

# Secrets to Success in Parenting Your Teen



By Sue Blaney

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Hi. I'm Sue Blaney, and I know you have what it takes to be a terrific parent to your teen... even if you have an occasional hard day. To build on your knowledge and to help you enhance your relationship with your teen, I'm

sharing some helpful tips and success "secrets" to guide you in this dynamic stage in your family's growth. I'm an author and speaker, and I've shared these "Secrets to Success" in recent programs and have prepared them for your quick read here.

The guidance I provide is the result of input from the thousands of parents across the country with whom I've spoken as well as research, reading and advice from many experts. I'm dedicated to enhancing communication and understanding between parents and teenagers, and I hope these "secrets" help you smooth out your ride!

## 8 Secrets to Success

1. Become an expert in adolescent development.
2. The three things teens need most are love, boundaries, and power.
3. Employ new communication techniques.
4. Allow your teen to fail.
5. Delay, delay, delay.
6. Look in the mirror.
7. Think "basics."
8. Develop and nurture a support network for yourself.

*Please feel free to post this on your website or blog, or email it to whomever you believe would benefit from reading it. THANK YOU.*

## Secret #1: Become an Expert in Adolescent Development

This first “secret” will require some time and ongoing effort on your part...and I’ll help you get started.

What does “adolescent development” mean and why is understanding it so important? It is the process through which adolescents acquire the social, cognitive and emotional skills required to navigate through life. Growing into adulthood is a process that takes place well into one’s twenties. Exactly where your teen is in this developmental process will be based on age, temperament, environment, and more. The behavior that you see is a product of where your teen is developmentally.

You can be a far more effective parent if you have a framework for understanding this developmental process.

Let’s get started...



# Growth and Development Factors

Teens develop:

- Socially
- Cognitively
- Physically
- Sexually
- Emotionally

What parents often don't know is that these five areas of development are not synchronized with one another. A teen may be ahead of the curve in one area, and behind the curve in another, creating puzzling behavior that confuses parents and makes understanding teens difficult at times. These areas of growth and development become more synchronized around junior year in high school.

Note:

*What your teen looks like physically does NOT reflect his internal level of development.  
Do NOT judge this book by its cover.*



# Tips for Parents

## On social development:

Provide encouragement, an understanding ear and guidance when needed.

Facilitate your teen's connections with friends and provide appropriate supervision.

## On cognitive development:

Give teens opportunities to make good choices and decisions, but don't count on them to always do so. Provide a safety net.

## On physical development:

Teens are very self-conscious about their physical development. Don't compare your teen's physical development to his/her peers. "Normal" covers a wide range for teens.

## On sexual development:

A parent's job includes teaching your teens about sex and the values you want to pass along. Be sure to discuss the emotional aspects of sexual relationships because this is unlikely to be covered even if your teen is receiving sex education at school.

## On emotional development:

Teens experience their emotions at twice the intensity of adults. While you probably don't want to allow your teen's emotions to rule the house, it can be helpful to give them a break and apply some empathy when emotions are high.



# Adolescent Development...the Bottom Line

You can't rush mother nature... development happens on its own timetable, and each teen's timetable is unique. Think of a fruit ripening...it will happen, but you can't influence the timing!

Develop appropriate expectations... depending on the age, maturity level and temperament of your individual teenager. Teens can be "flakey" – that's "normal." Sometimes they are just forgetful without having the intention of being disrespectful or making you crazy.

Focus on who they are on the inside... your teen may experiment with different looks in terms of clothing and hair style; if she isn't hurting anyone, try to allow her to express herself even if you don't like the look.

Let home be a safe haven where he can recharge his batteries...all kids need home to be a place that is supportive and where they can relax. Make sure your home provides the safe refuge that your teen needs.



## Secret #2: Three Things Teens Need Most

**1) Love:** Unconditional love, expressed in age appropriate ways; expressed frequently – and especially – to the crabbiest teens!

**2) Boundaries:** Clear rules and expectations teach teens appropriate behavior, help to keep them safe, and are ultimately an expression of your love.

**3) Power:** Teens need to express their voice, their view and their opinions. They want to make their own decisions, and with practice – and your guidance – they will learn to do this responsibly.





## Secret #3: Employ New Communication Techniques

Have you noticed communication has changed between you and your teen? Sometimes teenagers prefer to share their feelings and thoughts with their friends, rather than with you. This can be a way of expressing their independence or power and does not necessarily mean that you have done something wrong! However, you still need to know what is going on in your teen's life....so parents need to get really good at "indirect" communication.

### Some tips:

- Learn to read body language;
- Know your teen's friends and friends' parents;
- Know all the adults who play an important role in your teen's life: teachers, coaches, youth leaders, etc. Develop relationships with them;
- Focus on your relationship with your teen;
- Create comfortable moments where communication can unfold naturally.



