

## WHAT DOES YOUR TEEN REALLY NEED?

As parents, we provide the basic needs of food and shelter and give our children love. When there is tension in our relationships with our teens, or when our teen is sad or avoiding us, these behaviours let us know that something more might be needed- something is not quite right for them and it is impacting the parent/child relationship.

All humans have similar needs - for acceptance, respect, privacy, to be heard and to belong, for positive stimulation, for fulfillment and for safety and connection, to name a few. Your teen's irritability or negative behaviour tells you that one or more of their emotional or physical needs are not being addressed adequately. A conflict or an argument lets you the parent know that something in the relationship needs to change. Arguing does not mean that you have a poor relationship with your teen. It can mean that your teen's emotional needs have grown and matured, but you may have missed this subtle change. For example, are you as the parent pulling back too much, showing disinterest in what your teen is doing? Are you too involved, where your teen feels he cannot think for himself? Connection and distance are healthy attachment behaviours that co-exist in a parent/teen relationship

Parents of teens tell me that they feel like they are walking on egg shells. They feel that what their teen wants are the latest gadgets or trendy clothing, and not a relationship, so the parent feels used. So why do some parents and teens get along? It could be there is a good personality fit, so fulfilling the teen's needs is effortless or easy to tune into. It could be that the family has regular dinners together or home time where there are conversations about what their teen is experiencing with school, work and friends, so the parents more readily spot a longing or a void that is not being met, and can adjust their rules or give their teen more say in certain areas of their life. In essence, regularly adjusting your behaviours, comments or home environment to what you perceive their need may be will improve the overall mood in your home. Parents may worry that they are doing all the work! Well parenting with *intention* really doesn't go away, it only really lessens when your children leave the home.

When personalities are dissimilar, it does require a greater effort to maintain, or restore, peace in the home. Parents have to resist the urge to give up, and with attention the negativity in the home will go away. Persistent attunement to your teen's emotional needs with a heavy dose of empathy, goes a long way. For example, try more often to focus on the feelings your teen is experiencing, rather than focusing on their behaviour. Remember- if you are a parent who feels the need to be heard first so your wishes or desires are made clear, you will find it harder to build trust and respect with your teen. A teenager's brain is impulsive and overflowing with angst, excitement and worry. Let them get it all out first (which helps them to hear themselves think), be empathic and then present your views or concerns. Guide your exchange into a discussion where both your teen's needs and your parental needs can be addressed amicably. Remember that teenagers do not want to hear that their ideas are wrong, so parents need to find a way to communicate their understanding to help your teen compromise without losing face.

–Christine Kutzner is a Registered Clinical Counsellor who is a parent coach and child counsellor in North Vancouver. For parenting tips visit [www.ckcounsellingservices.com](http://www.ckcounsellingservices.com)