

THE  
RITES OF  
PASSAGE  
INSTITUTE

# HOW TO PARENT TEENAGERS

5 THINGS EVERY FATHER & MOTHER REALLY NEEDS TO KNOW



WRITTEN BY DR ARNE RUBINSTEIN

# THE CHANGE BEGINS



WITH US

Parenting a teenager can be one of the most wonderful and exciting things you will ever do. Hopefully they are passionate, intense, fun and full of surprises. But there is also another side to this experience.

Somewhere between ages 11 and 16, things are going to change very dramatically for your son or daughter. They are going to be taken over by hormones and go through massive physical changes in a very short space of time. Overnight your adorable, cuddly, cute little boy or girl can transform into a stranger who either no longer talks to you or has extreme emotional outbursts at the smallest thing ... or for no reason at all.

I believe that this period of time as they become young men and women is critical and how we as parents handle it will affect not only the wellbeing of our children, but also our relationship with them for the rest of their lives. I have devoted my professional career to this time of life because I have seen how some teenagers adjust to their new reality extremely well and are happy, motivated and looking forward positively in their lives, whereas others are angry, withdrawn and basically just looking for trouble.

I want to do everything I can to support parents to know what to do to give their young men and women every chance to do well and not go off the rails during their adolescence.



When our children are young we do all we can to try to set them up for their future by keeping them safe and teaching them about the world. The teenage years are often considered the hardest years as it's that in-between time when they are no longer children, but also not fully developed adults.

They want independence, they're learning about responsibilities and coming to terms with who they are as individuals. They want to be able to do what they want and don't want us telling them how to live their lives. However as parents we also don't want them to make really big mistakes, struggle too much or get hurt. After all, they are still our kids and we want to see them do well. However the more we try to do it all for them, the more we try and shelter them, the more they are likely to rebel or simply withdraw into their shells.

## REMEMBER

Teenagers are not just big kids and we can't go on parenting them as if they are.

**The way we parent needs to change.**





One of the big things about being a teenager is finding their own feet, growing from experience and being able to trust their own wisdom. Their mistakes will be great learning opportunities and our support from the sidelines, whether they succeed or fail, is invaluable.

The change from boy to young man and girl to young woman has to happen not only physically, but also in the way that they think and act.

I have created a model that describes the difference between Child Behaviour and Healthy Adult Behaviour.

(see table on page 5).

One of the biggest differences is that a child believes they are the centre of the universe and the most important person in the world. A healthy adult realises that they are connected to those around them and their actions have an effect on others.

Adults also take responsibility for their actions whereas children tend to blame others and always think that they are right.

# Child

## BEHAVIOR

"I am the centre of the universe, it's all about me"

"I take no responsibility for my actions"

"I want a mother who does everything for me (boy) and I want a hero father (girl)"



HEALTHY

# ADULT

## BEHAVIOR

"I am part of a community and I have to be aware of others and what they need"

"I realise that my actions affect others and that is important"

"I want a relationship with the feminine (man) and I want to engage with the masculine (woman)"

There are a number of things that have to happen in order for our children to go through the shift to behaving as adults and most importantly is that we as parents actually support it to happen.



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# IN A NUTSHELL

If we keep treating our kids as children they will keep acting as children.

This e-book is a simple and practical guide to some of the key differences between how to parent your children when they are young compared to when they are teenagers.

I have divided this book into two sections, one for fathers and one for mothers, however most of what I say is relevant to both. Regardless of your own situation – whether you are living together or not – it is actually really important that you support each other in how you parent and both be aware of what you are trying to do in order to help your teenager to thrive.



# IMPORTANT TIPS

## FOR MOTHERS AND FATHERS



If you're a mother, it's also important that you read the tips for fathers, and if you're a father, it's important that you read the tips for mothers. This is a challenging time for both parents so it's important that you not only understand the parenting role of your partner, but to support them and subsequently strengthen your own relationships.

If you're a single parent, the information below will help you to identify great mentors and role models within your circle of family and friends or even the larger community.



# SECTION ONE FATHERS

BIG TIPS FOR DADS IN RAISING HEALTHY, HAPPY  
TEENAGERS AND KEEPING A STRONG  
RELATIONSHIP

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# FATHERS



The quality of the relationship you have with your teenage son or daughter will have an incredible impact on their lives. If it is healthy, then you will be able to support them not only to reach their potential, but they will also feel safe to come to you at those times when things aren't going so well and they really need your help.

