

# New England Psychologist

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## Study shows teens care what family thinks

By Elinor Nelson

It may not seem like it much of the time, but teenagers really do care what their families think. New findings from the Simmons Longitudinal Study (SLS) show that adolescents who feel valued by their families and who believe they can rely on family members for advice have significantly improved chances for healthy social and psychological development as well as positive academic achievement.

The study has been in operation for 30 years, following nearly 400 residents of Quincy, Mass. from the time they entered kindergarten until their mid-30's today. This study is one of the nation's longest-running and most comprehensive mental health research. Participants, as well as parents, guardians, teachers, spouses and significant others have all been interviewed over the years and principal investigator, Helen Reinherz, Sc.D, MSW, MS, hopes to interview the participants once more, when they reach age 40.

In this aspect of the SLS, investigators revisited questions that had been put to the participants when they were nine, 15, and 18 years of age, inquiring into their feelings about being valued by the families, how well they got along with family members and how significant they felt within their families. "If they didn't feel valued," says Reinherz, "they tended to have less self esteem and more depression, interpersonal problems, drug abuse and behavioral problems."

Other studies had shown that cohesive families were helpful in decreasing the risk of negative outcomes among at-risk children, but the Simmons study explored elements of family interactions among children who weren't necessarily high risk, but might nevertheless experience later difficulties.

Adolescent functioning was assessed by mental health status, academic achievement, suicidal behavior and social, psychological, and behavioral functioning. These factors, investigators discovered, impacted both positive and negative outcomes, but the patterns of associations differed. For example, feeling valued by the family was associated with all types of social, psychological and behavioral functioning, but not with academic performance. Family social support and cohesion, on the other hand, correlated with academic functioning but fewer areas of social, psychological and behavioral functioning. Only feeling valued reduced the risk for serious depression later. "This shows," Reinherz states, "that family experience must encompass more than one form of health promotion."

"Effective parenting," the study determines, "has been found to be more influential in promoting positive adolescent behavior than peers and the media in promoting problem adolescent behavior," she said.

"Adolescents [may] seem to be self-sufficient," concludes Reinherz, "but they are deeply impacted by family. When asked who they would pick as a hero, more than 50% of them picked family members, not sports heroes, actors or astronauts."

Taken from: [http://www.masspsy.com/leading/0801\\_ne\\_studyteens.html](http://www.masspsy.com/leading/0801_ne_studyteens.html)

# About.com --- Teens

## Tips on Teaching Your Teen How to Deal with Stress

By Denise Witmer

Learning how to deal with stress is a part of growing up, but your teen will need your help. Here are seven tips that will help you, help him:

- Be available to talk. If you're never there for your teen, you won't be able to help him. Take some time out of your week for some one-on-one time with him. Make this part of your routine so that your teenager will know that he can count on you being there.
- Encourage healthy escapes from the daily grind of school. Show your teenager the benefits of taking the dog out for a jog, hiking a trail, or just going out for a walk. Physical activity is known to relieve stress. Creativity will also help to relieve stress. Buy your teenager a journal or diary or encourage another creative hobby.
- Laughter can get rid of stress just as much as exercise and is another healthy escape. Make comic or humorous books available in your home. Allow get-togethers with friends. Rent movies with a comedy theme. You can also teach your teen how to laugh at himself, using humor to take the stress away from normal human mistakes that can happen.
- Build your teenager's confidence and self-esteem by remembering to praise him when he does something good. Make this a habit by finding something your teenager did right – everyday. It's not that they aren't doing good things all the time; it's just that we, as parents, sometimes need to take the time to notice that they are doing good things. With the basic foundation of confidence and self-esteem that you provide, your teenager will be better able to handle changes and stress.
- Teach your teenager how to keep things in perspective. This is an important part of relieving stress. Taking a situation and looking at it from different points of view and seeing how it relates in the whole scheme of life is a skill your teenager will need to learn. He will be able to reduce his stress load if he is able to 'let go' of the little stress triggers we encounter in our lives.
- Show your teenager how to focus on the positive aspects of a situation. Have him try and list the benefits and opportunities created, rather than the problems. Even the most unpleasant experiences can lead to positive growth and outcomes
- Be wary of negative roadblocks. Often teenagers who do not learn how to deal with stress appropriately turn to drugs and alcohol. Talk to your teen often about these roadblocks and remember the warning signs.

