

# Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

January/February 2025

N F A P A

## PRACTICAL HELP FOR SHARED PARENTING IN KINSHIP CAREGIVING

Kinship care is fraught with complicated emotions for many reasons. When raising a family member's child, you might feel discouraged about others' life choices that require you to step in for these kids. You may be angry or hurt over unresolved conflicts. Your pre-existing relationship with the child's parents can make shared parenting challenging – especially during the holidays or around significant family events.

### Help for Shared Parenting When You are a Kinship Caregiver

Whether you are an aunt, grandparent, or family friend, consider that there will be no one-size-fits-all solution for navigating this relationship. Co-parenting with your family members to keep the child's best interest at the center of your focus is complex and unique to your family's situation. Legal considerations, safety concerns, and the child's parent's situation are just a few factors determining what healthy co-parenting looks like for your family. It will help if you decide to be as flexible and adaptable as possible while prioritizing the child's safety and stability as their current caregiver.

However, there are specific things you can do to help you establish positive shared parenting while you are in the kinship caregiver role.

### 1. Set Firm Rules and Boundaries for Shared Parenting.

As soon as you can manage the conversation, clearly define the boundaries of your and the parent's roles. Be sure every involved adult understands who is responsible for what and what each party can do. Be specific in your language, even if it feels unnecessary or repetitive from previous conversations.

Consistently enforced boundaries will reduce the chance of misunderstandings or repeated negotiations about what is and is not allowed. Clearly stated rules can also increase the child's sense of safety. Knowing who is in charge helps the child learn to trust that someone will care for them consistently and predictably.

A practical example:

If your kinship child is not allowed to ride in a vehicle driven by their parent, state this clearly. Ensure that everyone caring for this child – the school, respite providers, extended family

– knows this rule. Try to agree upon acceptable alternatives, such as calling another mutually agreed upon adult, if you cannot pick this child up in the designated routine. Ensure you can drop the child off for scheduled visits with their parents. Always keep each other informed of contingency plans that respect the rules.



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Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

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3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521  
402-476-2273, toll-free 877-257-0176, e-mail: Felicia@nfapa.org  
[www.nfapa.org](http://www.nfapa.org).

## NFAPA Staff

- Felicia Nelsen, Executive Director:** 877-257-0176 or Felicia@nfapa.org
  - Corinne O'Brien, Program Coordinator:** 402-476-2273 or Corinne@nfapa.org
  - Sabrina Nelsen, Program Coordinator:** 402-476-2273 or Sabrina@nfapa.org
  - Tammy Welker, Northeastern/ Eastern Area RFC:** 402-989-2197 or Tammy@nfapa.org
  - Robbi Blume, Northwestern Area RFC:** 402-853-1091 or Robbi@nfapa.org
  - Terry Robinson, Central RFC & Southwest RFC:** 402-460-9177 or Terry@nfapa.org
- \*RFC=Resource Family Consultant

**President**  
Tammy Wells  
308-928-3111  
tammy3wells@gmail.com

**Northern Representative**  
Kelly Muchmore  
402-270-9951  
Kellym246@gmail.com

**Vice-President**  
Amanda Neal  
402-804-0147  
mandafaye75@yahoo.com

**Eastern Representative**  
Kathi Plato  
402-680-9565  
kplato10@gmail.com

**Secretary/Treasurer**  
Kristine Ray  
402-613-3409  
KristineRay01@live.com

**Western Representative:**  
**Southwest**  
Vacant

**Southeast Representative**  
Tracy Wright  
402-730-1576  
twright1@lps.org

**Western Representative:**  
**Panhandle**  
Vacant

**Central Representative**  
Vacant

**At Large Board Members**  
Vacant

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## Attention Foster Parents! Earn Your In-Service Hours While Getting the Chance to Win a Great Prize!

Answer these 10 questions correctly and you will not only earn .5 credits toward your in-service hours, but your name will also be put in a drawing for a prize. For this issue we are offering a \$10 Walmart gift card.

There are a variety of ways to do this. You can email the information to [Corinne@nfapa.org](mailto:Corinne@nfapa.org), send the questionnaire to the NFAPA office at 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521 or you can complete the questionnaire online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NFAPAJanFeb2025> We will then enter your name in the drawing! We will also send you a certificate for training credit to turn in when it is time for relicensing. Good Luck!

1. What are 7 things you can do to help establish a positive shared parenting relationship?
2. Fill in the blanks. No matter what the issues are that caused this child to be in your care, keep your conversations and tone \_\_\_\_\_ when you talk about their parents.
3. Fill in the blanks. The more the parents feel they are \_\_\_\_\_ and that their opinions matter, the more likely they are to go along in other instances when you can't offer choices.
4. True or False. Remind the child's parents that this child doesn't deserve to be in the middle of grown-up issues, hard conversations, or sticky situations.
5. List. What Constitutes Childhood Trauma?
6. True or False. Understanding that her daughter was choosing rebellion helped her heart soften to the idea that her daughter was grasping to cope in a world that didn't make sense to her..
7. Fill in the blanks. Don't give up on them, especially on their \_\_\_\_\_, because that's when they need you the most.
8. Fill in the blank. During the teen years, decisions and choices are ruled by the \_\_\_\_\_, which is the emotional center of the brain.
9. List 5 mental health tips for parents
10. Fill in the blanks. When you take care of yourself, you're better able to parent with \_\_\_\_\_.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

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## 2. Stay Positive.

No matter what the issues are that caused this child to be in your care, keep your conversations and tone positive when you talk about their parents. Avoid complaining or talking down about them. This doesn't mean that you can't talk about their parents. However, do so respectfully or kindly. If you need a safe space to vent or discuss challenges you experience with this child's parent, find a therapist to help you work through those feelings.

## 3. Avoid Comparisons in Co-Parenting.

Be especially careful about comparing the child you are raising to their parents. Understandably, you might worry that your kinship child will struggle with the same issues their parents face. However, unfavorable comparisons or exposure to your worry will weigh the child down with shame and fear. This issue would be appropriate to discuss with your counselor or therapist.

