



Parenting Teens and Tweens
When Things Get Hard

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When children struggle in life, parents struggle too.

Do you:

- worry about your child's future
- feel exhausted
- delay your own self-care
- compare your child to other kids who seem to be doing better
- compare yourself to other parents who seem to have it all together
- wish that life didn't have to be this way
- rarely feel joy in your relationship with your child

You are not alone. Many parents feel this way but few think that they can discuss these feelings with others. This guide is for you.

Let's begin...



What's Inside:

- Tip #1- Shift your expectations to fit reality
- Tip #2- Decrease your reactivity to your child's moods and behaviors
- Tip #3- You and your child want similar things.
- Tip #4- Your thoughts may be a problem, but you don't have to listen to them.
- Tip #5- Simple steps to support your child's emotional health (and yours too).
- Tip #6- Create new connection points....it matters.



TIP #1



Shift your expectations



The Truth About Expectations

An important contributor to how happy or content we feel relates to whether we keep our expectations in line with reality.

- When our expectations of a situation are too high, we are often let down.
- Our expectations, or thoughts about how life or any given situation “should” be, need to be balanced with what is a possible reality.
- The more “in balance” our expectations and reality are, the happier we will be, and the better we will be able to relate to our kids.
- Sometimes, we have to accept that things cannot be as we hoped they would be.

Shifting Expectations



Ask yourself:

- What do I expect of myself right now?
- What do I expect from others (child, partner, boss)?
- Are these expectations realistic given the pressures we are facing?
- What is another way of looking at it?
- What expectations might be unreasonable and should be adjusted?

Let's try it with an example:



- *What do I expect of myself?*

I expect myself to accomplish all tasks needed at work, monitor my kids' schooling and homework, make healthy meals, keep the house clean, stay on top of our finances, and be positive for the kids.

- *What do I expect from others (child, partner, boss)?*

I expect my kids to complete all their school work and get good grades, be helpful around the house, not fight with their siblings, make plans with their friends, and keep a positive mood at home.

- *Are these expectations realistic given the stress we are experiencing?*

I have not been able to meet these expectations and neither has my tween or teen. He is struggling in school and I just found out he hasn't turned in any homework. I'm sad and frustrated and yelling at the him and his siblings. I feel angry that I don't get enough support and believe that no one appreciates me. **Maybe these expectations are not reasonable for myself and my son.**



- *What is another way of looking at it?*

I can't possibly accomplish everything at work and home perfectly every day. I can't possibly monitor homework every night or always know exactly what is happening at my daughter's school. It makes sense that my 6th grader was skipping some of her homework since she has attention problems and the work gets harder every year. Getting mad at her or myself won't help. I will speak with my daughter to try and understand what is going on and maybe reach out to the teacher for advice.

- *What expectations might be unreasonable and should be adjusted?*

Maybe I need to speak to my boss about adjusting my work hours to be at home earlier in the afternoon. Some days, the school work may not be 100% done, and that is to be expected. The house may not be clean either. Protecting my relationship with the kids by not yelling about school work undone is more important than them getting a good grade. And the yelling won't likely make a difference anyway.

Go ahead & give it a try.

Adjust your expectations for 1 week and see how you and your child(ren) feel.



TIP #2



*Decrease your reactivity to
your child's moods and
behavior*

*Decrease your
reactivity*



***You cannot control your child, nor should you try!
Your # 1 goal should always be to control yourself.***

You help set the emotional climate in your home. Stop looking at what others are doing to upset you and start looking at how to soothe yourself regardless of what is going on around you.

You can not fix nor control everything about your child. You can only work towards controlling yourself, understanding your child, and adjusting your behavior to support them and who they are (not try to change them to be what others want them to be).

We dig deep into how to do this in our online course:

*"Forget Perfect Parenting: Let's Get Real and
Raise Competent, Capable, and Connected Kids."*



Simple ways to stay calm in the midst of high family stress.

1) Expect things will go wrong, and times will be difficult. Review the earlier section in this handout on bringing your expectations in line with reality.

2) Make a mental commitment to *PAUSE* before reacting to your child's upsetting behavior.

a. *PAUSE & BREATHE*, before you react, to regulate yourself.

b. In that *Pause*, use *SELF TALK* to calm yourself.

- "Is this worth getting upset about?"
- "I'm going to commit not to yell and just step back."
- "We have been in moments like this before. It will pass."
- "I need to stay calm for my teen and for myself."



Tips cont:

- 3) Remind yourself that if you get angry or yell, it will escalate your child's emotions and make them more reactive. If you stay calm, your child will feel more secure and regulate their own emotions more quickly.
- 4) Be curious about why your tween/teen may be so upset and be curious about yourself and why you feel upset or reactive. Take a moment to assess the situation and what is really going on, before reacting to the situation. Sometimes a teen saying, "I hate you" is really a teen saying, "I hate this situation and I feel like a failure."
- 5) You are not responsible for solving all of your child's problems. You are responsible to listen to their problems respectfully and validate that this time or this moment is hard for them too.



Tips cont:

- 6) Even if you need to hold a limit, boundary, or offer a consequence, you can do so while being respectful of your child's emotions and their difficulties. Make this a goal.

- 7) Take steps to decrease your emotional vulnerability:
 - a. Exercise, even if only 10 minutes at a time.
 - b. Prioritize your own sleep.
 - c. Spend less time on social media.
 - d. Reach out to friends or family by phone or in person.
 - e. Spend at least 10 minutes outside each day during daylight hours.
 - f. Purposely do things you enjoy, even if just for a few minutes each day.
 - g. Forgive yourself when you make mistakes. We all are human, and no one is a perfect parent.



TIP #3



*What your child wants
right now is the same
thing you want*

*You and your child
want the same thing....*



What you want...