[http://parentingteens.about.com/od/teenwellness/a/deal\\_stress.htm](http://parentingteens.about.com/od/teenwellness/a/deal_stress.htm)

## Quick Tips to Lower Your Child's or Teen's Anxiety Giving

### **your child or teen the gift of less stress and worrying** Published

on December 28, 2013 by Jeffrey Bernstein, Ph.D.

Anxiety is one of the biggest emotional health challenges facing our children and teens. It can destroy their self-esteem, reduce joy, and interfere with, or even sabotage, them from taking healthy risks in life. Being a calming, skilled, and steadying influence to help your children learn to manage anxiety is a valuable lifelong gift that you can provide to them.

Here are seven strategies to help your children manage their anxiety:

- 1) Closely listen and observe your teen. True panic attacks include shortness of breath, heart palpitations, dizziness, dry mouth, nausea, or diarrhea, high levels of muscle tension, and possibly an irrational fear that he or she will die. If your child is panicking, encourage slow deep breaths, be reassuring and non-judgmental.
- 2) Be patient, present, and soothing. Use consistent eye contact, active listening, and a warm accepting demeanor. Gently encourage your child to reflect on positive memories, personal strengths, and valued past accomplishments
- 3) Listen for irrational thoughts (e.g., "My future is ruined", "I can never get anyone to like me", "No one ever takes me seriously", "I suck in everything I do", "Everyone in the school is going to talk about this all the time for the next ten years.").
- 4) Help your child to see that irrational self-talk raises anxiety (or even lesser forms of worry) off the charts. Explain how, like a snowball rolling down a hill, the more he or she dwells on negative thoughts, the larger the snowball will grow.
- 5) Coach your child or teen to realize the lack of evidence for irrational (unhelpful) thoughts and help him or her find evidence for more rational (helpful) thoughts. So, for example, point out how the student is not a total failure or total loser or totally unpopular. Go back in time and point out times when the problem did not exist and when the current problem does not exist. Finding such exceptions to the rule is very helpful.
- 6) Point out how "What is the worst thing that can happen?" is a more helpful question than, "What if?" Explain how worries often begin with "What if" and that these worries can often be squashed when realistically considering how the worst case scenario is not likely to actually happen. Even if the worst case scenario occurs, it may be upsetting but not the end of the world.

# Depression and Suicide: Signs and Symptoms

Depression and suicide can be scary topics to discuss, especially for young people who may have difficulty expressing their feelings. Most people who are considering suicide reveal their need for help through non-verbal messages. Learn to recognize the following warning signs of depression and suicide risk.

## Signs and Symptoms to Look For:

- Feeling worthless, withdrawn, helpless, and overwhelmed: "Nobody cares."
- Loss of hope for future, sense of futility: "Things will never get better."
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities: "I don't care anymore."
- Feelings of guilt, self-blame, self-hatred: "It's my fault; I hate myself."
- Isolation, loss of interest in friends, being alone: "Leave me alone."
- Fear of losing control, hurting self or others: "I don't know if I'm in control."
- Abrupt change in personality: mood changes, irritability, agitation, and apathy.
- Change in behavior: poor school performance/attendance, change in routine.
- Change in sleeping pattern, insomnia, extreme difficulty getting out of bed.
- Marked anxiety over schoolwork, money, relationships, illness.
- Pressure toward perfectionism, high self-criticism, extreme drive to succeed.
- Drug and alcohol use, increased risk-taking behavior, impulsivity.
- Preoccupation with death or morbid topics, ambivalence towards living.
- Suicidal talk, plans, or statements: "I should just kill myself."
- Suicidal gestures: taking pills, self-mutilation.
- Giving away personal possessions, putting affairs in order.
- Recent loss: death, divorce, separation, job, finances, status, self-esteem.
- In children, depression can be seen as agitation, hyperactivity, and restlessness.

# Five Mistakes Every Kid Should be Allowed to Make



by Chris Jordan

As parents our first inclination is to rush in and save our children when something goes wrong in their lives, or to shield them and prevent whatever the "bad" thing is from happening in the first place. Sadly, we all learn better through making our own mistakes. Sometimes watching the inevitable really does hurt us as parents more than it hurts them.

## 1) Choosing the wrong friends

At some point your child is going to become friends with someone that you do not like. Now I am not talking about allowing your child to be friends with a convicted felon, no I mean allowing your child to reach their own decisions regarding the friendship. It's okay to subtly point out things, but remember if you ban the friendship outright it will make it all the more alluring.