### New technologies

Another area where parents must learn to employ new communication techniques is in utilizing the new technologies that your teens are using. Whether it's texting on your cell phone or getting comfortable using Facebook, parents who don't adopt the new communication tools not only are at risk of being out of touch, but are far less effective at providing essential guidance to your teens.



# Parents' common communication mistakes

## Failure to change

Teenagers are changing in all the ways we already reviewed...so you will need to alter your communication style to reflect these changes.

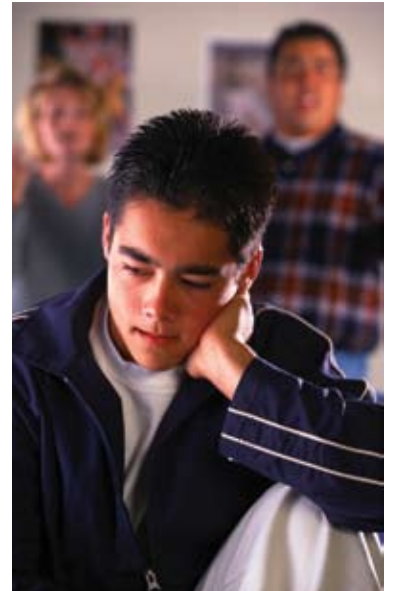
- **Engage** them in conversation, rather than directing them;
- **Identify** your non-negotiable rules or expectations, and be willing to open discussion on all else;
- **Listen** with respect to what they say; listen not just to the words, but to the underlying emotions.

## Problem-solving without being asked

When parents jump in to solve your teen's problems you are giving the message that she isn't capable to solve them herself. It's best to listen and ask her if and how you might be able to help her.

## Being over-involved to save your teen from mistakes or pain

The experience of failure and pain helps a child to develop resilience and the knowledge that he can survive life's ups and downs. While it's understandable that parents may want to minimize your child's pain, it's important to appreciate that experience teaches life's most powerful lessons.



*Remember that independence, not control, is the ultimate goal*

## Secret #4: Allow Your Teen to Fail

You may have heard the term “helicopter parent,” which refers to parents who hover too closely. These parents are often over-anxious and many of them interfere too much in their kids’ lives. Researchers are now beginning to see how this (perhaps, well intentioned) parenting style can negatively impact kids. Anxious, over-involved parenting is linked with increased teen depression, anxiety and even substance abuse. It can create young people who lack the resilience to deal with life’s ups and downs, and who grow up to be perfectionists who are afraid to take risks. A lot can be learned from mistakes and even failure; parents who prevent their children from experiencing these things may be doing more harm than good.

As a parent you’ll have to make value judgments about when it’s wise to intervene, and when it’s best to step out of the way of your teen’s natural experiences...which may sometimes involve pain, challenge and even failure.

### **Recommended reading:**

*The Price of Privilege*, Madeline Levine



## Secret #5: Delay, Delay, Delay

Teenagers and alcohol don't mix well. The very least parents should do is DELAY the start of your teen drinking.

Alcohol is the drug of choice among teens, and too many begin too young and consume far more than is healthy for their developing bodies and brains.

Too many parents make the mistake of thinking that it's inevitable that your teenager will drink alcohol. Not only is this dangerous, it gives your teen a message that makes your attitude a self-fulfilling prophesy. Rather, consider that our culture can change, and in fact it has changed. Americans' smoking habits have changed dramatically in the past twenty years, as have our habits around drinking and driving.

You can play an important and positive role in helping your teenagers stay safe and healthy by helping them delay their introduction to alcohol...and you'll want to when you read the impressive facts on the next page.



# Alcohol: The Drug of Choice

## Some facts you should know:

- Adolescents drink less frequently than adults, but consume more per occasion.
- Alcohol dependence rates are highest among 18-20 year olds.
- Starting alcohol use at a young age is extremely dangerous:
  - 10% of 12-year-olds have used alcohol
  - By age 13 that number doubles
- Teens who begin drinking by age 15 are 5x more likely to become dependent than those who start at 21.
- The single biggest predictor of teens using illicit drugs is early use of alcohol.

**• Alcohol kills more kids than all illegal drugs combined.**



## Tips for Parents on Dealing with Risky Behavior:

- Give consistent messages regularly
- Discuss your expectations in times of peace, not when they are running out the door to a party
- Show respect for your teen's voice and opinions
- Know the facts and share them
- Monitor your teen's activities and whereabouts
- Role play; help her be prepared to say "no"
- Help your teen get out of awkward situations; allow your teen to speak with you honestly



*Parents are the #1 deterrent to teens abusing alcohol and drugs.*

## Secret #6: Look in the Mirror

Ask yourself honestly if you are enhancing your relationship with your teen, or if you are contributing to problems. Your behavior matters a lot, and you have primary responsibility for creating the environment and family culture in your home.

