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You're proud that they have something to say. But are they safe?

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## EDITOR'S LETTER

### *I'm in my usual spot,*

behind the wheel of the Suburban, transporting children from place to place. My daughter and two friends are in the middle row. There's lots of laughter. I'm sitting quiet because the minute I talk, they remember I'm there and the conversation is more guarded. I love when I'm the invisible driver, getting a glimpse into their private world.

This time the laughter is coming from one girl. She is texting away, mumbling a few OMGs, and giggling over the responses while the other girls sit quietly. This girl is physically present in my car while attending another social experience in a nearby virtual world. And the other two girls aren't invited.

I'm not enjoying this view. In fact, I'm getting madder by the minute. It's rude, kind of like whispering. The girl with the phone is having a private experience while the other two sit confused as to their role.

At the time, the notion of using phones for more than placing calls was fairly new, and we had yet to really understand the need to set explicit boundaries.

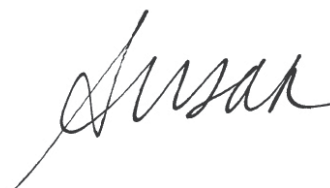
It's called phone etiquette. The phone has a powerful pull. I know that I can be deep in a one-on-one conversation, listening with all my being, when my phone lights up and my eyes pull away. That quick glance breaks the connection. I'm working on changing my habit, trying to remember to leave my phone in my purse. (My family will tell you that I am failing.)

That's the thing, it's not just our teens that are struggling with phone etiquette. We're all trying to figure out how to adjust our behaviors with the technology that is relatively new and entirely addictive.

Cathie Ericson's feature on phones offers helpful advice for all of us. No phones in the bedroom at night and so many more helpful nuggets. Don't miss the other great articles either. New guidelines for concussions. Some helpful holiday tips.

We hear from you, our readers, that you feel like *Your Teen* writers are hiding in your living room. How else would we know exactly which issues you are confronting? Guess what? Your Teen knows your concerns because your issues are our struggles too.

Enjoy the Read!



---

## FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS



### **Jessica Lahey**

Best known for her bestselling parenting book *The Gift of Failure*, writer Jessica Lahey is also a teacher and mom. On page 25 of this issue, she and son Finn offer us a slice of their personal reading list in their parent-teen review of *As You Wish: Inconceivable Tales from the Making of The Princess Bride*.



### **Matthew Rouse, Ph.D.**

Matthew Rouse is one of *Your Teen's* favorite experts to consult on tricky parenting questions. As a clinical psychologist specializing in ADHD and behavior disorders at the Child Mind Institute, Dr. Rouse has the answers parents need. See page 40 for his wisdom on what to do when your kid makes a bad choice.



### **Ella Anderson**

She may be from Michigan, but 12-year-old Ella Anderson has definitely gone Hollywood. She starred in *The Glass Castle* and appears in the Nickelodeon show *Henry Danger*. She (and her mom) give *Your Teen* the scoop on what it's like to be a kid actor. Take a look on page 18.



### **Eddie Glaude Jr., Ph.D.**

Professor Glaude, the chair of the Center for African-American Studies at Princeton University and author of *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul*, offers *Your Teen* readers real talk on America's race problem. Turn to page 58 for our interview—and Dr. Glaude's take on the challenges our young people are facing.

We asked teens...

When you're bored or waiting in line and you look at your phone, what's the first app you go to?

**Twitter.** Keeping in touch with friends that I don't go to college with and staying up to date on any important news.

**Charlie, Cincinnati, OH**

**Messaging.** It lets me see if anything new has come up with my friends.

**Daniel, Cleveland, OH**

**BuzzFeed.** I can read articles and learn new things, while also be entertained with quizzes and celeb gossip.

**Brooke, St. Andrews, Scotland**

**Instagram.** It's all images. Visual, no text.

**Lisha, Cleveland, OH**

**Notes.** Writing down the things I hope I'll remember later.

**Amanda, Grand Rapids, MI**

**Instagram.** Seeing what my friends are doing.

**Julia, Miami, FL**

**Mail.** Call me strange but I really like emails—receiving and sending.

**Jeanne-Marie, Cranston, RI**



## #ParentHack

### Clever Curfew

My teenage son is out having fun, but I'm yawning. I've got to get some sleep. "Just wake me when you get home," I tell him. "You know you have a 1:00 a.m. curfew."

Next thing I know, it's morning. "When did you come home last night? I told you to wake me."

"But Mom, I did wake you, and you said, 'G'night, honey.' Don't you remember?" he protests.

Did he? Did I? Maybe ... possibly...

This scenario played out every weekend when my oldest was a teenager and his friends started driving. Try as I might to stay up until they came home, I'd always fall asleep. And, listen, I remember being a kid myself—nothing good happens after 1:00 a.m. Nothing.

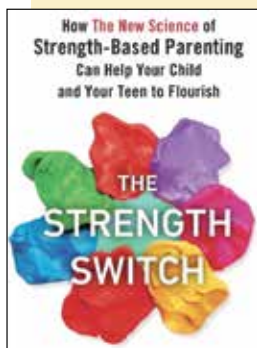
If they don't *really* wake me, how do I know it's "only" 1:00 a.m., anyway—what if it was 2:00 or 3:00? How can I know they're home when they said they'd be, and that they're sober and in one piece?

I finally found out a way to outsmart my clever "of-course-I-woke-you" kids. I went to sleep in their beds while they were out. Now they had to wake me—all the way—when they came home, and I could really rest easy.





## BOOK RECOMMENDATION



**The Strength Switch:** How the New Science of Strength-Based Parenting Can Help Your Child and Your Teen to Flourish  
By Lea Waters, PhD

With its scientific-sounding subtitle, you might expect *The Strength Switch* to be a complicated academic study of parenting rather than a helpful parenting guide. Instead, readers will find themselves nodding along in agreement as Dr. Lea Waters speaks to the importance of mindfulness and communication in the parent-child relationship.

Strength-based parenting reinforces and encourages a child's abilities by "playing to the strengths" of the child and emphasizing the positive rather than the negative. While it may seem reasonable, even logical, to say that we should focus on a child's strengths, it can be hard to turn off the parental critic and put positivity into practice. Through guidelines and exercises, as well as relatable anecdotes, *The Strength Switch* helps parents shift from a negative focus on a child's weaknesses to a positive outlook that acknowledges and honors the child's strengths.

Dr. Waters, a strengths-based scientist for more than two decades, reinforces what we may intuitively know: Cutting negativity from our parenting style can make a huge difference in a child's attitude and outlook. The benefits can include higher levels of achievement, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, as well as a reduction in depression and anxiety. By instilling and modeling positivity, we give our children a foundation for coping with anything life throws at them. *The Strength Switch* belongs on every parent's bookshelf as a go-to reminder of a loving, positive style of parenting. —Kristina Wright

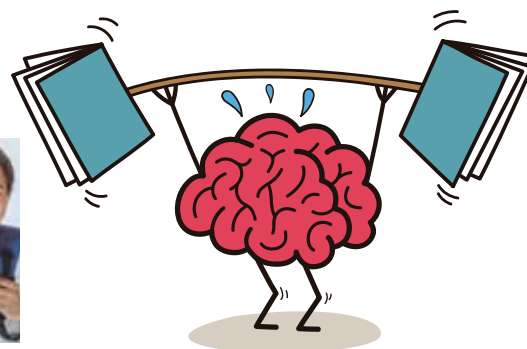
## By the Numbers...



# 25%

of teens say they spend time on a daily basis with friends in person outside of school.

Pew Research



# 73%

of the human brain is water. It takes only 2% dehydration to affect your attention, memory, and other cognitive skills.

National Center for Biotechnology Information



# 6.9

hours the average amount of sleep a high school student gets on a school night.

Statistic Brain Research Institute

# 88%

of Americans have turkey on Thanksgiving.

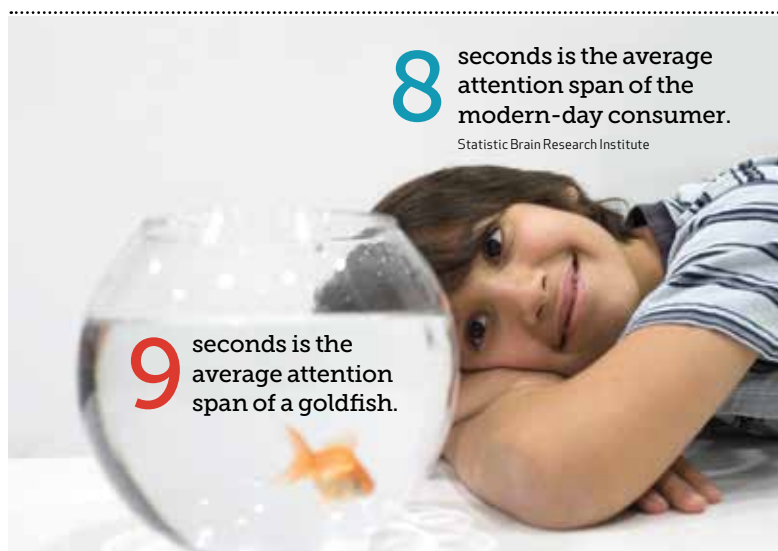
National Turkey Federation



# 8

seconds is the average attention span of the modern-day consumer.

Statistic Brain Research Institute



# 9

seconds is the average attention span of a goldfish.



# *Holiday Gift Guide*

A Gift for Everyone on Your List





# Gifts for Her...



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## Shhh Silk Pillowcases

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## In Styler Glossie Ceramic Styling Brush

A life-changer, says our senior editor, Jane. One pass of the hot styling brush through your hair, and it's straight from root to tip. \$79.99, [instyler.com](http://instyler.com)



## Heat Holders Leggings

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# Stocking Stuffers



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## Drinkmate™ Spritzer

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## IFROGZ Impulse Wireless Earbuds

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## Power it Up!



## RapidX X5 Car Charger

Fighting over one charger cord on your family road trip is so passé. Charge up to 5 devices at once at high speed. Your kids don't really want to talk to you anyway. \$24.95, [TheGrommet.com](http://TheGrommet.com)



## MyCharge Hub Plus

This all-in-one portable, rechargeable device keeps all of your family's tech charged. Apple Lightning™ cables, USB port, built-in wall prongs for the outlet. Boom! \$79.99, [mycharge.com](http://mycharge.com)



## Quirky Pivot Power Desktop Power Strip

You have so many things that need charging. Plug them all into one bendy surge-protecting power strip. It has 2 USB outlets, too. And it's so cute! \$39.99, [quirkypivotpower.com](http://quirkypivotpower.com)



Photo: Beth Segal

## WATCH YOUR WORDS

Gossip is anything but idle. Here's what your teen needs to know.

It's fun for teenagers to dish the latest news with friends—who has a new romance, who just got their license, who they saw at the mall yesterday. And that kind of conversation can draw friends closer together, and even alert others to someone in trouble—a teen who needs serious intervention, or maybe just some words of support because her dog died.

But what we may think of as harmless “gossip” can also have a dark side. You know how it starts: One teen says she saw another teen at a movie with a boy who wasn't her boyfriend, and suddenly the school and social media are ablaze with “cheating” rumors. Oh, it was just her out-of-town family friend? Too bad—the damage to that teen's reputation has already been done.

“That's gossip at its most insidious—when someone is not

in the room to defend or explain themselves,” says Nicole Zangara, a licensed social worker in Scottsdale, Arizona, and author of *Surviving Female Friendships: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*.

And talking about others in a hurtful way—whether or not the information is true—is never okay. “It can turn into bullying, which can lead to depression, anxiety, or worse,” cautions Zangara.

So here are good rules of thumb that you can share with your teen: Are you sharing information in a kind, helpful way, or are you simply being mean? And, further: Do you know it's true, or are you repeating something unverified from someone else?

Maybe that old adage is right: “If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.”

—Cathie Ericson

## MAKE TIME TO PLAY

Engaging kids in family fun night.

When is the last time your family played together? It may be a challenge to get kids on board the family activity train, but it's not impossible. With the right approach and some creativity, you can get them to put down their phones and join the fun.

“The parent's attitude is contagious, so you don't want it to feel like one more thing you have to squeeze in, but something that's enjoyable,” says Cynthia Copeland, New York Times bestselling author of *Family Fun Night: 300 Great Nights With Your Kids*. “Don't pick a time you're competing with other things. Maybe Sunday afternoon works better than nights—or just be spontaneous.”

Copeland advises parents to always be ready with ideas for family activities and then let the kids pick the music and the games. Ask them to teach you to play their favorite—maybe even the computer game you think you'd hate.

Lauren DePino and her boyfriend spend Friday nights playing games with his three kids (ages 8, 15, and 16). Yahtzee, backgammon, and bowling are standards, or they play a video game that involves all five of them working as a team.