My frienemy was named Elizabeth. Fact about Elizabeth, today, August 25th, is her birthday. If you are reading Happy Birthday, Elizabeth. Also, you were a bitch! Glad I got that off my chest thirty years later.

Elizabeth would do things like invite me over to her house and then cancel at the last minute because she decided to have a different friend over. She would steal things from my house and when I would confront her about it she would make up some ridiculous lie. She would be my best friend one day and then the next completely exclude me. My mother constantly told me that I shouldn't be her friend and pointed out all of her faults. But for some reason it just made me want to be friends with her even more. I mean, how dare my mother presume to know what is best for me. Sure, I was at an age where my mother still provided clothing, food, shelter, but my preteen self just wanted her to leave me alone. She just didn't *understand* me.

The thing was that when Elizabeth was your friend, she was so much fun. She had the exciting ideas- that usually ended up with me getting into trouble. She would say the things to people that you always wished you could say, but your common sense and manners prevented you from doing. I can't pinpoint the exact day my friendship with her ended, but I do know I eventually realized she wasn't a friend at all. However, that day would have come a lot sooner had my mother not been waiting there in the wings to say, "I told you so."

The lesson I learned from my relationship with Elizabeth is one that I pass on to my children. If someone is talking about other friends behind their backs and saying not so nice things about them, you can be rest assured that when you aren't around, the same thing is happening.

Of course, they have all had to learn this themselves.

## **2) Not doing their homework assignments**

I will admit that this one is difficult for me. I used to nag and nag and nag my kids to do their homework. But you know what I discovered? The more I nagged, the more I HAD to nag. It's like the nagging became the foreplay of the homework experience.

I learned to step away. I ask about homework. I ask if they need any help. But then my job is done. If they choose not to do their homework or study for their test, they are the ones who deal with the consequences.

The most difficult part about this one? Worrying about what the teachers think of me if my child does poorly. But it isn't about me, it is about them developing good study habits and discipline that will carry them through the rest of their life. I just pray they will learn this lesson before they flunk out of high school.

## **3) Disappointing someone they care about**

I think the younger the better this one is learned. That your actions carry consequences. That you need to think of other people aside from yourself. If someone is important to you, then you make them a priority. I know so many adults who still have not learned this, probably because their own parents saved them or shielded them from the disappointments of others.

Last year I reminded my older children to call their grandmother on her birthday. They are old enough to have their own cell phones. They certainly never forget to call their friends or to call me to chauffeur them around town. One of them kept saying that he would do it later. Well, later never came. I could have stepped in, dialed the phone and handed it to him, but what lesson would he have learned.

When I confronted this child the following day, he had a bevy of excuses. I reminded him that his grandmother is 85 years old. She doesn't have that many birthdays left. I may have thrown in some phrases like inconsiderate and think of other people sometimes. And some other choice things that probably better belong on a list of mistakes every parent should be allowed to make. He called. He apologized. But most importantly, he learned his lesson. His future wife will thank me one day.

#### **4)Wearing cringe worthy clothing and hairstyles**

Every time I consider telling one of my children my opinion of these things I think back to my own pre-teen and teenage years. Seventh grade was the year I decided to feather my hair. Every day I would use my curling iron to try and force my hair into submission. Then I would spray it stiff with hairspray. I'm not even sure I made it out the door to the bus stop before it drooped into a flat sticky mess. But, no one can ever say I was a quitter, I kept up that hairdo for almost an entire year.

Eighth grade was the year of the wispy bangs and more curling iron abuse. Also I wore lots of black concert shirts for bands I thought were cool, but i didn 't necessarily listen to or even like. Thankfully I had to wear a uniform to school so this fashion choice was confined to weekends.

Ninth grade I decided I wanted to look like some kind of half-assed punk rocker. I shaved the underneath part of my bob haircut and did this odd spiked thing with my bangs. I also pierced my own ear multiple times and took to wearing my crucifix from one of those holes.

Tenth grade saw me fully embracing the neon clothing, over-sized shirts that hung off my shoulder, and leggings. I scrunched my socks down into my Capezios. In fact, I seem to recall layering my socks. My memory is a little fuzzy. I probably have blocked it out, because who in their right mind wants to make their ankles appear twice as large and dwarf your feet.

Those things are just the tip of the iceberg, a large unfortunate iceberg. So really, how can I complain about any sort of choices my kids make, whether it is my 9yr old drawing tattoos on himself with permanent markers or my teenagers wearing shorts so long and baggy they look like they have no legs.