Here are 5 essential strategies you can use to have a healthy and supportive relationship with your teenager.

Remember, how you parent a teenager is very different from how you parent a child and I will explain some key things that need to change in your approach.

# ONE

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DON'T TELL THEM HOW TO  
LIVE THEIR LIVES

(THIS IS A REALLY BIG ONE  
FOR US DADS)

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"I want my teenager to be making good choices and personal decisions about the life they want to live and to be doing so responsibly."

When they are young it is actually your role as a father to teach and set boundaries for your children. They need to know what is ok and you, along with their mother, make the decisions around when they go to bed, what clothes they wear, where they go to school, etc.

The simple fact is that once they are teenagers they don't want you to tell them how they should be living their lives and what they should be doing. This is often the hardest thing to get across to fathers.

If you are having problems getting your head around this then think about when you were a teenager and whether you appreciated your father telling you how to live your life. He may even be still trying to do so today even though you are a grown adult with children of your own.



# TWO

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## SPEND TIME DOING SOMETHING YOU BOTH ENJOY (AND TURN OFF YOUR MOBILE PHONE)

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The most effective way to show a child that he/she is loved and to strengthen your relationship is to give them your time and to do things together without any distractions.

This is something that shouldn't change from when they are children. To maintain and continue to build a healthy relationship with your teenager, or anybody in fact, you need to be spending time together, one-on-one, which means without anybody else. Find something you both really enjoy – there are millions of examples including doing things in nature, playing sport or exercising, going out for meals or even travelling together. And by the way, you can have heaps of fun while you're doing it. I am a surfer and I just love going for a surf with either of my sons. We have also been on road trips together and been horseriding.

I also highly recommend that when you are having your time together that you turn off your mobile phone and ask them to do the same. Really give them your full and undivided attention. The important thing is to just be doing the activity and not asking them millions of questions or telling them what to do. You may well find that it is on the drive home or some time afterwards that they will open up and start sharing with you or ask a really important question.





# THREE

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## HELP AND SUPPORT THEM TO FIND WHAT THEY REALLY LOVE TO DO

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When a child feels their dad loves them for who they actually are, it gives them confidence to explore and express that part of themselves.

One of the critical things for a teenager is a need to work out what direction they should be taking in their lives. It is so important to realise that every single one of our children is different and they all have their own unique gifts and talents, they all have genius and they all have their own spirit.

Fathers play such a major role in helping teenagers recognise where their gifts lie and this can be done by making sure that you notice what they do well, what they are good at, what the things are that you love, admire and respect about them ... and of course telling them.

If you have a look at my [TEDx talk](#) you will see how I honour my son. If you don't want to watch the whole 17-minute presentation you can skip forward to 12 minutes into my talk to see an example of what I'm talking about here.



# FOUR

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DISCIPLINE **DON'T** SHAME ...

SEPARATE THE PERSON FROM  
THE BEHAVIOUR

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"I want my children to know if they are ever really in trouble that they can feel safe and confident to come to me for help."

I always ask when I give presentations if there is anyone in the audience who never once did something as a teenager that they really knew they shouldn't, that they knew they would get in trouble for and if they got caught. And surprise, surprise I have never met a single person who claims they were perfect as a teenager. This clearly tells us that all of our teens will misbehave, act out or just do something that is plain old stupid at some stage ... and very possibly on multiple occasions.

When this occurs, it is actually a critical moment when we can support them and get closer. The key is not to shame them by telling them we think they are stupid, or bad or mean. It's about letting them know that we love them, but that the actual behaviour itself is not ok. Shame tells them they are not worthy, or that there is actually something wrong with them.

