

Teens will live up or down to parent's expectations



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"My daughter will soon be a teenager. I don't know if I can stand it." This mother's statement is not uncommon, but contains two assumptions that we need to think about. Number one, it implies that all teens are difficult. Number two, she's saying her daughter will be like all the other teens.

Placing people into groups without considering their individual characteristics is called stereotyping. We see many examples of stereotyping teens as a negative group in our society. Parents need to guard against this. Like all of us, teens will have their difficult times. It may happen often! Becoming a teen does not guarantee problems. Parents and teens may get along better if they know and appreciate each other as unique individuals.



The role of perception in understanding each other is worth some thought. The way we view and interpret other people's messages determines how we respond. If we hear negative messages about teenagers today, we may tend to look for the worst. It's easier sometimes to see the "bad" behaviors than to pick out the "good."

The way adults perceive teens tends to show in the way we respond to them. We may not knowingly say or do something negative, but our body language, our conversations with other adults, and the distance we keep from teenagers can deliver a stronger message than actual words or actions. We all need to think about the perceptions we create as we interact with young people.

Anything either positive or negative that we believe about ourselves and others can affect the way we act. So, if we buy into the negative image put on teens, we may end up with difficult teens partly because that's what we expected. Teens may also think, "If I'm going to be blamed for it anyway, I may as well do it." Adult expectations can influence a teen's self perception in a helpful or harmful way. Teens are apt to live up to or live down to what they perceive is expected of them.

The age of adolescence is a challenging, yet exciting time. Facing it with a positive outlook, and keeping in mind the role perception plays, can make the time more enjoyable.