



Curse of the Teenager

By Thelma Dirkes

"I just don't understand teenagers!!"

"What happened to that child I loved?"

"It's like a spaceship from an alien planet stole my child and replaced him with a sullen, dissatisfied stranger!"

Choose your battles wisely. What kids choose to wear or how they shear their hair are non-destructive ways of expressing their individuality. Most teens want to show their autonomy by being different.

Avoid confrontations or disengage when you're in a heated argument with your teen. Most teens will confront and will try to draw you into a fight. They're experimenting -- expressing new ideas and values, practicing their ability to convince by using newly acquired verbal skills and their ability to keep arguing until parents drop from exhaustion.

Teens are testing limits.

Establish a few realistic family expectations and rules with pre-determined consequences (have your children participate in the formation of family rules and consequences). Again, be realistic! Rules that are impossible to follow and consequences that are not practical or doable can lead to constant failures and anger.

Keep the lines of communication open.

If all your teenager can do is grunt and sneer, keep this thought in mind:

"That alien spaceship did not take your loving child away, he's still there in that teenage cocoon waiting to burst out as a beautiful butterfly."

Despite the attitude, continue to talk lovingly and amicably with your teens, because years from now, when they're parents, they'll find out. Just wait.

Personal thoughts from the author:

There are other parents who are just as frustrated and puzzled about the "Curse of the Teenager".

It's a difficult time for parents -- and a difficult time for those "belligerent, "ill-tempered" teenagers. My parents told me when I was growing up:

"Just wait `til you have kids of your own... you'll find out."

Boy -- were they ever right!

When my son was 14...

I smugly believed my husband and I had a wonderful relationship with our son. I would proudly say,

"He likes being with us and he joins us in all of our activities."

That was true until that day I came home and saw my son standing before me with a sheepish grin and his hair dyed bright red. It was the beginning of something I foolishly thought would never happen - that "something" my mother wished upon me years ago - *"Just wait, you'll find out"*.

Not wanting to over-react...I told my son,
"You should've dyed your eyebrows too."

I was proud of my restraint and knew that my excellent parenting skills would prevail and his teen defiance would be short-lived! However, no one's immune, not even smug, "know-it-all" parents like myself.

A year into my son's teen-defiance stage...

there were no signs of change, except for his hair. His hair had gone through several stages:

- a pony-tailed-shaved-around-the-side look
- a shaved-all-over look
- a multi-colored-like-spumoni-spiky-hair look
- an orange Mohawk that's great for concerts and for moshing look
- the lime-green dreadlocks-in-every-direction look.

His attitude has gone through the gamut...from dreadful to even more dreadful.

However, I received a lot of support and a few tips from friends, mostly parents who have survived their children's teen years. The tips on this page will get you started!