America gave birth to the Department of Homeland Security.

They were born into a different world than previous generations, and are the first generation born in the 21st century. Because their early world is marked by terrorism, a troubled economy and a savvy, almost jaded social climate, they may not embrace the [optimism](#) of the early Millennials. In fact, below is my first attempt at contrasting the Homelanders with Generation Y. It is still early, but these are the marks we see in them, as we work with primary-aged kids and observe how parents, culture, and schools have shaped them.

GENERATION Y (1984-2002)

1. Adventurous
2. Green friendly, but self-indulgent
3. Secure; high [self-esteem](#)
4. Easy come, easy go
5. Poor at finances
6. Dependant upon parents/adults

7. Optimistic and progressive
8. Cause-oriented
9. I want it all
10. Naïve

HOMELANDERS (2003-2021)

1. Cautious and safety preoccupied
2. Green-biased; focus on conservation
3. Insecure; seeking [identity](#)
4. Calculated
5. Frugal stewards of resources
6. Self-reliant
7. Realistic and pragmatic
8. Issue-oriented
9. I seek balance; trade-offs
10. Globally savvy and aware

Our work with these young students may require us to develop a new set of skills and a new level of [emotional intelligence](#). They may need to hear different words of encouragement. They may need to be pushed to take risks and believe in the future more than their earlier counterparts did. While the world is still at their fingertips and communication with others globally is immediately available, this new batch of kids will approach life a bit more cautiously and safely. They'll be forced to be more calculated and pragmatic in their planning. They may be compelled to grow up faster than the "postponed" Millennials before them. With this in mind, observe these young children and see what you conclude about the habits forming in their lives. Let's lead them well.

Psalm 33:12-14 English Standard Version (ESV)

¹²Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!

¹³The LORD looks down from heaven;
he sees all the children of man;

¹⁴from where he sits enthroned he looks out
on all the inhabitants of the earth,

Proverbs 17:6 English Standard Version (ESV)

⁶Grandchildren are the crown of the aged,
and the glory of children is their fathers.

Matthew 11:25-27 English Standard Version (ESV)

Come to Me, and I Will Give You Rest

²⁵At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Luke 18:15-17 English Standard Version (ESV)

Let the Children Come to Me

¹⁵Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. ¹⁶But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁷Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

Acts 2:38-40 English Standard Version (ESV)

³⁸And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

3 John 3-5 English Standard Version (ESV)

³For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. ⁴I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.