“If we didn't initiate it, they'd probably do their own things, but we feel like it's important to engage,” DePino says. “And once we're all sitting around Monopoly, there's a lot of joking and laughing. Sometimes they have their phones out, but it's because they're Snapchatting their friends photos and videos of how much fun they're having.”

—Jaimie Seaton







Photo: Beth Segal

## HOLIDAY FASHION BATTLES

What you should—and shouldn't—do when your teens won't dress the way you want them to during the holidays.

**A**t the heart of the holidays are traditions, family togetherness, and the annual exchange of presents and goodwill. But most of us also want the holidays to live up to an ideal in our head. “People want to show they are holding it together—whether it’s true or not,” explains Dr. Deborah Gilboa, a parent and youth development expert and founder of the advice site [AskDoctorG.com](http://AskDoctorG.com).

This can be especially difficult when your teen is not cooperating with your clothing expectations and wants to, say, wear army boots in your khaki-and-white annual family photo shoot, or show up for Christmas at Grandma’s in a midriff-baring t-shirt.

What’s a parent to do?

First, says Gilboa, you need to figure out what your irritation is really about. Are you upset because their outfit choices are disrespectful to your family’s cultural or religious traditions, or does your irritation have more to do with your own ego?

If it’s the first scenario, you may need to put your foot down, Dr. Gilboa says. “If your children are part of a larger family whose religious beliefs involve not showing parts on their skin, then it’s reasonable to require your teen to cover up those parts of the skin,” she says. But there’s still room for individuality within these limits. “If your teen wants to cover their shoulders by wearing a rainbow shirt, that’s

totally reasonable,” she says.

If your objections to your teen’s clothing choices have more to do with concern about how others might perceive you, consider biting your tongue.

“Figure out a dress code. Maybe it’s that your children need to be dressed up. Or you might decide that they can’t wear anything that shows off the bottom of their glutes. But once you decide the dress code, back off,” Dr. Gilboa says. You can enforce that dress code, but don’t nit-pick other things. “I know how much fun it is to have your family dressed in matching clothes, but the unifying theme you really want from your holiday memories are smiles.”

—Rebecca Meiser



## Who Can Resist a Warm Brownie?

Do you have a budding young baker in your house? And a microwave? Here's a recipe teens can make all by themselves, without the oven or a lot of ingredients. The cake recipes in Chef Gemma Stafford's *My 50+ Microwaveable Mug Meals* are so sophisticated and delicious. No one will guess that they were made in a microwave in minutes.

"We all know that dessert is the most important meal of the day, so let's get down to business with this Microwave Mug Nutella Brownie," says Chef Jemma. "It is really chocolatey, and it's chewy. It's perfect for after school, sleepovers, or any time you want something delicious in just a few minutes."



## 3-INGREDIENT MICROWAVE MUG NUTELLA BROWNIE

Serves 1

### INGREDIENTS:

- ¼ cup + 1 tbsp (3 ¼ oz/90g) Nutella
- 1 large egg, gently whisked
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour

### DIRECTIONS:

1. In a large microwavable mug, whisk together the Nutella and egg.
2. Add flour, and mix until the batter is smooth.
3. Microwave for roughly 45 seconds - 1 minute. Always keep a close eye on your mug while it is in the microwave, so it doesn't overflow or overcook.
4. When the brownie is set and firm on top, it is done. Let the brownie cool for a few minutes before serving.
5. Serve with some vanilla ice cream while the brownie is still warm.

**Notes:** Mugs can be mixed up in advance and microwaved when you're ready.

Cooking time will vary depending on your microwave, and the width and depth of the mug.

Take care not to overcook, or the brownies can dry out.





# My Job, My Money?

## How to teach your working teen financial responsibility

By Cathie Ericson

When your teenager starts earning money, does that mean they can spend it however they please? Chances are, your teen believes they deserve their entire paycheck, and it's their prerogative to blow it on distressed jeans, fancy coffees, and movie tickets if they choose. But sometimes parents have a different plan, particularly as they work to raise financially literate teens.

And guiding teens in financial matters is smart, says Kris Yamano, vice president and regional leader of wealth planning for BMO Private Bank in Scottsdale, Arizona. "Since teenagers are on the cusp of being on their own financially, it's crucial to provide them with practical, hands-on experience in balancing earning, saving, and spending," she says.

### Have Them Pay Their Way—Some of the Time

There's no surer way to help your child understand the value of a dollar than by having them spend some of their own hard-earned money. When spending their own paycheck, teens can more concretely see the contrast between the hours it took to earn the

money and the seconds it can take to spend it.

Investment professional Phillip Reames of Reames Financial in Kalamazoo, Michigan has seen this in action with his own kids—they're more careful with money they've earned. "My kids were shopping at the upscale toy store," recalls Reames, "but they ended up not buying anything because they recognized that everything they looked at could be bought cheaper at our local supercenter." They were able to make that judgment because they knew the pain of wasting their hard-earned money, says Reames.

Splitting costs is another way to help teens understand how far (or not) their money will go, and whether extras are worth the hours it takes to earn enough to cover those luxuries. When Matthew S. Eads, CFA, of Eads & Heald Investment Counsel, was helping his 16-year-old son Ethan build a computer, he and his wife agreed to cover the cost of basic components. When Ethan wanted to upgrade the parts, they decided that these extra costs were Ethan's financial responsibility. "We helped him learn how to research products and save

money on the purchase, but it was squarely on him," says Eads.

### Teaching Financial Literacy

The key is providing some help, Eads says, versus just turning them loose. "We should be giving teens quite a bit of guidance about what to do with money," he notes.

Parents should take the opportunity to guide teens through decision-making situations while they're still living at home, adds Eads. However, he cautions parents not to tell them how to handle everything, but instead help them explore the pros and cons of various choices so they learn how to think for themselves.

Yamano agrees that the teen years are a time to guide kids through spending decisions. Talking to teens about the host of expenses adults have to cover every month—housing, food, insurance—and then comparing those to discretionary items, like pricier clothing, entertainment, and vacations, can provide a great foundation for teens to learn to assess and budget for "wants" vs. "needs."

Without the context of real financial responsibilities, that first paycheck may seem

like a lot of money to a teen. But understanding the costs involved in independent adulthood can help teenagers put their current spending and saving choices into a more mature context.

Parents shouldn't be afraid to have teens take on some real responsibility aside from paying for their own personal wants, she adds.

"Many of our clients, even those able to fully shoulder the burden of college expenses, express the desire not to hand their kids everything and instead choose to partner with them," Yamano says, noting the additional benefit that teens often pay more attention to their education if they have a financial stake in it.

And, as you're teaching teens fiscal responsibility, let them make some mistakes along the way with that new income of theirs. "There are some lessons that only buyer's remorse can teach," points out Reames. "They learn to evaluate what something is worth, and then to balance price with quality. But it's a lesson they usually don't take to heart until it's their own cash." ■

## Q &amp; A

## ...with Ella Anderson

At the age of four, Ella Anderson knew she wanted to be an actress. Now, as a 12-year-old, she has found a home for herself on the Nickelodeon series *Henry Danger* and has also made it to the big screen, starring in *The Boss* and now *The Glass Castle*. We talked with Ella and her mom, Rebecca, to learn about life as a child actor—and life as a parent of a child actor.



#### How did Ella wind up acting at such a young age?

**Rebecca:** When my twin boys were little, people said they were like the twins on their favorite show, *The Secret Life of Zack and Cody*. They would say, “We want to be on TV, too.” I found work for them, and I also found a role for a little girl. Ella auditioned and got the part. The boys lost interest, while Ella just fell in love.

#### You lived in Michigan when Ella got the acting bug. Why did you move to Los Angeles?

**Rebecca:** Ella did some small parts, but then Michigan eliminated the film tax incentive, so there were fewer opportunities. Ella noticed and said she wanted to go where they make movies. I took her to LA for one week, thinking that agents and managers would say no. I kept saying we weren't moving here, and the agents said we didn't have to—we just had to come for pilot season. My husband said to go for a couple of months, and she never stopped working.

**Ella:** Then Dad visited and said, “Why are we living in Michigan? The weather is so much nicer here, and there are so many more opportunities here.”

**Rebecca:** My boys are very active. In LA, they can be outside all year. We stressed to Ella that we didn't relocate for her acting; if she wants to be done tomorrow, she can be. We moved here because it was good for our family overall.

#### It's nice to remove that pressure from her.

**Rebecca:** Right. This is supposed to be fun because she's a kid. As soon as it becomes a job, that's when I'll encourage her to find something else to do, or go to school. I check in with her a lot.

#### Are you worried about her social life?

**Rebecca:** Yes. I went to traditional school, so pulling her from school was a worry. She's been fortunate. Nickelodeon does a nice job of facilitating a community. It's like being at a very small public school. She has consistency every day—going to the same place and having the same teacher.

#### Is it exciting to see all these famous people on set?

**Ella:** It's cool, but once I get to know them, they become regular people.

**Rebecca:** I think the entire idea of celebrity doesn't exist for Ella anymore. I try to teach Ella that being a good person makes you important, not how successful you are.

#### Do you have a favorite role you've played?

**Ella:** *The Glass Castle*, so far, has been one of the most special for me. It was really deep, but also very fun to do.

#### Was it hard to play this girl who has a very different life?

**Ella:** It was crazy because we are so different. I really had to find places in my own life where I could draw from and relate to her. I never had an abusive parent, but I've had pain in my life, so I brought that.

#### What are some of your worries about Ella growing up in Hollywood?

**Rebecca:** I worry about how people portray themselves on social media and how that will influence a young girl. I worry about her trying to keep up with these overly made-up women that I see on the covers of magazines.

#### How does having someone in Hollywood affect the family dynamic?

**Ella:** I don't think it affects anything. I will always feel like my brothers are a little cooler than I am.

**Rebecca:** When we first moved here, one of my boys said he was afraid he wasn't going to be successful. When I asked if he wanted to act, he said no, but he was afraid he wouldn't be successful if he didn't. I told him to stick with what he loved. That was a turning point. Both boys realized how much Ella loved acting, and that's what they hope to find in their life. For a while it was tricky, but now they are supportive of Ella, and she's supportive of them. ■

Interview by Susan Borison





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# 5 Buckets of Life Skills

As you help lay the path for college readiness, don't forget to include life skills right along with the academics. Your kid will thank you later.

By Jennifer Proe



Last year, a Hiram College freshman became the social media darling of his campus when he good-naturedly agreed to be the poster boy for how not to do laundry. He was spotted around campus wearing pink from head to toe; it seems he missed the memo on sorting his reds from his whites.

But when would he have learned to do laundry? Given the academic rigors, extracurriculars, and busy social lives our teens face in high school, parents may feel that there's no time to pass along the essential life skills their kids will need once they leave the nest. And yet, prepare them we must.

When it comes to raising college-ready kids, "independence, reliance, and emotional intelligence are just as important as SAT scores and grades," says Laura Kastner, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist in the Seattle area and co-author of *The Launching Years*. "The seven years of middle school and high school are the key period of time leading up to a successful college launch," she says.

Pink laundry is a trivial example, but teens who lack independent living skills can be at a real disadvantage once they get to campus.

"When students have not had an opportunity to develop some of these skills before college, it tends to show up in their academic performance around their third or fourth week," says Liz Okuma, Ph.D., vice president and dean of students at Hiram College. "We may notice they are spending a lot of time in their room or skipping class because they are feeling overwhelmed—whereas students who have had more experience navigating things on their own are keeping up with their work and joining clubs and organizations."

What are those magical skills we can help our teens develop—or, at least, begin to develop—before the big college launch? Okuma groups them into five buckets:

## BUCKET 1: Simple Life Tasks

Can they cook for themselves? Do laundry? Put gas in the car? Change a tire? Do they know the proper etiquette for writing an email to a teacher or potential employer? Can they wake themselves up in the morning?

## BUCKET 2: Managing Their Money

Do they know how to save money? Can they distinguish between "wants" and "needs"? Will your student be getting a job at college? Will they have a credit card? Whatever the financial plan will be, high school is the time to test-drive it.

## BUCKET 3: Managing Their Safety

What actions will they take if they find themselves in an unsafe situation? Teach them to be aware of their surroundings and to pay attention to what makes them feel safe or unsafe. Encourage them to enroll in a self-defense class to learn some practical safety skills.

## BUCKET 4: Time Management

College is all about "work hard, play hard"—but in order to achieve academic success, your student will need to learn to complete the work before they play. Help them learn how to say "no" to friends when the work cannot wait. College will be filled with distractions, so high school is the time to learn how to manage priorities.