## 4. Keep the Child Out of the Middle.

It's normal to have disagreements and arguments with your child's parents. Remember, though, that you must shield the child from those dynamics. Keep the contentious issues between only the adults involved and recognize that the child didn't ask for any of this.

Whenever possible, remind the child's parents that this child doesn't deserve to be in the middle of grown-up issues, hard conversations, or sticky situations. However, be prepared to take the high ground – mainly if the relationship with your grandchild's parent is rocky.

A practical example:

If your grandchild's parent breaks your rule about driving with their child, define it as such. Assure your grandchild that this was a grown-up choice and not their fault. Talk to your grandchild about how they could handle this situation in the future. However, do so in a way that the child doesn't feel responsible for their parent's choice to break the rule. Kids naturally take the blame onto themselves when their adults make mistakes. You can mitigate the child's feelings of self-blame by not questioning them or digging for more information.

If you struggle to keep the child out of things, contact a therapist or social worker for help. Your kinship child should not feel forced to choose sides between you and their parents and might benefit from time with a counselor as well.

## 5. Talk and Keep Talking About Working Together.

Actively listen to the child's parents and hear their concerns without judgment. Don't point fingers or assign blame. It's tempting to act as if your decisions and opinions are correct. After all, you're not the one who "screwed up." However, this

sort of adversarial approach doesn't help keep the focus on what is best for this child. Remember, the child is the priority here.

Keep these essential points in mind:

Accept that mistakes have already been made. Focus your energy on how to work together to make the most of the situation. Think instead about how to set the child up for success together. The child's parents deserve to be active voices in conversations and decisions about their child.

Plan a time for this conversation when you aren't already arguing. Once you are in the discussion, try to remain calm and focused on creating a plan you can both live with. If substance abuse is an issue, try to have this conversation when the child's parents aren't impaired.

And finally, be prepared to make concessions when you can, especially about small things. The more the parents feel they are being heard and that their opinions matter, the more likely they are to go along in other instances when you can't offer choices.

A practical example:

You want to sign your granddaughter up for an after-school activity. Your daughter had previously enrolled her daughter in a ballet class across town and wants her to return. It's a little out of your way, but agreeing to this class tells your daughter you value her parenting experience.

Another practical example:

Your great nephew needs a haircut before his holiday concert. There's a barber nearby who can fit him in today. However, your nephew prefers the Black barber that his family goes to. Choosing the barber he likes is an easy way to respect this child's father, extended family, and culture.

## 6. Form a Partnership with the Child's Parent.

Make every effort to create a sustainable and productive partnership for co-parenting this child. This child's parent



may not be able to function as a parent right now. Try to figure out what role this parent can take in the child's life and match their ability to the child's experience with them.

A practical example:

Your family's traditional Christmas gift exchange may be too big, too chaotic, or too much pressure for this child's parent. Instead, consider an alternate date to exchange gifts between the child and their parent. Guide the child toward simple, heartfelt presents that tell the parents they are loved. Please work with the parent on a gift for their child that they can afford or that you can cover for them until they can manage it themselves. Prepare the child for a low-key event and focus on other meaningful events they can enjoy.

## 7. Bring In Professional Help.

As early in this shared parenting relationship as you can, seek the help of a social worker, therapist, or mediator. Gain their insights to identify and define roles and troubleshoot problems. Contact the Kinship Navigator Program (if your state has one) or your county's child welfare department and ask for recommendations – even if you are not working through the formal child welfare system.

If alcohol or drugs are part of the parents' struggle, begin attending Al-Anon or Nar-Anon for the support it offers. If your kinship child is old enough, encourage them to attend an Al-Anon or Nar-Anon Family Group.

## In Shared Parenting, The Goal is Stability for the Child

No one said this path would be easy. We can guarantee that it won't be, at least at first. But when you take the time to form a healthy co-parenting relationship with your child's parents, things will be easier in the long run. Your family's version of healthy shared parenting will depend on your family's unique circumstances. It will likely change over time. Hopefully, the child's parents can take a more active role as they heal. Remember, though, that recovery is an uneven line. Things might deteriorate for the parents or volley between highs and lows. Likewise, your role in this child's life may change over time.

Be prepared to roll with the punches, remembering that the ultimate goal is to ensure safety and stability for the child through it all. In the meantime, investing your time and attention in open communication and a good partnership with the child's parent can help everyone involved make the best of the situation.

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<https://creatingafamily.org/kinship/kinship-blog/practical-help-for-shared-parenting-in-kinship-caregiving/>

# THE ABUSED CHILD ISN'T ALWAYS BRUISED

*Written by Jennifer Vail*

I was abused as a child by a very unwell and very toxic mother. The abuse was so horrific and the effects have been so long-lasting that I was diagnosed, decades later, with CPTSD—basically PTSD that occurs from long-term trauma (as opposed to a single event). I'm still in therapy to overcome what happened to me in the past, and while I've definitely made progress, I still have a very long way to go.

My mother isn't even alive anymore, but her legacy of torment will last much longer than her earthly self, and the wounds she caused still ache and sting. Nowadays, I can talk pretty openly about what I went through, what I'm still going through, and there aren't many people in my life who don't know about the abuse I lived through as a child.

## But when I was a kid, no one knew.

Teachers in my state are mandatory reporters, required to alert the authorities if they suspect abuse or neglect, yet none of mine ever did. No church members made calls to protect me, no parents of my friends expressed any concern for my well-being. Not because they failed me, not because they didn't care, but because they didn't know.

I never showed up with bruises on my body. No one could see the squalor I lived in or the empty cupboards I couldn't eat from. My teachers weren't there when sex was happening all around me. Falling asleep at my desk made me look lazy, not uncared for.

Looking back as an adult, I know why no one stepped in to advocate for me, and I hold no grudges toward those who didn't know. I was talkative, outgoing, involved. My grades were (mostly) stellar, I participated in extracurricular activities, I won awards and even held an elected class office. Eventually, anyway.

