

2-8-18 Raising a Teen, a Hair-Raising Experience?

I recall being nineteen years old, in a college psychology class when the professor announced that the very concept of a teenager did not always exist. That was news to me. How could they not have existed? They are between children and adults. Of course, they must have always existed! But, then you learn about child labor keeping young people as a monetary resource and one-room school houses and “older children’s” restrictions on acting independently, such as before the car gave them freedom to do so. And then you begin to see things differently. Teenagers did not always exist. They used to quickly transition to adulthood. The children learned a trade or their position in life. They prepared for that and most often married early, had children, and perpetuated the cycle.

It seems a long time ago that my household was dominated by teenagers. Yes, they were a handful and before the use of cell phones or even emails with the teachers, who knew what my teenagers were up to?

My talking to them about the importance of trust and honesty and consequences is not an outdated concept by any means but life does seem to get more complicated and at an ever increasingly rate of speed. How does a parent keep up?

I am very conscious of the immediacy of this question when I speak with friends of teens (and even younger children). One such friend was disturbed by her fifteen-year old daughter’s terminology and she did not like or approve of these phrases! Heck, she did not even understand it!

Sound familiar?

I suggested my friend check out (frequently) websites on teen lingo and texting acronyms to stay in touch and to decipher the meaning. With that said, don’t initially panic if you discover something seemingly alarming. That is the time to talk and discover. It may be a misunderstanding and the teen may honestly have been mimicking without understanding of the original meaning. For instance, if you see the term “DOPE” on your teen’s phone, it does not necessarily mean pot or any other kind of drug. It has evolved/changed/developed, as language always does, to also mean something along the lines of seriously great. Young people imitate, and they want to fit in. Sometimes they are innocent of the origin of a term. Remember when we used to say “Bad!” meaning cool?

The phrase that bothered my friend was “Fight me”. She could not understand why her daughter was saying this. She took it literally and was very concerned her daughter meant it literally. Therefore, her sweet usually non-confrontational daughter, was headed for a fight she would not be able to handle!

It turns out that in current slang, it means more like indifference; a nicer way of say “Bite me.”

My friend began to look at teen slang sites and began to recognize other previously confusing terms. It turns out that when her teenage daughter said, “You are so lit!” That was a compliment, as in “You are amazing.”

In addition to teen slang and texting acronyms, it is interesting to note that in their quest for independence they often do not realize how much of a follower they have become. We are all influenced by our surroundings. Even our accent or voice can change. We can put on airs or refuse them. We are still influenced. If we are, then of course our young people are.

A couple weeks after talking to the same friend who was concerned about the Fight Me phenomenon, I asked (not thinking of her daughter at all), You remember how the Valley Girl talk seemed so silly decades ago and yet we now see that it has morphed and remained? Educated women, journalists, documentarians, frequently use the “interrogatory declaration”. They end their sentences in an upward lilt. There is no need; it is just done. They have been influenced.

Have you noticed the latest trend, called “vocal fry”? It is usually a female and the voice is a low and gravelly, creaky sort of voice that is creeping into tv shows, and even journalism. I hear it more and more.

Well, my friend cracked up laughing because only the night before, her daughter came to her to ask a question and the parents were asking, “Why are you talking like that?” “Like what?” she asked, because she was unaware of the influence and unaware she was trying out a new way of talking. Well, it was new for her, anyway. A great way to start off a conversation, with accusations, questions and misunderstandings!

(Who remembers the lyrics, “Everybody’s talkin’ ‘bout a new way of walkin’”. Do you want to lose your mind?” Thank you, Rooftop Singers!)

They are turbulent waters and hair raising at times, for sure, but they are more easily navigated by staying in touch. I am not suggesting parents adopt the teen lingo. That would surely embarrass the them! Stay informed so that you can understand. And that will help to avoid misunderstandings.

It is a challenge. Raise them with love and understanding. The love and understanding will eventually return home.

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