

## Thriving During the Teenage Years - Tools From the Parent Survival Kit

By Jan Hittelman

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While parenting adolescents is often a challenge, there are key strategies that will dramatically improve your child's behavior and help maintain your sanity. Consider the following suggestions:

**Choosing your battles:** While choosing your battles is always a smart parenting technique, it is essential in reducing conflict with your teenage child. If the behavior problem is relatively minor, you can provide direct, calm feedback without necessarily imposing a consequence. More importantly, **catch your teen being good;** make an effort to provide positive feedback when your child behaves appropriately.

**Shifting from dependence to independence:** It is important to remember that the shift from dependence to independence is the normal developmental progression from adolescence to young adulthood. As parents, we need to teach our teenagers how to behave more responsibly and yet not make their decisions for them or oppose their efforts to take control over their lives. Ideally, we want to nurture their responsible independence.

**Empowerment:** The best strategy to promote a healthy shift from dependence to independence is regular and frequent use of empowerment; giving children a voice in their own discipline plan. When dealing with teenage children, using empowerment strategies becomes even more important. As children grow older, parents need to place more and more of the decision-making responsibilities on them. As parents we are often reluctant to do this because we fear that our children will use poor judgment and make mistakes. While this may be true, how else will our children eventually learn to make good decisions?

**Control versus advice.** As our adolescent children shift from dependence to independence, we as parents need to shift from controlling to advising. The most important reason for this is that your child needs to learn to make his/her own decisions to function effectively as a young adult. In addition, the more controlling the parent, the more likely the teenager is to rebel and eventually defy the parent. In this scenario everyone loses. The parent is frustrated and the child loses the opportunity to get useful advice from someone with a lot more experience in life and truly only their welfare in mind. In reality, a parent has very little control over an older teenager's behavior. You can't control their school effort, the friends they choose, the places they go, etc. If you try to maintain control, it's often a recipe for disaster.

**The school of hard knocks.** If you follow my advice regarding empowerment and fostering responsible independence within your teenage child, it is quite likely that they will visit the school of hard knocks. Stated another way, your teenager will inevitably make mistakes and suffer the consequences. Except for life-threatening or other extremely harmful mistakes or consequences, this can be a very productive learning experience for those smart enough to learn from it.

The excerpts above are from Dr. Hittelman's book: "Parenting Essentials: Seven Steps to Parenting Success, available at no charge on the Internet at [BoulderPsychologicalServices.com](http://BoulderPsychologicalServices.com).

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### Upcoming PEN Event:

**February 14th<sup>a</sup>**

**Teaching Heart**

Social & Emotional Intelligence

**Tom McSheehy, LCSW, Presenter**

**9am – 11am Recycling Center**

(1901 63<sup>rd</sup> Street, Boulder)

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Learn more about PEN by visiting their website at: [www.parentengagementnetwork.com](http://www.parentengagementnetwork.com) or by contacting Betsy Fox with the Boulder County Healthy Youth Alliance at 303-441-3981.

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