

HELP YOUR TEEN

Navigate Change

A teen's world is a whirlwind of change. And not all change comes easily. Author and change expert **Ariane de Bonvoisin** gives you the tools to help and guide your teen

Change is the one constant in life, and no-one goes through more changes all at once than teenagers. Their bodies change, friendships change, they may get into a romantic relationship for the first time, there are changes at school, their view of their parents and siblings changes, and they start looking at the world differently. As if all this isn't enough, teens are also trying their best to fit in with their peers. It's a challenging time for parents and teens, but there are ways you can make your teen's transition from childhood to adulthood smoother. →

1 DEAL WITH YOURSELF FIRST

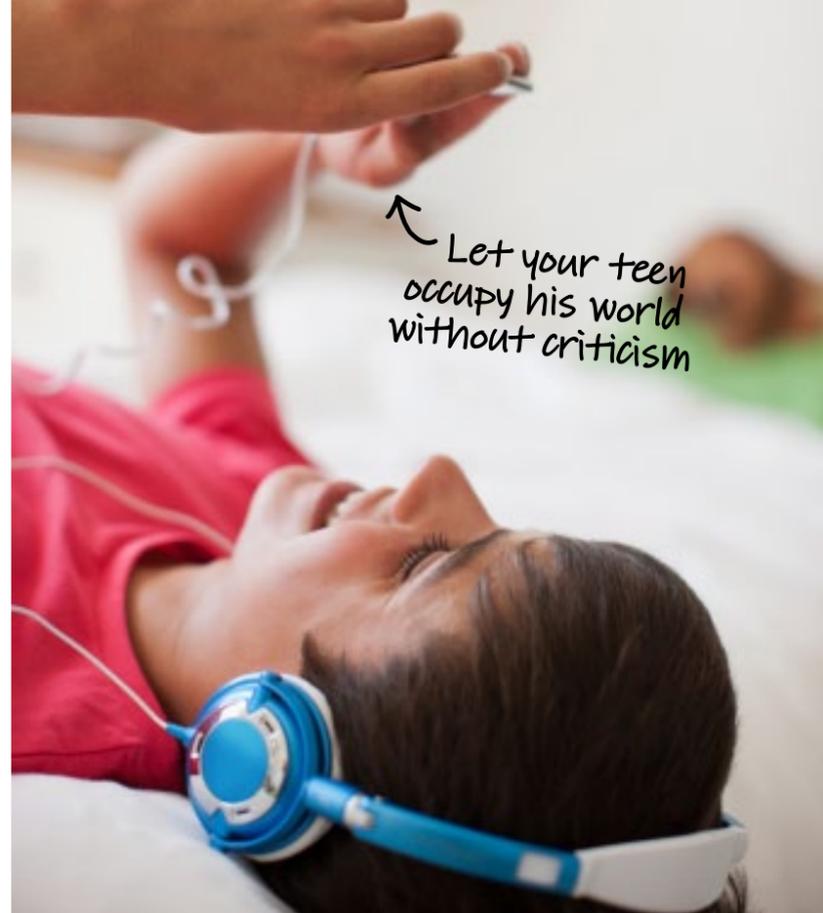
Raising a happy teenager is less about what you need to do or say, and more about what you need to *become* as a parent. Often, what's going on in your life, mind and relationship, as well as your fears, is mirrored in your child. Show your teen, through your own life, how to be.

- **Remove your own blocks.** Your own issues, like needing to be perfect or in control, concerns over money scarcity, and food or weight issues, will show up in your teenager. Get help, read books, do a course, learn to meditate, begin therapy – anything that will help you grow personally and take responsibility. Don't use your focus on your children to avoid your own issues.

- **Remove your own desires for them.** Your children are not here to fulfil your dreams. Let them play the instrument or do the sport they want. Give them that freedom. Having children is not about them meeting your expectations or achieving your unfulfilled goals. Good parenting through times of change is not about setting up control over what is good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable. Give up your expectations and projections and you will free yourself and your child.

- **Allow your teen to not follow the mainstream.** Some will love school, many will hate it. Maybe your teen will go to university, maybe not. Your child doesn't have to get married; they don't have to give you grandkids. Give them the freedom to make their own choices, and remind them that none of this is about pleasing you. The more freedom you give them, the less likely they will be to rebel and, in the end, the happier they will be.

- **Be aware of your own beliefs.** Parents tend to propel their own beliefs, about everything – religion, food, mon-



Let your teen occupy his world without criticism

ey, homosexuality, beauty – onto their children. Your teenager is going to show you very quickly that these are not their beliefs and will do what they can to rebel if you get too pushy with 'the way you think'. Let them find their own beliefs. Don't talk down to them; see them as equals, just in younger bodies.

