

The 5 mistakes *almost* every grown-up makes with teens



for Grown-ups





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Wow, Josh--depressing title for a book. You trying to induce a small panic attack?

You know, you're right. I'm sorry. It probably isn't even true, right? I mean, if you're like me, you never even make mistakes. Never misstep, never put your foot in your mouth, never have any regrets...wait.

Let's not lie to ourselves.

Everyone makes mistakes. Myself included. B-I-G time.

The difference between those who succeed and those who fail is what they DO about their mistakes. Those who succeed learn from their mistakes, become stronger, wiser, and more confident next time they're faced with a difficult situation.

I believe this is you.

So, don't get all defensive as you read about these five common mistakes. Rather, let them encourage you to be a better role model to the teens in your life.

Or, hey, maybe you'll read through these pages and go "HUH! I guess I'm doing better than I thought!"

Haha. Here we go...



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Mistake 1

Trying to act perfect

Notes

Teenagers don't relate to perfect people, they relate to humans. (You are a human, aren't you?) But here's the tricky thing about humans:

We're imperfect. We make mistakes.

Want your teen to open up to you? You go first. You ante up.

Get off your high horse, step down from your soapbox, and put away your know-it-all lecture notes. Embrace the fact that you're imperfect, that you have a sordid past full of screwups and lessons learned the hard way.

Sometimes the things in life that hurt you the most, are the very things you can USE to help others.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to build a bridge. Repeating the standards they've failed to meet isn't encouraging to teens. And hearing you talk like you're perfect when they're struggling isn't helpful. It's annoying.

Draw from your own failings to help them pick up and move on.

Consider a time when you were struggling. Who did you turn to? Your friend who acts perfect and makes you feel inferior? Or your friend who acts human...who gets what you're going through and maybe even opens up a bit about their own struggles?

Exactly. Learn from that, and repeat.



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Mistake 2

Show (OR) tell

Notes

The problem here is the OR. It's show AND tell, folks. Remember grade school?

It's a dangerous mistake to only communicate to teens in one way. Especially when it comes to important stuff like "I love you" or "I'm there for you."

If you're just showing or just telling, teens may never receive your message. You may think you're communicating how much you love them all day long, but they're not getting it--nothing computes, nothing connects. Fact is, the teen you're trying to reach may not receive or process information the way you prefer to communicate it.

I get tons of emails a week from teens about this problem. Stuff like "My dad buys me anything I want, but he doesn't understand all I want is him to be present with me and hang out with me" or "Seriously, Josh, I can't remember the last time my mom actually said the words... I love you."

Some parents/teachers/good-hearted folks just try to show teens they love them, but don't tell them. Other people just tell teens they love them, but never show them.

You must do both.

Nothing encourages your teen more than knowing (and hearing) you love them and are there for them.

Try this: imagine the teens you care about are either blind or deaf on any given day. The point? Prove everything you say with an action; support every action you take with your words.



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Mistake 3

Being friends

Notes

Your teens have friends--probably more than you do. What they NEED is a parent (or a teacher or a mentor). They need a role model. An authority figure.

Can you be both? Sometimes, ideally, yes. You can and should balance your authority with a crazy patient kind of love.

Relating is great. Being fun to be around is great. But you are NOT supposed to be a teen's buddy or BFF.

It may feel nice, it may be easier, but in the long run, your relationship with them is much stronger if you are the authority figure they need--not what feels the most warm and fuzzy for you.

If you really care about them (which you clearly do), you'll give teens what they NEED, not just what they WANT...or what makes you most comfortable.

As an authority figure, as a parent or teacher or role model or whatever, you're supposed to be the one who stands by the teenagers you care about and holds them accountable no matter what.

It's your responsibility to establish and enforce the rules and consequences, draw the boundaries. It's up to you to maintain a stable, loving environment where teens feels secure.

There is no way to count how many ways this impacts a teen; this is a life lesson of the highest order. Teens need to understand the idea of boundaries, and you can help them do that now.



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Mistake 3

Being friends (continued)

Notes

You know what I see a lot? I see parents and authority figures scared of being labeled as the “bad guy.” But here’s a secret: teens will tell you all day long they don’t want boundaries, but, secretly, boundaries make teens feel safe.

When I was a teen, I did this with my foster parents. I would gripe and complain about their ridiculous “rules” all the time when, really--inside--they made me feel safe. By establishing boundaries, they communicated their concern for me. I knew they cared.