Even if your teen is making you worried or worse, setting about to change your teenager may not be the best strategy. Rather, what you have under your control is *your* behavior, and *your* influence. So, a good question is: "*How can I maximize my influence?*"

Recognize that raising teenagers is an opportunity for you to develop and grow, and if you welcome this opportunity it will not only help you embrace an optimistic approach, it will enable you to model better behavior for your teen.



# Consider Your Own Behavior

Tune in to your tone of voice and watch closely how your teenager responds to what you have said. If you are having problems in your relationship, consider ways to alter your behavior that might yield different responses from your teen.



Most families face challenges at one time or another, and I'm perfectly willing to tell you that as I raised my son and daughter (who are now 24 and 21) we went through some rough times! This forced me to reflect on how I

wanted to behave when faced with something that felt like a crisis. Upon reflection, I realized that while I couldn't always keep problems away, I could choose how I responded to them. I made my goal to feel proud of the way I handled things when they went wrong. So I developed my own personal "Crisis Response Plan" which helped me to direct my behavior in a positive way.

## My Crisis Response Plan

Here is my plan; use it or develop your own guidelines. It helps to have a plan to put into action when things go awry.

**Step 1:** Breathe deeply to slow things down; sleep on it, if possible.

**Step 2:** Identify objectively what has happened.

**Step 3:** Ask "What is the best outcome we can have?"

**Step 4:** Ask "How can I help make this happen?"

The answers to these questions should guide your behavior. Be sure you are part of the solution, not perpetuating problems.



## Secret #7: Think “Basics”

There aren't any magic potions that will help your family interact and behave as you dream they will. It truly comes down to the “basics” of what you do every day:

- Treat your teen with respect.
- Listen with your head and your heart.
- Allow your teens to express their emotions.
- Be comfortable exercising your authority and your flexibility when appropriate.
- Get help when you need it...getting help from a professional is a sign of strength, not weakness.
- Allow others to play a role; it really does take a village to raise a child.



## Secret #8: Develop and Nurture a Support Network for Yourself

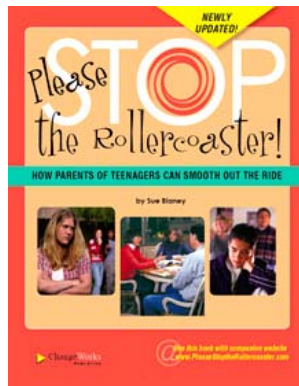
All parents need a support network; in our busy culture it is too common to be isolated from one another. Go out of your way to know other parents, and find ways to connect and share. You will help yourself and your teenager by talking with your peers, supporting one another, comparing notes, sharing ideas, and learning together. And you are certain to benefit from the additional perspective and good humor!

Visit [www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com](http://www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com) to learn about our books and programs for parent discussion groups that are helping parents improve their relationships with their teens while connecting them with other parents in schools, living rooms, churches and synagogues.



# Empower Yourself as a Parent

Parents of teens need three things: confidence, knowledge and connections. We have the products and programs to help you in all three areas.



**Please Stop the Rollercoaster! How Parents of Teenagers Can Smooth Out the Ride** is a parent discussion group program in a book. Designed to run like a book group, parents read one chapter at a time and use the discussion questions provided to guide them. Over the course of the 8 chapters, parents discuss the range of issues typical families are likely to face.

This empowering program has helped parents of teenagers across the country since 2003.

**Click to download a free chapter and view our informational video: [www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com/video](http://www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com/video)**



If you prefer to have a facilitator run the discussion group program, you'll want to access our secular, Christian or Jewish Leader's Guides. Faith communities are a wonderful place for parents to connect.

Visit our website to learn about our new virtual discussion groups – on the phone and online.

No time to join in a group discussion? Then listen to our three-hour audio program on CD or MP3 file, **You're Empowered! Parenting Teens with Conviction, Communication and Love.**

Using a communications framework, we'll give you the tools you need to be effective and enhance your relationship with your ever changing teen.



**Click for more information on our product line: [www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com/products](http://www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com/products)**

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## About the Author



Sue Blaney is the founder of Changeworks Publishing and the author of *Please Stop the Rollercoaster! How Parents of Teenagers Can Smooth Out the Ride*. A popular speaker, she advises parents of teenagers, secondary school educators and faith-based educators in ways to increase parent engagement, improve communication and create parent discussion groups. She has worked with the U.S. Department of Education, The Partnership for a Drug Free America and with parent, school and faith-based groups across the country. Sue is a communications expert with 30 years in training, marketing, publishing and sales, and a Certified Professional Behavior Analyst. She is the proud parent of two college-age students.

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