

## The Push/Pull of Adolescence

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Adolescence is a developmental phase filled with transition and growth toward the full state of maturity. There are many who describe this stage of life as the second toddler-hood. For most parents, it is a confusing time of balancing letting go and holding close: relating to an almost adult yet nurturing a child. Because of the sometimes “toddler like” behavior of a teen, there are two underlying inconsistencies that warrant discussion. It is helpful for parents to remember that part of the secret with teens is that they never let the parent know they are really listening. Keeping this fact in mind will help you through the ups and downs that come with the natural push/pull of launching your teenager into adulthood.

Push/Pull Number One: “I don’t need you, can you give me twenty bucks.”

There isn’t a parent I know of who has not had this experience or one similar. Adolescents are trying on all kinds of behavior in their own attempt to find out if they can handle life on their own. Although often on an unconscious level, every teenager I know is trying to find their place in the world. They are also trying to find their strengths and ability to think and act with confidence. What they do not feel comfortable with is the need they feel for what parents have to offer. More often than not, your teenager will not say to you...”I am afraid to live on my own. I’m not sure I can make it without you.” If anything, you will hear and see words and behaviors that say the exact opposite. This is because adolescents are scared. Scared they do not really have what it takes to live independently. Scared that they are forever going to need the parents to cover them. Everything inside them is asking them to venture away from the nest. As normal as this is, it is filled with the unknown. Normalizing this aspect of the process verbally, received or not, will help the adolescent relax internally. Focusing on what they do well and the effort they put forth will further strengthen their confidence in gradually moving forward into the freedom they so demandingly say they want. Your teen is not always going to thank you for making them learn in steps but it is what they need.

Push/Pull Number Two: “I know what I am talking about...you know nothing.”

In this process of attempting to become what the adolescent sees as being adult, it is difficult for them to know what they don’t know. This phase is characterized by a great deal of the “here and now”. Because of this, trying to convince them of what you know may feel like an exercise in futility. Part of the task of teenagers is to focus with ferocity on what they know, put it into play, and see what happens. Trying on all kinds of behaviors and ways of thinking, adolescents are taking in information on many levels. This means what you share is being heard. The fact that it is being heard is not always admitted. Remember the secret...never let the parents know they are getting through. **THEY ARE LISTENING.** They are

taking in every attitude, opinion and emotion you share. Support their ability to think through decisions. When they don't do so well, ask them to think of what they may have been able to do differently. Relating to them with confidence in their ability to identify these things expresses confidence in their ability to become responsible adults.

Through it all, remember how God has stayed the course with us. Adolescents need parents who will stay the course with them. This models God's love for them and His commitment to never leaving or forsaking which is His promise.

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