

Affirmations for Teens

As parents (and teachers), it can become a basic instinct to notice where a teenager needs improvement. How we can assist them in becoming the best that they can be and so we focus on what is missing. Shifting that thinking a bit and focusing on what is there instead of what is missing can have a positive effect on influencing your teen to foster change or motivate them to improve. ◇ ***Focus on the Donut, not the hole.*** As children are recognized for what they are doing that is correct and are acknowledged for it, they become more aware of what is right rather than what is wrong with their behavior thus improving their sense of self.

◇ ***Never do for or provide for your teen that which he or she can do for him/herself.***

~When you do, you rob your teen of the joy of discovery and the opportunity to feel competent. You will never know what your teen is capable of unless you allow him/her to try!

Madeline Levine, a psychologist who lives outside San Francisco, specializes in treating young adults. In “Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success” (HarperCollins), she argues that we do too much for our kids because we overestimate our influence. “Never before have parents been so (mistakenly) convinced that their every move has a ripple effect into their child’s future success,” she writes. Paradoxically, Levine maintains, by working so hard to help our kids we end up holding them back.

Supporting a positive view of “self”, can be held by parents. They can provide their teen with love and unconditional acceptance, but they can also help them feel competent and capable. This can be done by first allowing your teen to **experience** what it is like to discover, figure out, and problem-solve. As the child grows, there become more opportunities to allow for this experience. Parents can show their faith in their teen and their capabilities by allowing them to struggle with a problem, all the while providing encouragement. This means ◇ ***acknowledging their efforts*** vs. praising their accomplishments (i.e. You are working hard to figure this out, you tried some things that didn’t work but you keep trying to find another solution, etc.). For most parents, allowing their teen to struggle is hard – but a necessary process for them to truly feel capable.

Remember when your teen was a preschooler and was given a puzzle to put together. As a parent, you knew where the pieces should go but allowing your child to put together the puzzle by him/herself allowed them to feel a sense of accomplishment. Experience is the best teacher. ◇ ***Never do for or provide for your teen that which he or she can do for him/herself.***

Parents can help their teens to develop a positive view of themselves as competent and capable by responding in ways that give their teen credit for ideas, effort and accomplishments without praising.

Esteem-building responses:

“You figured it out”

“You did it!”

“You liked the way that turned out.”

“You decided...”

“You’re not giving up, you are determined to figure that out.”

“You’ve got a plan for how...”

As parents, you can participate in their problem solving by engaging in their active brainstorming for solutions. Instead of giving them the answer that you know will get to the solution quicker. They need to practice problem solving. You can walk with them as they brainstorm by reflecting what you hear them discovering or deciding.

Example: Your daughter has to put together her high school class schedule for next semester. You know what classes she should take that will allow her the best chances to get into the schools that you hope for her. You let her know **she** is creating the schedule. You might say, “So where are you on deciding your classes for next semester?” Allow your daughter to tell you where she is in the process. “I am still deciding – I haven’t figured it out yet”. You can join her in the process.

“Mmmmm. It can be overwhelming to figure that out. What are you for sure about?” Allow for her to answer and reflect what you hear. “So you know you need another math, but you struggled this year and you don’t really want to take the advanced math. Mmmm. What did your math teacher have to say about that? What friends do you have that have taken that math class?”

In this situation, the parents might know that a certain math would be best for their teen but allowing their teen to explore and come to the conclusion on their own, will allow them to own the decision to be in that math class. A parent can offer support and encouragement to set their teen up for success but brainstorm with them first so that the answers are their own and not yours. This provides them a sense of accomplishment and a sense of self.

As you notice more about the world of your teen, you will become better equipped to offer affirmations. ◇ ***Always attach an incident to a positive character quality.*** A teen is more likely to own that positive characteristic if an example is used that “proves” they are living it.

Example: “You are a compassionate friend. I saw how you stayed with him when you first got to the party because you knew he didn’t know many people.”

“You are a good sport. I saw how you high-fived each of your teammates after you lost the match.”

◇ -indicates a “parenting gem” – we are all diamonds in the rough. Using “parenting gems” can allow your teen to shine with their own brilliance.