

Dr Dan *for* Today

An Emotional Survival Guide for Teenagers

This month's newsletter is written for teens. If you are a teenager, this is for you. If you know a teen, pass it along.

This month, we will explore the hardest things about being a teen and ways to make it easier on yourself. We will talk about why life is such an emotional challenge at times, and what you can do to make it less stressful. With the strategies we'll be talking about, you may even *enjoy* your teen years.

The following strategies can help you survive your teenage years.

1. *Understand what emotional changes to expect.* It always helps to know what you're getting into. When you know what to expect, the changes of adolescence don't come as such a surprise. It's like seeing the trailer before you see the movie, or reading the table of contents before you start a book. It gives you a sense of what's to come, so you feel prepared.
2. *Get to know yourself better.* The teen years can be very confusing. You often may feel like you're not the same person you were when you got up this morning. How do you keep track of your changing self? One way is to keep a journal, a private notebook where you write about your feelings.
3. *Look for positive influences.* The teen years can be less stressful if you have a role model. This means someone whom you would consider a mentor, a good example, or someone to pattern yourself after. Role models are important because they set an example for you to follow. If you admire someone and model yourself after him or her, it can give you some direction and some goals. Think about the people who are positive influences in your life. They might be family members, teachers, leaders, or famous people you will never meet but whom you admire just the same.
4. *Practice thinking for yourself.* It is a sign of strong self-esteem. It means that you know you matter, and that you value your ability to think. Thinking for yourself means that you ask questions, rather than just accepting what people tell you.
5. *Learn to be assertive.* Assertive behavior is another sign of self-esteem. It usually means that a person values him- or herself. Assertiveness is standing up for yourself and protecting your own interests.
6. *Learn to present yourself with confidence.* Here is one way to develop confidence. First, make a list of at least five things you do well. Then make a list of at least five things you *don't* do very well. Choose something to do from the first list every day. This will make you feel good about yourself. Then, when you're feeling good, do something from the second list. You will see that the way you feel about yourself at the moment can greatly affect how you perform.
7. *Learn to express your opinions.* Here are some tips:
 - a. Know what you want to say. Organize your facts and arguments.

- b. Choose the best moment. Having good timing can make a huge difference in the impact your statement makes.
- c. Look friendly. People will be more receptive to you if you smile.
- d. Develop your listening skills.
- e. Watch your voice. Speak clearly and not too loudly.
- f. Disagree in a pleasant and polite way. Being rude or unfriendly turns people off and lessens your impact.
- g. Know the difference between facts and opinions. Facts will help you win your argument.
- h. Acknowledge the other point of view. People may not agree with you. You have more power when you acknowledge that others have a right to a different point of view.

8. Find out what you believe in. One of the tasks of adolescence is to find out what you believe in, what you value in life. This process involves questioning the ideas of people around you, especially your parents. It is understandable that you will reject some of the values and beliefs of your parents, but there are constructive ways of disagreeing.

9. Learn to disagree productively. There are plenty of nonproductive ways to disagree with parents and other authority figures, such as temper tantrums, violent behavior, rebellious behavior, and disobeying laws. You will have more success if you learn the more productive ways to disagree, such as developing your negotiation skills or by forming or joining a debate group.

10. Create your own private place. As you grow older, you have a greater need for a private place that is all your own. You need it as a place to escape to, but also as a place where you can create your own life. At the end of adolescence, you will be an adult, ready to go out into the world. You will need to be ready to stand on your own, as an independent and responsible person. It helps if you have some things you can call your own, such as:

- a. A private space
- b. A place to play music
- c. A place to study and read
- d. A place to write down your thoughts and feelings, such as a private journal
- e. Places to meet friends
- f. Your own money
- g. Your own possessions

11. Make a few good friends. Making new friends takes some effort. Some people seem to make friends quite easily, while others find it difficult. It's mostly a matter of learning a few skills. See if you can develop behaviors like these:

- a. Smile; appear friendly.
- b. Say "Hi."
- c. Ask questions.
- d. Give compliments.
- e. Join groups.
- f. Ask for information. ("Where did you get your jacket?")

g. Be interested.

12. Find someone you can talk to. Just in case you hadn't noticed, adolescence can be a highly emotional time. You are learning new things every day and you are not always ready to meet the demands of social situations. It's very important to have someone you can talk to during this time. Different people can help you with different kinds of problems. The important thing is that when you start to feel stressed, it means you probably need to let it out. Look for help from people like these:

- a. Parents
- b. Siblings
- c. Relatives
- d. Minister
- e. Doctors
- f. Psychotherapists
- g. Police officers
- h. Teachers
- i. School psychologist
- j. Guidance counselor
- k. Your friends
- l. Friends' parents
- m. Neighbors

13. Learn teamwork skills. Being a part of a team is an important skill, and it will become even more important when you are an adult. Teamwork skills include things like these:

- a. Cooperating
- b. Making decisions
- c. Being loyal
- d. Encouraging others
- e. Planning
- f. Problem solving
- g. Supporting
- h. Trusting

I have discussed some of the hardest things about being a teenager and ways to make it easier on yourself. I have talked about why life is such an emotional challenge at times, and what you can do to make it less stressful. With these strategies you'll have the opportunity *enjoy* and can help you survive your teenage years. Enjoy these years. They seem all of your life now, but they go by faster than you can even imagine.

Dr. Dan Trathen is a minister, psychologist, international co-author, and national speaker. His counseling office is located at 19284 Cottonwood Dr., Parker, CO 80138. He can be reached by calling 303-593-0575 vm111 or by visiting his website at www.DrTrathen.com.