## As an elementary student, the abuse I survived didn't come with bruises.

It came with manipulation, neglect, and parentification. I didn't have black eyes, I had a stolen doctor's pad, a talent for lying, a mistrust of everyone, and nights spent all alone. I didn't have to dress to cover scars, I had to move to avoid eviction, move to avoid being in the bed while people were having sex, move to keep the roaches from crawling into my backpack. I didn't have mystery injuries, I had frequent "illnesses," fake doctors' notes that were supposed to excuse my many absences because no one woke up to take me to school.

I didn't flinch when someone yelled, I recoiled when they offered kindness because I didn't know how to maintain a relationship with someone who wasn't pounding me with hurtful words. I didn't shrink into the corner because I was

afraid of others, I threw myself into the crowd because I was so desperately lonely. I befriended the librarian, the lunch ladies, the women in the front office not because I was nerdy, but because I was needy—I needed steady adults in my life, and neglect has a funny way of maturing you pretty quickly so that you really can't relate to kids your age.

Once I became a teenager and a little more independent, I found every opportunity to avoid home—after-school clubs, academic competitions, band, choir, theater, student government. I even volunteered to raise the flag every morning and fold it up every afternoon. I was walking the halls of my school well into the dark hours of evening so I wouldn't have to walk in the dark doors of my home.

### **From the outside, I looked engaged and grounded. On the inside, I was abused and haunted.**

At school, I consistently made the honor roll not because I had support and involvement at home, but because I thrived on and craved the validation I received from my teachers when I did well. I engaged in class because I was excited to have someone to talk to. I graduated with honors and scholarships not because I had helpful, invested parents at home, but because I did everything I could to leave that home.

*Not every abused child is bruised.*

Sometimes they're more mature than their peers because they're raising themselves. Sometimes they're talkative because they're often quite lonely. Sometimes they befriend adults, visit with the custodians, and have conversations with the mother of the child whose birthday party they're at because they so desperately need an involved grown-up to see them.

Not every abused child will try to disappear into the quiet corners—sometimes they're right in front of you, laughing with you, perfectly visible but completely unseen. Abuse doesn't always leave a mark, but it will always cause a wound.

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# **HAS YOUR TEEN EXPERIENCED TRAUMA? HERE'S WHY PARENTING THEM MIGHT LOOK DIFFERENT FOR YOU**

What Does "Trauma-Informed" Mean?

Trauma-informed care when applied to teens means approaching their needs with an understanding that they may have experienced traumatic events, actively recognizing signs of trauma in their behavior, and responding in a way that promotes safety, stability, and healing while avoiding practices that could potentially re-traumatize them.

What I've learned is that trauma can affect a child's brain development, which includes their ability to learn, reason, and socialize positively. In fact, according to research, seven main areas of a child's brain are neurologically impacted by trauma:

1. Sensory Development
2. Dissociation
3. Attachment Development
4. Emotional Regulation
5. Behavioral Regulation
6. Cognition
7. Self-Concept and Identity Development

A plethora of research exists on how trauma affects children, but I can tell you from my personal experience that the students I know who have experienced trauma struggle in one way or another.

From working closely with families of students who have experienced trauma, I have learned that trauma-informed parenting, just like trauma-informed educating, is different from raising and teaching children with little to no trauma in their lives. It just is.

## **What Constitutes Childhood Trauma?**

Trauma – sometimes called Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs – refers to any difficult, violent, or scary experience a child may have been or is subjected to. According to the Center for Child Trauma Assessment, Services, and Intervention at Northwestern University, trauma for a child may include:

- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Emotional Neglect
- Mother Treated Violently
- Household Substance Abuse
- Household Mental Illness
- Parental Separation/Divorce/Death

An ongoing ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) Study

found that 65% of children experience at least 1 adverse



event during their childhood and that nearly 40% of children experience at least 2 or more ACEs. The study also found that the greater the number of ACEs a child has been exposed to, the greater he/she is at risk for developing physical and mental health problems throughout their lifespan.

### Common Teen Reactions to Trauma

- While every teen is different, here are a few common responses to trauma.
- Strong emotions such as sadness, anger, anxiety, and guilt
- Overreacting to minor irritations
- Repetitively thinking about the traumatic event and talking about it often
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Returning to younger ways of behaving including giving up responsibilities or a sudden return to rebellious behaviour
- Increased need for independence
- Self-absorption and caring only about what is immediately important
- Loss of interest in school, friends, hobbies, and life in general
- Pessimistic outlook on life, being cynical and distrusting of others
- Depression and feelings of hopelessness
- Difficulties with short-term memory, concentration, and problem-solving.

Trauma-informed might be a buzzword right now, but learning more about it has increased my empathy as a

counselor for parents raising teens affected by trauma.

If this is you, know that I see you.

Raising teens with trauma can be a lonely, exhausting road that entails challenges other parents might not comprehend or recognize – take normal teenage hardships and multiply the adversity that accompanies those by ten.

As an effort to spread empathy, I asked several parents raising teens who have experienced trauma what they wish others understood about their kids and their parenting plight.

### The Need for Compassion

One of my dear friends is raising four kids who have experienced trauma. The deepest desire of his heart is the need for compassion. He knows his kids are hard. He knows they are difficult to reason with. He knows they are spontaneous and don't always understand cause and effect. He knows "nothing" gets through to them, at times. And knows they sometimes come across as having no moral compass.

But he also knows the confusion they feel within. He knows the power of their insecurities and anxiety. He knows their inability to express their feelings during moments of heightened emotion and the remorse they feel after meltdowns.

He shared with me that he and his wife are "parenting their asses off every waking moment," and he wishes others could have some compassion for the chaos in their home. They are trying hard to raise good humans.

### My Kids ARE Trying

One parent shared with me that she read a book by Ross Greene entitled, *The Explosive Child*, which was perspective-changing for her and her husband. Greene's idea that "children do well when they can" explains that if a kid is doing the wrong thing, it's because they lack the skills in that moment to do otherwise.

This idea helped her to go from blaming her daughter for apathy, immaturity, and disregard for rules to acknowledging her daughter's lack of development of coping skills.