I needed a disciplined environment to thrive.

Remember this--especially you parents out there: drawing and keeping boundaries, teaching teens the difference between right and wrong, what’s acceptable and unacceptable...this is your responsibility--no one else’s.

But watch this: if you don’t do it--if you choose to just be friends instead--they’ll learn the ropes from someone else...who may or may not have their best interests in mind.



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Mistake 4

Do as I say, not as I do

Notes

If your life doesn't match your words, you lose teens' respect.

Instantly. Just like that.

When you're consistently inconsistent, you teach them that what you say doesn't matter...and they quickly learn to ignore you.

You have to BE who you SAY you are; be the person you want them to be, because, believe it or not, teens are watching you.

All. The. Time.

And believe me, teens can spot hypocrisy and double-talk a thousand miles away. They're not stupid. And neither are you.

If you issue empty threats and set standards for them that you yourself don't keep, you're sunk. You've lost them. You've taught them your words don't mean anything. Even worse, you've taught them it's okay to hold a double standard.

Without even realizing it, you've taught them it's okay to lie.

You must LEAD by example. Why? Because teens LEARN by example.

You want them to be healthy? Okay, are you? Want them to treat women with respect? Great--is that how you treat their mom? You want to be heard? Then you'd better learn to listen.



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Mistake 5

Preventing mistakes

Notes

Let teens fail.

You heard me. Teens need to fail in a safe and loving environment. Everyone fails, everyone makes mistakes! If you deny them the opportunity to make their own decisions (even bad ones), you deny them a critical step on the path to adulthood.

Maybe you went through hell growing up and you want to spare the teens you care about the pain of learning things the hard way. I understand that.

But they may not learn anything if you protect them from the learning process.

Let them do things for themselves. It's the difference between coaching them through their homework and doing their homework FOR them.

Don't give them all the answers. Don't tell them who to be--that's their business. And don't expect them to grow up to be you--who you want them to be or, worse, who you always wished you were. Let them find their own way.

Be a good role model, yes. Guide them, yes. Answer their questions and reason with them. But more importantly, get them to reason with you.

Give teens the opportunity to take risks. Maybe they fail. Maybe their heart gets broken. That's hard to watch, I know. But don't condemn them or kick them while they're down or give them "you should have known better" speeches. Be there for them, accept them, affirm them, and help them break down what happened. How was that? How'd it go? Were you scared? What would you do differently next time?

Consider this: one day you won't be there.



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Mistake 5

Preventing mistakes (continued)

Notes

Will they be able to decide what's right when you're not there? How will they react to the consequences for their actions?

If it's the first time they've had to deal with a problem on their own, they'll freak out. Freeze. Become completely paralyzed with fear. (Sadly, I've seen it happen.) But if you've given them the gift of decision-making during their teen years, they'll be able to assess the situation, take a deep breath, and say "I've got this."

You must let them learn to function without you.

"But Josh, then they won't need me!" Correct. That's the point, isn't it? And guess what's better than them needing you? Them CHOOSING to come to you for advice long after they've stopped "needing" it because you've earned their trust and demonstrated unconditional love, even when they made mistakes.

There--you made it! You read through the five mistakes almost every grown-up makes with teens and emerged with your dignity intact. Congratulations!

By now you've either established that you are, in fact, a faultless paragon among mortal human mentor-types...or, having seen your face in the mirror, are now stronger, wiser, and more confident for the next round.

Just remember the basics: admit you're imperfect, play show and tell, stop being friends, lead by example, and let your teens fail. Therein lies the key to success.

Game on, champion! Go get 'em.

Yours truly,

//josh



About Josh Shipp

Josh Shipp is a teen advice guru, motivational speaker, marathon runner, and undisputed guitar hero. With more than a decade of hands-on, real-world experience, Josh has earned an international reputation as a leading authority on teen communication. Seen on MTV, CNN, NBC, FOX, Comedy Central, and featured in the LA Times, his inspiring personal story and life-changing message has reached more than a million teens... and counting. Say hi at HeyJosh.com.

About Hey Josh, LLC

Hey Josh, LLC is an integrated media platform created for one glorious purpose: to engage, inspire, and empower teenage humans and young adults, while helping those who care about these individuals find the courage and common ground to do the same.