- **Quit being self-referential.** 'I'm a good parent/I'm a bad parent' is unrelated to how your teenager turns out. Do the best you can, but in the end, they have their own path, their own choices to make, and their own lessons to learn.

- **The biggest gift you can give your teen is to be happy.** Do not make them responsible for your happiness – that is co-dependency. Find your own ways to be happy. Your joy is not dependent on how well your child does in school, or how many wins they have on the athletics field. If teens could articulate it, they would say, 'Get your own life'. The more they see you happily engaged in things that have nothing to do with them, the better. Do not have them as your primary focus; that is too heavy a burden for anyone to carry.

2 ALWAYS BE THE EXAMPLE!

As you know, your child is a sponge, absorbing everything you do. This means the number-one person to be conscious about is yourself.

- **Be mindful of all your behaviour in front of your teen.** How you talk, fight, eat, work, love their dad and treat others, and if you pray, tell white lies, stay healthy or are addicted to technology ... all of this matters. Tune your inner antenna to let you know where you need to change. If you have integrity, it will make them respect you a lot more.

- **Have time for them.** Teens need to know that things other than work, cooking, tidying, groceries and television are important to you. Show them that you have time to listen to them, to talk, to be their parent. Teens need to see that life is not about only working hard, being stressed and getting things off your to-do list.

3 STOP ARGUING WITH REALITY

Go with the flow of where life is taking them. Accept they are changing. So

many parents want to slow this process down. Time flies and they want their 'babies' back; the little ones who wanted cuddles or really wanted to spend time with Mom.

- **Let them grow up at the speed they want.** If they want to wear something grown-up, let them, obviously within limits. How parents see their teen is how they see themselves. If you squash their sexuality, they will go through their teen years not feeling desirable.

- **Encourage what they love and what they are good at.** Help your teenager grow up with the ability to find and choose what they love. Encourage them to be connected to their heart's desire, and they will not get stuck in subjects, relationships and jobs they eventually hate.

Be okay with them being uncomfortable. Don't try to fix their feelings. It's difficult to see your child in despair, getting dumped, excluded, hurt, sad, crying, or hating themselves and you. Hold a space for them. It's okay for them to not feel great. They will find a way out. Don't talk about how they are still young and have their whole lives ahead of them. Teens experience much more adult-type feelings than we often realise.

4 DISCIPLINE THOUGHTFULLY

When it comes to teens and discipline, many parents get frustrated and angry. Try to stay calm and mindful of your behaviour instead of raising your voice, losing your cool and saying things you later regret. When discipline is required, it's an opportunity for the relationship between you and your teen to grow. Try these tips:

- **Encourage truth, not lying.** From the earliest of ages, when children tell their parents the truth, they are frequently still punished – wiring the

child to associate pain with truth. Part of disciplining your teen consciously is to allow them to speak the truth and have them realise the consequences of their actions or words. If they own up to staying out late or getting drunk, say something like, 'I appreciate you telling the truth about what happened. Can you see, though, that it's not something I can accept or encourage?' This allows them to feel appreciated, and at the same time shows them they need to take responsibility for their actions. Don't put your disappointment on them, or remove love or money. Those things don't work with a teen – they will probably rebel even more to show you they are in charge.

- **As parents, your dialogue should go both ways.** Ask most teenagers, and they will say their parents are always telling them what they did wrong. Conversations with teenagers can feel like a one-way street: they don't really feel they can speak up and really share what's going on. Whether they hate what's happening between you and their father, or how ugly they

only later that their environment instils feelings of self-doubt: I'm ugly, stupid, friendless. Teenagers are always looking for clues from their parents, friends, members of the opposite sex, teachers and so on about to evaluate themselves. So, what to do?

- **Never label them.** Be mindful of how you describe your son or daughter. Too often we say things like, 'she's the athletic one' or 'the smart one' or 'the musical one'. Teens are very aware of what you say about them to friends, family and anyone within earshot. Be especially careful when there is more than one sibling at home, as this can start a comparison game. For example, a child who hears they are the smart one may not grow up feeling beautiful.

- **Be positive, no matter what.** Worrying about your teen is not equivalent to loving them. No-one wants to feel that their parents are worried about them. You need to be convinced that things will work out, your child will be okay, this will pass, and that life is taking care of them. Don't keep checking or asking your teen how they're feeling.

