

What Teens Want Parents to Understand

By Christine Vander Wielen, M.S.W., CAPSW

One of my favorite quotes comes from Mark Twain: "When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned." This seems to summarize some teens' view of their parents and also suggests that the negative view will change. Some teens believe that parents "don't get it" or "just don't understand." Recently, I asked teens to help me understand. I asked them; "what would you like parents to understand about being a teen?" The following comments immediately spilled forth: (I grouped the comments by subject.)

Fitting in. "It is important to us to fit in... probably the most important thing. Sometimes we are willing to do almost anything, say anything or wear the latest style in order to fit in. We feel glad when we feel as though we fit in and at the same time may despise ourselves for what we did in order to get there. Even though we may not show it, we feel insecure a lot. Much of our time and energy is spent trying to and wanting to be "in" with the crowd."

Moodiness. "Sometimes we get moody, okay... a lot of the time we are moody. We are told it is because of hormones and that may be true, but also it is because we are experiencing some emotions like anger and sadness to an extent that we never felt before. We kind of don't know what to do with the intensity of some emotions. We can "freak out" sometimes and when we are "freaking out" we don't need parents to "freak out" with us. We need them to be calm and help us to know it will be okay. Parents should not take our behavior too personally. We often do things before thinking."

Adventure. "We want to have and need to have adventures so that we can feel competent and learn our own style. We like to be around friends and do new things because they let us be ourselves, but sometimes we can go to an extreme in order to keep friends. There are times that we just want to be our own person."

Parenting Advice. "We still need parents around only not so close. We still need their advice but we would want to be the ones to ask for it instead of it just given. When it is just given out, we don't pay as much attention."

Word to Parents. So what did you think? Some of the statements, especially about fitting in, tug at the heart strings and the desperation that is sometimes there. To this I would like to offer some encouragement. As parents we can help our teens to know that they belong to our family and to help them to find activities, and to find other adults and friends that will be a positive influence. We can appreciate and encourage their individuality while we try not to "freak out" at things that scare us.

I would like to thank the teens that provided me with insight into their world.

Compliments of Practical Family Living, Inc.

P.O. Box 1676, Appleton, WI 54912 (920) 720-8920

You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute our articles in any format provided that you credit the author, no modifications are made, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you include Practical Family Living's web-site address (<http://www.pfl.org>) on the copied resource. Quotations from any article are also permitted with credit to the author and citing the web-site. Any use of other materials on this web-site, including reproduction, modification, distribution or republication, without the prior written consent of Practical Family Living, Inc., is strictly prohibited.