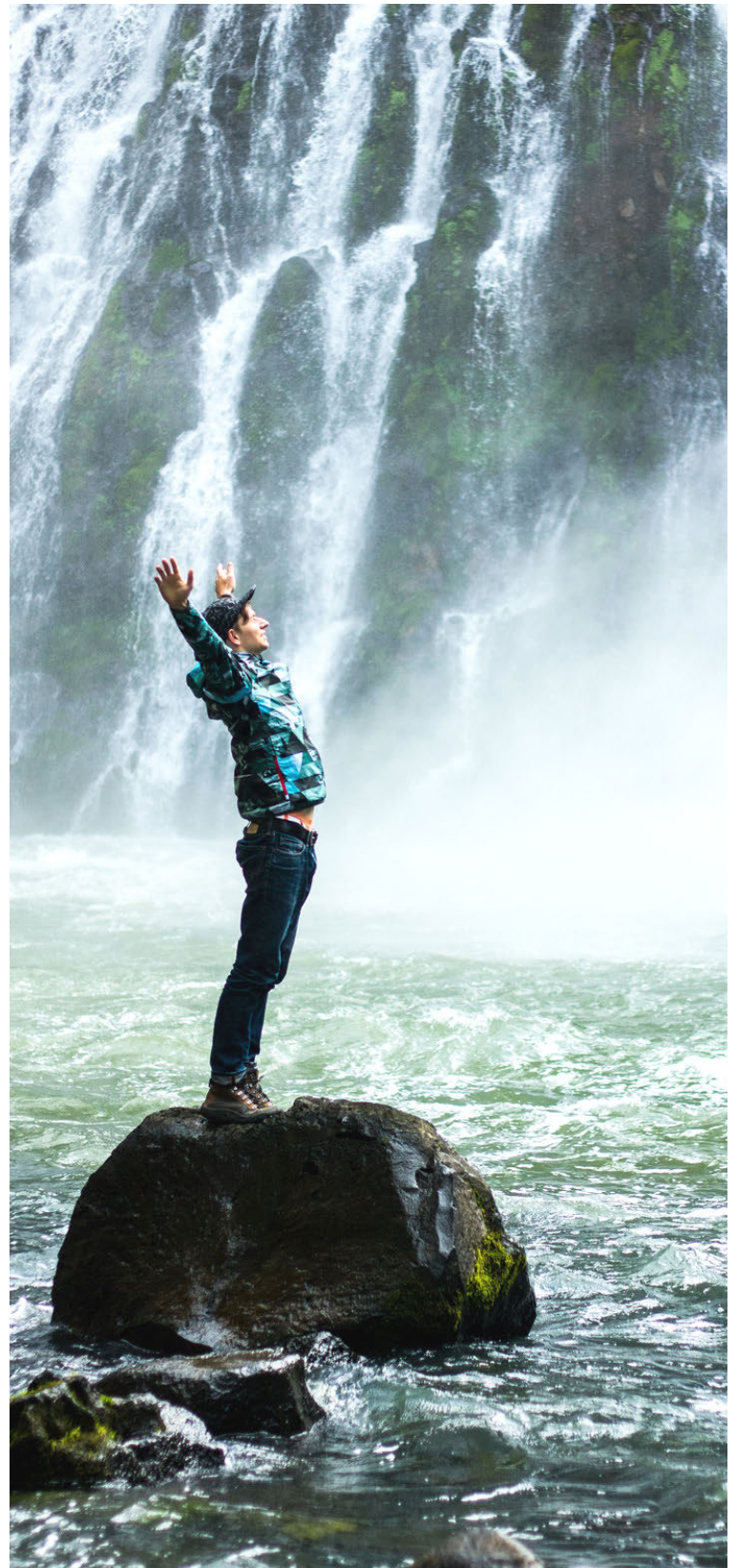
I will give an example: If my son skips a day at school and gets caught then I can shame him by telling him that he is an idiot and he will never get a job or a place at university. I can make him feel guilty by telling him that he is wasting his chance for a good education, etc. and make him feel really bad about himself.





Or I can tell him that I love him, tell him about things I did when I was his age and then ask him why he skipped school and what he did instead. If he feels safe he will tell me and it may even expose some problems at school that I really need to know about. We may get to have a discussion about what he thinks about school and what he wants to do afterwards which I could really support him with.

In the first instance when I shame him, I push him away and he is likely to simply not tell me when bad things happen. In the other instance, he realises that it is his life and I am actually interested in the decisions that he makes and how I can help him. It will help him to know that in the future he can come to me when he really needs to. I have no doubt which I would prefer.





# FIVE

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## HAVE OPEN AND HONEST CONVERSATIONS WITH THEM THAT INCLUDES LETTING THEM KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON FOR YOU

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"Our teenagers want to be treated like young adults and one of the best ways to do that is to talk to them as you would other adults, especially those that you are close to."