In the grand scheme of life, these things don't really matter. Just make sure you take lots of photos. They will be useful later.

#### **5) Quitting something they will regret later**

Who stopped taking some sort of lesson as a child and has regretted it ever since? Raise your hand.

It just gives your kid a hobby to take up again in adulthood. I am looking into buying a piano. You know, for the "kids."

<http://alphamom.com/parenting/five-mistakes-every-kid-should-be-allowed-to-make/>

Programs and Services Offered by:

## Jon Mattleman, MS Counseling

E-mail: [jonmattleman@gmail.com](mailto:jonmattleman@gmail.com)  
Website: <http://jonmattleman.com>

I have 30 years experience as a mental health counselor and trainer with a focus on issues facing youth and parents. I am committed to ensuring productive communication, collaborative problem-solving, and supportive relationships with and for my clients. My areas of expertise include innovative and effective parenting strategies, depression in children and teens, and suicide identification, prevention, and intervention.

### Individual Parent Consultation:

Living with and parenting a teen is challenging. While we love them, there are many times when their words, actions, and behaviors are maddening --- to say the least! Often parents find themselves at a loss as they watch their child engage in damaging behaviors to themselves and others. Parent consultations are one or two session intensive meetings where we:

- Discuss the real (and often secret) motivators of your teen's behavior
- Learn new language to more effectively communicate and engage with your teen
- Explore new ways of assisting and supporting your teen
- Arrive at decisions to actively address issues and give provide direction to you and your teen

### One Session Evening Parent Group:

When your children were young, you freely exchanged valuable information with other parents about toilet training, pre-schools, and babysitters. Now that your children are older and you may not interact as often with the parents of your children's friends --- or sometimes, you don't even know who they are--- you have lost a valuable resource and support. The "One Session Evening Parent Group" is held in a parent's home and is facilitated with no more than ten parents at a time. Together we create a safe environment in which to openly discuss issues such as depression, drugs, and alcohol; and/or have an opportunity to establish common ground rules regarding issues such as curfews, parties, and Internet use. This highly interactive (and fun!) session may have a specific topic focus, e.g. Make Peace and Not War With Your Teen, or may be an open agenda discussion. Parents will leave sessions with skills they can implement immediately and a renewed sense of direction and hope.

### "The Secret Life of a Massachusetts Teen" Presentation:

"The Secret Life..." is a high energy presentation for large groups which actively focuses on what teens are really thinking, what they fear, why they do not share their fears, and how parents can more effectively support their teen. Parents will leave the workshop with strategies they can implement immediately, new ways of understanding teens, and innovative techniques for engaging teens. The Belmont High School PTO President had this to say about Jon's presentation: *"Jon's many years of working with teens become quickly apparent by the insightful information he presents, in a very funny and right-on-target way. His connection with the audience was visible by the many heads shaking in agreement and the flurry of questions parents were anxious to ask. My only advice is to reserve a big room - we had close to 150 parents attended on a cold and snowy night!"*

### QPR Suicide Prevention Training:

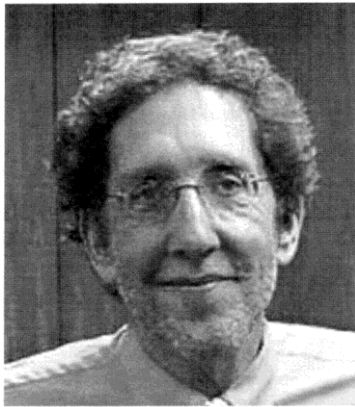
Did you know that there are 500 suicides a year in Massachusetts and that the Massachusetts Samaritans Suicide Prevention Hotline receives over 185,000 calls a year? Virtually every community has experienced suicide, yet few have taken steps to better understand this complex issue. I am a certificated QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) trainer and have worked with hundreds of parents to help them understand suicide and to keep their children and community safe. The QPR Suicide Prevention model is based upon the following: suicide can be prevented in most cases, the person most likely to prevent an individual from dying by suicide is someone they already know, and that prior to making a suicide attempt a person typically sends warning signs of their distress and suicidal intent to those around them. Participants will leave this training understanding the myths of suicide, learning the signs of self injury and suicidal ideation, and knowing how to identify and how to be of real assistance to a person in distress.



a presentation for parents/adults  
by Jon Mattleman

# Q P R

## Suicide Prevention Workshop



■ have 30 years experience as a mental health counselor and trainer, and have spoken to thousands of parents in schools, community groups, and religious organizations. My presentation style is engaging, respectful, warm, humorous, accessible, and energetic.

