

# **Stop Struggling With Your Teen**

A Complete, Easy-to-Use Guide to Reconnecting  
and Rebuilding Your Relationship with Your Teen  
Updated and Expanded Version

Includes:

**Stop Struggling With Your Teen Companion  
Workbook**

Your Personal Action Plan to Resolve Conflict Without Blame

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Revised Edition

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# Foreword

I met Evonne Weinhaus on December 31, 2009, when my then-partner and I walked into her

St. Louis home for a meeting.

I remember this day vividly, because it was New Year's Eve—my birthday—and because I did not want to be in Evonne Weinhaus' home.

Nor anyone's home, for that matter.

For anyone who has a December birthday directly before or after Christmas knows all too well how disappointing "Christmas" birthdays can be. And, as I walked into Evonne's home, I steelled myself for another in a lifetime of disappointing birthdays.

Boy, was I wrong.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a documentary my partner and I were about to make. Although I had no intention of participating in it, I somehow wound up not only producing it but also quite prominently appearing in it.

As Evonne and my partner spoke, I stewed.

But, as I half-heartedly listened, I began to realize Evonne and I seemed to see things in similar ways. And, though my partner and I weren't yelling, Evonne noticed we were, in fact, fighting. She quickly switched out of "meeting mode" into the mode of "therapist" and "counselor."

Then it dawned on me: the real reason for this meeting was to receive one of the best birthday presents...ever! I began to perk up.

Feeling resolved, I described a project I was envisioning to accompany the documentary: a blog focused on specific topics to explore in a live podcast. Each week the plan was to invite teachers who were featured in the documentary as co-hosts to discuss their unique perspective and disciplines. Together the co-host and I would also take calls from listeners to help them resolve their issues using our individual approaches.

I invited more than twelve spiritual teachers to participate in this year-long project. All of them agreed. Most of them began. Some of them lasted more than several weeks. The only one who completed the entire year was—you guessed it—Evonne Weinhaus.

Evonne's blog articles were insightful, vulnerable, and, powerful, and each week she bared more and more of her soul as she wrote about some of her most personal experiences and the life

lessons they yielded. And, each time she appeared on the podcast with me as a co-host, the number of listeners grew. Each week, she and I grew closer and closer, I grew to love her more, and I became more and more thankful for the “disappointing” birthday meeting that had brought us together.

In the following years, our personal and professional relationship and mutual respect blossomed. I’ve seen Evonne walk her talk.

During our first year, I learned she had co-written a parenting book with Karen Friedman in 1984, which did not surprise me in the least. When I learned the book was a bestseller, again, I was not surprised. When I learned of her appearance on *Oprah* while marketing the book—well, I have to admit, it sort of surprised and impressed me.

However, when I read the copy of *Stop Struggling With Your Teen* she had given me, I voraciously read each page and was amazed by the simple yet elegant perspective it offered parents—and teens, too. I was amazed that this woman, mother, psychologist, author, and, force of nature had become not only a colleague and friend, but also a trusted mentor and gifted listener.

For the last several years, she and I have had several conversations about her desire to update *Stop Struggling With Your Teen*. I thought, “Great idea!” However, until I read the new edition, I did not realize how something so ahead of its time could improve upon itself. But this is exactly what Evonne has done.

I have had the privilege of witnessing how Evonne—now a grandmother—manages not only to keep up with technology but also occasionally outdoes me in her knowledge of social media and computer apps. Because I have read both the 1984 version and this new version, I know she has not just peppered the book with buzzwords to make it relatable, but she also has firsthand knowledge of the “world” parents and teens inhabit.

In this edition of *Stop Struggling With Your Teen*, Evonne has stepped into the shoes of today’s parents to offer practical insights for both parents and teens. The issues facing them today are categorically different than in the 1980s. However, the dynamic and systemic issues between parents and their teens remain the same: WHO WINS? WHO LOSES?

I have had the privilege of meeting and working with many teachers, psychologists and facilitators in my role over the last twenty-five years as a personal development facilitator, corporate trainer, and soon-to-be doctoral candidate in the field of Industrial/Organizational Psychology. But, in my opinion, very few of them have had the laser yet gentle focus of Evonne. She has the uncanny ability to listen with gusto and speak with discerning reverence.

There will, perhaps, be moments while you are reading it when you will feel as if she has witnessed exactly what is happening in your home. Other moments, undoubtedly, you may feel uncomfortable as you recognize yourself sprawled across the pages.

But the important point is to keep reading. Do not give up. The relationship between you and your teen is at stake.