Through these conversations they can learn that struggle and not having all the answers right now is ok. It's something that we all go through at times. It is important for them to be seeing us deal with our own uncertainty and struggle and coming out the other side ok. They also watch how we celebrate our triumphs and encourage ourselves. So the more they get to see you are human, the more they will feel safe to share what is going on for them with you.

I love when I get time with either of my sons and we can have real conversations, not when I am telling them what to do or asking them if they have rung their grandparents recently. The conversations we love having and that really build our relationship happen when we talk openly and honestly about what has been going on. I get to share with them what has been working well for me, how my work is going, how things are at home and what new projects I am working on. I also tell them if there are things that I am struggling with. Sometimes it might be that I just feel I have too much happening and that feels stressful, or that I had an issue at work I am trying to deal with. My sons also get to share about things that they are excited about and enjoying, as well as if there is anything they are not finding so easy at the moment. Sometimes they ask me for advice and sometimes I even ask them for advice, which they really love and often they actually have some wise and helpful ideas.





# SECTION TWO MOTHERS

BIG TIPS FOR MUMS IN LETTING GO, FINDING YOUR  
OWN PASSION AND LIVING WITH TEENAGERS

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# MOTHERS

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A mother's relationship with her child is so incredibly special ... from the time of pregnancy through birth, early days, toddler years, first day at school and so many other shared and intimate moments. Mothers often do absolutely everything for their children and know absolutely everything about them, including how they are feeling, when they are hungry and when they have to go to the toilet.

The reality is that as our children approach adolescence this has to change and a different relationship has to emerge that will support both of you when your child becomes an adult. If you are not convinced then imagine your son or daughter married at 35 and think about whether you want to know everything about how they are feeling, when they are hungry and when they need to go to the toilet!

Please know that I am not talking about ending your relationship with your child, I'm talking about changing it to one that is suited to them being young adults and that will last your whole life, which is very different from the one they need from you when they're young.

Here are 5 really important strategies  
for mothers to maintain a special and  
loving relationship with their  
teenagers.





# ONE

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## GIVE THEM SPACE AND DON'T SMOTHER THEM

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This is so important. If you try and hold onto them, to do everything for them and to know everything that is happening for them then the chances are that they will push you away and reject you.

Teenagers need space; they need space to breath, to work out who they are and what they want to do with themselves. They need to be able to make mistakes and work things out for themselves. They are old enough to look after themselves on many levels now and by giving them the opportunity to do that and not treating them as a child you are allowing them to learn how to make healthy choices about their own life.

It is interesting that the word 'smother' contains the word 'mother' in it. That is probably not by coincidence. And the funny thing is that the more you try to hold them in, the more they will push you away, but when you actually give them some space but still make yourself available, then they will relate a lot better to you.

I have seen mothers still trying to tell their teenagers what to wear, tidying their rooms, even making their beds. It gives the message to their son or daughter that they are still a child in your eyes and this is not healthy and usually ends up in conflict.



# TWO

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## BE AVAILABLE BUT ACCEPT YOU WON'T KNOW EVERYTHING THAT IS GOING ON

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When we insist on knowing everything that is going on in their lives, the underlying message is we don't trust them to make healthy decisions.

We want our children to trust us, and more importantly to trust themselves so that peer pressure is not their guiding force when they are in challenging situations. We want them to be able to listen to themselves and trust their own judgement. When we don't need to know everything they are doing, we are saying that we trust them. Then they are more likely to come to us and share their uncertainty when they need to.

One of the hardest things for a mother can be to accept not knowing everything that is going on for her child. When they are teenagers you need to accept that you just won't know everything but that if you keep yourself available then hopefully they will come to you when they really need you, and this is what we really want.

