

# 3 Reasons Why It's Tougher to Be a Teen in Today's Culture

I have always been a fan of *Saturday Night Live*. One of my favorite eras of *SNL* was the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Dana Carvey had so many memorable characters and catchphrases. There was a character he did called Grumpy Old Man who would complain about progress and lament about how easy things are today. He'd spout off:

*"Today everyone's spoiled rotten. When I was a boy, we didn't have these video games. We made up our own games, like 'Chew the Bark Off the Tree.' You and your friends would find a nice oak tree and you'd start chewing the skin off of it. And there were no winners. Everyone was a loser. It rotted your teeth and left your intestines scarred and knotted. And that's the way that it was, and we liked it. We loved it!"*

It's easy to look at today's generation of teenagers and say they are babied, oversensitive and have a sense of entitlement. In some ways, that criticism is accurate, but when I see a viral video of a Jeff Daniels character calling late adolescents, *"The worst period. Generation period. Ever period."*

I think it's time to stop for a reality check. If I were given the choice between being a teenager now or 30 years ago, I'd take 30 years ago any day of the week. Young people growing up today have challenges more difficult to navigate; these challenges would be more difficult for anyone—let alone a teenager who hasn't figured out who they are yet.

They are living in a world that is completely different than the one we grew up in, and we can't rely on our own teenage experience to guide them effectively. When we understand their world, we will have a deeper influence.

Here are three reasons being a teenager is harder today than it was in our day:

**1. Under the microscope and forever documented.** Imagine having a filming crew document your teen years and then posting it all online. Think about every dumb or immature thing you did or said in high school or college. The Internet has provided a permanent and public place for all of that to be exposed and mercilessly judged. Privacy is nonexistent. There's always someone, mainly peers, documenting their every move and word. It's pressure we were fortunate to live without.

**2. Never-ending exposure.** The Internet is their world, and the stream of information is constant. Sure, they can decide not to go on, but that is like telling a teen to stay in their room for all of high school. It's not realistic. They are going to be on there and encounter everything offered, positive and negative. Unfortunately, the negative can do major damage. A kid being bullied could, at least, find a safe haven when they got home. There is no safe haven from cyber bullying.

They are exposed to violence and pornography at an early age without an ability to process what they are seeing. Most teenage boys, in particular, end up with an addiction to pornography as a result. Innocence and childhood are cut short while adulthood is still many years away.

**3. Unhealthy expectations.** I'm all for setting a high standard. The problem is that we are asking teenagers to do too much with not enough time. Today's teenager needs to play sports all year with the commitment level of a professional athlete. Most are forced into taking advanced placement courses, giving them a workload they are ill-equipped to complete. They must complete service hours, be a stage performer, do activities outside of school and sometimes have jobs. They do not have the time to do all of it at a high level. It's exhausting.

When I asked one teen to go to a summer camp several years ago, he asked if he would get service hours. When I told him no, he asked why he should go. When I said, "To have fun," he said, "I don't have time for that."

What a sad statement.

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