



Understanding Your Teen

Communication, problem solving, decision-making, and stress responses are all greatly affected by perceptions of teens and their parents. Whenever people observe another's behavior, hear words being spoken or receive information through other senses, conclusions are drawn about what was meant or intended. Parents' conclusions may differ from their teens'.

Interpretation of another's behavior is based on values, beliefs, and experiences. So for a parent, an important step in checking interpretations with one's teen is to ask some basic questions:

- "Do you mean.....?"
- "Are you seeing.....?"
- "Are you feeling.....?"

Checking out an interpretation before responding or acting takes only a minute or so, but could make a difference in a mistaken message. Therefore, take the time to carefully consider what has happened, what is going on, and what is involved in this situation. Try to recognize overreactions, faulty assumptions, and take-for-granted's growing out of your values or previous experiences. Also, talk out problems with someone. This person's views and experiences may bring clearer or different perspectives to your attention.

Assumptions about "Teens" are often stated by others in our culture-and many of them are negative. Parents need to guard against this too-easy prejudice. Get to know your teen as an individual. What is your teen's favorite meal? What is your teen's favorite class in school? Least favorite class? Who is your teen's closest friend? Who is your teen's favorite singer or musical group? What is your teen's greatest strength?

Be positive with your teen. Being optimistic (or having positive expectations) improves success, and being pessimistic discourages teens. We communicate expectations to our teens through our tone of voice, facial expressions, touch, and posture. These expectations may help or hinder youth by influencing their self-perceptions. They will live up to or down to what appears to be expected of them.

The age of adolescence is a challenging, yet exciting time. Facing it with a positive outlook, and keeping in mind the role perception plays, can help you to further understand your teen and make time together enjoyable.

Source: *Positive Parenting of Teens*, University of Minnesota Extension Service

For more information on parenting call INFO-U at 612-624-2200 and request a catalog of available topics.

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