



## Tips for Families with Teens

By Megan de Beyer

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My own body is still on high alert. I feel it in the way I breathe and the way my digestion and sleep have a rhythm of their own. My body is still adjusting to being indoors, and so are my thoughts and feelings. I see my friends and family, on Zoom chat, putting on a brave front, yet I can see the fear and the dread of further lockdown in their eyes.

I am a psychologist. I am the author of *How to Raise a Man* and have dealt with families, mothers and teenagers for 30 years. I should be able to help. Yet I too have to adjust, separated from loved ones, torn from routines and healthy habits. It's not easy. As I write this, I think of you all out there, isolated in your homes, tense in your bodies and seeing fear in your kids' eyes.

"I am the parent," you say to yourself, "I should be taking the struggles away and helping them feel safe." Yet you feel helpless and vulnerable too, especially after watching the figures rise and hearing some version of "*life will never be the same!*"

I have put my thinking cap on for you. I want to help. I want to be able to offer you resources, so I must turn to what helps me. Start with yourself. Become a little more self-aware and conscious before you expect your family to change.

1. Feel your feelings every morning. SHOW UP for yourself first. Sit still and feel the sensations. Practise the breath cycle. IN for four counts, hold for seven and OUT for eight. Breathe until you can do this easily. Then journal for ten minutes. Write down your feelings, thoughts and ideas. Let it be a "stream of consciousness" -- don't think it through. If writing is not for you, then sketch, doodle or move your body. Express yourself naturally and easily. Be curious and not critical.
2. There is not much you can control right now. What *can* you do? You can control your attitude and attention. Start with your attitude towards yourself. Can you be kinder and more forgiving of yourself right now? Then, can you be warmer and kinder to, and more understanding of, your children, teens and partner? Attention is also a tool. How do you pay attention? I suggest with an open mind, open heart and a willingness to engage. Try to be more accepting, and do it step by step.
3. Decide to set a parent intention. What do you hope to achieve in these #stayhome days? Use your imagination. What would a beautiful and harmonious ecosystem look like? How does that feel? Let the image fill your inner experience. What can a parent do to bring light, love and laughter to a dismal situation? What is most important now? It can be as simple as: "people before things". Think of your intention like a mission statement you want to achieve as a parent.
4. Now open up your mission and create a family intention that includes everyone. Have a group meeting and a team talk ("we are all in this together"). Create a team mission statement. "During this time we want to be ... and do ..." Even if your teen says: "I want everyone to leave me alone!", let everyone have their say. Try creating a team vision board. What does our family stand for? Create a logo. Include some family pictures and values.

5. Now have some fun. Turn the mundane into the magic. Boys will need some noise and action. If it ends in tears, no problem -- tomorrow's another day. Enjoy a picnic on a blanket, even if it is in the lounge; have a joint Zoom party with another family; practise yoga or take a dance class together via YouTube; share music playlists; play board games or cards or *30 Seconds*; google some general-knowledge questions and ask them; reignite story time – choose an action or sci-fi novel and read it to the family after a meal; cook together; clear the furniture for the evening and play tag; teach an old dance style, play Pass the Baton or a form of Blind Man's Bluff; schedule joint 'cross-training' – let's all get fit and build muscle. Remember, boys often need a goal and an outcome to motivate them.

6. Teach your teen some practical life skills – whatever you can. How to change a car tyre or a plug; test the pool water; make an extension for a lamp with tape; load a washing machine; iron; filter coffee; create a home- accounts spreadsheet; paint a wall; plant some seeds in a pot. Teach him whatever DIY you can. Show him how to do it and leave him to it. It took my son hours to fix a lamp, but he got there in the end.

7. Time-limit IT by enjoying loads of projects together (see suggestions above). Teens can go down the rabbit hole of gaming. Bring healthy alternatives to his attention. There are loads of documentaries and online channels like Chatterpack, *Curiosity Stream*, Skeptical Science and Headspace. Let him spend time with a girl (or boy) online. Help him to set it up and let him have his privacy. Don't watch over him, and don't ask how it went! Games, books, music, cooking, flower-arranging, exercise, painting, writing and chatting can draw him away from gaming. Use it all.