



# TOP 10

Biggest Mistakes  
for Parents to Avoid  
in the Teen Years



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# TOP 10

## BIGGEST MISTAKES FOR PARENTS TO AVOID IN THE TEEN YEARS

As a parent, you want what's best for your teen. You want your teen to be happy, healthy and successful. And yet, *at times*, your teen may not be experiencing happiness, health or success. You love your child, but, at the same time, sometimes, the best intentions do not always bring about the desired results.

While your child may have caused some stress while he or she was younger ("Why won't they just sleep?!"), you likely have come to understand the saying, "Little kids, little problems. Big kids, big problems." Even if your teen is not struggling with something major, the teen years offer a special opportunity for parents' patience to be tested.

As humans, we all make mistakes. Here, we present the top 10 biggest mistakes that parents should try to avoid during their kids' teen years. If you find yourself doing or thinking any of these, please don't beat yourself up. They are quite common. And, once you become aware of what you're doing, you can make the changes necessary to better interact and communicate with your teen.

So here are the top 10 biggest mistakes for parents to avoid in the teen years, along with what to do instead.

1. MINIMIZE THEIR EXPERIENCE
2. INTENTIONALLY EMBARRASS YOUR CHILD
3. FOCUS ONLY ON GRADES
4. NEGLECT YOUR OWN EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING
5. TAKE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR YOUR OWN ACTIONS
6. OVERGENERALIZE
7. ONLY NOTICE WHEN THEY DO SOMETHING WRONG
8. ALWAYS GIVING ADVICE
9. PREVENTING YOUR CHILD FROM "FAILURE"
10. TAKE THEIR ACTIONS PERSONALLY



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# MINIMIZE

## THEIR EXPERIENCES

As a parent who has had decades more experience in life than your children, it's easy to view their struggles as minimal. You likely have experienced some of what your teenager is going through (stress related to grades, friends, extracurricular activities, boy/girlfriends) and survived it all. As an adult, you probably have experienced (and may be continuing to experience) much more difficult situations: paying bills, issues at work, marital/relationship difficulties, parenting....

It may be easy to hear what your child is struggling with and think, "That's not that big of a deal." However, to your child, it is a HUGE deal.

Invalidating their feelings, even without meaning to, can cause your child to think that you don't understand them. And that can result in your teen feeling disconnected from you and to their seeking connection and validation elsewhere. And those places (such as social media) may not be optimal for your child.

The remedy is not to highlight the emotional drama ("Wow, that is the worst that could happen!"), but rather to empathize with what your teen is experiencing. "I can understand why not getting invited to the party hurts your feelings."

Along the same lines, especially as your children grow up, they will likely develop different options, beliefs, interests and/or practices that you may agree with or possess yourself. Unless it's an issue related to safety (such as drug use), telling your child they are wrong will likely push them away from you. Try to listen to your child's perspective, understand their mindset, and have conversations (not arguments) about how they view the world. Again, empathy is key!



## FOCUS ON EMPATHY.



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# INTENTIONALLY

## "EMBARRASS" YOUR CHILD

Making fun of your children in front of their friends or your friends may seem like harmless fun, but it actually can be detrimental to your relationships with your teen. I don't have to tell you that teenagers can be very sensitive, as they are venturing out of the protection of childhood and cultivating their own identity. Some parents may think their teen's sensitivity is excessive, and they can curtail it by having the teen accept what is meant as a humorous prod. However, in my two decades of working with clients, this is not what I've discovered. As one teen shared with me while we were working together, "It makes me want to avoid her (mother) even more. It makes me feel as if I am worthless."

Sure, we all love a good joke, but consistently jabbing your child is not a great way to cultivate a strong rapport, especially if it's related to a sensitive topic. If you continue to prod your teen about this sensitive matter, this is a sure-fire way to put distance in your relationship.

Of course, please realize that this concept is more of a one-way street. Children love to tease or make fun of their parents. Doing so helps your child cultivate their own identity. Don't personalize these kinds of interactions. As long as your teen is being respectful, try to join in with the laughter. It will help you get closer to your teen.

A few months ago, I found myself in an interesting situation. My daughters (both teenagers) and I were out to dinner. It felt as if at least half of the conversation was about them making fun of me — how I tend to speak loudly when I'm excited, the lack of diversity in the meals I make.... At first, the conversation was beginning to bother me. Then I took a step back and considered the conversations (even now!) that my sister and I have with our parents. For example, we have made fun of my mother for using the same serving platters, which were purchased before we were born. We don't discuss these things to be rude; instead, we do it to laugh and bond as a family.



*not at*

**LAUGH WITH <sup>not at</sup> YOUR CHILDREN.**



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# FOCUS

## ONLY ON GRADES

Especially during your child's high school years, it's easy to spend a lot of time concentrating on grades. "You need to do well so you can get into a good school," for example, is a common statement (or thought) that parents of teens often make. Or, perhaps you express your focus on grades more often in the questions you ask your teen. If the first questions you ask your teen tend to be along the lines of: "How did you do on your test?" or "How much homework do you have?", this can send a signal to your child that grades are of paramount importance.