Understanding that her daughter was not choosing rebellion helped her heart soften to the idea that her daughter was grasping to cope in a world that didn't make sense to her.

### Disciplining Kids Who Have Experienced Trauma Looks Different

Another student's parent said she wished others understood how much trauma changes the brain. She and her husband try hard to figure out ways to maintain a relationship with their kids, while also implementing discipline when choices are made that don't align with their beliefs. They have to choose their battles with their kids because almost everything feels like one.

She shared that she tries hard not to wonder what teachers and other parents think of their parenting because she knows they cannot relate. But what bothers her more is thinking that



# Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association



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others might think their kids are bad, in general. “Our kids are not bad kids; they are kids who are broken and in need of people meeting them where they are and showing them grace along with truth,” she said.

The approach has to be different for kids who have experienced trauma. Expectations can be the same, but the process of reaching those expectations might be a little messier for kids trying to process through trauma.

READ: Supporting a teenager with a trauma-informed approach.

## Some People Don't Believe Trauma Brain is a Thing

One couple shared that their most stressful times are when they're visiting families with similar-aged children. Other parents can't relate to what they view as a “lack of discipline” and sometimes literally question their parenting.

They understand that their kids can be “hard to love” sometimes, but they wish their own families, especially, would be more sensitive to their behavioral struggles and get to know their kids' hearts better. One mom stated that sometimes she wished ‘trauma’ had a look, because if others could see it, maybe they'd be more sympathetic.

For me, trauma-informed isn't simply a professional development buzzword. Learning about how trauma affects children's brains has increased my capacity to love and accept some of my most behaviorally challenged students and to empathize with their parents.

In every conversation I've had with the parents I interviewed, it was evident that they love their children deeply and are fighting for them. None of them aim to excuse their kids' negative behaviors, but all of them could use some grace and compassion for how difficult it can be to raise teens affected by trauma.

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[https://raisingteens.today.com/has-your-teen-experienced-trauma-heres-why-parenting-them-might-look-different-for-you/?fbclid=IwY2xjawHya71leHRuA2FibQlxMQABHRpFvxGhBjmWKPGviSFbRYpCO-4RbqZsS-3DOZXHXDVnoOyMwhlIOigcEg\\_aem\\_JZU6GMrx4Nwpo3zVpdASgw](https://raisingteens.today.com/has-your-teen-experienced-trauma-heres-why-parenting-them-might-look-different-for-you/?fbclid=IwY2xjawHya71leHRuA2FibQlxMQABHRpFvxGhBjmWKPGviSFbRYpCO-4RbqZsS-3DOZXHXDVnoOyMwhlIOigcEg_aem_JZU6GMrx4Nwpo3zVpdASgw)

# WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR TEEN REFUSES TO FOLLOW HOUSEHOLD RULES

## 12 STRATEGIES THAT REALLY WORK

*Written by Nancy Reynolds*

**One of my friends once told me that parenting teenagers is like trying to solve a puzzle with missing pieces. She was right! One of the most**

## frustrating parts? When they flat-out refuse to follow the rules you've set.

It's easy to feel disrespected or that you're somehow failing as a parent, but here's the truth: It's very common for teens to push back on their parents' rules.

Teenagers are hard-wired to push boundaries. Add in the fact that they're craving more independence and it only makes sense that they'd fight you a bit when it comes to your steadfast rules. But... here's the good news. There are ways to handle it without losing your temper, your mind, or your relationship with your teen.



## What to Do When Your Teen Refuses to Follow Household Rules

### Why Teens Push Back on Rules

You've been asking your teen for days to clean their messy bedroom and all you get in return is, “Okaaay... I said I will! Probably tomorrow...”

Or... your teen is notorious for making themselves a snack and leaving the kitchen a disaster. You've asked them dozens of times to clean up after themselves and the response you repeatedly get is, “I'm just gonna mess it up in a few hours anyway so why should I clean it? I don't see the point.”

You're frustrated, angry, and feeling deflated. Why won't they just listen?

First, take a deep breath. Then, dive a little deeper to find the root cause of why your teen refuses to follow your rules.



It's not always about being rebellious for the sake of it. Here are a few common reasons:

**They Want More Independence:** Your teen is figuring out who they are, and rules can feel like they're being held back. It's not necessarily that they don't care (although, let's be honest... sometimes they really don't care) – they just want more say in their own lives.

**They're Testing Limits:** Pushing boundaries is how they learn what's okay and what isn't. (That's why it's so important not to be a pushover parent.) They're figuring out what you'll tolerate and what you won't – even if it drives you nuts.

**Peer Pressure:** If their friends don't have the same rules in their house, yours might suddenly seem “unfair” or “too strict” which can trigger your teen to wage war on your rules.

**They Don't “Get” the Rules:** If the reason behind a rule isn't clear or your teen doesn't feel it's fair, they likely won't see the point in following it.

**They're Overwhelmed:** Hormones, school, friends, expectations and just being a teenager can make them more tired, emotional, and impulsive than they (or you) would like.

## How to Get Your Teen Back on Track

The key is to figure out how to approach the situation so everyone feels heard and respected without turning it into World War III.

Here are a few tips that have worked for me when my kids fought me tooth and nail on my rules – they might just work for you, too.

### 1. Take a Step Back and Reevaluate

Sometimes, we set rules when our kids are young and we don't adjust them as they grow. Ask yourself: “Are the rules still reasonable? Do they fit my teen's age and maturity?” If not, it might be time to tweak them. Your teen is much more likely to follow rules they see as fair.

### 2. Have an Honest Conversation

Instead of jumping straight to yelling, arguing, idle threats, or punishment, sit down and have an honest talk with your teen. Explain why the rules are there and how they help the family run smoothly. Then, ask for their input. A simple, “What do you think about these rules?” “Do you think they're fair and reasonable?” “Why or why not?” can open up a productive dialogue. I've found with my own kids that teens are far more likely to follow rules if they've had a say in creating them.

### 3. Involve Them in the Process

Let your teen help you come up with household rules that are agreeable to both of you as well as the consequences they'll have to face should they break a rule.

