



Riding The Wave: Surviving The Teen Years

By Thelma Dirkes

The teen years are like so many crashing waves that are so large we think they will surely drown us.

We'll do a number of things.

- We meet the waves head on and hope we have the stamina to stay afloat.
- We swim for our lives hoping the waves will never catch us -- but they usually do.
- Or we climb on a surfboard, stretch our arms out for balance and we ride the wave!

Question:

If you swim into the **natural** path of a crashing wave, do you tell the wave to stop or do you prepare yourself for the inevitable and attempt to let the wave take you where you would like it to take you?

We know all you tired parents out there are not in the mood for endless metaphors.

But we don't care, that's our job -- to initiate ideas and thoughts about parenting, parenting, and more parenting. But before you say, "You're all wet," let's rephrase the question.

You find your defiant teenager in front of you.

Do you tell him to stop being a defiant teenager or do you prepare yourself by empathizing and familiarizing yourself with this normal and inevitable developmental stage?

What is your goal with your teenager -- to always win, to always be right, or to come out of the whole experience with a reasonably intact relationship with your teenager?

We forget that we're dealing with a natural, developmental phase -- the teen years.

And, like ocean waves, some are smooth and short, some have major white caps coming one after another, and some are towering, rumbling, turning rolls of fast water. So what's a parent to do?

Start waxing your surfboards everyone, surf's up!

For starters, let's look at the developmental stage between 12 and 18 years of age:

Physical:

- Their bodies begin to change and they go through a growth spurt.
- Early maturation or concerns about meeting physical “ideals” may cause anxiety.
- Hormones are surging.
- There is an increase in emotional outbursts.

Remember ?

Social/Emotional:

They need guidance with expressing anger and dealing with mood swings.
They begin to develop their own sense of identity and values.
They have a strong reliance on their peers.
Their peers often will dictate their behaviors, ideas and values.

Increased conflicts with parents may be caused by differences in expectations and the teens' natural effort to separate from their parents so that they can develop into an “individual” – not an extension of the family. This effort can be expressed by extreme hairstyles, clothing, and/or defiant behavior.

Intellectual:

- Reason
- form ideas
- question
- and analyze.

It may feel uncomfortable when they're practicing these skills on you, **especially if their ideas and values are in conflict with yours.**

Think of it as a milestone - they are becoming adult thinkers. But don't get too comfortable yet – these skills are not fully developed until they're about 21 years old.

Okay that's the surfboard.

So what kind of balancing is necessary to stay upright? You'll have to bend a little. You'll have to reach out and hold back depending on the speed and height of the wave. Understand the momentum behind the wave. Respect the wave when it's mild and pleasant and also when it's powerful and strong. And love its natural beauty and its place in the world.

And always keep in mind -- waves will pass. Things are constantly changing. We find ourselves in situations that seem to never end -- yet we later look back at those moments and find they are nothing more than distant memories, just like the ocean waves.