



Launching Young Adults

Your teenager is in the process of moving away from you. Therapists have a term for this: developmental individuating. It means your child is doing the following:

- disconnecting
- leaving the nest
- launching out
- becoming his own person
- growing independent
- becoming a free moral agent

These phrases sound nice and inviting when they crop up on a psychology test covering the "developmental theories" chapter. But they don't always sound so positive and gentle when they're lived out in your family room or kitchen.

Still, the theory is right: Your teenager is separating from you and gravitating toward his or her peer group. This process is normal, natural and necessary. Fight it and you'll lose. The solution is to work with it as well as you can — by understanding what's yours to control and what isn't.

They're Moving Out

Think of your son or daughter as traveling down a pathway toward maturity. All teenagers proceed along this journey, though at different speeds. As your teenager leaves the past behind, he or she moves toward the future and the changes it will bring. Let's look at some of those changes and the challenges they offer.

1. Your teenager is **moving away from parents and family and toward his or her peer group.** This is the "getting ready to leave the nest" process. Most 15-year-olds can't make it on their own in the adult world yet; they need opportunities to try, "fly solo," fail, practice, scare Mom and fail again. All this trying can be very wearing on us as parents.

Your son or daughter also is connecting with his or her peer group, just as you probably did

when you were that age. This is necessary to make life work; after all, these are the people your teenager will work with, work for, lead, follow, vote for, run against, buy from, sell to, marry and bury. Your teen needs to find his or her niche within this group.

This quest is usually just as awkward for the teenager as it is for the parent. It must happen anyway, though. Being aware of it can at least lessen the stress and anxiety it can bring.

2. Your teenager is **moving away from dependence on you and toward being independent of you.** Notice I didn't say he or she necessarily is becoming responsibly independent. Research indicates your teenager will be dependent on your pocketbook — to some extent — on average until the age of 26.1 This independent-yet-dependent stage can be prickly for both parent and young adult, especially when the latter doesn't want your involvement in her life but still needs your financial backing.
3. Your teenager is **moving away from your rules and toward advice or counsel.** This is a struggle for many parents. Suggestions don't seem to have as much "bite" as rules do. Parents feel more powerful trying to enforce regulations than when they're simply giving advice, though the feeling is almost always an illusion. This movement by the teenager is also normal and necessary.
4. Your teenager is **moving away from your hands-on guidance and toward your hands-off availability.** It may not seem that way, especially when your teen still wants you to take care of those little tasks like laundry, cooking, cleaning and paying for everything. And he does need your guidance in those "teachable moments" and when he wants answers to those "Oh, Mom, what about ... ?" questions.

This kind of movement by a teen can be particularly difficult for a mom when her youngest child is moving away from the hands-on guiding she's been doing for years. For both moms and dads, the key phrase is "be there." Even if your teen doesn't always take advantage of your wisdom and knowledge and ideas, even if she doesn't even seem to want you around, be there — just in case.

5. Your teenager is **moving away from your control and toward influence**. Your role is changing. The sooner you realize it, the sooner you will discover the joy of releasing your kids to be the adults God intended them to be.

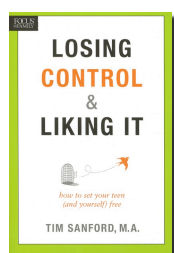
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Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it (Proverbs 22:6).

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

[An overseer] must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) (1 Timothy 3:4-5).

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Tim Sanford
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Brad Sachs, PhD
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