Even if you don't overtly talk about "getting good grades," focusing primarily on academic success sends a message to your child: "I have to do well in school, or else my life is a failure." Even if you don't believe this (and I am guessing you don't), this is the message your child may be internalizing. I can't tell you how many parents have said to me, "We never put pressure on her to get into Harvard; I don't know why she is so stressed out." It could be because of the focus of your conversations with your child.

And yet, we know from research (as well as personal experience, if you take a step back and reflect) that grades are not accurate predictors of future success. Rather, your child's future success is often determined by having a growth mindset, grit, emotional intelligence and other psychosocial skills.

This is not to say that ignoring the research is a good idea. Rather, try to determine how you can incorporate important psychosocial skills into their daily lives. For example, rather than first asking about a test, focus on the energy and effort your teen puts into studying. Or, inquire instead: "How did you help someone else out today?" or "What was something you learned today?" This shifts the focus away from grades only and on to the important values you want your child to embrace.



## FOCUS ON PSYCHOSOCIAL SKILLS, TOO!





# NEGLECT

## YOUR OWN EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

It's impossible to be the best "you" when you are in the Red Zone. What is the Red Zone? It is a level of elevated stress.

Consider stress as on a continuum from 0 to 10, in which zero is "no stress at all," while 10/10 is the most stressed out you have ever been. When we are at seven out of 10 or higher, we are in the Red Zone. And when we are in the Red Zone, we don't always think or act rationally.

Have you ever said something that you wish you hadn't? Or done something you wish you had not? If you're human, you probably have. And it's not because you're a bad person. It's probably because you were in the Red Zone.

Personally, as a parent, there have been times when I was a less-than-stellar role model for my children. And each and every time, it was because I was overly stressed out.

Taking care of your needs and your emotional well-being is absolutely vital to being a good parent. This is not the time to put your needs on the back burner. Trust me, I have tried it in the past, and it only leads to more problems. Take steps to help reduce and control your stress, such as meditating, exercising, getting the sleep that you need, spending time in nature.... Not only will this be helpful for you, but you'll also be a great role model for your children.



## DEVELOP HABITS TO HELP YOU STAY OUT OF THE RED ZONE.



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# TAKE

## ACCOUNTABILITY FOR YOUR OWN ACTIONS

Our children learn more from what we do than what we say. And, along with Red Zone actions, as parents, we are only human. As such, we may not always act our best. And when that happens, it's absolutely key that you take accountability for your actions. Apologize to your children when you lose your temper or engage in less-than-desirable behavior.

It's often much easier to minimize the extent of your actions or the impact they make on your children. Doing that may help you feel a little better, but it will only damage your relationship with your children. Even if what you said or did was not intended to be hurtful or negative, own how your actions may impact others.

By taking accountability, you not only model this key characteristic of a good leader, but you also build credibility with your children. Denying that you did something wrong or putting the blame on others can put distance in your relationship.



## APOLOGIZE WHEN YOU MESS UP.



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# OVERGENERALIZE

Generous generalizations can be detrimental to your relationship with your child. These could include labels such as (“You’re always so moody”); name-calling (“You’re so lazy!”); predicting a negative future (“You will never do that”); or putting down their friends (“They are going nowhere in life”); or their entire generation (“All you kids care about is social media”).

These generalizations can put up a huge barrier between you and your children, because, let’s face it: No person or experience is any one thing. What’s more, the teen brain tends to react more strongly to negative feedback than to positive and to internalize criticism. Of course, as a parent, it’s vital that you also offer feedback to help your teen grow and mature.

If you offer constructive criticism, make sure your focus is not on generalizations (“You should be ashamed of yourself”), but rather, on the specific behavior, such as (“That was not very smart to text while you were driving”). Then problem-solve together how to make positive changes in the present and future.



**IDENTIFY THE SPECIFIC CONCERN AND ADDRESS IT ACCORDINGLY.**



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# ONLY NOTICE

## WHEN THEY DO SOMETHING WRONG

It's easy to point out when your teen messes up. And, likely, you don't do that because you're trying to be mean, but rather because you want to help them be even better human beings.

At the same time, receiving consistent negative feedback will diminish your child's self-confidence and their sense of closeness with you.

In psychology, we talk about the "5 to 1 rule." Rather than countering a negative with a positive, what we find is that it takes five positive interactions to counter one negative. So, if you point out one thing your teen needs to improve upon to feel positive about your interactions, they also need to receive five positive encounters.