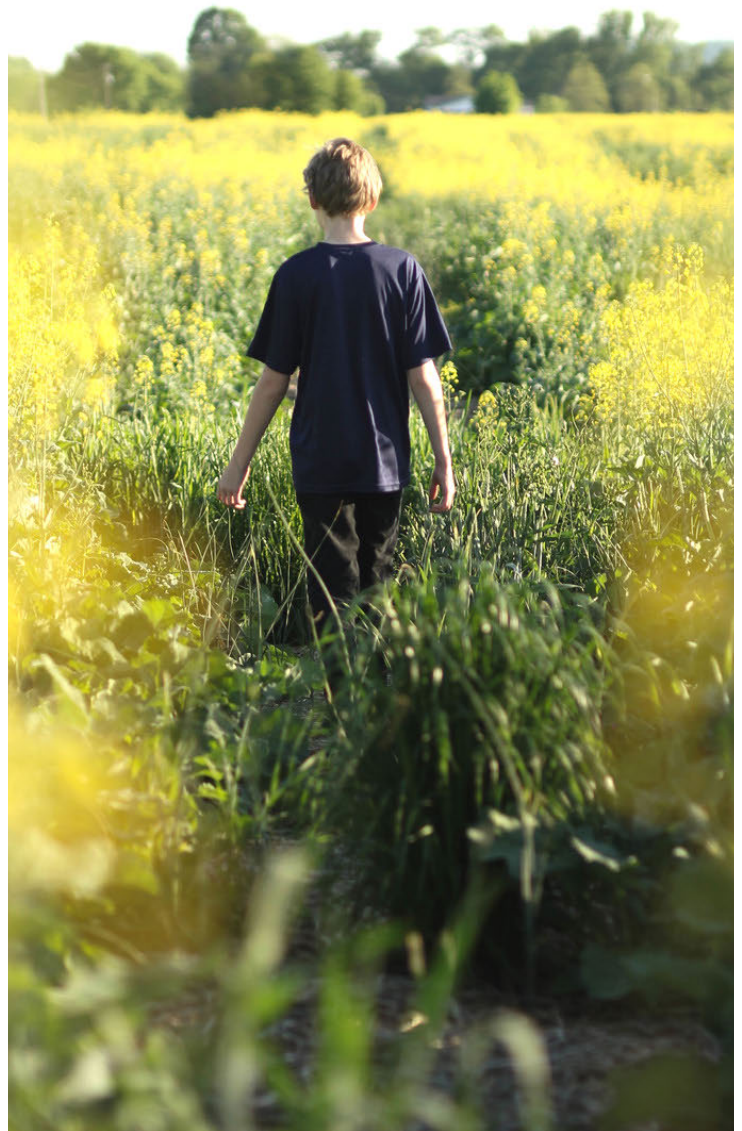
However if you insist on knowing everything that is going on then they are going to have to start keeping secrets from you. I had always been very close with my mother and as a child I told her everything ... and she knew everything.





But once I starting going through puberty and became a teenager I had parts of my life that I wanted to keep private. I became interested in girls and I really didn't want to have to tell my mother everything about that. I would have been happy to ask her things at times but unfortunately we never really worked out when was a good time for her to start to let go and so I pulled away from her myself and pretty much stopped communicating.

I feel very sad even today that this happened as I think it probably hurt her and she would have felt rejected on some level. I love my mother deeply and the last thing I wanted to do was hurt her but I simply did not know how to deal with the situation. I think it could have been a lot better if information like what I am writing about here had been available.





# THREE

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## FIND SOMETHING YOU ENJOY DOING TOGETHER

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The best way to maintain a healthy and connected relationship with your teenager is to do things together that you both enjoy.

Every person is different so there are endless possibilities about the right combination of what to do as it has to be good for both of you. The key is to just do the activity and not be going on about what you want them to be doing at home or their schoolwork or other stuff. Just actually spending time together doing something.

### HERE ARE A FEW IDEAS

- It could be as simple as going out once a week for coffee or breakfast.
- You may both enjoy nature so it may involve going for a walk, camping or even picking flowers.
- Music is so much fun and you could either make or listen to music together ... art is the same and a great thing to do.
- Sport and exercise are a wonderful way to spend time, and get fit as well.
- Visit art galleries and museums, or go to concerts or sporting events.
- Sometimes your common interest might be really zany ... maybe you both are interested in miniature trains, or the study of beetles.
- You could do a woodwork or jewellery making course together.

The list is truly endless ...

# FOUR

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## FOLLOW YOUR OWN PASSIONS IN LIFE

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If you want your teenager to create a life they love, then you doing what you love shows them it's not only possible but the way to live life.

Many mums give their all to their kids when they are young and put their own lives on hold. My mother was doing a PhD back in the 1960s when we were born and she never finished it because she decided to put all her effort into bringing up the kids and supporting my father who was also a doctor. I think that is something that she has always regretted and she never did finish her PhD.

