

What Makes Teens Tick

by Leah Rosenkrantz, ACSW, Counselor and Parent at San Francisco Day School

A classic book still offers clear insights

Have you ever read a book and been so positively struck by its contents that years later you still continue to recommend it unequivocally to others? That was my experience after reading *Being Adolescent: Growth and Conflict in the Teenage Years*, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Reed Larson (Basic Books; Reprint edition, 1986). When I was asked to review the book for *Parenteen*, I was glad to be able to take another closer look at the material.

Tracking teen moments

The authors followed a group of 75 male and female adolescents from a large suburb outside of Chicago. The students varied in socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, the educational levels of their parents and whether they came from intact, separated, divorced or remarried families. Some of the teens were sexually active and/or involved with drugs. The students also represented a cross section of the cliques and academic "tracks" at their schools.

The research protocol required the students to carry beepers, which went off randomly between six and 10 times a day over a two-month period. When they went off, the students were asked to record their mood at that moment, as well as what they were doing and thinking.

The honesty and integrity of the students' responses is fascinating, and the authors were able to draw some

interesting results from the data. For instance, the most tension between parents and teenagers occurs when the teen believes he isn't being taken seriously.

Safety of family

Although the data show that teens would rather be with their friends, they prefer being with their families to being alone. "Family seems to pro-

vide a setting of neutrality," the authors suggest, "where teenagers recover in relative safety and warmth from the highs and lows of daily life." Csikszentmihalyi describes family life with teens as one of continuous compromise, a process of instilling parental goals while making room for those of their developing adolescent.

**Family life
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He has become well known in recent years for his theory of "flow," that state in which a person is able to

completely and creatively concentrate on whatever she is doing. This book examines situations in which adolescents find themselves in "flow"—whether it's participating in or cheering at sports events, practicing music or becoming deeply absorbed in writing a paper. It also looks at the internal conflicts that can reduce a teen's capacity to work and pay attention. The authors also explore the range of daily interactions experienced by adolescents with parents, siblings and friends, at home and at school. I often wish high school teachers would read the chapters on "Coping with Classes" and "The Flow Experience" because they specifically capture the difference between joining with the flow of a teen's energy and getting into a power struggle with it.

Compelling read

Although I am still drawn to the passion with which the authors write about adolescents, some of their viewpoints now strike me as a bit dated. Their references to romantic relationships, for instance, are always heterosexual. And there is some bias as to what constitutes a functional adult in our society. The authors assume that children growing up should, ultimately, fully separate from their parents. A recent article in *The New York Times*, however, detailed how the children of baby boomers actually enjoy contact with their parents, even

at college, through cell phones, instant messaging and e-mail.

Overall, though, I still believe that this is a fascinating book and a compelling read, nearly 20 years later, for parents and educators alike.



The Coalition Mission

To support, educate, and inspire parents of adolescents in order to promote the health and safety of our youth.

If you or your school would like to be involved or if you have comments or questions, please call Eliska Meyers at (415) 282-4380.

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VERY IMPORTANT DATES

Parents' Coalition meetings

The Coalition meets once a month, September-June, from 7:30-9:00 p.m. at San Francisco Day School, 350 Masonic Avenue, (at Golden Gate Avenue). All parents are welcome.

For more information call Nancy McAteer, council chair, at (415) 922-7045.



Monday, April 28, 7:30-9pm – Forum: A Look at Teen Depression, Tamar Mendelson, PhD
Meeting location: The Drew School, 2901 California (at Broderick)

Readers are encouraged to submit letters to the editor, ideas for articles or articles themselves. Call Susan Wels at (415) 641-7694 for more information. To subscribe to *Parenteen*, call Victoria Legg at (415) 641-1528.

To learn more about the Parents' Coalition, check out our web site: www.ParentsCoalition.net



Teens and Romance

by Leslie Woodward, Parent, San Francisco Day School

Parents can help teens through the heartache of first love

With spring in the air, *Parenteen* asked several middle and high school counselors what parents need to know about teen romantic attachments.

Teens are less pressured to pair off than in past generations, in part because the maturational time line is so drawn out, according to Lowell High School Wellness Coordinator Elene Lee. With years of college ahead of them and the high cost of living, young adults today have a long wait before they are economically independent from their families.

