

Dear QSI Community,

As we continue with virtual learning, and the unusual situation of being home as a family, this week I would like to address teenagers, technology and time.

I began working with adolescents in 2001. People often joke about teenagers and their negative attitudes: notoriously emotional, unpredictable and self-centered. Naturally, teachers and parents are always seeking the key to working with them in positive, productive relationships. The answer to getting along with a teenager in my experience is simple: Like them. That's right. Enjoy their ideas, their company, their jokes, and even their dramatic darkness. Simply by engaging with them on what they care about, I learn about a whole new world from the teens in my life.

Something I have come to realize about the reality for today's adolescents is that, despite getting a lot of negative press, they must work harder and engage more in intellectual competition for university than my generation ever had to do. Indeed, if there is one positive out of this public health crisis, it is my hope that universities understand you don't have to crush a student with test-anxiety to recognize they are worthy to enroll at your school.

But before students make the leap to university, they have many formative years with you in an ever-evolving parent/child contract. When they are toddlers, they can't be in a room alone; when they are teens, they need to be home at a certain time. As they continue to grow, your relationship evolves along with their development, and as in all contracts, sometimes the negotiations can be sticky. This may have come into focus lately within your own household. Here are a few "tried and true" ideas from me about living with a teenager during quarantine for your mental health as well as theirs.

a. Technology — the constant switch-tracking and pinging going on makes us all act like dogs in a hotel room. We are nervous, on alert, and our brains are trying to decide if we are safe or threatened. Tech rules are paramount for everyone. Phones turned off and in a basket in the parent's room by midnight is a reasonable rule. So is a family "phone-free Saturday."

b. Meals — it doesn't have to be dinner, but one meal a day should be eaten all together. Unless we are emergency responders, no one has so much work they can't eat as a family at least once a day.

c. Fresh air — dragging your teen outside may not be easy, but it needs to be a family expectation. Expanding your lungs and feeling sunshine is needed for all of us. Whether coffee on the balcony, gardening or walking around the block, these moments help tell our brains we are free.

d. Do distraction — I have made a career of telling parents to not be their child's best friend. I am taking it back. They need you now. Teaching them to play cards, watching a concert video with them of their favorite band, looking up your old high school friends on social media and talking about what high school was like for you, all of these are distractions. Distractions are not time wasters. They connect us. Enjoy them.

e. Hygiene — yes. Showering, getting dressed, drinking water — all of these help to improve mood and feel more "normal." When we look better, we feel better.

f. Manage your own negativity — your teenagers neuro pathways in their brain are rapidly developing thought patterns. These pathways can be strengthened by both negative and positive thinking. In short,

this life experience will change your child's brain. Make sure you manage your own negativity and continually monitor theirs. Keep reminding them that we have lots to be thankful for.

Fast forward 10 years down the road, how will you and your child remember this time?

If as you read this you need help, or are concerned about your teen, please do reach out to your school counselor or administrator. I wish you and your family continued good health.

Kind Regards,

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