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Parent Question Paper

Question: *My daughter and I are very close—have been that is. She is 14. We did everything together, and I was her confidant, friend, and mother. There was nothing that she did not tell me, and we did lots of things together—shopping, eating lunch together, going to the movies, and just being together. I have two other children, one 18 year old daughter and a 20 year old son. Lately, my 14 year old seems to have too many other things to do, and we don't spend as much time together. I miss our times together. My son says to "let her go," and push her to be with others. My husband agrees. I know about the need for 14 year olds to do their thing—be with friends and so on. But I want to be sure she's ok and not embarrassed by me. Do you have some suggestions for what I could do?*

This is a very important question that many parents of teenagers have. Adolescence can be a very challenging time for both the teenager and everyone else in the family. It may be difficult, but it can also be rewarding watching the adolescent become an adult. During this time period, many things begin to change for the teenager, and they begin to have new life experiences. Their bodies are changing, their hormones are surging, they become better at abstract thinking and feel that they should be able to make more decisions for themselves, and peer groups become increasingly important. It is vital during this time period that parents stay involved in their child's life, but also allow them the room they need to experience life outside of their family.

Good family communication can help to smooth the transition from child to adult. It is important to spend time with the adolescent, as a family, and one-on-one, parent to child. Often, the teenager will not want to spend time alone with the parents, for any of a variety of reasons. In these instances, it is helpful to take a moment to just remind her that you are available to talk at any time, if she is interested. When communicating with her, pay attention, try not to interrupt, act interested in what she is saying, and be respectful of the opinions expressed. It is okay to disagree, but should be done with tact. Be willing to negotiate, and even compromise, as long as no risk of harm is involved (American Academy of Pediatrics,

2006). It is also okay to be angry with her for poor decision-making, and it is important to be angry with the actions and not with your daughter. Self-esteem is very important at this age in the development of her self-concept, and criticizing her character can have detrimental effects.

Sometimes, verbal communication can be difficult. In these circumstances, writing notes can be helpful. A little note in her lunch bag, such as "Hope you have a good day today," can send a little message that you care, and not be overly intrusive, either. In other cases, active listening can also go a long way. By simply being interested to listen to the adolescent's story about their day, parents show they care (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2006).

During adolescence, peer groups become increasingly important, because parents all-of-a-sudden become "not cool" to hang out with. It can be difficult for parents to understand how their child goes from spending every spare minute with them to not wanting to be with them anymore. Many parents of teenagers go through this. As the teens become less involved with family members, they become increasingly reliant on their peers for social interaction. They often report that being with friends is their favorite activity and is more important than anything else, which often makes it difficult for parents to understand. Close friendships with a few select individuals with similar interests provide opportunities for the teens to explore themselves, develop understandings of other individuals, and help them deal with the pressures of being a teenager. They learn to formulate their own personal values and beliefs and acquire new social skills and ways of handling situations (Jackson, Bijstra, Oostra, & Bosma, 1998). Groups of teenagers provide the opportunity to get to know others and interact with individuals from the opposite sex without having to formally go on dates or have

constant adult supervision. These peer groups help the adolescents feel secure enough with themselves to branch off on their own, thus preparing them for college and/or the adult world.

This can be a very trying time for all family members involved, especially for you, since you and your daughter were so close. It is understandable that you may have feelings of sadness during this time. Your daughter is merely exploring the world through her peer groups to gain a clearer sense of her identity, as all adolescents need to do during this time. Do not worry. This normal transition was not brought about by anything you said or did. It is normal growth and development that children roughly aged 11-18+ must endure. I understand how you are feeling, especially since this is your youngest child. You may feel as if your daughter "doesn't need" you anymore. She still needs you, but she needs you in a different capacity. Instead of being her "best friend," she needs someone to be there, yet in the distance. She still needs your direction, but she also needs the opportunity to be able to freely explore her world, and have a safe place to return to when she is finished.

By maintaining open communication with her, promoting a positive self-esteem, and allowing her the ability to make some of her own decisions, you are allowing your daughter the opportunity to explore who she is as an individual, so she can emerge from this transition as a lovely, successful woman. Please be reassured that your feelings are completely normal, and many other mothers experience this "empty nest syndrome" well before their last child actually leaves the home. One study showed that the event of the last child "leaving home," whether physically or emotionally, significantly improved the happiness and overall well-being of the mothers, and a significant reduction in the number of daily hassles (Dennerstein, Dudley, & Guthrie, 2002). I know it does not feel this way now; however, things should get better for you and your family. I understand this is difficult for you, but be assured it is okay

to have these feelings. I hope this letter has addressed all of your questions and/or concerns. Should you have any questions, or would like to speak with me more in person about this issue, please do not hesitate to contact me at the office. I wish both you and your daughter the best during this difficult, yet normal, life transition.

References

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