Anything that smacks of lecturing is apt to turn off your teen

"Teens can go out in mixed groups without the pressure to form couples," said Lee. It's perfectly acceptable to go in mixed or same sex groups even to the senior prom, she added.

At Lick-Wilmerding, counselor Maureen Poppers says most teens don't form couples, although many do, and occasionally the relationships are very serious. Sometimes they can last one or two years, sometimes they end fast with broken hearts.

Most middle and high schools discuss relationship issues as part of their health education curriculum. Lowell High School's health education classes, for example, include discussion of decision-making skills in a healthy

relationship and how to let a partner know how you want to be treated.

"Parents need to realize that schools only touch on these subjects," said Bill Corkery, director of guidance and counseling at Sacred Heart Cathedral College Preparatory School. "Health classes don't usurp the parent's role as educator."

Here are some points that counselors advise parents to cover with their teens:

Timing matters. Parents and teens alike need to be aware of developmental time lines. As in past generations, girls mature both physically and psychologically several years ahead of boys. A sixth-grade girl may be noticed by an eighth-grade boy, which can be both exciting and frightening for the girl.

Define love and sex. Teens need to appreciate that words can mean one thing to a young woman and another to a young man, said Corkery. If a young man tells a girl he has just met that he loves her, it's likely that he really means he's sexually attracted to her. A girl, hearing those words, may give them a romantic meaning that the boy doesn't necessarily intend.

Teens may also have a skewed view of what constitutes sexual relations. Some teens believe that oral sex, for example, doesn't count as intimate sexual behavior and convince themselves that they have not "had sex" if they engage in it. Parents need to make sure teens understand what sexual intimacy is and the responsibilities that go with it.

Take it seriously. If your teen does become romantically involved, it is important for parents to take the relationship seriously. You may think it's "puppy love," but don't share that perspective with your son or daughter. Let your teen know that you are available to answer any questions. Be especially open if your teen is gay or bisexual and struggling to come to terms with his or her sexual identity.

Linda Gore, counselor at Katherine Delmar Burke School, adds that the middle school years are prime time for crushes. "Parents need to appreciate that these infatuations are

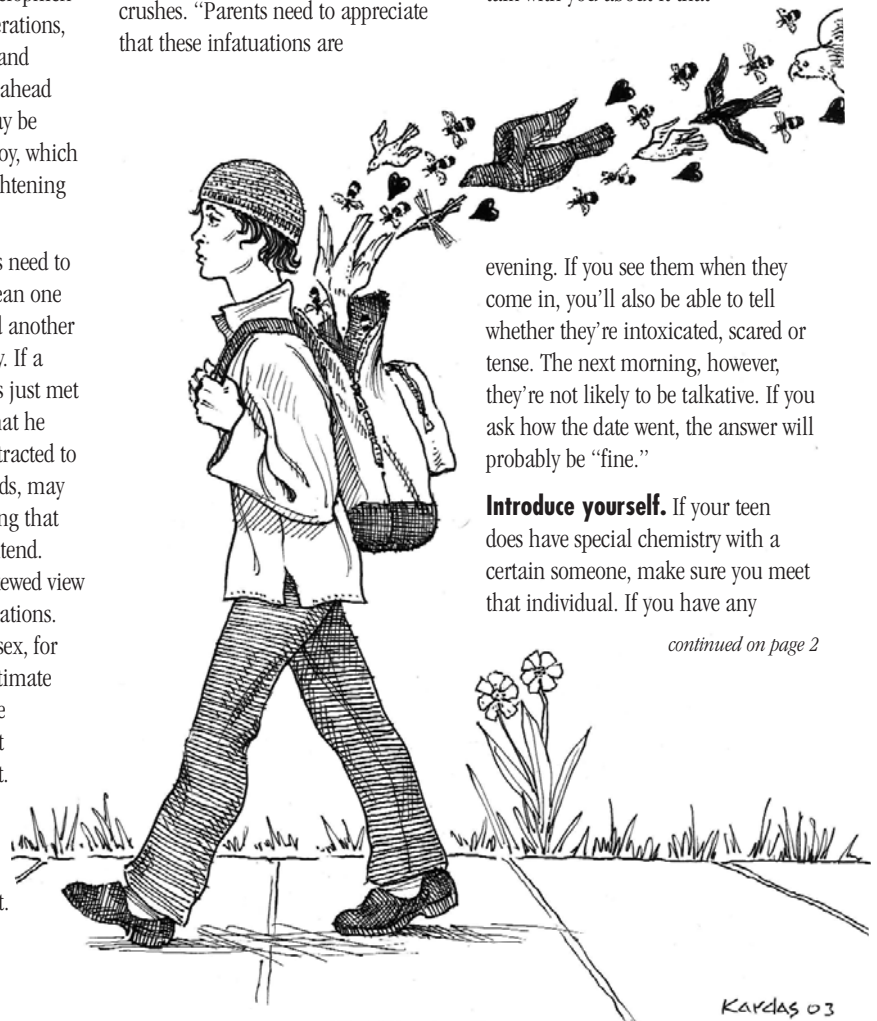
serious," she says. Middle school students can develop crushes on an older person of the same or opposite sex, and parents need to talk with their youngsters about these feelings.

