

# Families with Teens

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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## Information Series for Parents and Caregivers of Teens

### Teens Will Live Up (or Down) to Parents' 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. One, it implies that all teens are difficult. Two, she's saying her daughter will be like all the rest.

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! But, 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." For example, we tend to notice when a group of teens are hanging around the street corner where we think they are causing trouble. But, if a group of teenagers are working at a summer camp with younger children, we aren't as quick to notice.

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.

Johann Goethe once said, *"If you treat people as if they were what they ought to be, you help them to become what they are capable of being."* Anything – 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. Children 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.

*Prepared by Kari Fruechte, former Regional Extension Educator, 2000. Reviewed by Colleen Gengler, Family Relations Specialist, 2005.*

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**For more information on families with teens, check out these resources:**

Teen Talk: School Issues – A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers, #08129  
Teen Talk: Youth Choices – A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers, #08130  
Teen Talk: A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers, #07938  
<http://www.parentingteens.che.umn.edu/TeenTalk.htm>

Thriving With Your Teen, #07752,  
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7643.html>

The Growing Season: A Parent’s Guide to Positive Parenting of Teens,  
#07607 – video/booklet package  
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7607.html>

#07776 booklet only <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7776.html>

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