

Empowered Teens and Parents

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Let Me Be Me, I'm Not You by Debra Beck

The pressure teenagers feel to follow in their parents' footsteps is a big burden.

Even as adults we feel this pressure to conform. Have you ever had someone say to you, "I can't believe you did that; I would never do that. Are you sure that's a good decision?" It's all the same message whether it is coming from your parents, friends, siblings or co-workers. It says, "You are not good enough and we **do not** trust your decision-making process."

What has worked for parents doesn't always work for their children. For example, a father played football all through high school and college. Then he pressured his son to do the same. His son played football for a couple of years but hated it. He was passionate about art and tried to squeeze his art projects in between practices and games. **He resented his father for pressuring him to follow in his footsteps.**



So, how can we guide our teenagers while allowing them to be themselves?

First and foremost, we have to realize that they are their own persons, here to learn their own lessons and become who they will become. People do not learn from other people telling them what to do, even if the advice is based on their triumphs and mistakes. Unfortunately, that is not the way it works. We learn from our own experiences.

Of course, we want our teenagers to become good decision makers so that when they leave home, they will have the tools they need to make good choices. The way we do this is to teach them without allowing our opinions (which feel like judgments) to come into the picture.

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If there is a decision to be made that involves our teens, we should solicit their opinion by asking, "What do you think?" If we disagree, it's better to bite our tongue; anything that comes out of our mouth at this point is going to shut them down.

If we want to help our teenagers make better decisions, we have to foster open communication. **The more we are okay with who our teenagers are and who they will become, the more we will empower them.** If we are judging our teens (which we are if we say, "I did this, why can't you?"), they will not come to us for guidance. Instead, they will be out there making important decisions on their own, without the tools we have to offer.

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To build confident teens, who make good choices, we have to believe that they are capable individuals. We can do research with them, looking at the pros and cons of every situation. If we start doing this when our children are young, we will be helping them develop the decision-making muscles to grow into responsible adults. They will be in a much better place to make excellent choices from a place of empowerment than from feeling they are not good enough.