For example, instead of dictating a curfew, you could say, “What do you think is a reasonable time to be home on weekends?” You might be surprised by how responsible they

can be! MANY times my kids surprised me! If you don't agree with their response, strive for a compromise. “Listen... I feel like 11 pm is too late. How 'bout we compromise and say 10:30 pm?”

### 4. Be Consistent with Consequences

This one is tough but important. If you set a consequence for breaking a rule, stick to it. Consistency shows your teen that you mean what you say. But keep the consequences fair and reasonable – remember, the punishment should fit the “crime.”

### 5. Lead by Example

If you want your teen to follow the rules, make sure you're modeling the behavior you expect. If the rule is “No phones at the dinner table,” don't scroll through your own phone during dinner. I promise you, your teen is tuned into everything you do (and don't do) and they're quick to call out hypocrisy.

### 6. Reward Good Behavior

Sounds like something you did when your teen was a toddler, right? Well, positive reinforcement can work wonders for older kids, too.

When your teen follows the rules or takes initiative, acknowledge it. A simple “Hey, thanks for cleaning up your room without being asked” or “Thanks for putting your dishes in the dishwasher” can go a long way. You can even offer up a small reward to motivate them to keep it up. “Here's my credit card. Why don't you head out and buy yourself a burger at that place you love.”

### 7. Pick Your Battles!

This is a BIG one, parents. Not every rule is worth a fight. Focus on the non-negotiables (like safety and respect) and let some of the smaller stuff slide. If their room looks like a disaster zone but they're doing well in school and treating people kindly, it might not be worth the energy to argue. Some things will always matter more than others.

### 8. Teach Them Problem-Solving Skills

If your teen doesn't like a rule, challenge them to come up with a better solution that still works for the family. For example, if they hate taking out the trash, they could trade chores with a sibling. If they're fighting you on a curfew, let them explain (in a calm, mature fashion) why you should give them a later curfew. This helps them feel more in control and teaches them valuable life skills.

### 9. Stay Calm

Easier said than done, right? But losing your temper only makes things worse. If your teen's defiance has you seeing red, take a deep breath and revisit the conversation when you're both calmer. Staying composed shows maturity and helps de-

escalate the situation.

## 10. Offer Choices

Sometimes, giving your teen options can make all the difference. Instead of saying, “You have to do your chores right now,” try, “Your room is a mess. Would you like to clean it today or wait until the weekend?” Choices make them feel like they have more control in their lives.

## 11. Focus on Your Relationship

Your teen is more likely to follow your rules if you foster a foundation of trust and respect. Spend time with your teen, be an active part of their lives, and keep the lines of communication open. When they feel valued and understood, they’re more likely to cooperate.

## 12. Get Outside Help if Needed

If the conflict is escalating or your teen’s behavior is getting out of hand, don’t hesitate to reach out to a counselor or therapist. Sometimes, an outside perspective can help you both navigate the rough patches.

## Final Thoughts

I know it puts your parenting to the test when your teen pushes back on your rules. But remember: it’s a phase, and it doesn’t mean you’re doing a bad job.

They’re just trying to figure out where they fit in the world, and a little rule-breaking comes with the territory. By staying calm, communicating openly, and focusing on building a strong relationship, you can guide them through this tricky stage while keeping the peace at home. Hang in there!

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# 5 THINGS EVERY STRUGGLING PARENT OF TEENS NEEDS TO HEAR

**NO ONE HAS THIS PARENTING GIG ALL FIGURED OUT.. NO ONE**

*Written by Ali Flynn*

When parenting your teen is “down in the trenches” hard, and you feel as though you can’t even muster up enough strength to come up for a breath of air, it can bring comfort knowing that other parents are struggling, too.

I think we can all admit, this is hard...

Sure, there are plenty of amazing and rewarding days that accompany the teens years, but if we’re being completely honest here, there are also plenty of exhausting and difficult, lonely

and confusing days. Both our teens and us are navigating waters neither of us have encountered before.

The trick to getting through the teen years with our kids is to find the sweet spot. We have to look for the beauty, the blessings, and maybe even the humor. Here are 5 things every struggling parent of teens needs to hear.

## 5 Things Every Struggling Parent of Teens Needs to Hear

### 1. You Are NOT Alone

No matter how hard it is (and, we all know there are days raising our teens that can be downright painful), you need to know you’re not on this journey alone.

No one has this parenting gig all figured out... NO ONE.

**Rather than standing stoically trying to convince those around you (and yourself) that you can withstand the hurricane-force winds that sometimes accompany parenting teens, allow yourself the freedom to be vulnerable.**

Reach for a lifeline.

Accept the fact that being transparent with other parents holds the key to connection and a bond with someone who’s been there or is in the trenches right alongside you. Maybe it’s another mom, a trusted friend, or a relative who’s come out on the other side of raising teens who can offer a fresh perspective, a healthy dose of humor (something we all need a little more of) or a few tidbits of advice to help you get through this phase of parenting.

Just hearing someone else say, “I get it. I’m going through the same thing with my teen,” can make you feel less alone, less anxious and offer comfort and validation that everything you’re going through is normal and temporary.

### 2. Teenagers Don’t Have Control Over What’s Happening in Their Bodies and Brains

Don’t be mistaken. That teen of yours in their grown-up-looking body is still little on the inside. Their body, while growing by leaps and bounds, still has plenty of growing up to do, and their brain, according to medical experts, won’t fully mature until the age of 25.

According to Premier Health, “The frontal cortex (the frontal lobe of the brain) is one of the last areas to mature. This is where executive function is handled, where the brain processes data and examines pros and cons. It’s also the ethical and moral part of the brain.

During the teen years, decisions and choices are ruled by the amygdala, which is the emotional center of the brain. That’s why any conversation you might have with your teen, no matter how innocuous it seems to you, can quickly bring your kid to tears or rage, or trigger them to completely shut down, or any other range of “over-reactive” emotions.

One thing I've learned with my own kids is to take a step back and recognize their behaviors are not intentional. Their goal in life isn't to hurt my feelings or upset me. They simply need to develop emotionally and this process takes time.