Give up your expectations and projections and you will free yourself and your child

feel or how hard their homework is, stop telling them what to do, and instead ask your teen to tell you what's on their mind, especially when they are being difficult. Then let them come up with solutions that can work for them. You may be amazed at what comes out of their mouth.

5 BUILD THEIR SELF-ESTEEM

Believe it or not, children are born with a lot of self-love. They have no concept of what their deficiencies are, if any. It's

- **Build their intuition.** Teach them the difference between external technology (smartphones, iPods, TV and so on) and their own inner technology, which is even more powerful. Their intuition, their emotional guidance system, is more advanced than any man-made device and the answers to so many of their questions are inside them already. Teens need to know and be reminded that they can trust themselves, that they already know the right thing to do. It's not about you problem-solving for them any more. →

6 HONOUR THEIR BODY AND THEIR HEALTH

Our rushed lives mean that when it comes to lunchboxes or suppers we often opt for what is available, fast and convenient rather than healthy and nutritious. Your teenager's body is the foundation for their emotions, their mood and their relationship with themselves. You really can make a massive difference with what you feed them, at least on the home front.

7 SHARE THESE CHANGE SKILLS

When the opportunity arises, remind your teen that they are already equipped with many of the tools they need for managing change.

• **The Change Guarantee.** This states that 'from any change, something good will come'. It's a hard one for people to get, since the good stuff doesn't often

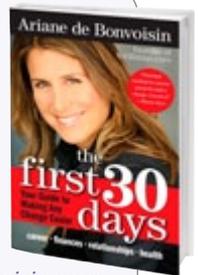
happen in the time or manner that we want. But it does happen. Just share this statement with your teenager. Maybe write it on the fridge so that it stays visible. Eventually, they may get their head around it without telling you.

• **Remind them that they have a Change Muscle.** Yes, we all have a part of ourselves that is really good at change. They've already gone through so many incredible changes; acknowledge them for that. Even though whatever change they are facing might be new, they already have coping skills that can handle it.

If your teen really is struggling with a transition, if they are being bullied or your intuition tells you something is more serious, let them see a professional counsellor, without you around. If they don't like that person, keep looking for someone they do like and connect with.

Change in the end is always an invitation to go inside, to find out what they are made of, to learn difficult lessons and to discover what they want and don't want. Honour who your teenager is on the inside, not their achievements, their friends, their looks or their marks. Honour what they've become, their values, how they handle things and their self-worth. This is the greatest gift you can give them: to see them and love them for who they are.

Ariane de Bonvoisin is the author of several books, including *The First 30 Days: Your Guide To Making Any Change Easier* (HarperOne). For more information, visit Ariane's website at www.arianedebonvoisin.com.



TEEN TALK: DO'S & DON'TS

What you do and don't say will help make it easier for your teen to cope with the changes they are facing

Relationship changes

- ✗ **DON'T** ask too many questions about their love life. Period. (Assuming you've chatted about contraception.) They'll volunteer what they want, when they want. This is their private world and their opportunity to learn important lessons for themselves.
- ✗ **DON'T** push them or try to speed up the grieving process if they're struggling with a break-up. Don't expect them to be happier than they are. Things will get better. Don't minimise what they're feeling by reminding them they're young.
- ✓ **DO** encourage your teen to be themselves around the opposite sex, to be authentic. This is especially true if your child is struggling with the fact that they are single.

Body changes

- ✗ **DON'T** make comments about how they look, about their breast size, voice, hair or skin. If they want to speak to you about something, they will.
- ✓ **DO** offer help for specific treatable problems, like acne. Ask if they would like to see a dermatologist, and talk about healthy food choices.

Friendship changes

- ✓ **DO** encourage your child to voice what they feel and not be silent. Comments like 'It's not worth it' or 'People are like that' don't help. Give them their voice back; even if the conversation doesn't end the way they want, expressing their truth is very important at this stage.
- ✓ **DO** focus on their friends' positive qualities. Criticism can create rebellion.

School changes

- ✓ **DO** remember your teen is pretty much an adult. They really *can* manage.

- ✗ **DON'T** get pulled into their whining and complaining. Say, 'I hear that you don't love school or your teacher. I also had some hard times at school.' You don't need to find a solution or even agree with them.
- ✓ **DO** encourage your child to find their passions and to pursue activities they love after school.

Family changes

- ✓ **DO** give them their space. Don't expect them to get involved in everything family-related. Yes, it will feel sad if they don't, but they'll rejoin family life sooner if you don't force them.
- ✗ **DON'T** fight or argue with your spouse or partner in front of them. It will only infuriate them and make them want even less to do with you. When a teen's environment is positive and calm, they are more likely to want to engage with you. ■