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Teen Success in Challenging Times: *Practical Tips on How You Can Help Your Teen*

By Bobbi DePorter

These are challenging and disruptive times for all of us – wars, the environment, the economy – and our kids, particularly teens, are being affected as well. Everywhere they turn there is talk of how bad things are and they take it in.

Teens may give the appearance that they're immune from these issues, but many of them actually are feeling concern deep down. Other teens are more vocal, blaming adults in general and, often times, blaming their parents specifically.

Whether your teen appears unsettled by today's world events or not, it's well worth your time to do what you can to keep your family relationships strong, keep the communication flowing, and provide guidance that your teen needs at this stage in his or her life.

Following are some answers to four key questions that many parents are asking these days regarding what they can do to help their teens.

With so much global turmoil, how do I help my teen better cope and understand what's going on in the world and be more resilient?

The most important thing you can do is to talk with your teen. Talk about the economy, war and the environment. Talking helps kids grasp how we're feeling in general and how specific issues, such as the economy, are affecting your family today and your plans for the future. This is not a time for doom and gloom, but thoughtful sharing about what's real for you and your family.

Teens need to know that with turmoil and crisis comes change. Share with your teen that research shows that with crisis people, including young people, are breaking through and becoming more creative and innovative. This information allows you to move the conversation into a positive direction.

Also ask and encourage your kids to share their feelings, their questions, and what they know about these issues.

These conversations give you the platform to address taking ownership of the future versus being a victim to events and circumstances we don't control. This mindset can move teens from placing blame and feeling depressed to having hope and gaining direction for the future.

What can we do to guide our teens through these challenging times?

An important facet of how we teach new life skills at SuperCamp is through modeling. Throughout the ten-day camps, our staff models the desired behavior. Leading by example is important, especially in these times. The term we use is "Everything Speaks."

You're probably familiar with the term – lead by example. In the educational world, it's called modeling. What you can do within your family is model how you want your kids to feel and behave with your actions and words.

Be aware that in addition to your direct interaction with your kids, your behavior with your spouse and friends are seen and heard by your teens. Even casual remarks can be exaggerated in your kid's mind, especially when they don't know the background, which means they may take something out of context.



Teens are smart. They're aware of what's going on and the debates and opinions that are in the news. Pay attention to what news is on television. There is no benefit to playing doom-and-gloom news non-stop all evening. So, without making a big deal of it, try to minimize the amount of TV time devoted to negative news.

Something else you can do to guide your teen is to provide understanding, context, and knowledge. Separate the facts from fiction and speculation. Guide your teen into reality by explaining that a lot of what they hear and read are extremes and worst-case scenarios, often times generated by news media for shock value and ratings.

How can I strengthen the connection with my teen?

Sometimes parents don't get a clear picture of their child's experiences because the information is filtered through their own adult points of view. Don't try to solve a problem before fully understanding your teen's perspective.

Teens may think "Mom and Dad don't understand me — they have no idea what it's like to be me." Teens don't yet have the emotional strength they will gain as adults. As a result, they can go from happy-go-lucky to making snippy comments or having sulking bouts.

When parents see these sudden changes in behavior they want to take action, to fix it. But, often times, these well-intended actions to make things better only makes matters worse.

So, instead of fixing it right away, try to initiate a conversation. Start by trying to pick a time when you think your son or daughter will be receptive to having a conversation, for example, when you're in the car together.

When you are able to engage your teen, be attentive. Listen more and talk less. If you seize the moment by launching into your side of the conversation, chances are your teen will perceive it to be a lecture and either tune out or get argumentative.

Ask questions, then be calm and wait for an answer. Try to break down an issue, concern, or topic into smaller parts, so you can ask a question that is fairly easy for your teen to answer. If you get too short of an answer say, "Tell me more." Eventually, you will draw your teen into a more relaxed conversation.

When you are listening, make a conscious effort to listen to understand versus listening to manipulate. A useful communication tool is OTFD (Open The Front Door), which stands for observation, thoughts, feelings and desires. Here's how it can be used to start a conversation with your teen about how the economy or a situation within the family is affecting them:

"I know there is lot going on right now. I think some of it might be affecting you. I'm concerned that you're concerned. Let's chat."

This technique is simple and effective because it tells your teen why you want to initiate a dialogue.

How can I instill core values that will both sustain my teen through challenging times and be a foundation for the rest of their lives?

What you want to do, as a parent, is create a "home court advantage" for your kids. In sports, a home court advantage means that the home team has the support of fans and the comfort level of being in familiar surroundings. In your family, you can build this same feeling of support and comfort.



Your goal is to instill a sense of safety, support, and belonging. In doing so, your teen will be comfortable knowing he or she can turn to you for help, even during tough times.

A big part of establishing a home court advantage is recognizing the values and beliefs that the family lives by. If they're not talked about, then a teen will make assumptions about what they are and these assumptions aren't always positive. A family's values, beliefs, and traditions are a constant through good times and bad. They're a fall-back, a guiding light, for your kids to help them make the right decisions even when you're not around.

Practice these interpersonal and communication techniques within your family and you can do a great deal to help your teen through these challenging times.

About the Author:

Bobbi DePorter, teen motivation and accelerated learning expert, has changed the lives of over five million kids through her SuperCamp and Quantum Learning school programs. SuperCamp is a learning and life skills summer program with more than 56,000 graduates in the U.S., Europe, Asia and Latin America. Quantum Learning is an accelerated learning-based teaching and learning methodology that has helped improve thousands of schools and districts across the nation. Bobbi is the author of more than a dozen books, including *The Seven Biggest Teen Problems and how to turn them into Strengths (An Insider's Look at What Works with Teens)*. For more information, visit <http://www.SuperCamp.com> and <http://www.QLN.com>. Contact Bobbi at bdeporter@qln.com.