

Do Teens Appreciate Their Parents?

Parents often say that they feel unappreciated by their teens. But if parents are observant, they may notice the small things that are signals that can tell parents that they are appreciated.

A smile, a gesture, a teen coming into a room where you are, (even if he just looks at you), are signs of connection. Be happy with small indications of affection and connection. Your teen may accompany you on an errand, occasionally spend part of the day with you, talk in the car, or offer to show you something on the computer or an interesting television show. If your teen invites you to come shopping, go to a movie, asks to come along with you somewhere, or initiates a conversation, be sure to respond and take that opportunity. Take an interest in what your teen is interested in. Even if you find the activity, movie, or music not to your taste, it should be important to you, simply because it is important to your teen.

Don't expect to hear a lot of thank-yous. Be prepared to ignore some rolling eyes and bored body language. If your teen says he or she doesn't care if you come to a sports event, school assembly, or any other activity at which parents are welcome, don't take that too literally. You will likely never be told by your teen, "It would mean a lot to me if you were there," but in reality, your presence will have meaning for them. Parents who attend these events send a strong message of love and support to their teens.

It may be helpful for parents to remember how they felt as teens. It was a time of rapid development, of coping with the challenges of emotional and physical maturing. You may have thought your parents would always be there, and taken their support for granted. And you probably thought your parents were incredibly old. Do the math and you may be surprised to find that you are now as old as they were, or older!

As teenagers get older and work through the stages of adolescent development, they begin to see the value of their parents' views. A quote attributed to Mark Twain illustrates this, "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 in seven years."

The changing perspectives of teens as they grow up was examined in a British poll published early this year in the Daily Mail, which indicated that not until around the age of 22 years do young people begin to appreciate their parents. After leaving home, more than half the young people surveyed said they missed having their parents looking after them. More than 70% of the respondents thought they 'knew it all' in their teens. As young people approach their mid-twenties, they look to their parents for answers to questions about home ownership, parenting, finances, and work.

While you are waiting for those days to come, I am not suggesting, that parents put up with sullenness or a lack of manners just because they now are parenting teenagers. I think that despite the many changes and challenges that teens face, everyone in the family still should be treated with some basic courtesy. Teens may rebel against some of their parent's expectations, but it can help to frame these expectations as being what an adult room-mate, co-worker, or

spouse would expect. When you ask if your teen will be home after school for supper, you are not 'treating her like a child', but needing information that you would expect from any family member, from an invited dinner guest, or from a partner or spouse. It is unfair to expect someone to prepare a meal and not give them the courtesy of knowing how many people will be there to eat it.

The same is true with evening curfews-needing to know at approximately what time your teen will be safely home, is not being intrusive or overly strict. After all, you would expect adults, such as a spouse, roommate or house guest to let you know if they were not coming home or were spending the night somewhere other than home.

So, take comfort from small signals of appreciation. When your teen asks for your help, that is a message that they respect your knowledge, and believe you can be counted on.

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