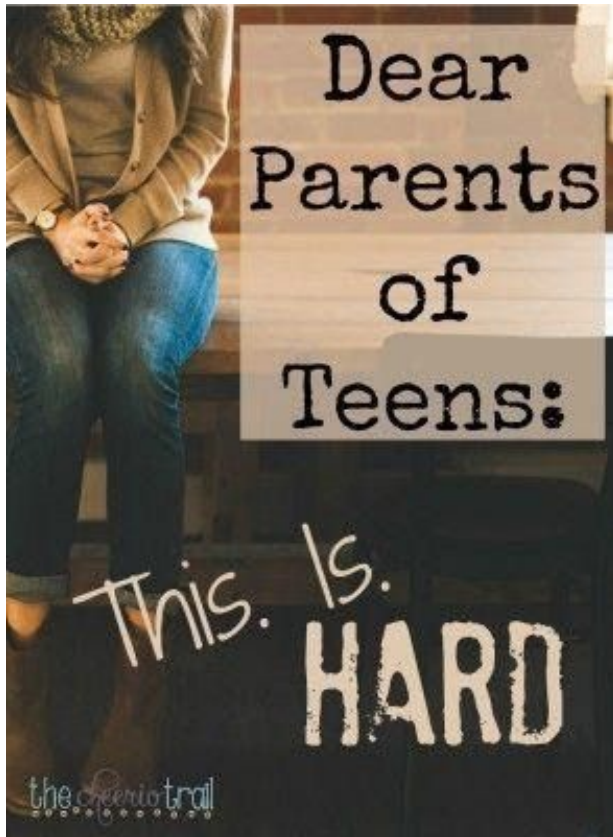


Parenting Isn't for Cowards



Parenting isn't easy. Babies come into the world without instructions and we seem to have to assemble them on our own. They grow up to be maddingly complex. You had greater control over your child's life and well-being than you believe you have now.

Adolescence is a fascinating and crazy time of life. Do you remember what the world of adolescence was like for you?

Were you the “insider” or “outsider” when you were your teenager’s age?

What were your greatest fears when you were a teenager?

In an article from “The Gospel Coalition”, the three biggest teenage fears are:

1. Fear of the Future
2. Fear of Failure
3. Fear of Intimacy and Loneliness

How are these similar and different from your greatest fears as a teenager?

In an informal survey of our Youth Group, the following fears were expressed:

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Deut. 31:6-8

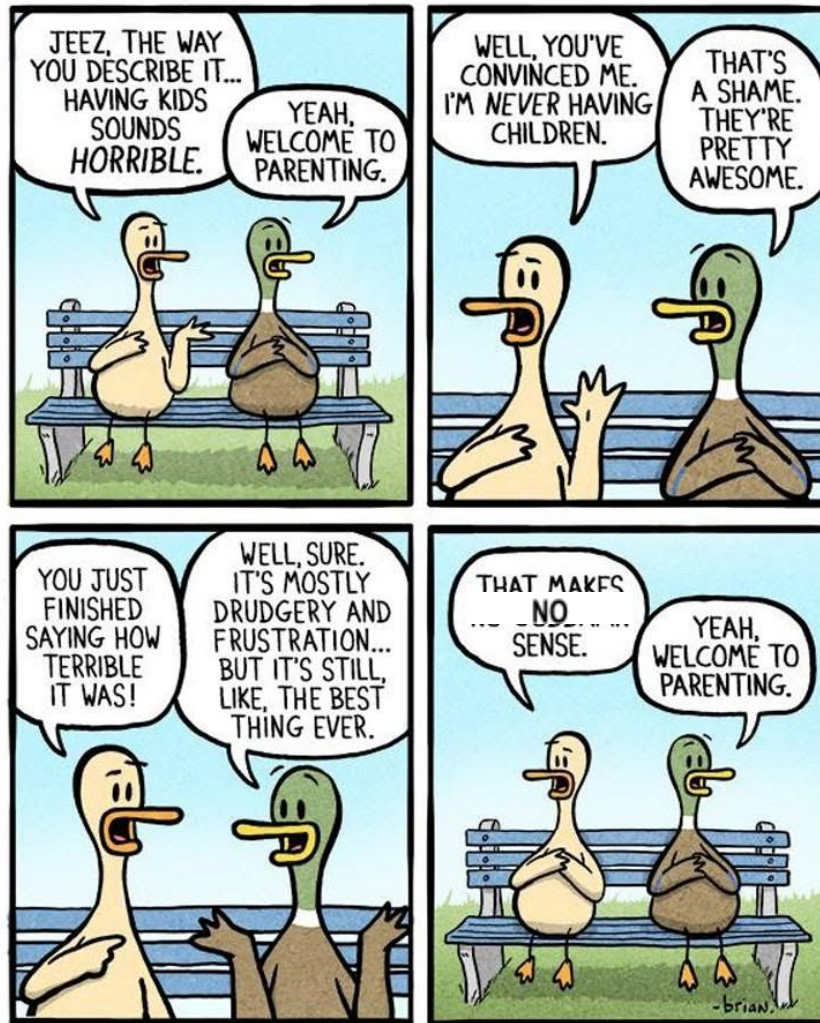
*Be strong and **courageous**. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”*

*Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and **courageous**, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it.*

It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

You're a parent. You worry. It just comes with the territory. In many cases your fears are absolutely founded. But are the things you're worried about always the biggest threats to your kids?

What are your greatest parenting fears?



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Biggest fears	Reality
<p>30%</p> <p>respondents fear their child will be hurt in an accident.</p>	<p>A valid fear</p> <p>Unintentional injuries were the leading cause of death among children ages one to 19 in 2015.¹</p>
<p>25%</p> <p>respondents fear someone will hurt or attack their child.</p>	<p>A valid fear</p> <p>Among 10- to 24-year-olds, homicide accounted for more deaths in 2011 than cancer, heart disease, birth defects, flu and pneumonia, respiratory diseases, strokes, and diabetes combined.²</p>
<p>23%</p> <p>respondents fear their children won't feel safe in the world.</p>	<p>There are bigger things to worry about</p> <p>While this is an understandable concern, accidents and violence are much more serious threats.</p>
<p>14%</p> <p>respondents fear their kids will be kidnapped or abducted.</p>	<p>An extremely uncommon threat</p> <p>In 2011 kidnappings affected approximately only 0.0000000001417% of children.^{3,4}</p>
<p>8%</p> <p>respondents fear their kids will be bullied.</p>	<p>A valid fear</p> <p>National statistics show that 28% of US students in grades six through 12 experienced bullying.⁵</p>

Encouragement for the Season of Parenting Teens



Recently I was sitting in a coffee shop talking with several Moms who had teens or who were approaching the teen years. I threw out a question:

“When you think of raising teens, what’s your main emotional response?”

“Fear, frustration, guilt, and loneliness. “ One Mom added, “excitement. “

Just as in the other seasons of our lives, the season of parenting teens will have unique challenges but also specific blessings. It helps to articulate the challenges yet choose to focus on the blessings.

There are so many changes happening for our kids and for us as well. What is happening to them?

Emotionally. You have to brace yourself for when your teen walks in the door from school. Will she be happy or in a funk because *the right girls* didn’t ask her to sit with them at lunch? Mood swings are the norm.

Physically. Either your daughter develops too quickly and is embarrassed or your son still has a little boy voice while his friends’ voices have already changed.

Socially. It's an awkward time for your child. He may try on different personalities to see which fits best. One day he's "Mr. Cool," the next day the clown or a tough guy. It's exhausting for the family but it's even more frustrating for the child who doesn't yet know who he *wants* to be.

Mentally. Your child has moved from the fun of the ABC's to the pressures of the SATS. He can feel he's in a "no win" situation and for some this is compounded by learning disabilities.

Spiritually. It's a season of questioning. "Why do I believe what I have been taught? Do I really want to believe?"

What about us, their parents?