## BUCKET 5: Stress Management

Help your teen pay attention to what causes them to feel stressed and what actions they can take to help them feel better—whether it's taking a walk outside, playing a board game, or just spending time with friends.

"These are not things you can just teach them one time and then check off the list," says Okuma. Instead, put your teens into situations where they can practice these skills. For example, give your teen the responsibility of making a meal, even once a month, rather than just showing them how to make the meal.

Setting these expectations while teens are in middle or high school primes them for success once they are on their own at college, says Kastner. It's okay if the teen struggles at first. "It's important to help your teens start developing self-regulation. Allow them to make some mistakes and to experience the natural consequences of those mistakes," she says.

A little pink laundry now is a small price to pay for a thriving college kid later. ■



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# The Pursuit of Passion

Your kid's quirky interest may not be the one you would have chosen, but it might be their ticket to happiness—and possibly a lifelong hobby or career.

By Jennifer Proe



By age 12, Gavin Svenson had a full-blown obsession with bugs. He couldn't get enough of digging for them, observing them, and collecting them. He recalls that his bemused parents patiently indulged his passion for insects even as he stored them in the freezer of their upstate New York home.

Around that age, Svenson saw an interview with an entomologist on PBS and thought, "Whoa! You can do this as a *career*?" Apparently, yes, which explains how he ended up as the curator of invertebrate zoology at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.

Deep interests that present at an early age often stay with us throughout life, says Susan Newman, Ph.D., a social psychologist from the New York metro area who blogs for *Psychology Today*.

At the same time, expect some fluctuation in the interests of teenagers. "It's not uncommon for a passion to dwindle during the teen years due to social and academic pressures, but that interest could very well reignite at a later stage," says Newman.

Parents can be patient and supportive without going overboard. Newman advises parents to resist the urge to schedule more lessons, buy more equipment, or line up a mentor unless the child is truly engaged. "We run the risk of burning them out when we do this," she asserts.

In Svenson's case, he feels his parents struck the right balance.

"My parents were super supportive, but it was mostly me driving it," says Svenson. Though his parents had some misgivings about his narrow choice of a career path, they never sought to change his trajectory.

Now, on a daily basis, Svenson gets to do what he loves—research bugs and share his passion with museum-goers. "Everyone starts out as a scientist," he observes. As a museum curator, he loves the thrill of helping to answer the same "who, what, where, and why" questions he had as a kid.

During adolescence, teens tend to try on lots of new activities and may drop them almost as quickly as they pick them up. Last week they lobbied for a drum set, and this week they want to learn to skateboard. How can parents know when it's a true passion versus a passing fancy?

Newman defines a passion as "an interest or activity that you can't get enough of; it keeps you coming back for more. It makes you inquisitive. As a parent, you'll notice that you can't get their attention because they are totally absorbed."

But what if the passion that's absorbing your child 24/7 is not the one you would have picked for them? Perhaps they still want to build Lego forts when you think they should be joining the debate team or playing a team sport, for example.

"Parents have to realize that their children are separate individuals with

interests, likes, and dislikes that can be very different from their own," says Newman. "You have to let your teen take the lead on what interests them."

Now a parent himself, Svenson concurs. "Never undercut your kids' interests. Kids are smart, and they have an incredible ability to judge for themselves."

And if your child has yet to develop a keen interest of their own?

"Parents should not be alarmed if their child has not developed an obvious passion by the teen years," says Newman. "These interests can develop much later in life, when they meet a friend in college who introduces them to rock climbing, for instance."

Whether your child's passion develops early in life or later, our role as parents is the same: Be patient, be supportive, and remember it's ultimately your child's job to find out what interests them most. ■

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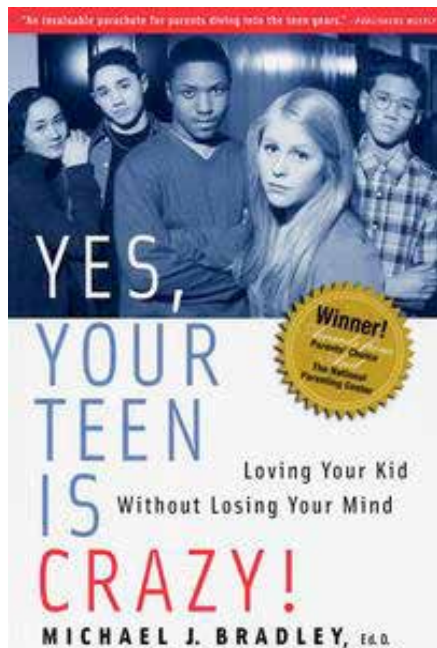
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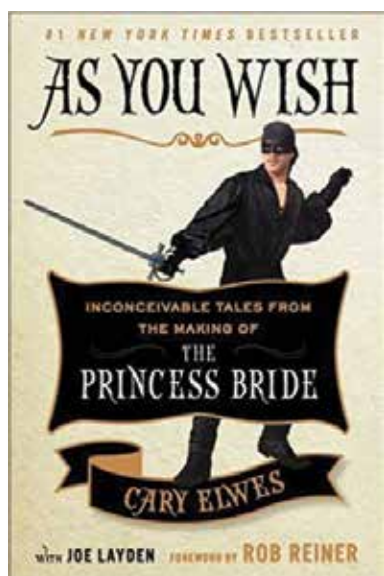
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## As You Wish: Inconceivable Tales From the Making of The Princess Bride

by Cary Elwes and Joe Layden

### TEEN REVIEW

By **Finn Lahey**

The book *As You Wish* tells the story of the filming of *The Princess Bride*. Written by Cary Elwes, who portrayed the iconic character Wesley, it describes the production of the movie and its effect on the movie industry from then on.

Throughout, Elwes describes mistakes, mishaps, and injuries, and how the show must go on; no book explains this better than *As You Wish*. Each chapter has a different fascinating story from some time during the filming of the movie—each with some new problem that the cast and crew must get through, often resulting in hilarity. If the princess nearly catches on fire or a member of the crew makes a crucial error, the book reports how they fix these mistakes.

Although the making of a movie may seem like arduous work, this book shows that if you have a job you love, you will never work a day in your life. Each actor provides a new take on the making of the film. Elwes recalls his interactions with the variety of actors, each performing some wacky and entertaining role in the film.

*The Princess Bride* is a favorite film for many, and learning how it was made can give insight into how great movies are produced. This can be an important step into understanding that a good film has to be made by a cast who truly enjoys being there and is sincerely invested in it.

Although many may consider this book only for movie fanatics or die-hard fans of *The Princess Bride*, I would definitely suggest it to anyone who wishes to get a look into the making of a great film and get a glimpse inside the head of an actor who became famous for a role in one of the most beloved comedies of all time.

*Finn Lahey is an eighth grader in New Hampshire.*

### PARENT REVIEW

By **Jessica Lahey**

When my children were young, I could not wait for them to grow old enough to appreciate the movie *The Princess Bride*, the tale of a Farm Boy-turned-Dread Pirate Roberts who must rescue his true love, Buttercup, from the clutches of the evil Prince Humperdink.

I wanted them to laugh when I said, “Inconceivable!” and “He’s only mostly dead,” and “Have fun storming the castle!” When they were finally ready, and it was time for the long-awaited family movie night, I worried they would not love the film as much as I do.

I am happy to report that this was not the case.

*The Princess Bride*, released in 1987, has been our family’s go-to movie for years, so when the book, *As You Wish: Inconceivable Tales From The Making of the Princess Bride*, was released, I knew my kids would love it. I purchased it in audio form because it’s read by nearly the entire cast. Co-author Cary Elwes and actors Christopher Guest, Carol Kane, Wallace Shawn, Billy Crystal, and Robin Wright—as well as director Rob Reiner and producer Norman Lear—all have their own stories to tell about how the film was made.

My favorite part of the book concerns a scene atop the Cliffs of Insanity, an epic, acrobatic sword fight between Farm Boy Westley/Dread Pirate Roberts (“As you wish”) and Inigo Montoya (“You killed my father, prepare to die”). On film, the fight is beautiful to behold; the characters parry, flip, leap, and feint in a display of brilliant swordsmanship honed through years of training.

As the actors Cary Elwes and Mandy Patinkin recount in *As You Wish*, however, neither one knew how to hold a sword, let alone fight with one. Both recount the grueling training they undertook over six months—before and during filming—to get ready to film that one scene.

If your family loves *The Princess Bride* as much as ours, *As You Wish* makes a great drive-time listen. Besides, when your kid says, “Could you turn the book back on?” you will have the opportunity to reply, “As you wish.”

*Jessica Lahey is a teacher, writer, and mother of two teens.*



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## Inquiring Minds: Great Questions to Ask at the Parent- Teacher Conference

You may only have a few minutes with your child's teacher to find out how things are going at school. Here's how to maximize the intel from that precious time slot.

By Jennifer Proe

Most of the time, the after-school feedback I get from my teens comes down to one word: "Fine." Whether I'm asking, *How was your day at school?* or *How did you do on that geometry test?*, I typically get that famous one-word response that tells me absolutely nothing.

Luckily for me, there is one time of the year when I do get a sliver of insight into what's really going on: at parent-teacher conferences. Conferences can be a parent's best insight into a teen's daily life at school, as long as we use the opportunity wisely.

The number of teachers we need to speak with, however, and the relatively short period of time assigned for each conference, can make the whole affair feel a little bit like speed dating. If you don't have a good strategy, that time can pass quickly without getting to the good stuff.

Emily Levitt, vice president of education at Sylvan Learning, suggests having a few targeted questions ready to go to help you fill in the picture. Based on her experience as a classroom teacher, she recommends asking:

*What do you think are the most important skills to have in order to succeed in this class?*

*Are some types of assignments weighted more heavily than others?*

*What strengths and weaknesses do you see in my child?*

*Is my child raising their hand and participating in class?*

*Is my child asking for help when they need it?*

Levitt says, "If low grades are a concern, parents can ask, *Do you think this reflects a lack of effort on my child's part, or a lack of understanding of the material?* A great follow-up question would be, *What can I do as a parent to provide support at home?*"

Levitt also advises parents to take the opportunity to uncover any social issues that may be impacting a student's performance. "If a parent has potential concerns about bullying, for example, be sure to ask the teacher, *How is my child interacting with their peers? Do you see any problems I should be aware of?*" she says. And if you haven't done so already, let the teacher know of any extenuating circumstances that could affect a child's academic performance, such as a death in the family, divorce, or an extended illness.

Cyndy McDonald has seen her share of parent-teacher conferences in her more than 14 years as a guidance counselor in California. She stresses, "The most important thing is to go in with the attitude that we're all on the same team. Teachers want to hear that parents will support them in their mission to educate."

Having said that, sometimes the conference does not go according to plan. Perhaps there is an issue with the teacher that does not get resolved to your satisfaction—whether it has to do

with your child's academic performance or a personality conflict.

In that case, McDonald recommends, "Be sure to talk with your child's other teachers to find out if this issue is happening in every class, or just in this one. If the issue is missing homework, for example, you could let the teacher know, *This is what seems to be working in other classes for my child; could we try this in your class?*"

If this approach doesn't lead to a positive resolution, McDonald then suggests meeting with the guidance counselor, vice principal, or dean of students to form a "student study team" to address the issue at hand. "If a parent comes to me after they've done their homework on the issue, that makes my job so much easier to help resolve it," she says.

Even if all issues are not resolved at the parent-teacher conference, that one-on-one time with the teacher lays the groundwork for proactive communication and teamwork between you, the teachers, and the student you both care about. Make the most of it. ■



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# Help!

## My Son Is a Procrastinator!



MOM

When Sam was in elementary and middle school, I tried—unsuccessfully—to impart the wisdom his father and I had learned the hard way: Waiting until the last minute to tackle an assignment isn't worth the stress.

Once Sam started high school, I was sure he'd heed

my advice and manage his time better. Reasonable, right? Nope. This past spring, my freshman had weeks to complete a history project, yet he waited until the last possible moment to begin creating a dozen-page scrapbook that was so complicated it even required that he fashion his own musket strap.

Knowing he had several other commitments, I implored him to begin as soon as possible, explaining that the quality—and his grade—would likely suffer if he attempted one of his usual rush jobs. (With that in mind, I told him the deadline for this article was a week earlier than it truly was. Shh! That's our secret.)

"Stop worrying, Mom," he told me with an exasperated eyeroll that I was lucky to get: It meant that he had momentarily looked away from the video game consuming much of his free time. "I'll get it done."

"You have to stop procrastinating," I told him, adding that I would not be going out at midnight in search of ink for our printer or faux leather for a bayonet handle. "What if a friend called and asked you to do something really fun today and you had to miss it because you hadn't gotten your work done? Then wouldn't you be sorry you hadn't finished it earlier?"

"No, I'd hang out with my friend and start this project even later. And I'd probably still get a good grade on it," he responded with a smirk.