If you feel overwhelmed, just take baby steps. And, as you see the positive results, the satisfaction you feel will give you the impetus to take one more step. Then another. And, before you know, you'll not only have stopped struggling with your teen but also learned a great deal about yourself!

I wholeheartedly recommend *Stop Struggling With Your Teen*. I send each one of you a heart-filled prayer and a wish for the ability to laugh at yourself as you embark on a journey to discover how to create responsible children, adults, and, future leaders.

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# A Heads-Up from Evonne

**W**hen I asked my previous co-author, Karen Friedman, to read my final version of my updated and expanded version of *Stop Struggling With Your Teen* and give me her blessings, she made one suggestion I'd like to pass on to you: "Evonne, parents need to know this book is transactional. Parents are in pain, they are overwhelmed and full of frustration. You know that. This book is not about their pain, but how to move past it and find solutions that work."

## **Praise for *Stop Struggling With Your Teen***

“What I love about sharing this book with these parents is witnessing how the words in the book speak to them. The parents gain a voice. Since the book is written in a language parents can easily understand, they also gain a system and framework they can begin to implement immediately. The parents leave the session with renewed energy and hope. And they report back improved relationships with their teens, and less sleepless nights for them.”

— Phyllis Rosenthal, Educational Consultant

“*Stop Struggling with Your Teen* is a MUST for anyone wanting a respectful, enriched and loving relationship with their teen.”

— Susie Berg, M.Ed., LPC, NCC, therapist and owner of Sound Mind Therapy

“I highly recommend this book. It is one of my favorite books (and I’ve read several). It’s a quick read, and it’s easy to quickly reference and find something when I need to go back for a refresher. It gives good examples and concise explanations of why something is a good/bad response to a situation.”

— KidzMom

“Made me lose 15 pounds of guilt! I was able to read the book in one evening and immediately put into practice the principles of communication you were trying to get across. Thanks so much for caring about parents and their kids.”

— Jodi S.

“The beauty of this book is, it provides information which a parent can use immediately and effectively, with dramatic results. As an educator, I have recommended this book to many parents who feel their parenting skills have increased, and have noticed a positive difference. I highly recommend this book—an easy read with humor—it will make a difference in your life.”

— Parent Educator

“A complete program is mapped-out...rich with examples on major difficulties.”

— *Toronto Sun*

This really short book packs a wealth of truly practical advice and techniques for managing your teen. Clear, concise, and easy to follow suggestions. I found the ideas immensely helpful and effective, with tips for empowering your children by expressing confidence in their ability to take on more responsibility in the very areas that drive you nuts the most.

— Rita Levin

“This is the best parenting book I have read and have passed along copies to many of my friends and family.”

— Amazon reviewer

“As a certified Family Life Educator in Canada, I facilitate parent workshops for a rural Family Resource Centre in Nova Scotia. Your wonderfully wise book is written in a very accessible, fun style and the concepts are distilled down to the most basic but important ones so it’s comfortable to “digest.” It’s a perfect book/workbook for parents with teens.”

— Leslie Hauck, Family Life Educator



# Dedication

**T**his manual is based on some of the work of the late Robert Bayard, Ph.D., and the late

Jean Bayard, Ph.D., authors of *How to Deal with Your Acting-Up Teenager*. Working with Bob helped me find an approach to parenting which blends a peaceful, loving attitude with a determination to protect both parental and teen rights. Bob and Jean have touched the lives of many grateful parents and teens, and they have touched my life as well. I want to thank them both for their inspiration.

I would also like to dedicate this updated version to our grandchildren, Ethan, Max, Noa, Manny, Louie, Solomon, Sadie, Ernie, Gabriel and Benjamin, all of whom I love wholeheartedly. Thank you all for expanding my heart and enriching my ability to play—be it with cars, computer games, cards, trains, or make-believe with jewelry.

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# Why An Update Now?

I clearly remember the day I promised myself to update *Stop Struggling With Your Teen*. An

exasperated mom brought her very reluctant 15-year-old daughter to see me for a counseling session. The mom was ready to sit down in our waiting room while I “fixed” her daughter. I most certainly surprised them when I asked if they could *both* see me together.

I don’t think they expected the session to go quite the way it did—I most certainly didn’t. In fact, out of the three of us, I was the most surprised. Why? Simply put, I understood more thoroughly where the teen was coming from than where the mom was coming from. Her parents did not know how to control her, so they sent a loud, clear message: “You’d better listen, or else!” Each time the teen misbehaved—from a tiny infraction to large misdeeds—they took away one of her electronics. The teenager thus felt totally disconnected from her world, so she acted worse and rebelled more, and her parents swiped something else of hers. It went on and on.