Be there. "Parents should be home when kids come in from a single or group date," advises Lee, "because they are often open to talking then." If your daughter is wondering if she went too far, or your son is concerned about whether he let something inappropriate happen, they're more apt to talk with you about it that

evening. If you see them when they come in, you'll also be able to tell whether they're intoxicated, scared or tense. The next morning, however, they're not likely to be talkative. If you ask how the date went, the answer will probably be "fine."

Introduce yourself. If your teen does have special chemistry with a certain someone, make sure you meet that individual. If you have any

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reservations about the young man or woman, go with your intuition and voice them early on, Corkery suggests. Poppers adds that parents should get to know the person and share their feelings in a nonjudgmental way. "The person may look inappropriate on the surface, but may in fact be a terrific kid," she says.

Be cautious with advice. Poppers advises that you discuss sexually transmitted diseases and birth control long before your teen is apt to form an attachment, since it can be tricky to bring it up after your child has already met someone special. Anything that smacks of lecturing is apt to turn off your teen.

Help mend broken hearts. Being "dumped" is painful at any age, but particularly if it's the unhappy end to a first romance. Teens may be convinced that they'll never feel good again. Parents should be available and understanding, counselors agree. Poppers suggests that parents might want to share "in an appropriate way,"

what similar situations were like for them. "It's comforting to hear a survivor story," she says, but don't let your story take away from your teen's pain. If your teen shows signs of serious depression, the counselors advise, don't hesitate to seek professional help.

Playing by the Rules

by Susan Wels, Parent, Convent of the Sacred Heart High School

Teens talk about parents, rules and responsibilities

For most teens, family rules and responsibilities in some form are a fact of life. To find out how teenagers deal with these expectations, and how they feel about them, *Parenteen* talked to a group of eight boys and girls from four Bay Area High Schools. In a panel moderated by Catherine Hayden and Marilyn Friend, PhD—cochairs of the Coalition's Issues and Choices committee—here's what the high school students had to say.

Do your parents give you rules that you have to follow?

- I'm not allowed to watch TV on school nights.
- If I go out, I have to leave information about where I'll be, then call my parents if anything changes.
- My rules are pretty basic: no drugs and alcohol. I have to do chores around the house and be home by midnight or 1 a.m.
- I have more of a responsibility than a rule; I have to walk my dog two or three times a day. That's true even on the weekends, so I never get to sleep in until noon. I even have to plan my homework around walking the dog.
- I have different kinds of rules with each of my parents. My dad is con-

cerned mainly about issues and consequences. When my mom gives me rules, she is more likely to take into account what I want and how I feel.

- If I get agreement from one parent, the other one will just go along. So the trick for me is figuring out which parent to ask first.

"We need guidance, not strict regulation."

Do you have any special rules about driving?

- I always have to have my cell phone with me so they can reach me. And I can't get in a car with anybody who's been drinking.
- If I want to go driving with a friend, my parents may want to meet him and find out how long he's been driving.
- My parents don't allow me to be driven by my friends, but sometimes I

do get in a car with them without my parents knowing. I don't like lying to my parents, but otherwise I'd be stranded.

- I got my license a year ago. When I still had restrictions on my driving, I had to be home before midnight every night, and my dad was really strict about it.

Are there rules or expectations about how much time you spend with family?