Argh. Something tells me he won't understand my point until the very last minute, either.

*Liz Alterman is a mom of three boys and a writer. She is currently working on a memoir chronicling her adventures in unemployment.*



SON

Despite what my mom will tell you, I obviously don't procrastinate for the fun of it. The thing I don't like is when teachers say not to procrastinate. I don't waste as much time as some of my friends do, and I actually have good grades in school.

So why does everyone think it's so bad?

I'm not completely defending the habit, but I think parents and teachers are blowing things way out of proportion. I always hear teachers saying, "Procrastination is evil, and it will make you fail in life." But I'm passing their classes while doing the thing that's supposedly "setting me up for failure." So where's the problem?

I think I work best under pressure. When something needs to get done, I'll get right to it. That's how I work. I'm completely in the zone. No matter how long it takes, I will finish it, and the quality will still be there. But if something isn't due for a while, I almost see it as free time, or a place where I can take a break from my work.

In history class, I had a massive project that we had two months to complete. It was due on a Monday. When I woke up on Saturday morning, I grabbed my laptop and settled into a good seven straight hours of work before eating, then got right back to where I left off.

Sure enough, the next week we got our grades back, and I had a 98—one of the highest grades in my class.

In short, I don't think procrastination is necessarily bad; I just see it as a way I choose to live my life.

*Sam Alterman is a high school sophomore. He enjoys playing football and baseball and riding roller coasters.*





PRO

## PROCRASTINATION: ADVICE FROM AN EXPERT

Sam raises an interesting point: Is putting off your work until later always a bad idea?

Not necessarily. Anytime we choose to do one thing, we're necessarily choosing to delay something else.

When this decision makes sense, we're prioritizing. If the delay is bad for us, but we do it anyway, we're procrastinating.

Here are a few questions to help you tell the difference between prioritizing and procrastinating:

*Do you want to start your work earlier, but can't get yourself to start?*

*Do you feel stressed or overwhelmed before deadlines?*

*Do you stay up too late the*

*night before an important due date?*

*Do you rush to complete your work before the deadline?*

*Do you fail to meet your goals, and are you disappointed with the quality of your work?*

If you answered "yes" to two or more of questions, you're probably procrastinating.

In this case, Sam seems to be happy with his decision to save his work until the last minute. He's not stressed out, he likes how he's spending his time, he's doing good work, and he's earning good grades.

The person who is really stressed here is Liz! Unfortunately, her stress isn't going to motivate Sam to start his work earlier.

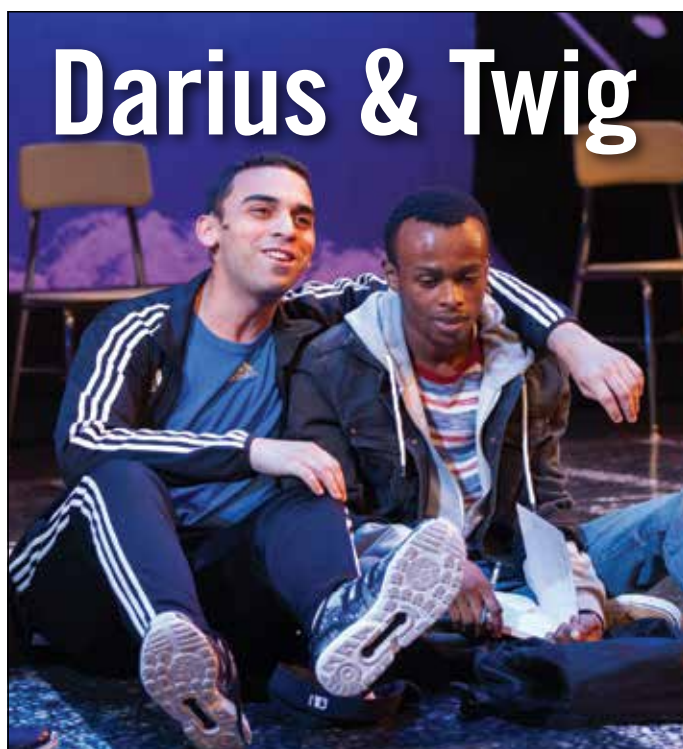
So, Liz, as long as Sam continues doing well—finishing his projects on time without panicking or losing sleep, and earning great grades on them—consider taking steps to reduce your stress level and put Sam in charge of managing projects. Some steps you can take:

- Let Sam know that you will no longer be reminding him about deadlines.
- Set clear guidelines for when you're available (e.g. not midnight!) for shopping trips, brainstorming sessions, etc.—and stick to them.
- Ask teachers to forward project reminders to Sam instead of you, explaining that you want Sam to learn how to manage his deadlines independently.

The goal here is to step into the role of a consultant on Sam's projects, rather than an active manager. It sounds like Sam is ready for that ... which is fantastic!

And if his work suffers without your support, you can always step back in to help later ... after you both agree that he would benefit from solving his habit of procrastinating.

*Dr. Maggie Wray is an academic & ADHD coach who specializes in helping teens develop the organization, time management, and study skills they need to earn better grades with less stress. You can learn more about Dr. Maggie on her site, [CreatingPositiveFutures.com](http://CreatingPositiveFutures.com).*



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# BOARDING SCHOOL

If boarding schools make you think of a stiff blazer with a stuffy crest on the lapel, you may have another thing coming. For many students, boarding school offers a more supportive, academic, and social, community in which to grow.



By Ken Schneck

When Will Mason was in the eighth grade, his parents sat him down and informed him that he would be attending boarding school. They were disappointed in the education he was receiving in public school and felt that he would benefit from more rigorous instruction and mentoring. Mason was not initially thrilled with this plan, however, and his transition was rough.

“My first semester, my grades were so bad that my parents considered taking me out of school, but decided to give it one more semester,” says Mason. As the second semester progressed, something just clicked. He started enjoying his classes, surrounded himself with a good group of friends, and developed close relationships with his teachers. Not surprisingly, his grades improved.

With small class sizes, robust co-curriculars, and strong academic support, boarding schools can be a great fit for students who need a more comprehensive and nurturing environment in which to grow. “It provides a sense of community, both academic and social,” says Mason.

The close relationships Mason developed with his peers and mentors were key. “They strengthened my curiosity as a student, and furthered my growth and maturity as a person,” he says. “My teachers were people who I could talk to about anything, not just school work.”

In fact, his teachers were so influential that after college, Mason decided to follow in their footsteps and become a boarding school instructor so that he could provide the same kind of mentoring that had benefited him so greatly. He now teaches science and math at Grand

River Academy, a boarding school for young men in northeast Ohio.

Without a doubt, the decision to pursue a boarding school education is a big one and requires much consideration. By following these tips, families can navigate the process to decide if boarding school might be the right fit:

## MAKE IT A FAMILY DECISION.

Find out from the start how your son or daughter actually feels about the idea of going away to a boarding school. “Everyone should sit down at the same time around the same table to have this conversation,” recommends Rosalyn Lowenhaupt, a consultant with Independent School Placement Service of St. Louis. Involve the entire family at the start of the process to decrease anxiety and increase buy-in from all parties.

## DO YOUR RESEARCH.

There are many details that differentiate boarding schools: size, philosophy of education, demographics of students, rigor of the curriculum, and academic support services, to name a few. Talk with the admissions representative and visit the school’s website to get a detailed picture of life at the school. You may even want to consider working with a boarding school consultant. “At no point in the process should there be unanswered questions,” advises Lowenhaupt.

## VISIT.

All the research in the world can’t replace the importance of actually setting foot on campus. “You have to see what a school actually feels like, not just what is

on the website or in the brochures,” says Amy Roth, dean of students at Grand River Academy. Visit when classes are in session to get the most realistic picture.

## LOOK BEYOND ACADEMICS.

Don’t forget that students will spend a good chunk of their lives outside the classroom. That time needs to be just as fulfilling. “Parents sometimes over-prioritize the academic piece and forget their child is a teenager,” says Roth. “Beyond-classroom opportunities let students step outside their comfort zone and try new things.” Ask questions about recreation, athletics, mealtimes, clubs, and community service.

## KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON THAT FIRST YEAR.

Given his own experience, Mason advises parents to check in often during the first year, but not to intervene too quickly. “Parents must understand that boarding school is a big change,” he says. “A sufficient amount of time is needed in order to assess the decision.” ■



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# THE SMARTPHONE GENERATION

Cell phones are here to stay.

By Cathie Ericson



Photo: Beth Segal



Many of us parents, given the option, would snap our fingers and make smartphones—and all their complications—go away forever. But, as you may already be discovering, there's an inevitability about teens and phones, so we might as well face that reality head-on.



What do we worry about? Too much screen time, too little face-to-face socializing, and the potential pitfalls of social media. As smartphones become ubiquitous, teens have all the pressure associated with always being “on”—but potentially without the maturity to handle it. And that’s troubling.

As reported in Jean Twenge’s new book *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*, rates of teen depression have skyrocketed—a phenomenon the author links to smartphones. Boys’ depressive symptoms increased by

21 percent from 2012 to 2015, while girls’ increased by 50 percent. Research supports a connection between this shift and smartphone usage, finding that teens who report more screen time are more likely to be unhappy, compared to teens who spend less time than average with their screen.

Given these findings, why do we even allow our teens to have phones? In many cases, it’s almost as though we have no choice. Pew Research reports that three-quarters of teens have a smartphone, and a whopping 92 percent of them say they go online every day.

Your teens are likely to be among these connected teens—so, rather than “just say no,” how can parents set wise limits?

## Is It Time for a Smartphone?

The first step is the “when.” If you’re among those parents who haven’t yet allowed a cell phone at all, you might

want to keep holding out—and if they have a simple flip phone, tread carefully when it comes to smartphones.

“Wait as long as possible to give your child a phone,” recommends Twenge, referencing an online campaign called “Wait Until 8th,” where parents pledge to hold off on giving a child a smartphone until eighth grade.

That’s because the younger a child, the larger the negative effects of time spent on social media. “There’s this collision between a child’s first time with a smartphone and their first time dealing with adolescent issues,” Twenge points out. “Middle school is a time when teens are struggling with emotions and identity and budding sexuality, and it’s even harder to work out those issues in a digital age.”

Even when you decide your child is mature enough for a smartphone (see our sidebar for tips), that’s not the cue to just give them the phone, says Doreen Dodgen-Magee, a psychologist from Lake Oswego, Oregon, who specializes



## Is My Child Ready for Digital Independence?

Smartphone readiness isn’t just about age—social and emotional skills matter too. If you’ve already allowed a phone, don’t worry. You can still coach your child through these considerations and perhaps tweak the details of their phone usage accordingly.

- Does your child show that they can handle expensive things carefully?
- How do they deal with their peers and the normal ups and downs of relationships?
- Can they apologize if they offend someone?
- Do they understand privacy?
- Can they manage their impulsiveness?
- Do they have the patience to wait for a reply?
- Do they have mood swings that might make social media more challenging?



in technology health. She suggests calling the device a “family phone,” rather than their personal phone to emphasize that parents are going to instill guidelines, and teens will have to prove themselves to be reliable and responsible.

“You want to put norms in place rather than just add screens,” she says. Focus on helping kids balance online relationships with real-life relationships. “Tell them that it is your job to keep them safe, and that you are going to be their frontal cortex since theirs isn’t yet fully developed.”

If you’re not sure your child is ready for all the bells and whistles of a smartphone, you can start slow with how you allow them to use the phone, says Devorah Heitner, author of *Screenwise: Helping Kids Thrive (and Survive) in Their Digital World* and founder of the website *RaisingDigitalNatives.com*. Let them use the device to talk and text, but don’t immediately load it up with a bunch of apps, for example.

## Easy to Love, Hard to Put Down: Setting Limits on Phone Use

Does it seem like your teen is constantly clicking and scrolling? To be fair, we might be, too. A survey from Common Sense Media found that 78 percent of teens reported checking their phone at least hourly, but 69 percent of parents said the same.

“I like to remind parents that they are the models,” says Dodgen-Magee. “If you don’t think they should use their device at night, then you shouldn’t bring yours to bed either.”

Which brings up one of the most important limits that should be set: Encourage good evening habits so the phone doesn’t interrupt their sleep. “If you only do one thing, keep the phone out of their room at night,” says Heitner.

Of course, you know they are going



Photos: Beth Segal

to say it’s their alarm clock. Remind them of this novel invention—an actual clock, which you can find for about \$10, says Twenge. “Even if the phone is off, it’s still too tempting to have it at the ready while they’re trying to wind down, or if they wake up in the middle of the night.”

