

Understanding Your Role as a Parent of Teens

By: Tricia Propson for the Times Villager-July, 2010

One day when my daughter was in the second grade, I became painfully aware that I was confused about my role as a mother. My daughter was sick with the flu. It was late spring and she was behind in her schoolwork. I had the brilliant idea of reading aloud to her while she lay on the couch. That was a loving and caring thought right? It might have been if I had been thinking of her needs at that moment, but I had a different agenda. All I could think of was making up lost time in school. She got up and ran to the bathroom. Like any good mother, I followed. But instead of holding her head and comforting her, I kept reading. I didn't think anything of it. In fact I was actually feeling quite good about the fact that I was selflessly devoting my undivided attention to my sick child. I was filled with shame when my daughter raised her head and asked politely, "Mom, do you think you could do that later?"

I missed it. I had an opportunity to love and nurture my child when she needed me and I missed it. I recall that as one of my all-time lows as a parent and it made me realize that I did not fully grasp the importance of my role in her life.

I wish I could say I have changed, but I still make mistakes with my kids everyday, just ask them. The good news is I get a second chance every morning to do things differently than I did the day before. In a culture where parents are ridiculed, making my parenting role a priority is a constant battle. In my heart, I know it is my number one job, but as a working mom, I get distracted and tired. Society has lied to us by casually rewriting our parental job description and the message is clear. Popular culture constantly reminds parents that they are unnecessary when their teens have friends, youth groups, magazines, guidance counselors, T.V. and the internet who are better equipped to meet their needs. Nothing could be further from the truth. Parents must be courageous enough to stand up to a world that insists they are irrelevant in their teen's life.

A USA Today study suggests that parents are being replaced in their role with teens. When asked where they turn in a crisis, the number one response by teenagers nationwide was music, the second was peers, and the third was the internet. Here is the statistic that should grab our attention. Fathers appeared as number 48 on the list and mothers came in at 31. This study should

shock us but we can see the reality all around us. What can we do to reclaim our role as parents and the most important influence in our children's lives?

The first thing we can do is understand what our role as parent is and define our strengths and weaknesses. Then we can make adjustments to reclaim the role we play in our teen's lives.

The number one message written on the traveling renekt traveling graffiti wall is, "I wish my parents loved me." That statement might suggest that parents do not love their kids but we know this is not true in the majority of homes. Love looks different to every teenager so we must make sure that we love our teens in a way they receive it. For most teens love is spelled TIME and in our busy world, time is the one thing we don't have to give. Many of us have nothing left at the end of the day, but that is when they need us the most. Try setting aside uninterrupted time with your teen each day, even five minutes of your undivided attention can show them love. If you don't know what makes them feel loved, ask them and then make a point to do it.

Another role teens desperately need from parents is that of advisor. A teenager at a recent youth camp tearfully shared his story. After 2 hours of pain and sadness poured out, I asked him what he wanted. He said, "I just want my parents to help me make decisions. I don't know what to do. I need them to help me." Teens today feel overwhelmed by the onslaught of decisions they face. Teens report that the most anxious part of their day is right after school. That is the time of day when the most bullying, dangerous behavior, and self-injury occurs. They don't know how to process the overwhelming and confusing situations they face. Often times they are alone after school and do not have the adult leadership they need to help them cope. Make it a point to connect with your teen during this at-risk time of day. Talk to them about their anxiety and fears and find out what you can do to guide them through this challenging time.

"I don't feel it is my place to meet my son's friends." "I would never look at my daughter's facebook, she would think I was spying." "I don't want to embarrass my son in front of his friends so I don't get involved."

continued...

These comments were made by parents of at-risk teens in our area. These parents bought into the lie that they don't need to protect their own teens but that is one of our main roles as parents. Just as we protected them from physical harm when they were toddlers, they need parents to protect them from situations that can harm them now. In a culture where discipline is rare, and children's rights can bring legal action against parents, it is no wonder many parents have given up their role as protector. We would never let our teen run in front of an oncoming train; likewise we must be willing to step in when our teens are involved in other dangerous behaviors. Even if they reject your help initially, inwardly they may feel relieved and turn to you more often when they need answers and protection.

In decades past, parents were the primary teachers of their children. In our modern society that role has been replaced but its importance has not. Teaching goes much farther than academics and our teens desperately need us to teach them how to live in this crazy world. Children learn by watching and mimicking the adults around them. Because we are not with our teens all day, the time when we are becomes even more critical. The old saying 'children learn what they live' has never been more true than it is now. Make your time with your teen count. Model for them the things that you think are important. Teach them by doing and they will learn by seeing.

Another role parents need to reclaim is that of encourager or nurturer. I am not by nature a nurturing person. I tend to be results oriented and efficient. When my kids are facing a crisis, they don't need solutions, they need comfort. We live in a tough world. Teens need parents to build them back up again. Don't be afraid to be a cheerleader for your teenager. Even though it is hard and it might feel awkward, try to find one thing to complement your son or daughter with each day. Listen to what is going on in his or her life and encourage them with kind words and affirmation. In the tough world they face, they need encouragement more than we may ever know.

© 2010 Cornerstone Communications. Duplication without permission is prohibited.



What Is My Role as Parent?

Try these simple "Take 5 to Save Lives" tips to help you determine where you are in your role as parent with your teen. Talk to your teen about this and see if there is something they wish you would do differently.

1. On a scale from 1-10, 10 being best, how would you honestly rate your role as a parent to your teen?
2. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being best, where do you think your teen would honestly rate your role as a parent?
3. What is one thing you wish your parents had done differently in their role as parent to you?
4. What area in your parenting role needs the most attention? Choose one and make a list of things you could do differently in this area.
5. What is one thing you can do this week to change in your role as a parent to your teen?

To receive a copy of the parent/teen How Well Do I Know You Quiz and other parent/teen resources, please visit:

www.cornerstonecomm.org and click on [rekenekt/](#) resources or contact.