

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

**HELP!**

**MY TEEN  
THINKS I'M  
THE ENEMY**

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**dr. bill maier**  
general editor



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## Foreword

As a clinical psychologist working at Focus on the Family, part of my job entails responding to the correspondence we receive from our constituents around the world. In fact, here at Focus we receive approximately 250,000 letters, phone calls, and e-mail messages every month.

Many of the individuals who contact us are parents struggling to maintain a positive relationship with a teenage son or daughter. Some of these parents contact us because their teen is involved in dangerous or destructive behavior, such as drug or alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity, cutting, or even criminal activity. Many of these moms and dads are desperate for guidance and don't know where to turn.

This book is written for parents like those who contact us looking for help.

It features a compilation of advice from experts such as Joe White and Susan Alexander Yates. Joe and Susan understand what makes teens “tick,” and I know you’ll appreciate their depth of knowledge, their insight, and their compassion.

Whether your relationship with your teen has been feeling somewhat strained or you’re in the midst of an all-out battle for control, you’ll find this book packed with useful information that you can begin applying immediately. And, as always, especially if you’re in the midst of a crisis, feel free to call us at Focus on the Family at 1-800-A-FAMILY.

May the Lord guide you and direct you as you seek to build a healthy, loving relationship with your teen!

Dr. Bill Maier

Vice President, Psychologist in Residence  
Focus on the Family

## Loving and Living with Teens

*Looking out the front window, Susan noticed her 13-year-old daughter walking slowly up the driveway on her way home from school. Her eight-year-old son was already home and busily searching in the refrigerator for something to eat.*

*Opening the front door, Susan greeted her daughter. “Hey, honey, I’m glad you’re home. How was your day?”*

*“Ohhhh . . . okay,” she replied in an exasperated voice and threw her backpack on the floor. Making a beeline for the kitchen, she bumped into her brother as he came out.*

*“Why don’t you look where you’re going!” she barked with an emphasis that said, “Get out of my way now!”*

*Casting a quick glance into the refrigerator, she turned accusingly to her mother.*

*“Why don’t we ever have any good food to eat in this house, anyway?”*

*They did. Susan had just been to the grocery store that very morning!*

*Not waiting for an answer, her daughter stomped out and headed to her room, shutting the door with a loud bang that seemed to say, “So there! Everything is all your fault!”*

*As Susan stood there in silence trying to figure out what to do, her son looked at her with a puzzled expression on his face and asked, “Mom, what’s the matter with Sis?”*

*“Adolescence, that’s what,” she replied.*



Sound familiar? If so, rest assured that you’re not alone. That sweet, thoughtful child you were living with just last week now stomps through the house and wants

to be anywhere you're *not*. Your teenage son thinks that you are completely out of touch with reality. Your preteen daughter suddenly spends every waking hour on the telephone and bursts into tears when you comment on the dress she's wearing. No doubt about it; the teen years can be trying for both teens and parents of teens.

Maybe you feel that you're losing your son or daughter. You miss the talks you used to have and the closeness you used to feel, and you wonder how to connect with the sullen teenager in your home. Don't panic! You may feel as though your teen thinks you're the enemy right now, but your son or daughter still needs you.

In this short book, we'll talk about the changes your adolescent is experiencing, because as parents, understanding what our teens are going through enables us to relate and offer help, encouragement,

advice, and sometimes just a shoulder to cry on when they need it. Together we'll look at ways to connect with your teen. We'll also go over issues such as dealing with rebellious teens and when to get professional help. And we'll talk about building a lasting relationship with your teens.

By picking up this book, you've taken the first step in learning how to successfully survive those few years of having a teenager in the home. And trust us, those years will go by faster than you think. You *can* do this. And we're here to help!



Part  
One

**You and  
Your Teen:  
Evaluating the  
Relationship**

*—by Joe White*

Is your teen distant? Belligerent? Is the relationship you'd hoped for disappearing under indifference, anger, or defiance?

Sometimes the signs couldn't be clearer. You may have found a marijuana bag, or a pack of condoms, or the empty aerosol cans and rags and paper sacks that indicate "huffing."

Or maybe you're worried about smaller earthquakes. Your daughter paints her fingernails black. Your son gets his nose pierced. You hear "I hate you!" more than any other phrase—or you hardly hear anything at all.

Take a look at the list below and check the following that apply to you.

1. \_\_\_ Your teen is respectful and responsible most of the time.
2. \_\_\_ Your teen has faults, but you suspect she's reacting to (or imitating) your own.

3. \_\_\_ You get feedback from others about what a “great kid you have,” even if you don’t see it at home.
4. \_\_\_ Your teen may not always respond the way you’d like, but generally chooses friends well, does homework (if grudgingly), and can be coerced into doing chores.
5. \_\_\_ Your teen seems to respond well to you when things are calm at home.
6. \_\_\_ Your teen’s behavior hasn’t changed radically and negatively in the last year.
7. \_\_\_ Your teen seems to get angry at nothing, blowing up at the slightest provocation.
8. \_\_\_ Your teen is defiant no matter what you say or do.

9. \_\_\_ Your teen seems to be saying or doing things continually to hurt you or to prove you have no control over him.
10. \_\_\_ Your teen consistently walks in the house grumpy and leaves grumpy no matter what you say or do.
11. \_\_\_ Your teen never communicates; all your attempts at even casual conversation are thwarted.
12. \_\_\_ Your teen is involved in drugs, sexual promiscuity, or alcohol abuse.

If you chose one or more of statements 1-6, chances are that your teen's behavior falls into the "normal range" for today's adolescents. There may be distance, but there's hope. In Parts 3 and 5, you'll find practical suggestions for ways to close the gap in your relationship.

If you chose one or more of statements 7-12, you face more of a challenge. Distance may have turned to hostility, even self-destruction. You may need outside help to turn things around—but there's hope for you, too. Part 4 has some specific advice to help you.

Either way, a first step toward success is understanding why things have changed in your relationship with your son or daughter. Is it all hormones and peer pressure?

Those factors often play a role. In our next section, we'll take a closer look at the changes—physical and emotional—that your teen is experiencing.

## Resources

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