Beyond that, the key is to make sure they are balancing their screen time with other activities. Twenge has found a direct correlation between negative teen

mental health and the number of hours they spend on their devices, particularly on social media. While more research needs to be done to determine exactly why these things are correlated, Twenge recommends parents err on the side of caution and look into one of the numerous apps like Freedom or Kidslox that allow you to set daily limits.

However, you probably





## Are *Dumbphones* a Smart Option?

When my son entered middle school, I wanted to be able to text him to let him know I would be late for school pickup or have him be able to reach me if he needed a ride from lacrosse. But he'd always been a "screen guy," so there seemed to be no reason to offer him a tempting computer in his pocket. A flip phone with talking and texting capabilities would be enough, right?

My kid wasn't happy, and the salesperson looked at me like I was crazy. But the store finally produced a no-frills phone, which my sixth grader carried for a year until we upgraded him to the coveted smartphone.

If it seems like all phones are actually mini computers, that's because, well, they mostly are. In fact, research firm eMarketer found that among teens aged 14-18 who owned a phone, 85 percent had a smartphone, while only 15 percent had another type of mobile phone. But you can find them: Dumbphones, also known as feature phones, can be found on Amazon for as little as \$40, with monthly service running about \$25 for unlimited talk and text.



However, a dumbphone isn't necessarily the only answer, especially for parents who want to offer a hand-me-down phone. "You can strip down the functionality so there's not an overwhelming array of apps," says Heitner. If you do decide to block certain apps, consider granting access from, say, the family computer, so they are not totally in the dark. These days lots of plans are made via social media, and cutting them off completely might not be the answer.

shouldn't outright take the phone as a punishment, says Heitner, as they often need it for homework or updates (like when the next soccer practice is). "It's more productive to have a conversation about when they should unplug and help them develop a healthy balance."

### The Right to Know: How Much Access Should Parents Have?

Whether to read your kid's texts is a matter of ongoing debate. On one side are parents who say the phone is theirs and so it's theirs to read; on the other are those who say kids deserve their privacy. (Of course, social media is not private, so at the least, you should scroll your kid's account every now and then.)

If you do choose to read their texts, let them know you're going to peek, rather than covertly looking, Heitner suggests. (They might want to warn their friends.) And give them a heads-up about the kind of content that is going to bother you. Can your kids use colorful language? Can they talk about other kids?

But, adds Heitner, if you go this route, prepare to have your feelings hurt. "Think about the stuff you would say to your friends when you were walking home from school and you'd blow off steam if you were annoyed with your mom. Now it's all written down."

And checking texts might not bring you the peace of mind you think it will: Remember that kids are masterful at

covering their tracks, whether it's by deleting texts or communicating via another method, like Snapchat. Even having GPS is no panacea, as kids can easily override that or just leave their phone at the place where they are supposed to be.

You also want to be aware of whether you're giving them the space to learn independence. When they text you with every question or need, do you jump to their rescue? "Teens are no longer learning how to make mistakes and solve problems on their own," Twenge says. "It's a balancing act to decide how much you want to protect them and how much you should let them make their own choices." After all, points out Heitner, are we still going to be geotracking our kids in college?

Rather than focusing on monitoring, spend your time developing non-shaming, empathy-based connections with your kids, says Dodgen-Magee. "Tell them you know that they will have hard experiences online, and promise them you won't overreact when they come to you. Keep the communication open."

The bottom line is that it's impossible to prevent the pitfalls. "Parents should be more concerned about teaching discernment and wise use, rather than trying to pretend we can control what they see," Dodgen-Magee says.

The more we empower our kids to learn the rules of the digital world, the safer they will be online. ■

## TEEN SPEAK

# Don't Take My Phone Away!

By **Madison Peebles**

Let's be real: It's 2017 and technology isn't the future anymore; it's the present. Being a teenager today means relying on our phones for almost every single task: We use them to text our friends, stay connected to the outside world, wake us up in the morning, turn in homework, and more.

How can we do all that when a parent can just snatch our phones out from under us at any given time? Sure, taking a teenager's phone away for a substantial amount of time

can get a parent's point across. But it can also make us withdraw socially, feel disconnected from everyone and everything, and put our organizational systems out of whack.

When our phones get taken away, it makes us feel like our parents don't trust us to get on top of whatever we're being punished for. They're taking the phone because they think it's the only way to motivate us to do what they want.

Unfortunately, this action has only negative effects. It doesn't make us want to do our tasks sooner. It's like realizing your child can't sleep, then taking away their favorite blanket in hopes of helping them sleep. Why take something away when you can make a trade or deal that genuinely motivates us? You know what your teenagers like—say, your artistic teen might like some new charcoals—and maybe offering us something small could motivate us to take action sooner.

Instead, when parents take our phones, we are sitting around feeling lazy and mad, all the while waiting to get our lives back. ■



Photo: Beth Segal

# IS IT SAFE TO **VAPE?**

Vaping isn't as harmful as regular smoking, but it's still dangerous, especially for teens.

By Sandra Gordon





First, the good news: Teen smoking isn't as cool as it once was. Over the past 40 years, smoking rates among teens have fallen nearly 23 percent.

The not-so-great news? More than two million middle and high school students use e-cigarettes (vape). E-cigarettes are battery-powered devices that heat a liquid ("juice"), turning it into an aerosol that the user inhales. E-cigarettes don't produce the same mix of tar and carcinogens as conventional cigarettes, but they're far from harmless, says Steven Schroeder, M.D., director of the Smoking Cessation Leadership Center in San Francisco.

The juice in e-cigarettes is available in enticing flavors like mint, mango, tobacco, or crème brûlée. Most of the time, it also contains nicotine, but research shows that only a quarter of high schoolers know this. Juice may also contain other chemicals known to be toxic to humans, such as ethylene glycol, a chemical used in antifreeze; formaldehyde; volatile organic com-

pounds; and heavy metals, like lead and diacetyl.

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, six out of 10 teens believe that using e-cigarettes causes only "a little" or "some" harm, as long as they don't vape daily. But that's not true, and the risks range from the physical to the psychological. Nicotine in any form isn't healthy for a teen's lungs or brain, which is still growing until around age 25. According to a recent study in the *Journal of Physiology*, nicotine exposure in adolescence can make the brain sensitive to other drugs and prime it for future substance abuse.

Just as with regular cigarette smoking, the nicotine from vaping gets into the lungs and bloodstream, and keeps the smoker coming back for more. "You can get addicted to an e-cigarette," says Bill Blatt, director of Tobacco Programs

for the American Lung Association. In teens, nicotine is more addictive and can mess with the brain's hardwiring, leading to mood disorders and permanent impulse control. Plus, e-cigarette smokers are four times more likely to become traditional cigarette smokers. On top of these concerns, e-cigarettes can also be used as a delivery system for marijuana and other drugs.

The FDA has banned the sale of e-cigarettes to minors, but teens still find ways to get them. Even if you don't think they are vaping, it's worth discussing—e-cigarettes are easy to hide. Because the smoke isn't as noticeable as it is with regular cigarettes, a teen can take a draw from a vaping pen and put it in their pocket without an adult seeing it. "They can even smoke in class," Blatt says.

## How to Convey to Your Teen That Vaping Isn't Healthy

### **Initiate an ongoing conversation instead of a lecture.**

Start casual conversations about the dangers of e-cigarettes, such as when you see an ad on TV or come across an e-cigarette shop while driving together. (E-cigarette stores are fairly common now, and usually have some form of the word "vape" or "vapor" in their names.) Or, to get your teen talking, ask them what they think about e-cigarettes. As the conversation gets going, mention that vaping can be as addictive as smoking regular cigarettes and that it's bad for your brain, making it harder to concentrate and control your impulses. Texting is another great way to communicate your message. Your teen can read the info

at the timing of their choice without feeling lectured.

### **Ask a pediatrician or coach to talk to your teen.**

A trusted adult can have a huge impact on your teen's understanding of the risks, and teens hear the same information differently when delivered by a non-parent.

### **Set a healthy example.**

Even though you may be doubting whether your teen notices you at all, studies repeatedly confirm that your teens still see you as a major role model in their life. So if you're among the 36.5 million Americans

who smoke, do your best to quit. According to a study in the *American Journal of Public Health*, parents who smoke are more likely to have teens who smoke.

If you or your teen have developed the unhealthy habit of smoking, now's the time to get support. To increase your chances of kicking the habit, meet with a smoking-cessation counselor, join an online program such as the American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout ([www.cancer.org/smokeout](http://www.cancer.org/smokeout)), or call the Center for Disease Control's national tobacco quit line (800-784-8669), which is staffed with professional counselors.



# When Good Kids Do Bad Things

## TEEN

By Casey Fenton



Like many teenagers, my early school years were completely trouble-free. In fact, I couldn't exactly remember the last time I was in a principal's office,

or brought home a detention slip. I was a good kid—rarely misbehaved, as I feared not only what the school would do to me, but what my parents would do to me.

However, my outstanding personal record came crashing to a halt my sophomore year of high school, when I got caught up with the “cool kids.”

We were your typical high school boys doing typical immature high school things: making messes and even stealing small items from high school property. But it wasn't typical for me. I suddenly went from being the “good kid” to a “rebellious punk” teenager in a matter of just a few very regrettable days.

I'll admit it was exhilarating, doing something I knew was very wrong and wondering if I would get caught. I was finally having fun (or so I thought) and justifying all of it with a “Well I'm only gonna be a teenager once!” kind of attitude. Nothing really gives you that rush like finally fitting in with the cool kids, something that many teenagers struggle with.

My 15 minutes of fame suddenly ended with the dreaded announcement, “Can Casey Fenton please report

to the front office immediately?” I knew what it was about—the mess a bunch of guys and I had made of the school bathroom—and I could hear my mother's voice before I even stepped into the principal's office. Would she still love me? How could I explain this? What will happen to me? Why would I do something so out of character? Was any of that fun rush of going a little wild worth any of the grief I'm about to watch my mother suffer through?

And my parents were, of course, upset. Looking back, the worst part for me was not the punishment, but the disappointment I felt in myself and the regret I felt about everything.

I was lucky that my parents were firm and that they also talked openly about the many times they had made poor choices as teenagers. The realiza-



tion that my parents had messed up too, that they were normal teenagers who had not been perfect 100% of the time, and yet they still had grown into great adults was the best rehabilitation I ever received. It gave me the confidence to not let one bad set of choices define me or my future.

And, yes, I did indeed learn another big lesson—that all the choices I make are my choices, and the guilt I felt having my parents think my misdoings were their fault is something I never, ever want to feel again.

*Casey Fenton is a sophomore at Florida State University, majoring in communications/digital media.*

## PARENT

By **Melissa Fenton**



I was always the “My kid would never do that” kind of mom—until one day, I wasn’t. And that was the day my very perfect teen-

ager became very not-so-perfect, in an instant and shocking way.

Here was a kid who had never seen the inside of a principal’s office his entire childhood. This was the kid who had never had a detention or a behavior warning and never did one single thing to necessitate the need for a parent-teacher conference. He sailed through elementary, middle, and half of high school unscathed.

And there I sat, proud of this perfect kid I had raised and 100% in denial of the fact that even the best parents (with seemingly the best teenagers) will one day have to face the fact that all kids mess up. They just do.

I now realize (having learned the hard way) that the teen brain is wholly incapable of quantifying consequence and teens are also at the most impressionable time of their lives. Add those two together and there is a very high probability that even the most moral

teenager will one day do something so completely dumb and out of character, it will have you shaking your head in utter disbelief.

It happened to me, and when and if it happens to you, here are some lessons I learned. First, it is in no way a reflection of your parenting. Period. One hiccup is not a summation of your 15+ years of childrearing. Second, letting them fail enormously and in front of everyone you know is going to sting badly. So what. Let it. It doesn’t sting forever. Third, be honest about your own failings when you were a teenager, reminding your teen that everyone messes up, and it is not an indication of their future. Translation: High school is just a blip on a very, very long life journey.

And finally, stress the importance of what can be learned through life’s great missteps and failures, and that it isn’t what we do when we fail and fall that matters—what really says everything about us is how fast we get back up, brush ourselves off, and do the right thing. Both you and your teenager will come out of this better, stronger, and more humble people. Trust me.

*Melissa Fenton is a freelance writer and adjunct faculty librarian. She is a mother of four sons, and writes about modern motherhood and parenting teenagers. Find her at [4boysmother.com](http://4boysmother.com).*

## EXPERT

By **Dr. Matthew H. Rouse**



Casey’s mother wrote: “One hiccup is not a summation of your 15+ years of childrearing.”

I understand and support the sentiment. Parents shouldn’t feel like failures when their children inevitably slip up.

