

How to Give Advice to Teens

Here's a question I hear from parents a lot - and to be fair, it's one I've asked myself many times:

How come when I suggest something to my daughter she gets mad, but when *someone else* says the same thing she acts as though it's a brilliant piece of advice?

Doesn't she realize that I'm trying to save her trouble? Doesn't she realize I'm trying to *help*?

Ocean currents

Fact: There's a deep ocean current that circles the earth, sixteen times as powerful as all the world's rivers combined. The water we *can't* see is by far more powerful than the water we *can* see.

I wondered what happens under the surface for my daughter when we give advice to teens. I suspect there's quite a lot.

I've been a parent for 19 years, and I like to think I know my daughter pretty well. But she's always changing, and I can't know who she is becoming.

When she's hustling to meet a deadline because she spent too long sleeping in and texting her friends, I see a problem that needs solving.

I wondered what *she* sees, so I asked. I said I wanted to write about her point of view as a teen and as a student, and share those views with you.

What We Do vs Who We Are

"Why can't I make a simple suggestion," I asked. "Why can't I offer advice and have it taken seriously?" 

As we talked, I realized that there is indeed something deeper going on: a force that moves all teens and young adults, and makes it hard to give advice to teens. It's the powerful drive to become more their own person.

The most important parts of who my daughter is are almost invisible - especially if I forget to tune in because I'm so focused on [time management](#) and homework.

Here's what she said:

A Peek Into the Depths

"You think you know what I need to do, so you tell me. Because it's *right*. And you're trying to help. I get that. And it's hard for you because it seems like I'm not on top of things. And sometimes that's the case.

But high school and college students - we're really into autonomy. My friends and I, we get autonomy by pursuing our ideas, without the help or encouragement of parents. We like it *better* when things are our idea.

Suggestions, action steps, they challenge our autonomy. Just hearing them rankles. Even when I know you're trying to help."

Even if I was headed toward certain disaster, I'd rather have that disaster than unsolicited input from my parents, than having my mom step at the last second and save me.

Students do best when they put pressure on *themselves*.

Because ultimately, the only person that can save me from procrastinating is me. And if I don't figure it out now, I'll have to figure it out in college, or after college, and that will lead to tears.

And some of us have more important things in our lives than being students. Even if you don't agree. We have friends, relationships, drama, health problems, sports.

It's a catch-22. You're worried. But it's really hard for us to hear things directly from parents."

What Teens Want (Maybe)

“So what can a parent do”, I asked, “if my son or daughter is a junior or senior in high school, and I see a row of zeros in Powerschool?”

“First,” she said, “take some deep calming breaths.”

[Side bar: It’s so gratifying (and unsettling) to hear your own instructions back from your kids]

“Then count to 10.

Then recognize that your kid might not agree with you.

They might want to talk with their friends before they do homework.

They might want to try a few things on their own.

They might mess up.

And that’s okay.

That’s when it’s time to bring in someone else to give advice. Find someone else to help your kid figure things out. It’s time to outsource. Someone at their school. A relative maybe. A therapist. [An academic coach.](#)”

And then maybe, she said, ask a question:

“Anything I can do to help you get started?”

“Do you need some help with that?”

“Would you like to talk?”

How to give advice to teens

Here’s what I learned from this conversation:

Teens *can* hear your advice. It’s just that they can’t always hear it from *you*. Or at least not right away. Let someone else give advice to teens (for now). A teacher. A coach. A family friend.

What your teen *can* hear, now, is your offer of help.

And they hear it best in the form of questions.

Questions are more powerful than advice, in the long run, because they get us thinking.

Questions touch, and move along with, those deeper currents.

If you’re wondering how to give advice to your teen around school issues, and you’re looking for an academic coach, check out the “Skills for Academic Success” program. Pat LaDouceur helps stressed-out students study smarter, get better grades, and still have time for friends and fun. Your teen might want to check out this page on [Study Skills and Academic Coaching](#).