Some mothers work and some mothers stay home to look after the children. What you do is up to you but I believe that either way if you pursue your own passions and hobbies it is really healthy for you and your children. Obviously it is difficult the younger they are but as they get older it is more and more important that they see you as a person with your own life and not just someone who is there to serve them.





This is especially the case once they are teenagers as their growing independence means you have a greater opportunity to really do more of the things that you love. Your children will appreciate more the time that you do spend with them and it will also be very fulfilling for you.

You may decide if you haven't been working that this is a good time for you to do so. You may decide there are certain things that you have always wanted to do but have been too busy looking after everyone else until now ... well this is the time to start to do them.

I know one mum who had always wanted to learn to surf and another who wanted to do a course in calligraphy. Both totally loved their special time when they were able to do something they were passionate about.



# FIVE

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## DON'T PUT UP WITH INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

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How you set your boundaries and the behaviour you accept will reflect on how your teenagers set their boundaries and the behaviour they will accept in the future.

When our children are little some of their behaviour is actually quite outrageous but because they are young we excuse it. They throw full temper tantrums when they don't get what they want, they often expect you to be a servant who cooks them meals and tidies up afterwards, they leave their clothes on the floor and their room's a mess ... and probably very rarely if ever they say thank you for everything that you do for them.

It is one thing for this to happen when they are six years-old but at 16 it is now really inappropriate. If a teenage boy has temper tantrums he can become physically intimidating. If a teenage girl refuses to help in any way then she can be a nightmare to live with.

As teenagers, some of the behaviours from their childhood are now simply not acceptable and they need to know that. It's not that you don't love them, it's just that their acting like children is really not ok. If they get pocket money then that should be conditional on them being decently responsible, and together you need to decide what that looks like.







It's about them connecting privileges with responsibilities and if you keep letting them get away with behaving like children then that is what they will do and you will simply be prolonging the behaviour. Worst of all when they leave home and get in relationships there is a good chance they will slip straight back into that childish behaviour.

Still today I hear many women telling me that their husband at times acts like a child and that he never really let go of his mother ... and she never really let go of him. If you are cooking for a young man or women, if they are living in your house and you are supporting them, then together you have to work out the rules you are going to create and the boundaries you will set ... plus of course the consequences if they get broken.





A FINAL WORD FOR

# MOTHERS + FATHERS

**Accept that your children are not a mini version of you, they will have their own thoughts, their own ideas and their own emotions ... all of which will almost definitely be different from yours, and that is just fine.**



Sometimes the best thing you can do is to just listen when they have a big challenge or strong emotions about something. Don't try and fix or change them, but instead support them to work out the answer that is best for them. If you can help them do it in their own way to move forwards (which may involve very different choices to the ones you'd make) then you will not only give them great confidence, you will also strengthen your relationship with them and they will be more likely to keep connecting with you more.

Raising teenagers can be one of the most rewarding and also most challenging things you will ever do. I am yet to meet the perfect parent and I certainly have not been one myself. However we can always keep learning and I hope this short booklet will help you in some way on this great adventure of being a mother or father.

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# TEEN TRACKER

SEE HOW YOUR TEEN IS TRACKING  
TAKE THIS SHORT QUIZ

START



DEVELOPED BY DR ARNE RUBINSTEIN





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Arne Rubinstein has been working with young people for over 30 years as a workshop facilitator, medical doctor, mentor and counsellor. His programs and seminars have been attended by over 25,000 people globally and are designed to support children to successfully make a safe, healthy transition to young adults, with a particular focus on creating coming of age Rites of Passage.

In 2008, he was nominated for Australian of the Year for his groundbreaking work with youth. He is also passionate about bringing out the best in men of all ages which means breaking down unhealthy stereotypes. His work helps men find what they are truly passionate about and challenges them to have respectful, healthy relationships with their children and partners which includes supporting women to be equally important in all areas, including professionally.

Dr Arne's 2013 book, *The Making of Men*, has become a bestseller and is a practical handbook for men, parents and teachers of boys. It is the culmination of his years of experience in working with teens and their parents, in particular fathers and sons. In 2000 he was the Founding CEO of the Pathways Foundation, an organisation that created Rites of Passage programs for boys and girls nationally.