- We have family dinner together once a week. It's an hour when we can talk about things.
- I see my parents a lot in the morning and after school, and every dinner is a family dinner. Weekends are my chance to get away. My parents don't like that, though, and they make me feel bad about it.
- Both my parents work really hard, and they're not home much at all. That makes me want to spend time with them when they are home.
- In my house, the rule is to eat when you're hungry, so we don't really have dinner together too often. I really appreciate it, though, when it does happen.

Are there any benefits to having rules you have to follow?

- When I was younger, my parents would tell me to stop watching TV and do my homework. Now I end up telling myself the same thing. The rules helped me.
- You internalize your parents' rules and expectations.
- I agree. If I watch TV the night before a big test and don't do as well as I should have, I tell myself that I shouldn't have done that.

What advice would you give parents about setting rules for teenagers?

- We need guidance, not strict regulation. Parents should help us think about things and make good decisions.
- You can set rules as long as you can justify them in your child's eyes. Share the reasons for the rules—don't just dictate them.
- Know the kids your teen hangs out with.
- Spend a lot of time with your children. The kids I know who really need help have parents who aren't very involved in their lives.

A Vote for Sports

by Nick Hoppe, Parent, Ross Middle School, and Freshman Boys' Coach, Redwood High School

Win or lose, teens grow when they're part of a team

A friend of mine got into a long argument with his eighth-grade son the other day. My friend was insisting that his son play a sport when he enters high school next September. The son, knowing his father was a sports nut who would not back down, didn't disagree. He understood the value of physical activity, camaraderie and sportsmanship.

The argument was about whether skateboarding qualified as a high school sport.

Power of participation

The dad prevailed. While skateboarding certainly promotes social and physical activity, it does not yet show up as an organized high school sport. My friend's son will have to make do with the old standbys of basketball, baseball and football, or perhaps try his hand at water polo, lacrosse, crew, golf, track and field or wrestling.

But he'll find something, because 1) the opportunities are there and 2) his father insists.

In our house, I don't insist, but I do strongly encourage, which is pretty much the same thing. I've coached baseball, basketball and soccer for many years, and I'm currently coaching freshmen boys' basketball. I've seen close-up the value of participating in sports. And I want my kids to continue that experience, at least through the first year or two of high school.

My kids don't need to be stars. In fact, they don't even need to be good. My oldest daughter's athletic career ended soon after her freshman year, following her participation on her school's junior varsity basketball team. I watched her games and knew she wasn't going much farther when she stole the ball and stopped to apologize to the opposing player. She didn't have an athletically competitive bone in her

body, but she loved the experience of playing on the team.

Camaraderie and competition

My daughter loved her teammates, loved complaining about the coach, loved putting on the uniform. Many of the friends she made on that team remain her friends to this day, eight years later. They still laugh at their exploits, including a buzzer-beating,

game-winning bank shot my daughter made that she still doesn't believe went in. Considering that it was the only basket she made all season, that's understandable.

Her younger sister had other motives. An excellent athlete with a fierce competitive spirit, she played four years of varsity basketball in high school. She thrived on the competi-

tion, the sweat, the immensely satisfying feeling of being thoroughly exhausted after a grueling practice or intense game. She didn't have to be encouraged to play. She wanted it, and no one was going to stop her.

Now both daughters are in college, and neither is playing sports. The opportunities are no longer there, and they are moving on. Few are good enough or motivated enough to continue playing in college. And that was never the point. It's the memories that are important, whether they are competitive memories or comical memories.

Meanwhile, my boys are now getting ready to enter high school. The older is in eighth grade, the younger in seventh. We're already running through the list of sports offered by our high school, wondering which one will fit the bill. And we'll find something, whether it's cross-country or tiddly-winks. It doesn't matter. I just want them to play something, at least during their freshman year.

No pressure to be stars

I want them to try and make some team. Like my older daughter, they may realize that their athletic careers are destined for obscurity, and that's okay. They can retire after their first season and find additional extra-curricular pursuits, whether it is the school newspaper or the accounting club or the hip-hop dance club. Or they can do it all.

All I want is for them to participate. I want them to absorb the sense of competition that high school sports offers. I want them to bond with their teammates, feel the exhilaration of athletic activity, and establish themselves as a team member.

And if skateboarding ever does become a high school sport, I guess that's okay, too. No hurry, though.

