



OU ISRAEL

FEATURING MICHAL SILVERSTEIN, MSC

PARENTING COLUMN

The OU Israel Parenting Center was recently launched in partnership with the Jerusalem Municipality. The goal of the parenting center is to help anglo Olim navigate the challenges of parenting through lectures, workshops, an advice line, and parenting articles.

Weathering the Storm

Many parents are at a loss when raising a teenager. They may feel they were calm and confident when their child was younger and then something changed. They don't recognize their own child and their relationship has morphed into something totally different. This is a very common feeling among parents of teenagers.

Firstly, these feelings are valid!

Your child is growing physically, emotionally and psychologically at a rapid pace. This is caused by a sudden increase and fluctuation of various hormones such as growth, sex and adrenal hormones. The sleep-wake cycle changes as a result of changes in melatonin. In addition, the brain is growing rapidly due to brain plasticity leaving teenagers fatigued. Despite the rapid growth of the brain, the

prefrontal lobe is compromised-meaning their ability to make good decisions, control their impulses, and delay gratification is impaired. This section of the brain which deals with organization will not be fully developed until your teenager is about 24 years old.

That being said, how does a parent navigate these turbulent years?

You can have a fully developed 15-year-old child who is bright, can carry on deep conversations and yet is incapable of cleaning their room or make logical decisions. If you have a teen who struggles with ADD/ADHD then these struggles are more exaggerated.

1. Accepting and understanding that your child is going through many changes will help you approach your child in a more sympathetic manner. In addition, when you know to expect outbursts and tantrums, you can mindfully wait outside the storm! Since teens are in a state of flux it is the role of the parent to be the anchor. Parents, take advantage of your fully developed frontal lobe! Stay calm, do not enter the storm and once your child is calm, be the voice of reason. Share your insights and advise in a non-judgmental way. Parents have more life experience, and the ability to see things in the long

term. Teens have a hard time seeing long term consequences and tend to make decisions based on the here and now.

2. Knowing yourself is key in dealing with teenagers. Parents should understand their own triggers and what makes them angry, defensive and vulnerable when interacting with their children. Additionally, knowing what's important to you and what your values are, will help you set rules and expectations for your child which are consistent.
3. The importance of setting a good example for your child. During this time, when your child is exploring their own identity, they look at you very closely. Knowing who you are and acting consistently is essential. They will pick up on your double standards or inconsistencies. They will play devil's advocate many times, challenging their parents in order to clarify who they are. The best way to get your teenager to be calm, rational, trustworthy and honest is for you to set that example.
4. Decide what your most important rules and values are. Ideally, these rules should be agreed upon by both parents. You want to avoid constant confrontation with your teen and only enforce what is absolutely necessary.
5. Don't take your child's outbursts personally. Many times, they will act out a home because that is where they feel safe.
6. When you set rules, be very clear.

When you ask your teen to do something, literally spell it out and break it up into small steps. This will help them follow through with a goal. This is especially relevant to teens with ADD/ADHD.

Lastly, it's important to observe your child and notice their strengths. You want to comment on their positive qualities no matter how trivial they seem. Positive comments and compliments should outweigh the critical comments.

Although raising and guiding a teenager is daunting at times, there are many skills that parents can utilize in order to make the process less intimidating. Sometimes, parents focus on trying to change their child or be in control of a given situation. Realistically, that's a losing battle. Parents should be present and available for their child while they are weathering the storm of the teen years. It is their job to listen, guide and develop mutual respect and trust, leading to an authentic relationship that will continue through adulthood. ■

Michal Silverstein made aliya in 1997. After receiving her masters degree, she worked with at-risk teenage boys from all over the world at Matara residential program, under the auspices of Dr. Stuart Chesner (head of the Bnei Chayil school in Jerusalem). She also worked for Kav L'Noar facilitating social-skills groups in Israeli high schools. Michal created a big-brother/big-sister program in her community, which aimed to empower both the mentor and the mentee. She runs various parenting workshops and maintains a private practice. She was a columnist for the Jewish press and a feature writer for the Jerusalem post.