We too have changes. We've moved from the physical exhaustion of the baby/toddler years to the emotional exhaustion of the teen years and for those dealing with both it's a double whammy. Discipline seemed easier when they were small. They just threw a temper tantrum. Now they argue and their arguments seem so much smarter than ours. They used to appreciate us; now they roll their eyes at parental suggestions. Now we hear phrases like, "You just don't understand, why can't you trust me, everyone else's parents let them ...have a cell phone, get to go to that movie, etc." And there is the challenge of their friends-some frighten us and cause us worry. Others worry because their child doesn't have any.

Yes there are challenges but there are blessings unique to the season as well. Finally we begin to see some pay off of the early years of training. Two siblings who once disliked each other seem to be moving towards a friendship. A self centered young child may now occasionally offer to help. Signs of responsibility appear. We begin to have grown up conversations. We enjoy them. (OK perhaps not always but they don't enjoy us all the time either.) The benefit is that looking back we do see steps of progress and that's a blessing.

Articulating the challenges and focusing on the blessings in each season of life is a wise principle.

But there's more. Five tips will enable this season of parenting to progress from one of exasperation to one of adventure.

1. Give your teen hope.

I remember myself as a young teenager in tears saying to my mother, "Nobody likes me. I am not popular and I am not pretty or smart." My wise Mother simply responded, "I understand how you feel, but your Dad and I think you are beautiful and smart. One day your turn will come." I doubt I responded at all but what my mother gave me was hope. And that's what every teen needs the most. In this season they lack perspective.

Your teen may have had a bad day, been ugly to siblings and been denied permission from you for something he wanted to do. He's in a nasty place. Write a note and leave it on his pillow. Say something like, "Son you are going through a hard time now. You don't like us or your siblings or even yourself right at the moment. But I want you to know that I think you are an amazing person. We will come through this time and we will be friends. I love you and nothing can change that-ever." Don't expect him to thank you for the note or to mention it. But you may be surprised one day to find it crumpled up in a drawer.

2. Care for their friends.

The most important purchase we made during the teen years cost 10.00. It was ugly, took up room we didn't have, and kept us up late at night. It was a used ping pong table. It was also a magnet to draw kids to our house.

Although I'm not a good cook I tried to have plenty of food available. And I tried to hang out with my kids' friends. Sometimes I had to ask my child about a friend. "What is Joe interested in? I don't know him well and I'd like to. Give me some things I can talk to him about. "

During these teen years do all that you can to make your home the "hang out." You can control what goes on in your own home. You may have to give up your own social life but it is only for a short season.

3. Have a clear discipline philosophy.

At this season, you are the parent, not the friend. My friend Lyn said recently that her mother tried too hard to be her friend when she was a teenager. She did not have clear boundaries. Over time this caused my friend to lose respect for her mother. Even though as a teenager she pushed back, she needed and wanted boundaries.

It gives our kids security when they know they are not in charge. Establish a discipline policy with your husband. (It may help to write it down) Follow through. Your children will learn that you are trustworthy. They can count on you.

4. Expose them to others of faith.

During the teen years our kids need to hear faith proclaimed from someone other than Mom or Dad. Insist that they be involved in a vibrant youth ministry. Send them to good camps and on mission's trips where you aren't. Invite young adults and internationals over for a meal after church. Ask them to share their faith stores. Your kids may roll their eyes and complain but you are building for the future and they are listening even if they don't want you to know it.

5. Rely on God.

Because our kids live with us they know what our priorities are. And our first priority should be growing in our own faith. Make time each day to be on your knees praying for your kids and in the scriptures receiving comfort and guidance. **Proverbs 14:26** says, "He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress and for his children it will be a refuge." It's our faith that is a refuge-not our parenting. We are going to blow it. It helps to remember that our kids are not looking for perfect parents. There aren't any! What they need are honest parents-a parent who is quick to say, "I'm sorry I shouldn't have...or I should have...and will you forgive me?" The reality is that we are all children in different seasons getting to know a loving heavenly Father who will always forgive us and give us a fresh start.

A favorite passage of mine is from the writer of Hebrews, "...because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through Him because he always lives to intercede for them." ([Hebrews 7:24-25](#))

Right at this moment Jesus himself is praying for your teenager. It is not all up to you or to me!

What a relief!