### 3. You Are Your Teen's Safe Haven

Even on those days when your teen pushes you away, doesn't seem to care in the least about being a member of the family or takes their frustration and hardships out on you, take comfort in knowing that you are their safe place... even if your teen would never admit it.

You are their constant.

You are the one they know will never abandon them.

**You are the reason they feel comfortable being their true selves, even on the ugly days (and trust me, there are a few ugly days along the way).**

Even though their love is hard to see or feel on some days, just know they love, cherish and appreciate you far more than you know... they just don't verbalize it, quite yet. Don't give up on them, especially on their hard days, because that's when they need you the most.

### 4. Soon Enough, a Beautiful New Season Will Emerge

Parenting never really ends...

In fact, 18 is just a number. Sure, it might be the end of our kids' "official" childhood, but it's also the beginning of an amazing and beautiful new era.

We may have bid farewell to more than a few stages of parenting, but there is still a lifetime to parent our big kids.

**They still need us in their lives (perhaps more than ever), they still need our love, our guidance, and our unending love. They still need us to check up on them, make them their favorite dinner, tell them that everything is going to be okay, and wrap our arms around them when they need it most.**

They're facing new challenges in college and overcoming tough hurdles in their new job. They need a role model, guidance and plenty of encouragement.

The beauty of it all is that somewhere along the way, our relationship begins to shift in the most beautiful and unexpected way. Suddenly our child isn't simply just our child, they become a trusted and cherished friend... and, we become the same to them.

### 5. All They Truly Want (and Need) is Your Love & Acceptance

This one is simple. Love your teen for who they are.

They may not view the world through your lens. They may

not dress the way you'd like them to. They may not listen to everything you have to say, follow in your footsteps or be who you envisioned them to be. They are their own person and our job as parents is to love our kids exactly as they are.

As John Lennon so eloquently once said, "All you really need is love," and this right here is all you truly need to remember throughout your parenting journey. Just love 'em through it all...

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## THE 5 POWERFUL LOVE LANGUAGES OF TEENAGERS

The other day I was hanging out in my daughter's bedroom while she was getting ready to go out with a few friends. While I was chilling out on her bed, she was busy trying on outfit after outfit trying to decide which one she liked best.

"Do you like this one? I feel like this might be too dressy. Maybe I should wear something more casual."

"What about this one? I think this one is super cute. What do you think?"

Just watching her, thinking about how fast these days are

### **NFAPA SUPPORT GROUPS**

Foster parenting is hard. You face challenges as you parent children and youth with a trauma history that your friends and family do not understand. Please join us in one of our support groups where you can find mutual support and opportunities to discuss parenting joys, challenges and strategies as you navigate the life of a foster parent.

#### **Faces: Online Foster Parent Support Group Chat on Facebook**

- Meets Tuesday nights at 9:00 (CT).
- Contact Robbi at 402-853-1091. You must have a Facebook account.

#### **Parenting Across Color Lines**

- Fourth Tuesday of the month – for multi-racial families.
- 6:15pm at Connection Point, Lincoln. Pot Luck Supper prior to meeting.
- RSVP required – Contact Felicia, (402) 476-2273 or Jessica at <mailto:jessicia@nfapa.org>

#### **Adoptive Mom Support Group in Lincoln**

- Second Friday of the month, for adoptive moms.
- 7:00-9:00 pm
- RSVP required, Felicia, (402) 476-2273

slipping by and wondering to myself how many more times she'll actually ask for my opinion, I started to get a little sappy.

I said to my daughter, "Do you have any idea how much I love you?"

After rolling her eyes for a brief second, (because she knew I was clearly in one of my sappy moods), she said "Yes, mom, I do."

"But how?" I asked. "How do you know how much I love you?"

"Because you spend so much time with me. You're always there when I need you – even for the small stuff."

I never really gave it much thought, but it occurred to me that our special time together – even if it's just a few minutes a day – means the world to my daughter.

Have you ever stopped to think about what makes your teen feel loved? I mean, sure, we love our kids. That's a given. But, are we loving them in a way that matters the most to them?

According to Gary Chapman, author of the best-selling book, *The Five Love Languages of Teenagers*, "There are only five basic languages of love. Of the five, each teen has a primary love language – one that speaks more loudly and deeply to him or her."

"Visualize that your teen has an emotional love tank," says Chapman. "When a teen's love tank is full – when they feel genuinely loved by their parents – they can make their way through their teen years with minimal trauma. But when a teen's love tank is empty, they will grapple with internal struggles and typically look for love in all the wrong places."

After diving into the book, it became blatantly clear to me what my kids' love languages are. For my daughter, it was clearly quality time. Although I realized it wasn't the same for my other kids. Each one has different needs. Each one feels most loved in a different way.

Curious what your teen's love language is? Here is a brief description of the 5 powerful love languages of teenagers.

## **5 Powerful Love Languages of Teenagers**

### **Physical Touch**

Remember when your kids were young and they crawled into your lap to snuggle? Remember when they adored your hugs, clung to your legs and couldn't go an hour without feeling some form of physical connectivity to you?

Well... a lot sure has changed since then. Still, despite some teen's "offish" behavior, there are plenty of teenagers whose primary love language is physical touch.

Sure, they may not seek physical touch quite the same way they did when they were young, but they fill their physical touch bank in other ways. Maybe it's when they plop themselves down next to you and ask for a back rub. Maybe it's when they give you a high five when you drop them off at school. Or, perhaps it's when you're on the couch with them watching television or silly YouTube videos and they sit close

to you – shoulder to shoulder.

Teens whose primary love language is to feel the warmth of their parents' touch will always find subtle ways to stay physically close and connected.

### **Quality Time**

Teens whose love language is quality time feel the most loved, the most secure, and the most cherished when they spend one-on-one time together with their parents. Just like my daughter loves and craves those small pockets of time we carve out to be together, some teens need to feel that special, individualized connection with their parents.