What can you learn in  
100 minutes?

Enough to save a  
person's life.

The QPR Suicide Prevention model (Question, persuade, Refer) is based on the concepts that the person most likely to prevent an individual from dying by suicide is someone they already know and an at-risk person typically sends warning signs of their distress and suicidal intent to those around them.

Every year in Massachusetts:

- 500 people die by suicide
- 186,000 calls are received by the Samaritans suicide crisis hotline
- 6,700 visits are made to hospital emergency rooms for self-inflicted injuries

Investigate the myths surrounding suicide, explore the warning signs of suicide risk, discover the differences between suicide and self injury, and learn how to really help a person in distress.

Contact Jon at: [jonmattleman@gmail.com](mailto:jonmattleman@gmail.com)

Learn more about Jon at: <http://jonmattleman.com>

# Jon Mattleman's

## Top 15 Parenting Tips

### #15

**Your job is not to be cool or to be their friend.** Your job is to be a parent; this means that sometimes you may not be cool in their eyes. It is age and stage appropriate that your kids hate you at times. If and when they do, we have to feel OK about this ---- meaning we may not like it, but we cannot take it personally.

### #14

**An adolescent's concept of risk is different from ours.** Due to their adolescent brain, they do not see the consequences to risk that an adult does. They operate on their social rewards more so than other factors.

### #13

**Re-think their need for technology 24/7.** Technology increases the potential for at-risk behaviors including drinking, drugging, sex, etc. Do they really need a cell phone all the time? Why would they need one while at school?

### #12

**They may not be ready for making good decisions.** We are trying to build their resiliency up so they can deal with complex decisions such as drinking, drugging, etc. That said, no matter how much we work at this they may simply not be able, developmentally, to make good decisions. Are we asking for them to make good choices well before they have the brain development to be able to do so?

### # 11

**Think about being home as much as possible.** No one ever said on their deathbed that they wished they had spent more time in the office.

## #10

**Do more listening and less talking.** What you say is less important than what they say. Not every moment is a teachable moment, but every moment can be a moment to learn more about your child.

## #9

**Put down the distractions.** TV, iPhones, Blackberries, computers, tablets etc. Model good electronic behavior.

## #8

**We complicate things.** Sometimes our expectations are too high, we want our kids to be different (and all they want to do is be the same), we are constantly giving them feedback and trying to fix things. Create realistic expectations and stop trying to fix things.

## #7

**Have stamina and never give up on your child.** In my experience this is perhaps the most critical factor for parents and it almost always translates into healthy relationships with your children in the post-teen years.

## #6

**It is hard being a kid today.** Although it is also probably true that our kids have it easier than we did in some ways. I know of virtually no one who would voluntarily return to high school. It is nice to sometimes let your child know that it is tough being a teen.

## #5

**Only fight about the top 3 issues.** Let the other stuff go. In my house, my daughter's room was a disaster, but it was not in my top 3, so I let it go. If you fight about all of the issues, you will be fighting all of the time --- not exactly what we or they want.

## **#4**

**Get into their world.** In fact, the TV show "The Secret Life of An American Teen" was poorly reviewed, yet was the highest viewed show ever on ABC Family as teens flocked to see this. Try watching shows like "The Family Guy" (or other shows your teen watches) with an open mind.

## **#3**

**Ask other parents for help and advice.** You will be amazed at what you will learn. In addition, please seek professional help when needed. Some of the bravest and most caring parents are the ones who know when to access outside assistance.

## **#2**

**Allow your child to make mistakes.** Be glad that they do so when they are in middle and high school, so that you can support them in this learning process.

## **# 1**

**Take them away for a day.** Here is what you do: Tell them that you will be showing up at school one day and will tell the main office staff that your child needs to be dismissed and will not be returning for the day. Then do something fun like skiing, go into Boston, or have lunch and see a movie. Do not have an agenda regarding what to talk about, just have fun together.

**When you go home tonight, please give your child a hug (if they will allow) and tell them that you have no idea how they handle and balance so much --- and that you are impressed !**

Written by:

**Jon Mattleman, MS Counseling**

E-mail: [jonmattleman@gmail.com](mailto:jonmattleman@gmail.com)

Website: [www.jonmattleman.com](http://www.jonmattleman.com)