I can’t possibly express the intensity of my physical reaction to this vicious cycle. I wanted to reach out to the right of me and hand them a copy of *Stop Struggling With Your Teen*. I couldn’t—the book was out of print—but this didn’t stop my strong visceral feeling. So I improvised. I used the principles from our book to help them reach a negotiated agreement and tried to add a dose of compassion and humor. The teenager promised not to be physically or verbally abusive anymore. She would give herself “time out” and listen to music on her device, which had been recently returned to her. Her mom promised to start making a change in herself, not to keep trying to change her daughter. The mother and I talked about how she could still set boundaries with her daughter while encouraging her independence. In this way, her daughter could experience the results of her own actions rather than cast her parents in the roles of villains.

Do I know whether the session changed this mom and daughter? Truthfully, no, but I do know it profoundly affected my own life.

Other moments, too, have deeply moved me to update this book. In fact, one still sticks in my mind. It happened when someone made an off-handed comment to me—and, honestly, I can’t remember who said it. Lately it has been popping up in my mind every so often, and each time it does, I hear the comment louder and louder: “Evonne, you wrote *Stop Struggling With Your Teen* for yourself. It was your own roadmap.”

Could that be true? Again, I truly don't know. I do know this has been quite a tumultuous yet exciting journey for me. I usually start talking about my experiences by saying, "Vanity saved my eyesight." Let me explain further.

One morning in September 2000, I couldn't see clearly enough to put on my eyeliner. Having just had my eyelashes dyed, I thought maybe the dye or an eyelash was stuck in my eye. A trip to the eye doctor revealed that it was far more serious: if this problem wasn't taken care of immediately, I would most definitely go blind. Yikes, he certainly got my attention!

Unbeknownst to me, for eighteen years I had had a benign tumor larger than a golf ball in my brain, and Dr. Krettak, my neurosurgeon, told me the tumor had affected me as if I had undergone a lobotomy. What did he just say to me? I didn't have the ability to feel feelings and emotions deeply; my feelings were flat. In other words, I didn't have access to my feelings to guide me as other people did. Maybe the person who made the off-handed comment was correct. *Stop Struggling With Your Teen* had become my roadmap. Was this part of the reason I updated our book? So I could do a rewrite using my "new brain"?

Since the brain surgery, I have delved deeper, asking myself the bigger questions of life: What really came first? The shutdown of my emotions from feeling overwhelmed with my new role of wife and mother, which manifested in the tumor? Or did the tumor itself create the shutdown? I know which one I wanted to believe: the tumor was the culprit. This was a very difficult question for me to think about. I seriously began to wonder if the tumor was really the sole reason for my so-called "lobotomy."

I remember I had been emotionally fragile, easily overwhelmed by my feelings, and extremely emotionally sensitive to what was going on around me years ago before the tumor occurred. And to think, as the years went by, that I thought I had improved! It never crossed my mind that I had emotionally shut down because I couldn't handle all the feelings coming at me, and the tumor could reflect this shutdown. It was much easier to act as if the tumor had created it in the first place. Now I recognize, with or without the tumor, that I hid from my emotions because they were too painful to deal with.

I know many parents also hide from their painful emotions because it is easier not to come to grips with their fears. Instead, they cover them up by coming up with stricter rules or idle threats they can't or don't enforce. Then the fighting with their teens escalates. What lies underneath this fighting is their desire to connect, to be heard, to be seen. So many times, both parents and teens don't know there is a totally different way to connect with one another.

I hope *Stop Struggling With Your Teen* will serve you as a roadmap for change as it has for me and will provide you with the practical tools for arguing less and connecting more with your teen.

# Looking at the Big Picture

**A**s you begin the Stop Struggling process, let's first look at an example of what

happened when one mother decided to overhaul her entire approach with her teen. Hopefully, by seeing this process in action, you will be inspired to consider the Stop Struggling approach as one of your ways to express love. Let's take a closer look:

Her son, Brian, had been doing fine in his old school, but life had changed when he changed schools. In his new school he had already been suspended twice. He was on a path of destruction, going nowhere except to potentially drop out.

Out of desperation, pain and anger, she said to me, "I've had it. There's no talking to him. I've tried everything to get him to stop fighting. First, I tried threats. I took some of his electronics away. I grounded him. I removed everything from his room that potentially could be 'fun.' When my husband said my punishments were over the top and I'm making my own son hate me, I felt guilty.

"Then, I did a 180-degree turn and became a total pushover. Why? Because it takes less energy to give in than to keep fighting. So, after dishing out punishments, I tried positive reinforcement—essentially bribes. I told him if he went to school for a week straight, I would buy him an iPhone. Guess what? He went for a week, I bought him the phone, and then he stopped going!