Whether it's hanging out in the kitchen making dinner, going for a drive and talking or simply hanging out in their bedroom late at night talking about their day, teens who long for quality time treasure special moments with their parents (even though they'd never admit it). Even if it's simply a few minutes a day, having that focused attention fills their love bucket to the brim.

### **Words of Affirmation**

When our kids were young, we encouraged them all the time, "Look at you eating with a fork! I'm so proud of you!" "You learned your ABCs. Wow! You're so smart!" We seem to forget that, for a lot of teens, those powerful words of encouragement are not only what they still want to hear, it's what they need to hear.

If your teen's primary love language is words of affirmation, give them what they need. Boost them up, encourage them, tell them they can do it, praise them and tell them you're proud of them when they've done something well or met a goal. Not only will you be giving their self-confidence a big boost, but you'll also be giving their heart exactly what it needs.

### **Receiving Gifts**

According to Chapman, "Some parents use this language almost exclusively and they're often shocked to find that their teen doesn't feel loved." Although gift-giving isn't the love language for all teens, let's face it, when it comes to teenagers and getting gifts from their parents, it holds the power to speak pretty darn loudly for many.

My son, for instance, doesn't crave a lot of time with me (typical teen boy behavior) and he doesn't crave my physical touch (although he'll never turn down a back rub), but what he does love is small gifts – a candy bar left on his desk, a new sweatshirt he's had his eye on, a new video game or even a couple of dollars tucked in his backpack for helping me out with something. His eyes light up when I surprise him with gifts – clearly one of his primary love languages.

### **Acts of Service**

Some teenagers feel most loved when their parents do small things for them – acts of service Chapman calls them.

Maybe your son loves it when you go out of your way to make his lunch for him every day. Or, maybe your daughter beams when you offer to help her with her language arts essays or she sees that you tidied up her room a bit when she's totally stressed out.

These small expressions of love, especially when they're done with a positive, caring attitude, can be just what the teen needs whose primary love language is acts of service. (Don't confuse spoiling your teen with nurturing and loving them by doing small things for them. As long as you don't overdo it, you're not spoiling them. Every teenager, whether "Acts of Service" is their primary love language or not, needs to feel special and adored and loved by their parents.)

Identifying your teen's primary love language could be the key to connecting with your teen on a much deeper level. By giving them exactly what they need and want, you will be solidifying your relationship with them and filling their love tank to the brim.

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<https://raisingteentoday.com/the-love-languages-of-teenagers/>

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## 8 SELF-CARE TIPS FOR PARENTS: PRACTICAL ADVICE

Self-care helps parents stay balanced, present, and set a positive example for their children.

Being a parent can be incredibly rewarding, but it's also demanding. It's easy to get caught up in the daily grind and forget to take care of yourself. However, self-care for parents is essential. It helps you stay mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy, so you can be the best parent possible.

When you take care of yourself, you're better able to parent with patience, joy, and presence. You'll also be setting a positive example for your children, demonstrating that it's important and healthy to take care of yourself. Focusing on self-care for parents shows kids how crucial this habit is.

These mental health tips for parents can help you better care of yourself as you care for your child.

### 1. Acknowledge that parenting is hard

Take a moment to acknowledge that raising kids is one of the hardest jobs there is — even on a good day. Give yourself some grace and remember that you are doing your best. Self-care for parents starts with self-compassion. Learn more about how toxic stress impacts us and how we can build resilience.

### 2. Don't take your basic needs for granted

In the chaos of caring for kids, it's easy to forget to tend to



your own basic needs. Remind yourself to get enough sleep, stay hydrated, and eat regular, healthy meals.

### 3. Self-care comes in many forms

Taking care of yourself doesn't have to be expensive or take a lot of time. Start small — take a bath after the kids are asleep or meditate for five minutes. Self-care for parents can be anything you do for yourself that makes you feel good.

### 4. It takes a village, but you need to ask

Friends and family members can be great helpers — but they likely won't know how to support you unless you ask them directly for what you need. Practicing self-care for parents means recognizing when and how to seek support.

### 5. Modeling self-care helps everyone

Yes, taking good care of yourself will help you to be more available for your children. And it will teach them to make healthy habits, too. Self-care for parents has a rippling effect on the family.

### 6. Accept your limits

Part of avoiding burnout is to understand that you can't do everything yourself. Figure out your stress limit and try not to feel ashamed to know when you hit it. Learn more about managing burnout and creating a relapse prevention plan.

### 7. Find other parents who can relate

Whether through social media, support groups, or after-school activities try to find people who are in a similar parenting situation. Hearing what other families are going through can give support and perspective. Self-care for parents includes building a supportive community.

Surround yourself with other adults who understand your

challenges and can offer a helping hand. This network could include your partner, family members, friends, or fellow parents in your community. Share responsibilities, delegate tasks, and ask for help when you need it.

## 8. But also connect with friends outside of parenting

It can also feel good to make time for friends who know you outside of your role as a caregiver. A phone call, a walk, or a coffee date with a friend can be good reminders that being a parent is a part of who you are as a person, but not your whole identity. Pursue self-care for parents to sustain your well-being and balance.

*This article was last reviewed or updated on December 3, 2024.*

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# SCHOOL MORNINGS WITHOUT THE STRESS

HOW TO GET YOUR CHILD UP AND OUT THE DOOR WITH THE LEAST AMOUNT OF CONFLICT

*Written by Beth Arky*

*Clinical Expert: Dave Anderson, PhD*

During the school year, a cry is heard from parents across the land: Getting kids out the door Monday through Friday is a killer.

What makes school mornings so hard? “They’re kind of like a perfect storm,” says David Anderson, PhD, a clinical

psychologist at the Child Mind Institute.

“You have a number of things that have to get done,” he explains, “and there’s also a time limit.” Add to this the fact that parents sometimes feel their kids don’t appreciate the ticking clock while they’re trying to get everyone to school and work and you’ve got a pressure cooker that can, at its worst, lead to yelling, tears, and forgotten lunches.

Dr. Anderson says one colleague calls times like school mornings—along with homework, transitioning from dinner and shower time to bedtime, and then actually getting kids to sleep—“frequent flyer situations,” when stress levels regularly reach their peak. He says mornings are “definitely tough for most families we talk to,” whether the child has a psychiatric diagnosis or not.