However, I would like to offer a slightly different perspective. In this situation, Casey’s behavior, but more importantly his response to his mistake, is a reflection of the parenting he has re-

ceived up to that point. I would argue that the total sum of parenting—every praise given for a positive behavior, every limit set, every consequence given, every time he was allowed to work something out on his own, every time he was comforted—has resulted in a positive outcome. Because of effective parenting, Casey was able to learn from the mistake and course-correct before going further down that path.

In my work with parents and their children, I frequently make the comparison between kids and scientists. As they develop, children test out different behaviors, sometimes just to learn about the effects of those behaviors. What happens when I lie to my parents? What happens when I steal something that doesn’t belong to me? What happens when I say something mean to a friend? Conducting these experiments is an essential part of their moral development, and it’s not something parents can prevent.

Where smart parenting becomes essential is in the aftermath of such experiments. Casey’s mother uses a beautiful array of strategies to help ensure that he learns from this mistake. She uses a mix of firmness and validation to communicate simultaneously that the behavior is unacceptable and that she understands it. Importantly, Casey’s parents gave him a consequence for the behavior, but also used the mistake as an opportunity to connect with their son—a master class in authoritative parenting.

Teens possess different levels of skills when it comes to learning from mistakes. Some teens like Casey seem to get it right away, whereas others may need to make the same mistake multiple times before the lesson sinks in. Parents of teens who get stuck in a negative pattern may want to consider getting professional help—especially if the mistakes are affecting the teen’s life or closing off certain options.

*Matthew Rouse, PhD, MSW is a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute.*

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# The Healing Power of Story

Almost every teen knows that being excluded from your peers hurts. What they might not understand is that they're not alone—and that writing about it can help.

By Jennifer Proe

Sometime in middle school, Zephaniah Galloway noticed that her peers treated her differently. Although she is African-American and grew up in a predominantly black community, she did not fit in. She says, "I kind of had the feeling that I was not black enough. People would always ask me, 'Are you really black? Were you raised by white people?' They didn't understand why I didn't like the same things they liked, or why I liked so-called 'white' things, like classic rock music or vegetarian food."

The jokes her peers made about her being an "Oreo" hurt, even though she sometimes laughed along with them. She tried adopting their interests and attitudes, but continued to feel lonely and disconnected.

Her mother was worried. "There were no friends who came over," says Sadigoh Galloway, a social worker. "There was no social life or recreation that I could see. I was concerned about her happiness."

It's not an uncommon experience, of course. At some point in adolescence, most teens feel excluded from their peers. And like most teens, Zephaniah chose not to talk about it with anyone. Instead, she continued to isolate herself and hide her hurt feelings—until the day she put them on paper.

One of her high school advisors encouraged her to enter an essay contest sponsored by the Maltz Museum of Jewish

Heritage. Called Stop the Hate, it asks students to share their stories about how they have dealt with intolerance or exclusion.

It felt good to put her feelings into words—but when Zephaniah learned her essay had been chosen as one of the finalists in the competition, she had new concerns.

"I was so nervous about reading it," says Galloway. "I thought, is my family going to be mad at me?" Instead, something transformative happened as a result of sharing her story. Not only did she win a \$40,000 college scholarship funded by the Maltz Family Foundation, she discovered a whole group of friends and supporters.

"After people read my essay, I found out there are other people out there who feel this way," says Galloway. "A girl from my high school reached out to me on Twitter and told me she was having the same experience and was so glad to have someone to relate to. And my younger brother told me I had inspired him to be himself in front of other people."

"Many young people feel a lack of agency in their world," says Jeffery Allen, director of education and public programs at the Maltz Museum. "But sharing their stories and taking a stand for what's right can be very empowering. Connecting with others in this way provides an opportunity for communal healing and reflection."

Katie Hurley, a Los Angeles psychotherapist and author of *No More Mean*

*Girls*, encourages the teens she works with in group sessions to write down and share their feelings for this very reason.

"There is absolutely something magical about putting your words down on paper. You can choose whether or not you're going to share them with others," says Hurley. "There is the emotional relief of getting all those feelings out. You can bring them to the surface and give them meaning."

Hurley asks the teens in her group if anyone would like to share what they wrote. "All it takes is one brave person to speak, and the others will open up," she says. "Once they hear a story that resonates with them, they realize they are not alone in the world."

Sadigoh Galloway is proud of the courage her daughter showed in being that brave voice. "I see a sense of freedom and peace in her," she says. "The very thing that was making her feel isolated now makes her feel included." ■





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# CONCUSSIONS

If your teen has ever had a concussion, then you know that recovery can be a lengthy process. In 2017, the Concussion in Sport Group, an international panel of concussion experts, released new treatment guidelines. To learn more, *Your Teen* spoke with Dr. John Leddy, a professor of orthopedics at the University of Buffalo—and one of the co-authors of the new guidelines.

## What were the old treatment guidelines for concussions?

When an athlete suffered a concussion, they were told to come off the playing field or court as soon as possible, and not return to play for fear of risking even greater injury to the brain. The old guidelines advised patients to see a physician familiar with the treatment of concussions and to rest as completely as possible, remaining in a darkened room with little visual or physical stimuli, until all symptoms had gone away.

The practical interpretation of these guidelines by physicians across the country was to require all symptoms

to be completely gone before the patient could consider returning to structured exercise or to play.

We called this complete rest “cocoon therapy.” No reading, no screens, no hanging out with friends. Kids could be out of school for weeks. Depending upon the particular patient, and the severity of the concussion, it could take several weeks or months for symptoms to calm down.

## What were the concerns with cocoon therapy?

First, it’s very hard on patients. That level of inactivity, in a dark room, with

no light or stimulation and nothing to do can drive you crazy. We also noticed that prolonged inactivity was actually delaying the brain’s recovery. Athletes were not, in fact, getting any better. So instead we studied guided and controlled activity, and assessed their tolerance to exercise at a sub-threshold level. We found that with low levels of activity, and short periods of rest, concussion symptoms resolved more quickly.

## What do the new guidelines recommend?

The advice now is to have complete rest for a brief period of anywhere from 24



*We have to rely upon athletes themselves to be honest about symptoms. Parents and coaches who know the patient well can corroborate that they are in fact getting better.*

to 72 hours, depending upon the patient and the severity of the injury. After this brief period, patients can resume some limited physical activity, such as walking around the block—not a return to the sport, but some limited physical activity. This initial period of rest allows the symptoms to calm down. After that initial resting period, the teen can return to their normal activities until they can identify the threshold at which they develop a headache, or feel dizzy, or experience vision problems. When the symptoms return, they can stop or take a short break.

We also ask patients to time themselves and keep track of how long they can go. If they went 15 minutes and then felt a headache, we'll suggest they walk 10 or 12 minutes the next day and see how they feel. They can try again for 15 minutes the following day. We want to stimulate brain recovery in a controlled way without making symptoms worse.

#### How do you know when the athlete is actually improving?

We have to rely upon athletes themselves to be honest about symptoms. Parents and coaches who know the patient well can corroborate that they are in fact getting better. This is also where a skilled clinician who treats concussions helps, as we perform a physical exam with benchmarks that will prove if they are improving.

#### When can patients return to school?

We recommend returning to school in a staged way, starting with a few hours or a half day. Physicians can give them a note requesting additional time to complete homework and tests, and for permission to put their head down in class and rest if necessary. We recommend that they do their school work in short durations and with frequent breaks, up until the point at which they begin to experience symptoms—and then take a break. ■

**John J. Leddy, M.D.**, is a professor of Orthopedics and Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Buffalo Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, and also Medical Director of the Buffalo Concussion Management Clinic.

*Interview by Jane Parent*

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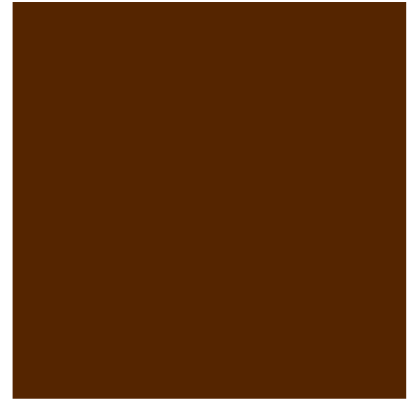
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## Playing Sports in College: What's the Game Plan?

Is your son or daughter hoping to play sports competitively at the college level? Or might your kid be happier just playing for the love of the game? Experts share what you and your teen need to know so you can make the best game-time decision as a family.

By Linda Wolff

Just yesterday, your child was playing pee-wee soccer and you were helping lace up their shoes. Now, you're buying adult-sized cleats and your teen is putting in long practice hours, perhaps with the dream of playing competitive sports in college.

Few achieve the golden ticket—the invitation to play on a Division I NCAA team with scholarship money—but that doesn't mean your child should give up altogether on a dream of playing college sports.

Nevertheless, it's important to have a realistic conversation. Cecilia Castellano, vice provost for strategic enrollment planning at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in Ohio, suggests assessing the following: "What is their skill level, level of interest, and commitment towards their sport? What are their academic and career goals?"

"Academics and career goals should come first," stresses Van Wright, assistant to the vice provost for strategic enrollment planning at BGSU. For most students, college graduation will be the

end of their athletic career. Choosing a college that is a good fit academically, socially, geographically, and financially is just as important (if not more) than which team your athlete plays on.

Teens also need to think about how they will balance the dual rigors of sports and academics at college. How much of a priority will sports be in their lives? Wright recommends that students and parents do their research by visiting college and NCAA websites to better understand the time commitment a particular sport will require; it can vary depending on the school and athletic division.

Division I sports are the most selective, offer the most money, and have a huge year-round time commitment (far greater than in high school)—often leaving students with time for little else. Conversely, Division III is the most manageable in terms of time commitment, but rarely involves scholarship money.

"Parents also need to consider what their family can afford," says Castellano. You might be hoping for a scholarship

for your child, but only around 6% of high school athletes will compete in the NCAA, and less than 2% will receive scholarship money.

In other words, having a backup plan is key. "Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst," she adds. "Families need to be planning and saving some money just in case their child gets an injury, doesn't get a scholarship, or loses their passion for that sport."

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a coveted spot on an NCAA team, their high school coach should be their first point of contact. Coaches often have connections at colleges and universities and can reach out directly to a school's athletic recruiters.

High school student athletes will need to keep academics a priority because recruiters will be looking at their grades and test scores right along with their sports stats. And be aware that the level of commitment required to have a shot at being recruited may mean sacrificing other interests while your child is in high school.

"All my son did in high school was eat, sleep, work out, and study," says Cari Kuprenas, mother of a Division I water polo player at Princeton University.

Keeping your student healthy and injury-free can also be a challenge. "Kids who are serious about playing need to know how to eat and train properly," advises Dr. Peter Waldstein, a Los Angeles pediatrician. This is another area where the high school coach or athletic trainer should provide guidance. Waldstein also recommends students have an echocardiogram (a heart ultrasound) to make sure your teen's heart can handle playing at a highly competitive level.

One final thought to consider: If your student would be happy to play a sport in college just for the love of the game—and as a way to stay active and make friends at school—consider club or intramural sports. Having all of the fun, minus the time commitment and competitive pressure, could be the winning game plan for your student. ■



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# The Grandparent Gift that Lasts a Lifetime

By Diana Simeon



**T**he holidays are right around the corner, and grandparents may be trying to decide what to give their grandchildren. Here's an idea: Help them pay for college. Sure, it may not be as exciting as the latest gadget or other big-ticket item, but when it's time to pay the tuition bill or repay those student loans, it will be much more meaningful.

## How to Save

You could save for your grandchild's college education in a regular savings account, but there's a better way to do it: a 529 plan. You can think of a 529 like an IRA, but dedicated for college savings. As with an IRA, the money you save in a 529 grows tax-free. Withdrawals are also tax-free, as long as the money is used for qualified education expenses such as tuition, room and board, books, computers, and other mandatory expenses.

529 plans offer other tax advantages, too. For example, in 2017, Ohio residents contributing to CollegeAdvantage, Ohio's 529 Plan, can take a deduction of up to \$2,000 per beneficiary on their state taxes. "And in 2018, that rises to \$4,000 per beneficiary," says Timothy Gorrell, executive director of the Ohio Tuition Trust Authority, which oversees CollegeAdvantage. And, if you contribute more than \$2,000 in 2017 (or \$4,000 in 2018) there's unlimited carry-forward so you never lose the deductibility of the rest of your contribution.

Anyone can open a 529 plan. You can make a lump-sum annual contribution or

set up automatic monthly contributions. While you can invest in any state's 529, even if your grandchild has no plan of going to college in that state, it's best to start your research with your own state's offering, given the potential tax benefits.

## Open Your Own—Or Contribute to Someone Else's

Grandparents can set up their own 529 account, or they can contribute to a 529 account owned by a parent or grandchild. Here's what you need to know about each option.

