

**Dear OU Parenting,**

*Our 15 year old daughter has become friends with girls who we think are a “bad influence”, as she started coming home past curfew and not dressing to our tzniut standards. We want her to distance herself from them. Any advice on how we could influence her? M.L.*


**Michal Silverstein, MSc**  
**Dear M.L.**

The teenage years are not only a time of adjustment for teenagers but also for parents. As teenagers gain independence and explore different parts of themselves, parents also have to switch gears. They must start to accept that their child is in the process of becoming an adult. Although intellectually this is obvious, it's more difficult to emotionally internalize this fact. This means that you have less control over your child and their decisions. Having said that, a 15 year old is definitely not an adult yet which means that parents still have a very important role to fulfill. Knowing exactly how much to guide and enforce, and how much to take a step back can be complicated, becoming somewhat of a dance.

**Refuah Shleima:**  
**Martha Bat Masha**

Most likely, telling your teen that you don't like her friends and to drop them, will not go over well. However, there are ways to broach this subject in an effective manner.

Noticing things about your child is important even if it's something that you don't necessarily agree with. It's important for teens to be seen by their parents. You can tell your child that you notice that she's hanging around with some new friends. Maybe these friends make her feel like she's part of a group and accept her? Maybe they understand her? Usually, the people who we surround ourselves with serve a purpose in some way. You may ask what she likes about them? Or what do they do together? Teenagers don't always want to share, especially if they're feeling judged, but the more you take interest even if it's not reciprocated, the better. Try to be curious rather than judgmental. The more you invest in your new parent-teen relationship the more your child will feel comfortable confiding in you or asking for your advice.

In addition, you can still tell your teen what you expect and coordinate expectations. You may want to adjust her curfew to half an hour later and see if she can consistently follow through. Same goes for the

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dress code. She may decide to dress differently than the rest of the family, all part of exploring herself. Whenever you can be flexible and avoid a battle the better. However, If there are things that directly conflict with your core values you must draw the line and say that you expect her to respect and follow your rules.

The teenage brain grows at a rapid pace, and although they can be very intelligent, their ability to make good judgements and decisions and control impulses are limited. This is all due to the not fully developed frontal lobe. Although this objective fact is even more distressing to parents, it actually should be validating. Many teenagers go through a certain amount of experimenting, making mistakes which is a normal process of becoming an adult. Some teenagers come in conflict with their parents on a regular basis while others seem to breeze through this stage. It depends upon your child's personality and your dynamic with this child.

Having said that, parents should keep their eye on their teenager for any signs of distress. Major changes in eating and sleeping habits, extreme mood changes, social isolation and slipping grades are a cause for concern. If a parent suspects that their child is in distress and is suffering from a

mental health issue such as anxiety and depression, they should reach out to a mental health professional. In addition to the normative teenage angst, the Corona pandemic has contributed to higher incidence of mental health disorders and addictions caused by interrupted school schedules and social isolation.

Being a parent to a teenager comes with its challenges. It's especially difficult if your teenager makes decisions which you do not agree with and can not really control. Unless her choices are dangerous, or risky, such as smoking, drinking, etc... try to be flexible, allowing her to assert herself and become more independent. Take comfort that this process is normal. Having open honest communication and building a mutual respectful relationship will help navigate this turbulent time. ■

Michal Silverstein has a MS in educational psychology and counseling. She facilitates parenting workshops in and around Jerusalem and maintains a private practice.

Feel free to send in any parenting questions you may have to [parenting@ouisrael.org](mailto:parenting@ouisrael.org) (Details will be changed to preserve anonymity).

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