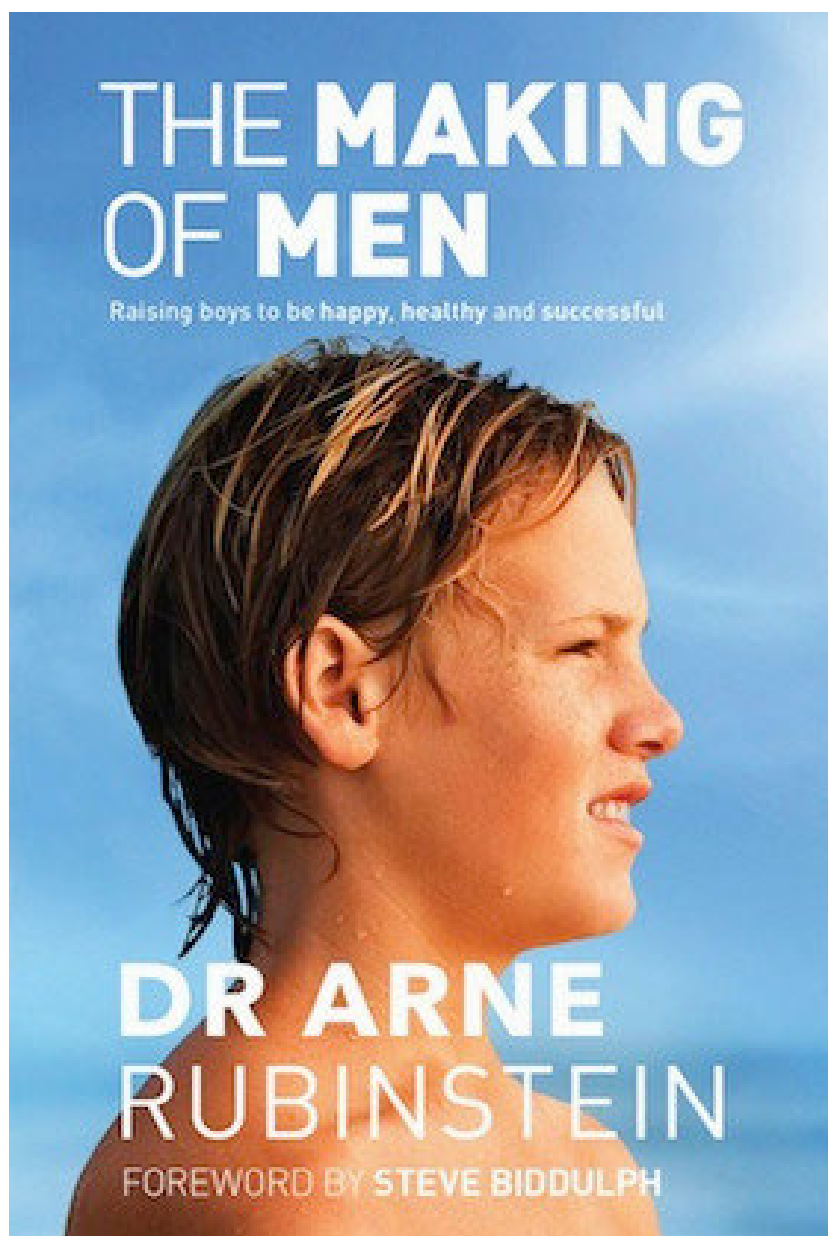
In 2011 he was the founder of Uplifting Australia, a not-for-profit set up to improve the emotional wellbeing and resilience of children and their families around Australia and now heads up The Rites of Passage Institute with a vision to bring out the best in every teenage boy and girl and have them making a positive contribution to the community.





# THE MAKING OF MEN

RAISING BOYS TO BE HAPPY, HEALTHY AND SUCCESSFUL



**\$24.95**

SHIPPED

As parents, we all want our boys to grow up to be happy, healthy and successful. For this to happen, it's vital we understand their world, their challenges, and how our relationship with them must change as they become young men.

Using real-life examples, parenting expert Dr Arne Rubinstein clearly explains the risks teenagers face today, including drugs, alcohol, technology and peer group pressure. He then shows how you can equip your son to make safe and sensible choices.

Whether you're a single mum of a happy-go-lucky eight-year old, or the parent of a troubled teen, The Making of Men is a practical, commonsense guide to helping your son transition from a boy to a young man who is motivated and inspired.

'Funny, encouraging, gritty and real.'  
Steve Biddulph, bestselling author of  
Manhood and Raising Boys

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