This doesn't mean you should overly praise your child for every little thing they do. But it does mean focusing on the positives they do, their application of the values you taught them, their thoughtfulness, their efforts, and acts of compassion.... Encourage and highlight the positive attributes in which they're already engaged that you want to become even stronger. When you do this on a regular basis, your adolescent internalizes these positive attributes. They also are much more able and willing to take constructive feedback for what it is, not an attack, but rather as a means to become even better.



**SHARE WITH THEM WHAT  
YOU ARE PROUD OF  
AND WHAT YOU  
ADMIRE IN THEM.**



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# ALWAYS

## GIVING ADVICE

As a parent, you have had many life experiences. And when your child is upset about something, it's easy to want to help solve that problem based on your experiences. However, despite having good intentions, this approach can actually make your teen less likely to speak with you.

Often, teens just want to vent. They don't want you to solve the problem. They simply want validation, and they want to feel heard.

If you aren't sure what would be most helpful as your teen tells you about a stress in their life, you can ask the question: "Do you want me to just listen, or do you want me to help you solve the problem?" Lending an empathetic ear and being a supportive parent can help strengthen your relationship.

I worked with a parent of three children who could not understand why his teenagers didn't want to talk to him. Upon further exploration, it became evident that every time they spoke with him about something they were struggling with, he would use it as a "teaching moment." He wanted to share his wealth of wisdom and experience, so his children could learn and grow in a positive manner. Unfortunately, his teens interpreted this kind of advice as his telling them what to do, which resulted in their avoiding conversations with their father. After working together for a while, he began to realize the power of listening. "I can't believe how much closer we are when I just keep my mouth shut," he told me.

Of course, there is a time and place to speak with your child, share advice, and problem-solve together. Moreover, much potential exists in listening to your teen to help strengthen your relationship.



## LISTEN MORE.



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# PREVENTING

## YOUR CHILD FROM "FAILURE"

I have a saying when it comes to parenting: "Just because you can doesn't mean you should." You love your children and want what is best for them. Often, that can come out as you, as a parent, wanting to protect your teen from "failure" or uncomfortable experiences.

And yet we know from research that letting your children "fail" is absolutely vital to their growth and development. Consider that, in your own lifetime, when you didn't receive the outcome you wanted, eventually that experience led to incredible growth or new opportunities for you.

I especially see the detriment of micromanaging children after they go to college. There are extremely sad statistics that demonstrate the increased rate of suicide in college. One reason is that teens often would go from an environment in which they were always successful, because their parents took care of their every single need into a world where not everything works out perfectly.

Of course, you want to protect your children and keep them safe. At the same time, let your teen try new things and "fail." Remember how they learned to ride their bikes when they were little. It's only by falling off and figuring out the right balance on their own that they learned to pedal independently.

Don't do things for your teen that they can do for themselves. Let them try new experiences to problem-solve, learn and grow.



**GIVE THEM  
SPACE TO  
"FAIL".**



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# TAKE

## THEIR ACTIONS PERSONALLY

*I didn't say this would be easy.*

Your child performs poorly in a class; they deviate from the rules; or they speak to you in a less-than-respectful manner. While it's important to address all these objectively with your children, it's also absolutely vital that you don't take their actions personally.

Adolescence is a time to test the waters. As I once said on "The Steve Harvey Show" when discussing parenting, "It's the parents' job to establish the rules, and it's the child's job to try to cross the line. It is also the parents' job to create consequences and ensure that rules are followed."

When your child messes up or acts in any way inconsistent with how you think they should act, talking to them about it is good. However, when you personalize their actions, it only increases your stress, which can put you in the Red Zone. And, as a reminder, when you are in the Red Zone, it's tough to be a great parent.

I am certainly not saying this is easy; instead, I am saying it's powerful.

I applied this advice in my own life when my teenage daughters wouldn't clean their rooms. At one time, I would go into their rooms and not only get upset at the mess they were in, but I also would personalize the situation by saying they weren't cleaning their rooms because they didn't respect me. This resulted in my getting even more upset with them. In fact, not cleaning their rooms had nothing to do with their view of me. But, by learning not to personalize their actions, I was able to remain more objective and help problem-solve how they can abide by the rules. Depersonalize your teenager's actions, so you can be a happier and an even better parent.



## REALIZE THEIR ACTIONS ARE NOT A STATEMENT ABOUT YOU.



I don't have to tell you that parenting a teen is not always easy. Despite the best intentions (which I know you have!), you may have recognized yourself and your own actions in some of these examples. Don't beat yourself up; you aren't alone. That said, by avoiding these mistakes, you can get even closer with your teen.

Soon, your child will graduate from high school. These years, while potentially challenging, also can be a time to grow closer to your child and create lasting positive memories.

Moreover, you don't have to do it alone! We are here to support you.

At EleVive, our motto is: **Elevate your Mindset. Thrive in Life.**

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DISCOVER HOW  
ELEVIVE CAN HELP  
YOU AND YOUR TEEN!



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