- For parenting to not feel so hard
- To feel In control
- To be less stressed
- To see friends more and feel less alone
- To not have to worry about money and how to pay the bills
- To smile more
- Not to worry about the future
- To have fun sometimes

*What your child
wants...*

- For school/home life not to feel so hard
- To feel in control
- To feel less stressed
- To see friends more and feel less alone
- To not have Mom or Dad worry about money. Not to feel like a burden
- To have Mom or Dad smile more
- To feel excited about the future
- To have fun sometimes



You have more in common with your kids than you think. They just don't have mature brains & can't regulate their moods as well as you do. Remind yourself to be patient with them.

You and your child want the same thing....

To be understood and supported



TIP #4



*Your thoughts may be a
problem and
how to change them*



A thought is not necessarily a fact. It is just a thought.

When you work to change your thoughts, your behavior and mood will change too.

**What you
think**

He did so poorly on the math test. He is becoming a terrible student.

**Thinking
Error**

Magnifying
the Negative

**How to
Change it**

Ask yourself, "Is this the only way to look at it or Is there other evidence to consider?"

"He had a hard time with math, but he did okay on his history test last week. Just because he is struggling in one area doesn't mean he will be a bad student overall."



What you think

The teacher never got back to my email, so she must think I'm rude or be angry that I made a suggestion. I was just trying to be helpful.

Thinking Error

Mind reading

How to Change it

We never know what someone else is thinking. In fact, we are horrible predictors of other's thoughts. So, don't waste your time worrying about what others think.

Did you actually do anything wrong? If not, there's nothing for you to do. Someone else's thoughts are their business, not yours. Move on.

There is also another way to look at it – e.g., the teacher may be busy and not had time to respond.



What you think

My teen's behavior has been bad for weeks. He is out of control and doesn't care about me or anyone else. He is never going to be that sweet boy I used to have. I just can't help him.

Thinking Error

Catastrophizing

How to Change it

You are going to the worst case scenario in your mind, and think it's true & that there is nothing you can do.

Ask yourself...What is most likely to happen?

Is there anything I can do to take action or gain understanding? For example, you can call the school counselor or speak to your pediatrician for advice. We all go through hard times. Your son may be struggling in this moment but it does not mean that he is lost and will NEVER be himself again.



What you think

I feel so alone. I'm sure the other parents are getting together, but I never get invited. I know my daughter has been struggling at school and likely arguing with her friends. Maybe I am being left out on purpose. Maybe she is too.

Thinking Error

Emotional Reasoning

How to Change it

Because you feel a certain way, you think that things are that way.

You feel lonely and worried about your daughter socially. You assume that you are being excluded as a result of her struggles.

Try and label your feelings and get some distance from them. Remind yourself, that just because you feel a certain way, doesn't mean things are that way.

Then ask yourself, is there anything I can do in this situation? Can I do something to improve my mood, or can I reach out to someone and invite them over to feel more connected.



What you think

Thinking Error

How to Change it

My neighbor made a face at me when I was asking about their screen time rules. I really was asking for help for me, not to be judgmental of them. She must hate me now.

Personalizing

Hold on a moment, stop assuming everything is your fault!

The vast majority of the time, other people's mood & behavior is a reflection of them and NOT YOU.

Another way to look at this could be that she is stressed out too, or maybe felt embarrassed that she doesn't have screen time rules.

You can't control how other people feel and much of the time it is hard to know what they are thinking. It is not helpful to assume that everyone's emotions are about you!

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TIP #5



*Supporting your child's
mental health*

Ways to support your child's mental health



Tips:

1) **Take care of yourself.**

Your kids see what you are doing. Your kids' environment is impacted largely by how you feel.

2) **Listen to your kids and acknowledge their feelings.**

Even if they are not under the pressure you are to manage the home, work, and finances, your kids are under stress. Kids who feel that their parents truly see them and can validate what they are feeling, are more likely to be able to handle their own emotional difficulties over time.

3) **Encourage your child to connect with others.**

You can't be responsible for your child's entire social world. Encourage your children to call and text friends and other family members. Kids may not know what to say in a phone call, so you can help them with some ideas, or encourage them to have their peers watch the same show as them and then they all can talk about it.

Ways to support your child's mental health cont.



Tips cont.:

4) **Keep a schedule to the degree possible.**

Things get harder as kids get older, so you may not be able to be as “on top of things” as you once were. Let’s accept that to be, and be realistic about what you can and can’t control in any given day. To the degree possible, try and help your teen keep a regular schedule for bedtimes & wake times. Encourage them to eat regular and balanced meals and to find time for relaxation and fun.

5) **Encourage your tweens/teens to do things other than screens.**

Getting outside, exercising, and completing projects are all activities that can improve mood. Regular exercise has been proven to enhance mood and help lessen symptoms of depression and anxiety. Exercise can also help increase attention and clear thinking.



TIP #6



*Create new connection
points*



We are parents too. We know that when “experts” come and tell us to do more than we feel we can (when we are already overwhelmed and exhausted), it makes us angry and feel invalidated.

Parenting is HARD and there are no quick and easy fixes.

It is more realistic to find ways to be together, or connect, when we layer it into our every day lives.



Ideas for ways to connect & make memories:

- Start watching a new show together.
- Start watching an old show (e.g., Seinfeld, Family Ties, L.A.Law) together.
- Put on music when making dinner
- Ask your tween or teen to tell you about the YOU Tuber they watch. Or ask them to show you their current favorite video.
- Walk the dog together.
- Take turns making dinner.
- Play 1 round of a card game together while eating a meal.
- Teach them how to play a game you played as a child.
- Let your tween be the DJ when choosing music on car rides, and then rock out together.
- Grab a slice of pizza or ice cream after you pick them up one day after school or an activity.