**Grandparent-owned accounts:** You set up the account with your grandchild as the beneficiary. The upside: The grandparent retains control over the money in the 529. The downside: This approach can significantly impact the grandchild's financial aid award.

Specifically, once the money from a grandparent-owned 529 is used to pay for college costs, the next time your grandchild fills out the FAFSA (the financial aid application that all students must file each year), they will have to report that money as income. The college will then reduce the amount of financial aid by approximately 25 percent.

For example, if a grandparent pays \$5,000 from a 529 for a grandchild's freshman year expenses, then sophomore year the school will likely reduce your grandchild's financial aid by \$1,250.

There is a way around this, which is for grandparents to hold off using the

money in their 529 account until second semester of their grandchild's junior year. "Use this money last," suggests Gorrell. That's because at that point your grandchild will have filed her final FAFSA.

Of course, if your grandchild won't be eligible for any financial aid anyway because of their parents' income bracket, then use the assets in a grandparent-owned 529 whenever you like.

**Contributing to a parent or grandchild's account:** The second way to save is for grandparents to simply contribute money to an already-established 529 plan owned by either the grandchild's parents or the grandchild. You can send a check or use a portal like Ugift.com (if the 529 plan is a participant). The downside: The grandparent loses control over the money once it's gifted to another 529 plan.

The upside: this approach has a minimal impact on financial aid because money will be viewed by the FAFSA as a parental asset (and assessed at just 5.64 percent). That same \$5,000 would only reduce the grandchild's financial aid by \$250.

Note that a dependent student 529 is an exception to the rule that putting

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money in a student's name should be avoided in advance of applying to college. That's because student-owned 529 plans are counted as parental assets, not student assets, which are assessed at a higher rate.

Although the grandparent ultimately decides which way to go, it's worth having a conversation so everyone can plan accordingly. "While surprises are usually great fun, this is one situation when surprises can backfire in a big way," says Jack Shacht, founder of MyCollegePlanning.com. Grandparents may want to let their grandchild and his or her parents know their intent, so funding can be coordinated together.

## A Lasting Legacy

No matter how you coordinate the details, college contributions from grandparents are a valuable gift, given that "paying for college is the second largest expense most families will ever tackle, as tuition continues to increase at twice the rate of inflation," notes Schacht. Even modest gifts reduce the long-term impact of college expenses.

"There are many things that can constitute fond memories of grandparents by grandchildren," says Gorrell. "How wonderful for a grandchild headed to college to know that his grandmother or grandfather was part of this and made this possible." ■

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# KIDS STINK?

## Help! My tween won't take care of their personal hygiene

By Whitney Fleming

When my oldest was in 4th grade, I was surprised when the “Meet the Teacher” presentation included a section on personal hygiene. I mean, how bad could a 9-year-old smell? Try volunteering in the classroom after gym class, though. I quickly understood exactly why there was a heavy emphasis on the topic.

So where should parents start? Turns out the discussion is a tricky one. If we push too hard, we're nagging and our children tune us out. Don't bring it up at all, and they could be the target of bullying.

### When Should We Approach Personal Hygiene in Tweens?

Most parents assume that because we can smell sweaty feet or notice greasy hair, that our children will as well. Unfortunately, it often doesn't work that way, and many kids need multiple lessons on this important component of personal care.

According to Dr. Andy Bernstein, a pediatrician at Chicago-area North Suburban Pediatrics and a spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics, parents should start teaching personal hygiene early, “with lessons on the importance of washing hands before eating or after going to the bathroom, or of brushing teeth in the morning and before bed. As they get into their tween years, showering, brushing hair, and using deodorant should be rolled into those habits.”

While poor personal hygiene can affect a tween's overall health—for instance, making a child more prone to infections or rashes—the social consequences can hurt even more.

“Most children should be interested because being dirty or smelling bad can affect their interactions with their friends and classmates,” continues Dr. Bernstein.

### How Can Parents Help Their Tweens

Experts agree that personal hygiene for tweens includes: showering and wash-

ing hair, using deodorant, wearing clean clothes, maintaining oral health, preventing and caring for acne and, perhaps, shaving or removing hair. Managing these tasks can seem daunting for some kids, causing them to ignore personal hygiene issues altogether. (Note that refusal to bathe, shower, or complete a simple task of brushing one's teeth can be a sign of a mental health issue, such as depression.) For most, however, it comes down to one simple point: They just don't feel like doing it.

“Your tween's poor hygiene is likely a matter of unestablished habits rather than a sign of devaluing themselves,” says Michele Kambolis, a registered child and family therapist, parent educator and author of *Generation Stressed*. “Keeping up with personal hygiene is a skill like any other. It takes a lot of time and repetition before it becomes an automatic act.”

Kambolis says, “With time, patience, and consistency those behaviors will become second nature.”

Negative approaches are not recommended. Try not to shame your child and don't physically force them to complete a task. Name-calling or threats that people will not like them will affect your child's self-esteem. Instead, adopt a positive spin on keeping clean. Allowing your tween to pick

out the deodorant they like, or purchasing special soaps just for them, may provide enough of an incentive to get the process moving forward.

And sometimes, you need to let natural consequences spur the process along. Tweens are notorious for their brutal honesty, so it may only take one friend to say your daughter's breath stinks or a girl mentioning your son's body odor to solve the problem.

Most importantly, however, is preserving the relationship with your tween as you move into the challenging teen years.

As Kambolis says, “Criticizing and nagging will only undermine your ability to guide and may have a lasting negative impact on your child's self-esteem. After all, one of the greatest joys for parents is seeing their teens grow into themselves, capable and happy, regardless of how they smell.” ■



Photo: Beth Segal





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# Social Media Right Now

## What's Hot, What's Not

By Laura Richards

What social media apps do your teens love? Probably not the same ones they did last year, and probably not the same ones you do. It's tricky to keep up, but parents should make the effort.

Social media is "a wonderful source of learning and insight, and a great way to encounter individuals and ideas whose paths you'd otherwise never have crossed," says Scott Steinberg, author of *The Modern Parent's Guide to Facebook and Social Networks*. But it can also have pitfalls. Like all technology, the value of social media depends on how it's used, which can be challenging for parents. Steinberg counsels parents to keep up with developments in social media and commit to being involved in their teen's social media usage.

According to new research from the University of Chicago, the top social media apps for teens age 13-17 are Instagram (76% of surveyed teens use it) and Snapchat (75%). Facebook and Twitter are less popular, with 66% and 47% of the teens reporting that they use each app. According to many parents, even if their teens have Facebook or Twitter accounts, the accounts lie mostly dormant. Texas dad David Conner, for example, reports that his teenage daughter calls Twitter "a 'distant third' for keeping up with famous people, news, and world stuff."

The big social media trend seems to be in messaging: 91% of teens use the text messaging that's built into their phone, but 40% also use downloaded

messaging apps, which may often include additional features not included in traditional texts, and which may fly under their parents' radar.

So, what apps are teens using, and what do parents need to know?

### Snapchat

Photo and video messaging platform with expiring content. Users can share events of the day with friends. Users can access in-app media content from outlets ranging from CNN to Cosmopolitan.

**PROS:** Easy to use. Fun features like photo doodling, captions, and filters.

**CONS:** Content doesn't completely "disappear," but can live on in screenshots and data recovery. Teens who believe that snaps disappear may engage in risky or inappropriate behavior.

### Instagram

Platform to share photos and videos with followers. Add and edit photos and short videos to share with friends and followers. Users try to gain followers and get content "liked."

**PROS:** Users can send private messages or make accounts private to opt out of Instagram's typically public posts. Teens with unique interests may find community with like-minded users.

**CONS:** Content is public unless the user changes privacy settings. Location informa-

tion can be displayed, depending on phone and Instagram settings. Teens may feel pressure to present themselves in a way that leads to accumulating "likes."

### Kik

Messaging platform to send text, images, and video. Offers a wide range of activities, including surfing the web from within the app, sketching, chatting with strangers, making in-app purchases, and sending virtual greeting cards.

**PROS:** Unlimited texts are free, besides normal data usage charges.

**CONS:** Strangers can start conversations. Kik has allegedly been used in predatory crimes. Kik users often post their Kik usernames on other social media, which may give strangers access to a teen's profile. Kik does not monitor or censor user content.

### WhatsApp

Platform for text, image, video, and audio messaging as well as voice and video calls. Users can easily connect with people from around the world.

**PROS:** Unlimited messages. No international calling plan needed to connect with relatives or friends abroad.

**CONS:** Pushes users to add "friends," and your teen (and their phone number) can easily be added to group chats with friends-of-friends without consent.

### WeChat

Feature-rich messaging and call platform. Offers fun in-app games, stickers, and "Friend Radar" to find nearby users.

**PROS:** As with WhatsApp, teens can connect with friends around the world.

**CONS:** Strangers can contact users by adding their WeChat ID, unless the user manually turns off friend adds. Some features show location.

Consider creating your own accounts in your kids' favorite social media apps, friending or following your kids, and keeping an eye on what's happening. But create some personal limits. "You as a parent need to also know your boundaries, just as you do in real life," says Steinberg. That means no embarrassing posts about your kids.

"Talk to your kids about what they're doing on social networks, as well as whom they're interacting with," says Steinberg. "Using social networks as a starting point for discussion can lead to great and highly informative conversations with your kids."

Above all, know what they're using and keep the door open for communication, says Steinberg. "Let them know where to turn for help if it's needed—and make sure they know they can trust you to hear them out, offer positive insights, and not freak out when challenges present themselves." ■



# Couch Potato Teens

By Mary Helen Berg

**M**y daughter once played soccer and tennis and took gym class every school day. Now 17, she's dropped sports and, for the first time since kindergarten, she'll have no physical activity at all at school. This year, a roster bulging with AP classes will guarantee that she's more desk-bound than ever.

In other words, like today's typical teen, she's now mostly sedentary. Unfortunately, if her habits continue until she's 19, she will be on course to be about as active as an average 60-year-old, an "extremely concerning" trend among teenagers, according to a new study published in the journal *Preventive Medicine*.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous daily physical activity for adolescents, but 75 percent of teen girls and 50 percent of teen boys don't hit that mark, says Vijay Varma, one of the study's authors and a researcher at the National Institutes of Health.

If your teen is like mine, lots of screen time and sedentary habits aren't surprising, but comparing their fitness to folks who could be grandparents should set off alarms.

The study of more than 12,000 participants found that the reduced rate of activity among 12- to 19-year-olds is due

partly to the fact that teens start moving later in the day, losing the active morning hours that benefit other age groups. They lose hours by sleeping when they could potentially log steps, according to the study from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The real problem, warns Varma, is that when healthy teenagers are sedentary at such a young age, they invite health problems ranging from Alzheimer's disease to obesity.

The good news? Teens don't need to launch a radical exercise routine or sacrifice sleep—or screens—to become more active and reap the benefits, says Varma. Little changes add up.

# 6 Tips to Get Your Teen Moving

## 1. Start with simple changes.

Varma says teens should ask themselves one question: "When am I not moving, but could be?" If teens begin to take the stairs, walk to school, and stretch during study breaks, they're already on their way to a healthier future. "Small changes that increase light physical activity can have huge effects over time," he says.

## 2. Focus on the positive.

Exercise can be a touchy topic, whether your teen is overweight or simply reluctant to leave their desk or couch, acknowledges Linda Escobar Olszewski, staff psychologist at Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center in Manhattan. Parents should emphasize physical activity as one element of a healthy lifestyle that also includes nutritious eating habits. Don't stress exercise as a

way to change body type or reach a weight target, Escobar Olszewski suggests.

## 3. Talk about the long-term benefits.

Don't threaten your teen with a doomsday scenario of what will happen if they don't start jogging tomorrow. Instead, tell them that the science is clear: Exercise helps prevent many health issues, while lack of physical activity causes chronic disease. If your studious teen worries that exercise will take too much time away from her books, remind her that exercise boosts brain health. "Exercise is Miracle-Gro for neurons," Escobar Olszewski says. "It really stimulates our ability to learn."

## 4. Find the right match.

If school sports don't motivate your teen, try the neighborhood spin

class, yoga studio, or rock-climbing gym. Community centers often offer free or low-cost classes, as well as access to basketball courts, pools, weight rooms, treadmills, and other workout equipment. If your teen finds a fitness activity that interests her, she's more likely to stick with it, says Escobar Olszewski.

## 5. Prioritize family time.

Instead of bingeing on the latest Netflix hit together, go for a walk or bike ride. Active outings are a great way to bond while banking some exercise time, says Escobar Olszewski.

## 6. Practice what you preach.

The most powerful way to reach teens is through modeling. Your teen is more likely to choose to be physically active if she sees that you already are.