However, the stress quotient can rise among families with a child who has special needs. “Kids with ADHD or behavioral issues may be much less likely to be able to maintain their focus on what they need to get done, remember what they need to get done, or may actually be defiant about getting things done like getting dressed, making their bed, taking a shower, brushing their teeth, or eating breakfast,” Dr. Anderson says.

Meanwhile, kids who are depressed may have difficulty getting out of bed, while those who are very anxious may refuse to do what’s required because they are avoiding something that is happening at school or even school itself.

Dr. Anderson adds that if a child is on the autism spectrum, mornings might be tougher because of a rigid adherence to rituals. If his parent needs him to be flexible and do the tasks out of order, that could lead to a lot of conflict.

Also, many kids have difficulty with transitions, whether they have diagnoses like ADHD and autism or not, and the morning is all about transitions done under a hard and fast deadline.

While parents can be more flexible about things like bedtime—perhaps they’ll let a child stay up reading until he falls asleep—morning doesn’t afford the same luxury.

If a child leaves the house in the morning without the right shoes, or sports gear, or homework, or without eating breakfast, it can contribute to problems during school.

And if a child ends up being late to school, the parent is often late to work, too.

So what’s a parent to do to both get out the door on time and with as little conflict as possible? Dr. Anderson recommends several things.

## Plan ahead

First, regardless of a child’s age, think about what can be done the night before such as making lunches, taking showers, organizing backpacks, and laying out clothes. Talk with your kids as to what needs to get done in the morning. “It’s great to have these discussions when cooler heads are prevailing and we can really problem solve about how to get things done in an efficient way,” Dr. Anderson says.

Parents of younger kids need to focus on being clear about what needs to get done, helping them develop this list into good habits. This can be accomplished by noticing when a child is successful, then praising him for those successes. It's also helpful to break tasks down into very small steps and then noting how well the child is trying to comply or do things independently.

Those with older kids could help them develop an organizational plan—a list they could check back on to make sure each step is completed. “We’re all more effective when we’re very clear with ourselves about what steps we might need to take and realistic about what we actually have time to get done,” he says.

## Temper expectations

Dr. Anderson also says it's a good idea for parents to prioritize the essential steps—what must get done—vs. the “icing on the cake” steps, at least at first.

Exactly what is essential? “The reality is often that the child at least has all of his clothes on, has something in his stomach, and has brushed his teeth,” he says. “If we can get those three things done somehow, either before the child leaves or on the way to school, and reinforce the child’s progress, then we can start to build those habits and make it so that mornings are easier in the future.”

Once the essential steps become habit, parents can focus on the “icing,” which can include things like a child keeping his hands to himself around a sibling, making his bed and organizing his things.

## Use visual prompts

Dr. Anderson says that especially for younger kids who are on the autism spectrum or have ADHD, “we absolutely want to make it so that any behaviors we’ve defined as target behaviors are also prompted visually so that they can remember and, over time, start to independently do them.” Visual prompts might include posted schedules and photos of targeted behaviors, such as a picture of a child brushing her teeth near the sink.

With typically developing children and teens, the amount of visualization needed varies: “There are kids who only need their parents to give instructions verbally and then they can usually remember them and follow through. Certain kids need either more reminders or time to form these habits,” notes Dr. Anderson.

## Create incentives

When it comes to making mornings better, rewards are also key. They can be either short term, involving some kind of immediate treat or, because of the time crunch, earned privileges to be enjoyed later.

Dr. Anderson offers one of his favorite examples of a short-term reward, involving a teenager and her mother. “They talked about what specific behaviors they were going to focus

on,” he says. “The idea was she gets up by a certain time, gets all of her things together and leaves by a certain time for school. If those three things happened without too many prompts, then they would stop for a special breakfast like Starbucks and walk rather than take the subway.” Not only did this motivate the teen, it improved the mother-daughter relationship, since they had more time to talk.

Younger kids can be motivated by a more defined behavioral plan with meaningful rewards. Dr. Anderson cites the example of a fourth grader: As long as he gets up, eats a breakfast from among a few healthy choices, gets dressed quickly, and brushes his teeth without too many parental prompts, he earns points for each of those behaviors. These points translate into 30 minutes of screen time that evening.

## Stay calm

When parents hit bumps in the road and tempers are flaring, they need to think about ways to deescalate the situation, since arguing is a distraction and can damage their relationship with their kids, as well as slow things down even more. There are several ways parents can try to deescalate a situation, such as:

- Speaking in a calm tone
- Being clear about expectations
- Continuing to praise even small efforts rather than focusing on what the child might not be doing
- Focusing on the next step in the process
- Keeping one’s eye on the prize, both in the short and long terms.

It also helps to accept that in least in the short term, things might not be perfect but that by sticking to behavioral strategies, they can improve.

If all else fails, seek professional help.

In situations where kids have difficulty “even getting out of bed or where there’s conflict every morning with screaming fights,” to the point that family function is impaired or there are mental health concerns for either child or parent, Dr. Anderson recommends professional counseling. This could involve behavioral parent training, where caregivers learn to use effective behavior management strategies; coaching the parent and child together for more successful interactions; or working individually with the child on cognitive behavioral therapy to build coping skills and better emotion regulation.

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[https://childmind.org/article/school-mornings-without-the-stress/?fbclid=IwY2xjawHyZelleHRuA2FibQlxMQABHeQj4PIQKAn82fXKnwu1OY7KrlDhL\\_Qps99fu9oVYUr1fCaaDO-hw\\_wk9A\\_aem\\_p21sUBdYst\\_ZzYaJdg6btg](https://childmind.org/article/school-mornings-without-the-stress/?fbclid=IwY2xjawHyZelleHRuA2FibQlxMQABHeQj4PIQKAn82fXKnwu1OY7KrlDhL_Qps99fu9oVYUr1fCaaDO-hw_wk9A_aem_p21sUBdYst_ZzYaJdg6btg)

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