"First, I can't get him going to school, and then they kick him out. I've been to three parent-teacher conferences in the last month. The teachers seem to be worthless. But I am not giving up. If this means I have to stand up to the teachers or stand up to him, I will do it—whatever the cost is—because the cost is greater if I don't. He'll go down the wrong path, and I won't be able to stop it.

"Yes, I'm used to getting my own way, one way or another. As a kid, my mom always gave into me. I like to say I could 'out-argue' her. She would ground me for a month but give in after a week, because who wants to be locked in the house with a loudmouthed teen? It became more of a punishment for her. Sometimes she'd threaten to tell my dad, and I never knew how my dad would react. Sometimes he'd think it was funny and pay no attention to what my mom said, and other times he'd threaten me to stop 'or else.' He was so unpredictable."

At that moment, the mom realized what she had just said, paused, and haltingly acknowledged, “Before, I just thought my son was being typically stubborn. But to look in the mirror and recognize he was like me—used to getting his way—was more than I could accept. Then it really hit me. I realized I had become my dad, moving back and forth from a tyrant to a total wimp.”

This was the moment when the mom made the commitment to change. No more threats. She had to change her actions and, more importantly, her reactions. Her son, in turn, needed to become responsible for his own actions. So she would stop engaging in yo-yo parenting—swinging back and forth from being a policeman to being a pushover, and then restarting the vicious cycle. What she realized was:

1. Parents can get rid of the strong-armed tactics they have used in the past and turn over responsibility to their teens about decisions that primarily affect their teens’ lives.
2. When parents start to take a stand on the part of the problem that directly affects them, they can establish the credibility of their word by following through, which clearly demonstrates they are no pushovers. They will stop protecting their teens from facing the consequences of their own actions.

How do you accomplish this turnaround? Continue reading *Stop Struggling With Your Teen*, and find out how to develop a parenting action plan by striking a delicate balance between setting limits and encouraging independence. You will be able to do this by:

- Thinking Differently
- Turning Over Responsibility
- Tapping into Parents’ Rights
- Taking a Stand

The immediate results? Parent-teen relationships are built on mutual respect. Far reaching results? Parents play an important role in helping their teens become responsible adults who are filled with a self-love, self-respect and self-reliance openly expressed both within themselves and with other people in their lives. If this piques your interest and matches you and your value system—or if, for no other reason, you agree with the saying, “Desperation breeds change”—then continue the process. Remember to start with small changes so you can become encouraged and empowered along with your teen. Good luck!

NOTE: Both “he” and “she” and “him” and “her” are used alternately throughout the book for an easier read. Enjoy

# Thinking Differently

## In the Beginning

The parent-teen relationship is unpredictable—so unpredictable it can turn your whole family upside-down. You may find it comforting to know: most teenagers come out of the adolescent period right-side up. But in the meantime, many parents find themselves in a confusing, frustrating position. They have tried everything to create a healthy, harmonious atmosphere, but, for reasons they can't understand, they end up living in turmoil. Both adults and adolescents are left feeling discouraged and defeated.

As a parent, you may have tried some of the following methods of discipline:

- Grounding: "You stayed out past curfew again. You're grounded for the week."
- Rewards: "I'll buy you an iPhone if you get all As and Bs."
- Guidance: "If you don't do your homework, you'll flunk out and never even make it to college."
- Supervision: "I am going to start taking you to and from school, plus emailing your teachers once a week."
- Understanding: "Why do you do these things? Let's talk about it so at least I get where you are coming from."
- Orders: "Take the garbage out now!"
- Pleading: "I don't ask that much from you. Please, please take your dirty dishes out of the den!"
- Confiscating: "Put your phone away right *now*, or I'll take it away from you!"

If by some chance you've found some of these approaches effective with your teenager, stick with them. Don't tamper with success! However, if these methods aren't working and you're at your wit's end, it may be time to take a look at what's going on. More than likely you've been doing one or both of the following:

1. Trying to run your teenager's life.
2. Failing to make your own life happy.



In this guide, you will discover a plan to turn this situation around. Please take each step seriously, and spend some time on each one. In fact, you might want to browse through the guide first to get the total picture, but then you may want to sit down and work through the entire process as it is presented. Stay encouraged. You should see some changes within four to six weeks after starting the Stop Struggling process. As you continue to incorporate the ideas presented here, not only will you see improvement, but both you and your teen will also gain a sense of self-satisfaction. Parents deserve the chance to be calm and happy, and teens deserve the opportunity to learn to be self-sufficient and run their own lives.