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# Race in America: What We Need to Know Today

Recent news of violence, protests, and controversies undeniably remind us that the United States is still grappling with race. From high-profile events to the mundane details of who sits at their lunch table, our teenagers are growing up in a period of extraordinary opportunity to dig into our country's ongoing reckoning with its past—and its present. *Your Teen* recently spoke with Eddie S. Glaude Jr., chair of the Center for African American Studies at Princeton University and author of *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul*.

## What do you want to tell our readers about racism today?

Be aware of inequalities that define our country and how those inequalities are rooted in our cultural practices. It's not just about identifying bad people and good people; it's about identifying the kinds of choices we make. It's about recognizing the stereotypes that we hold about our fellow neighbors.

## How does paying attention lead to change in the system?

If you believe that racial inequality is created by prejudiced people and behavior, then you're just going to look for a loud racist as opposed to looking at particular issues, such as public education. Pay attention to how your schools are tracking the black and brown kids in different ways. Once you become aware of that, then mobilize other people to respond to that particular issue.

## How does this inequality portray itself in social settings?

The lunchroom reflects how deeply segregated our society actually is. I think the data is that 70% of white social networks are all white. And the same thing happens with black folks. There are these social barriers that are evident in the way we organize our lives that lead us to these [cultural] barricades, so then we always have to translate for other people. It's just exhausting, so I'm just going to eat my lunch where I don't have to translate for folks.

## How do you think your son's experience is different than your own?

I grew up in a majority black town on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi to working class parents, and I went to an HBCU (historically black college/university). His life has been dramatically different from my journey. His godfather is [prominent black intellectual] Cornel West, and he's grown up with books and academics all around him. He went to a private school and he's attending Brown as an undergrad, so I think his world is much more integrated than mine. His formal education was much better than my own.

But at the same time, he's had to imagine his own life in the context of a world where 12-year-olds can be killed by the police, and where student debt has surpassed credit card debt. He has extraordinary opportunities that I didn't have, but he faces some challenges that I couldn't match.

## Do you think that his generation is better poised to make change?

His generation has no choice. They are the generation that came of age with a black family in the White House, and with the startling contradiction of the haunting ritual of black folks having to bury their children, family members, and friends. His generation will have no choice but to put everything on the line to save the country.



## Do you see change starting to happen?

It's everywhere. We saw it with Black Lives Matter and now with all the activism we're witnessing across the country. Right now, we see grassroots organizing, people running for office, people really mobilizing to put forward a vision of a world we want to live in. I think my son's generation will play a central role in that.

## Are there any learnings we can take away from the past election?

One of the things that we do know is that young millennials voted for third parties. They voted for Green or Libertarian, so it gives you a sense of the political consciousness of the younger generation. And what is foundational to their view is the rejection of the status quo on both sides.

## Do you have a final thought?

Something is on the horizon, and we have reason to be hopeful. Not optimistic, because there's a distinction. Optimism says it's all going to be all right in the end. Hope isn't about a guarantee that good will make itself known; hope is rooted in what we do. That is, the world can be saved or it can go to hell; it all depends on us. There's no guarantee. It's what we do. It's in our hands. ■

*Interview by Susan Borison*



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Division II

# Tweaking Traditions

How to Switch up the Holidays and Still Maintain that Festive Feeling and Holiday Warmth.

By Kate Pocock

**T**hings happen: Grandparents move, parents divorce, and favorite aunts who make scrumptious Christmas turkey or stacks of glistening Chanukah latkes pass on. Or, perhaps it's just that you want to simplify the holidays and take a sunny vacation instead of cooking and decorating.

Do changes mean that the usual cheer and warmth of the holidays will disappear? Not at all. Traditions are important because they give us—parents and teens alike—a sense of stability and connection.

That doesn't mean, however, that traditions can't change. "One should not be overly burdened by traditions," says Dr. Brian Carr, President of Behavioral Health Associates in Lubbock, Texas. "Traditions have a start, and traditions have an end. There's a time to retire grandma's ambrosia bowl or not to freeze your tootsies off in Santa Land."

## WHAT NOW?

It may seem obvious when it's time to retire a kiddie tradition like Santa Land, but other traditions can slowly drift away from relevance. Does anyone really like tromping through the snow with a saw to cut down a real evergreen?



Maybe, but maybe not. It pays to ask.

Rachel Jones, minimalist guru and author of *Simplify the Holidays*, suggests that everyone—kids and parents—complete the sentence, "It just wouldn't feel like Christmas or Chanukah or Thanksgiving or Kwanzaa without..." If you're looking to simplify, consider limiting it to your top five must-haves.

The result will be unique to each family: Jones' three teens agreed they would really miss their annual homemade gingerbread house that they design, craft, and decorate. "One year my mixer broke, so I bought a packaged kit," laughs Jones. But the kids complained, "Mom, this is not the same!" So, they brought back the homemade

gingerbread house, which in any given year might take the shape of a hobbit house or a decorated dwelling à la Hansel and Gretel.

Carr agrees that it's important to do the holidays as they suit your particular family. Often, on Christmas Day, Carr's large blended family travels to the ski hills, where they can take advantage of lower resort rates. "There's almost nobody on the mountain," he says. "It's important to make it your holiday, not someone else's holiday."

Similarly, food traditions needn't be traditional. "We don't eat turkey," says Dr. James Wellborn, a clinical psychologist in Tennessee and author of *Raising Teens in the 21st Century*. At their house, Christmas dinner

is spaghetti and meatballs, "It's a delicious recipe that now has the weight of tradition," he says. "We all look forward to it."

## LASTING HOLIDAY MEMORIES

Even when a new holiday experience falters, that mishap can become part of family lore. When Elyn Smith was 13, her family drove three days to celebrate Christmas in Florida and arrived to find that their hotel was, unexpectedly and hilariously, located on the roof of a sketchy restaurant. Nevertheless, the good memories of swimming in the hotel pool on Christmas day and Santa arriving in sunny Florida still bring laughter at family gatherings.

Allowing yourself—and your teens—to participate in making new traditions reinforces the value of family rituals, but also lets your family be itself. "If I could tell people one thing it would be not to ask, 'What should we be doing?' but rather, 'What can we do to make this night stand out?'" says Susan Lieberman, author of *New Traditions, Redefining Celebrations for Today's Family*. "It doesn't matter what you do; it only matters that you do something to make the family feel special." ■



# The Long Road to Letting Go

By Gretchen Bitner

**A**s a teacher, I am constantly giving parenting advice. I spent many years quietly judging those whose children tend to misbehave—until I became a mother.

My son Aaron was the pleaser in the house. If his sister Kate was acting nutty, he was the pacifist who with his gentle nature knew how to bring us all together. When he was 11, he told me that he didn't want to go to middle school because he wouldn't see me all the time like he did when I taught in his school. He was still spooked by bumps in the night, and we would often trip over his sleeping bundle when we got out of our bed in the morning. He felt safest when we were close by, and, to be honest, I loved being able to hear him breathe at night.

When he was 12 he told me, "Mom, I'm super tired tonight, so I'm going to sleep with my door closed. Try not to disturb me." *Oh no, it's happening*, was all I could think. So, like any normal mother would do, I set my alarm for 1 a.m., checked his room, and confirmed that he had indeed snuck out.

The next few years were a little bumpy, but he continued to be my sweetheart, and I remember thinking, *Pheew, I think we are going to be okay*. I said it again after Aaron accidentally started a fire with fireworks, and again after he got a 12-point ticket for doing donuts in the school parking lot. I only began to admit the truth when we received a call that he was smoking weed in the golf course parking lot. I had been blinded by his smile and sweet nature. I was an idiot.

I was determined to retain control of my rebellious son. I wanted what was best for him, but it's also true that I was hurt and missed our closeness.

One night when he was 17, Aaron didn't return home by curfew, so I went onto Facebook and found out where the parties were. (Being his friends' teacher

did have its perks.) It was 2 a.m. and my husband had the audacity to be asleep while I quietly paced the living room floor. I threw on some shorts, grabbed my purse, and went out. You didn't hear me say bra or shoes, right?

I stormed out of the house and drove eight blocks to where I was sure he was partying. Jackpot! There was his sporty little car sitting innocently in front of the very loud party house.

At first, I pondered barging into the house and dragging him out. However, after glancing in the mirror at my crazy-haired, braless self, I decided to come up with another strategy. My brilliant new idea was to somehow take the car so that when he came out he would have no choice but to call me in a panic. Problem: My car would still be there, and I knew Aaron had a key on his key ring. Next brilliant idea: I take both cars home.

I was determined. I began the process of leapfrogging both of those cars home. I knew the neighborhood, so I drove my car about three or four houses down the street, parked it, ran back to his car, drove it three or four houses past my parked car...and so on and so on.

The rocks in my bare feet didn't faze me, because I was determined to get home before Aaron realized the car was missing and caught me in the act. Those rocks only made me angrier and the sweat dripping down my neck in the

July heat only drove me to go faster.

After two hours, I finally made it home with both cars. My husband was just waking up for work and saw me sitting at the table gulping down cold water. My face was flushed and sweat was dripping from every pore. I was angry, but mostly I felt *powerful*. I had taught that child the lesson of his life. When he realized his car was gone he was going to need my help, and then he would finally see how much he needed us and how grateful he should be.

My husband stared at me for a few moments, kissed my forehead, and told me to go lie down and get some sleep. He didn't want to hear the details and, frankly, it was 5 a.m. by then and I was so exhausted that I was ready for a rest. I would deal with the child later, but for now just to soothe my aching feet would be a treat. I slowly crawled into my bed thinking of how much I missed my little boy and dreading the conversation that was sure to come in the morning.

I didn't have to miss him for long, however, because the little angel was in his old spot next to our bed, fast asleep on the floor—right where he'd curled up after being dropped off by a friend hours earlier. ■

**Gretchen Bitner** is a teacher in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Gretchen believes that humor may be the only way to survive parenthood.

# Lake Effect

By Stephanie Schaeffer Silverman

I've lived in Cleveland, Ohio, for almost 20 years. When people talk about "lake effect," it has disastrous overtones, and for good reason: We are about to be slammed with snow, the kind where getting out of your house is not an option.

But no one ever told this Cleveland gal about the other type of lake effect.

Five of us had just traveled to Canada for a girls' weekend. It was our first full day up on the lake, and we were spending a lazy summer morning sitting on the dock. The stillness of the lake was magical. I was in my happy place.

"Does it get any better than this?" I said, fanning my hand above the lake, and simultaneously knocking my phone off the chair. Into the lake. Far down into the lake, the weed-filled, dark lake.

"Oh my god, my phone!" I shrieked.

Everyone jumped up, some looking off the dock, others swatting at the water. Except one of my friends, who just mumbled repeatedly, "If it's an iPhone 6, it's trashed."

We continued to look anyway, and I had that really sick, how-could-I-do-something-so-stupid feeling. All I could picture was one of my teens telling me they had dropped their phone in a lake and me thinking, *How could you be so careless?*

Within five minutes I gathered myself, shrugged my shoulders and said, "Whatever."

"Let's see if we can find an Apple store," one friend offered. (We were about two and a half hours from civilization—the whole purpose of the getaway.)



"No, it's fine."

"Steph, it's not a big deal—we have nothing planned," another suggested.

"No, really, I'm not even sure I want to replace it."

They all laughed.

"I'm serious. If I can't survive without a phone, I've got bigger issues. Plus, you all have yours, and Todd and Zach get here in 36 hours. I mean it—it's fine," I reassured them (or maybe myself?).

Truth be told, I had contemplated a tech-free week. Work was poised to be quiet. Plus, the cottage didn't have Wi-Fi, so all online activity would mean international data charges. I figured maybe I would just check my phone at night to make sure that nothing had imploded in my absence. I've never had that I'm-so-critical-the-world-will-implode-without-me attitude, so this seemed like a viable plan.

But it begs the question: Why did I take the phone down to the dock in the first place? I was with some of my favorite people in the world, beautiful scenery, and an endless mug of coffee. It should have been enough.

I could defend myself and say I had it down there to take pictures—and that would be somewhat true. But if I am being really honest, there is something reassuring about having my phone in my hand or back pocket that had become a habit—and not a good one. It had become an appendage. I was ready to be free of it, and that's when I wondered: Had I purposely dropped it in the lake? Was I putting myself to the test,

putting my money where my mouth was? Maybe.

The next 36 hours were heavenly. I drank it all in—my friends, the stillness of the lake, the deep conversations, and the sounds of nature. I can still hear the fire crackling, see the lotus flowers floating on the lily pads. I was really looking, seeing, imbibing it all. It gave new meaning to the word grateful.

I'll take this lake effect any day of the week.

*Note to the reader: I had packed a waterproof case with a built-in floatation device to prevent this very catastrophe. The problem is that apparently you have to actually use the case for it to work. Leaving it in its package—yeah, waterproof, not foolproof.*

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