

Parents: Be Compassionate With Yourself. Your Teen Will Love You For It.

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As a parent, you have great responsibilities. You've got to take care of your kids, feed them, do their washing, clean up after them, drive them to and from school/practice/events. You've got to talk to them, listen to them, deal with their fears, mistakes, issues, problems. You've got to make time for them, monitor them, support them, plan and pay for vacations, school, events and their futures. You've got to keep the family together while not letting yourself fall apart.

Being the parent of a teenager can be doubly taxing. Dealing with their challenges, faults, apathy, moodiness, defiance, anger and many other emotions and behaviors can be a full-time job. You probably worry constantly about them, too, whether it's about their schooling, friends, activities, behaviors, safety or futures. You get frustrated by their choices, their apparent indifference toward you and your inability to reach them. Maybe you even think they don't care about you, or that you can't give them what they need, which is why they roll their eyes at you or, worse, not speak with you.

With all this, there are undoubtedly times when you get exhausted, irritated and overwhelmed. And probably instances when you don't feel you're doing a good enough job as a parent, that you simply aren't able to reach them or support them because you don't know how or don't have the time or the patience. Your lack of patience and confidence with them may even cause you to lose faith, patience and confidence in yourself. This can manifest itself in many ways.

If this is the case, given your busy life and responsibilities, you probably have a hard time accepting yourself as you are, being compassionate with yourself, either as a parent or as a person. You might be hard on yourself, beat yourself up, wonder what's wrong with you. Maybe you feel as if you're too much or not enough. You might even expect yourself to be perfect, with your child or with yourself. Check in with yourself and see if this is the case. When are you hard on yourself? Do you demand too much of yourself? What are the signs?

It's important to do this exercise because you need to understand that what you're going through

- a. is normal
- b. affects your child and
- c. can be easily remedied.

First of all, you're not alone. Most parents of teens go through what you do. Raising a teen is hardly the easiest thing in the world. Naturally, you want to be there for them and are concerned about them. You want to make sure they grow up healthy, happy, safe and successful. But you can't always get through to them or see things from their eyes. With good reason. After all, this is the most significant growth and development phase in a person's life.

Teens undergo drastic changes in their physical, mental and emotional make-up. You're both going through a lot. Occasional confusion and even conflict is inevitable. It's not that easy for your teen, just as it isn't for you. But it's normal for both you of you to be going through this process.

Now, if you're not able to be compassionate with yourself and you tend to get down on yourself because of what's going on with you and your teen, then it's going to carry over to your child. If you can't see yourself as good enough, or too much, or not right in how you parent or live your life, your teen will immediately pick this up. When they see this quality in you, they will likely hold it for themselves. By showing them that you aren't accepting and taking care of yourself, you are actually preventing them from loving themselves exactly as they are. A teen is very impressionable, just as they were when they were younger. They are still very much in a learning and growth phase of their life, and they usually take in exactly what they see from their parents.

By not appreciating yourself, you are unconsciously projecting this onto your teen. If you're not compassionate with who you are and what you're doing in your life, your teen is likely to act out your feelings of not being good enough or being too much, and not understanding or accepting what they're going through. The result for your teen can be anything from indifference and silence around you, to low self-esteem and poor performance at school, to depression and high-risk behavior.

With all this in mind, the good news is that you can easily correct this feeling of not being compassionate with yourself. The simple key is to see yourself as plenty good enough exactly the way you are. To understand that you are going through a lot and that challenges are part of parenting and of life. To appreciate all that you do for your child, for your spouse/family, for your friends, your colleagues, and for yourself. How you are is exactly how you should be.

So, how can you show compassion to yourself and model self-care when things get difficult? Maybe it's taking a time-out for yourself. Or going out for a walk or relaxing in a bath. Or showing patience with your teen if you don't agree with them or they make a mistake. Or realizing that it's okay for you or your teen to feel frustrated about something. After all, you are from a different generation than your teen. What you see and think is simply different from what they do because... well, because it should be.

Imagine what could happen if you parented—and lived—from this place most of the time. How would you be different with your child? How would you be different with yourself? Most likely, you would be more understanding and supportive of others, want to listen and share more, and not beat yourself up if things don't always go smoothly. Just tell yourself, "This is normal. It's just part of life." Laugh it off, even. You are plenty good enough, just as you are.

Think about it from your teen's point of view. When they can see that you love yourself exactly as you are, and take care of yourself when you need to, and don't take things personally with

them, they get it. You're modeling self-care and self-compassion for them. Imagine what that would do for them. If they could see that they are good enough and that who they are and what they want in life is valuable. If they could see that you support them from that place—even in they decide to get an earring or dye their hair—then they realize that they can start living into what they want to be in life, knowing that you are there to trust and believe in them.

The lesson, in short, is: When you are compassionate and caring to yourself, you are giving yourself a gift of love and acceptance and can in turn give this gift back to your child.

So with this in mind, ask yourself some of these questions:

- How can you become a lover of what is (in yourself, in your feelings, in your teen, in your life, etc.)?
- How would you experience life if you could love exactly what is in your life? Even if you've had a hard day or hard life, how can you still love it and yourself?
- How can you have faith in the job you've already done as a parent, and trust that you can always support your child?
- What can you do to let your teen see how wonderful you feel about yourself?
- What can you do to support and respect what they are doing and who they are? How can you teach them to do the same with you and others in their life?
- How can you help ensure their happiness and give them what they need?
- What questions can you ask your teen that will engage them and earn their respect?

So again, love yourself exactly as you are. Rest assured, it'll carry over to your teen. When you realize there is no such thing as a perfect parent or person, you will automatically have more compassion for yourself, your child and others.

The result:

1. You will become a better parent and
2. your teen will become a better person. By accepting how each of you is, you can both become even more of who you want to be.