## Change Your Attitude

**L**et's begin by looking at how you may have stopped taking care of yourself. Before changing your relationship with your teen, you have to help yourself feel better. Parental feelings of happiness are often replaced with guilt, worry, and frustration. This causes parents to develop an attitude that binds their happiness to their teenagers' behavior. For example, here are some common parental attitudes which tie you to the teen in this way:

"It's all my fault."

"If I don't step in, he'll do something irrevocable."

"What will other people think?"

"She is at such an impressionable age; I have to help her understand."

"If my teen isn't happy, I'm not happy."

These attitudes assume parents are entirely in charge of their teens' actions and teens aren't capable of being responsible. When you see things this way, you put your own thoughts, feelings and wishes aside and react only to your teen actions and needs.

For example, Mr. T., a divorced dad whose daughter was angry with him "for life," wanted to buy his daughter a birthday present, but she wouldn't answer his texts or phone calls. At first he asked himself, "How could she do this to me?" Then he decided not to get her anything unless she called him back. This kind of thinking would definitely lead him down a path of feeling discouraged, angry and helpless.

What could he do differently? He could switch his attitude. He could move from a “Why did she do that?” attitude to a “What can I do?” attitude. Here are two ideas for birthday presents that depend solely on his actions, not on how his daughter responds:

1. If he has an account set up for her (i.e., an account for college), he could put the birthday money into her account.
2. He could send her a gift card. It is her choice whether or not to redeem it.

His ultimate choice is not as important as recognizing how he could change his attitude. Instead of falling into the typical trap of allowing his teen’s reaction to become the measurement of his success or failure, he could begin to think differently.

In short, when Mr. T. changed his thinking from a “Why did she do that?” attitude to a “What can be done?” attitude, he based his success on *his* actions, not on how his teen responded to them.

For the next example, let’s say your teenager makes a habit of showing up late for dinner because he’s over at his friends’ homes playing video games. You have his dinner ready, even though he’s late *again*. You start questioning him the minute he walks in the door:

Parent: “Where were you?”

Teen: No answer.

Parent: “Why didn’t you call?”

Teen: “My phone was dead.”

Parent: “You know you’re supposed to be home at six-thirty. I’m so tired of hearing your excuses.”

Notice where the focus is: on your teen and what he has done “wrong.” You can see how nagging is getting you nowhere.

How do you turn this situation around and begin to focus on *you*? You start by realizing that, although you may not be able to control many aspects of your teen’s behavior, *you are in control of your own actions*. Therefore, instead of putting all of your efforts into convincing your child to change, you concentrate on *what you can do*. Using the above situation as an example, you might want to begin by saying, “I have dinner ready at six-thirty, and after that I’m off-duty.”

Many parents are quick to respond by saying their teens won’t care; they will simply fix themselves something else to eat. Remember, your intent is not to *punish* your teen. Your intent is to change the focus from *what the teen did* to *what I can do* by replacing questions and accusations that spotlight your teen’s behavior with a simple, direct statement that puts the spotlight on you and your action. Goal accomplished.

## Make Small Changes, See Big Results

**O**ne way you can begin to change the focus from accusations to acceptable rules is by

limiting your questions for one week. If you find this impossible, try one day at first. Don't give up—you can learn to replace many questions with statements about your own behavior, as shown in the example above, and you may even find some questions unnecessary. Here are some additional examples:

***Instead of asking these questions...***

“Why didn't you fill the car with gas before returning it? How many times do I have to remind you?”

“Why do you always leave dirty dishes in the den?”

***...try these statements:***

“I *want* the gas tank to be filled when you use the car. Remember our agreement: the gas tank is filled before you come home.”

“I *expect* the dirty dishes to be put in the dishwasher.”

***Instead of making these accusations...***

“How dare you use the emergency credit card to pay for pizzas for everyone!”

“You only talk to me when you want something from me.”

“Don't you dare use that kind of language with me!”

***...try these statements:***

“I notice on the Visa I gave you for emergencies that you bought twelve pizzas. I expect to be reimbursed \$135 by the end of the week.”

“I would like to spend some time talking with you, or set up a time so we could do something together.”

“I do my best to talk to you with respect. I would appreciate and expect you to do the same.”

Your decision to *focus on your own behavior* is a significant beginning in changing your parent-teen relationship. Your sense of powerlessness and helplessness will start to lift as you take control of your own behavior, and the hostile exchanges between you and your teen will lessen.

# SUMMARY

## Thinking Differently

1. Stick with the parenting approaches that have been working for you.
2. Develop a new attitude that relieves you from feeling totally responsible for your teen's behavior.
3. Realize that your happiness does not have to be tied to your teen's behavior.
4. Change the emphasis from "what my teen did" to "what I can do."