



PARENTING TEENAGERS DURING CORONAVIRUS QUARANTINE

Strange and scary times we are living in!

There is a reasonable likelihood that if you have teenagers, you are or are about to be, faced with the possibility of experiencing some sort of restricted movement scenario which could result in you and your kids being isolated in the same building for the length of a short custodial sentence.

If the idea of being locked up with your own offspring for more than 3 days is as terrifying to you as it is to me, then this little note is for you.

If you are one of the amazing minority of people who relish uninterrupted proximity to adolescent versions of yourself, I do hope you enjoy this most blessed of seasons. But this little missive is probably not essential reading for you.

Those of us parents who were born after the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918 (which has become my wife's latest historical fascination) have not experienced anything like what is happening now.

So, it goes without saying that for our teenagers, this whole experience is like otherworldly new.

That means we find ourselves in the unique situation of working out what is best and how we should respond to a completely new set of variables in real-time, while our teenagers are watching us closely (without showing it) to get some ideas on how they should process current events.

Oh, and we have to do this while locked in our own family version of Big Brother House (minus the cameras) hoping to be able to welcome intruders one day.

So, what to do.....

Well in these days of toilet paper famines and facemasks, I thought I would offer some simple encouragements.

DON'T BE A SUPER PARENT

During Coronavirus season, the last thing you need to be doing is trying to win parent of the year award (as the ceremony will likely be cancelled anyway.) All those parenting goals you set for yourself at the start of the year (or maybe sometime in 2017), probably need to be reprioritised and potentially replaced with something like;

“let's get through this the best way we can.”

In times of great uncertainty, high anxiety, and police patrols in supermarkets, trying to optimise your parenting to new levels of efficiency, wisdom and self-control may not be the most practical course to chart.

Cut yourself some slack.

Cut your kids and your partner some slack.

We are all going to have a few more wobbly parts to our day than usual. And while that might not feel great, it is to be expected.

And it is perfectly okay to let our normal standards and modes of operating as a family flex a little.

It's okay if the usage of Netflix, iPads, and gaming consoles increases – if ever there was a time for such technology it is now.

It's okay if your self-isolated teenager gets a bit more sleep than usual, it might make them more bearable.

It's okay that you aren't as calm and composed quite as often as you to be, life is stressful and the stress is going to be visible sometimes.

It's okay if your teen is on social media a bit more because there is no group in society more horrified by the term "social distancing" than teenagers.

There are no books or research done on raising adolescents during global pandemics (that I know of) so what best practice entails at this time is an open domain waiting for you to define it as you go.

So feel free to blaze your own trail, and get through all this the best way you can.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.

The best thing you can do for your teenager at this time to make sure you are taking care of yourself.

In particular, that means being honest with yourself about your own levels of anxiety, disappointment, and helplessness. We are all struggling with these unprecedented events, and all in our own way. But it is important we give ourselves permission to acknowledge the uncomfortable feelings and process them constructively.

The alternative is to ignore your anxiety about your health, your family's safety, your income, your job, the lack of pasta at the supermarket, and then becoming distant, irritable, or overly harsh towards your kids (while also turning into a hoarder and watching prepper videos on Youtube).

The uncertainty is real, and you are absolutely entitled to feel stressed and a bit out of control. But as you are a grown-up you are also in a position to choose how to care for yourself and let others care for you.

Be humble enough to admit when the stress starts to get big on you.

Try and find some quiet space (without a news feed) to process what is going and collect your thoughts.

Take a nap.

Call a friend to vent or unwind with.

Let your partner know what is worrying you.

When you do things like this, you put yourself in a much better place to be present for your teenager and engage with their uncertainty and anxiety.

IMAGINE BEING A TEENAGER TODAY

It's not like your teenager wasn't processing enough uncertainty and insecurity prior to the whole world going into lockdown.

Although the idea of not being allowed to go to school without being suspended seems like some sort of adolescent dream, deep down there will be some real disappointment and frustration for lots of teenagers if they can't go to school.

Representative sports will be missed, concerts will be cancelled, camps called off, excursions are off the agenda for the year. Some of these events your teen won't get another chance at.

Then there will be the everyday losses. Lunchtime with friends, keeping an eye on the latest crush, playing in the band, soccer on the oval, handball comps, joking around on the bus and just having physical proximity to the most important people in life – their friends.

So when your teen becomes a little too much, try to remember they are missing out on stuff, and that isn't easy for a generation who have taken FOMO to the next level.

IDEAS FOR PARENTING YOUR TEENS

While there are no rule books, a couple of ideas on how you could make this term of restriction and confinement slightly more bearable.

Encourage them to get some fresh air every day. Not everyone has a yard where offspring can run around, and the weather in some parts of the world might not be perfect for relaxing outdoors. But if your teen can get at least a few minutes of direct sunlight on their face, and breathe some fresh air every day, this will go some way to reducing cabin fever.

Give them some space. We are all going to need somewhere in the house that is just for us to have some time alone and not have any other person encroaching on our personal space. Your teen is no different. Define an area where they can just be for defined periods of time without having to worry about anyone bothering them.

Expect some frustration, and try not to take it personally. The double whammy of missing out on normal activities and being couped up with their family for what will feel like an inhumane length of time will likely result in outbursts of frustration and dissatisfaction. On more than a few occasions, it is probable your teen will express how much they dislike the house, the family, your parenting, the lack of anything to watch on TV (I know,) or even just life in general. When they do, try not to take it personally (easier said than done) and hear it instead as them saying “Coronavirus sucks!”

Let them talk about how they are feeling – if you have one of those teenagers that talk. Anxiety, anger, disappointment, and frustration are all feelings that are entirely appropriate during this season of chaos. If your teen expresses these types of feelings, that is good. Resist the urge to try and fix them, minimise what is happening, or utter platitudes about everything being okay. It doesn't feel okay to them, because in lots of ways it is not. What your teenager will benefit from most is someone to sit with them in the “not okayness” of it all and validate that what they are feeling is appropriate and makes sense.

The only caveat to the above is for teens whose anxiety can get a bit out of control, some coaching on mindfulness and relaxation might come in handy, as well as some calm talk at the right time that keeps some perspective- maybe riffing on the ideas that the world is not ending and this season will pass eventually.

Share honestly with your teenager. It is good to let your teen know that this is all new for you also. Appropriately share your own feelings of uncertainty and helplessness. Let your teen know that you never expected trips to the supermarket would be like competing in the Hunger Games, or to see airports become deserted open spaces of peace and tranquillity. Knowing that these events are disconcerting to you will help your teen be more okay with how they are processing things.

Of course, my caveat to this is you still need to be the grown-up and not dump all your emotional junk onto your 14-year-old in some sort of cathartic release. If you need to completely drop your bundle, or even just half your bundle, find an adult shoulder to cry on.

So hang in there! This too will pass one day, and in the meantime, you and your teenager have a unique opportunity to bond. I will leave you with the hope that sooner rather than later we might run into each other in a public place and not have to worry about decontaminating.

If you want more ideas on getting through this with your teenager, sign up to the free email course below. Get an email a day for 7 days with ideas and strategies for parenting a teen in lock-down!

Be kind and courageous!



FREE 7 day email course with survival strategies to help
parents isolated with their **teenagers!**

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