

How to Teach Your Teen That Being Awkward Is OK

As a mom of 10 kids, I've been through every stage (a few times!), and I have to say that the hardest, most confusing time for girls is the pre-teen and teen years. Between ages 12 to 16, girls' bodies are changing, their emotions are charged, and on a scale from 1-10, their desire for peer approval is an 11.5!

All the lessons that little girls soaked in during quiet time devotions about their value, worth and beauty dissipate as soon as they become a teen, walk into a group setting and have a half-dozen sets of eyes fixed on them.

The truth is that there are multiple situations a day when teen girls have to deal with going with the crowd or choosing a different way and feeling uncomfortable and awkward. We raise our teens to be different than the world, but being different is painful for girls who want to fit in!

I love what Kari Kampakis says in her book, *10 Ultimate Truths Girls Should Know*:

"It's not a matter of if you'll be pressured, but when. People will push you as far as you let them. Unless you establish parameters now, you'll be talked into things against your better judgment."

The good news is that parents can help! In addition to reading through *10 Ultimate Truths Girls Should Know* (which I recommend!), here are other ways parents can help. The advice below came from my mom friends. Feel free to use these as conversation starters for your teen girl.

Lea Anne: I try to emphasize more how uncomfortable the consequences are of doing wrong. That way, these tough

conversations or awkward noes seem like a positive step for their own safety and well-being.

Tina Marie: Even though it's hard to stand up for yourself and not follow your peers, it is OK to stand up for what you feel is best for you and or right for you. It is OK to be different than them. If your friends are your true friends, they will stick by you in the choice you make for yourself.

It is hard to see the consequences at the time of the wrong, but try not to rush into quick decisions. Wait till the last minute to give your answer, call your parents and talk it out with them. If allowed, come up with your own group get-together that's safe for all.

Cynthia: Encourage your teen girl to be a mentor to someone younger. When teens know they're counted on as a mentor, they often counsel the younger with the advice they need themselves.

Martha: Work hard to teach them to be teachable, but at the same time own their uniqueness and abilities. When you don't mind being unique or different, but are comfortable in that, it makes you able to stand against peer pressure and be a leader.

Erin: I do a game called "What Would You Do" with moms and daughters. It's scenario-based with a question that lays out peer pressure, etiquette, friend-related and dating type of questions and it has multiple choice answers. The girls get in groups, the moms get in groups and discuss the scenario among themselves. At the end of the game we discuss the questions and our answers. The idea is they have pre-decided how they will handle the situation (or something similar) before it happens. They have had a chance to pre-determine their values surrounding the issue. Then, if faced with this situation, they will be better prepared to respond appropriately.

Anne: When I was a tween/teen, I stood apart a lot because of

my faith in Jesus. Knowing that my home was a safe place made a huge difference. Plus daily Bible reading, youth group, prayer and honest spiritual conversations really helped!

Jodi: Long before my oldest became teens, we had a family saying: "Sometimes, doing the right thing means doing the hard thing." Be the blame if needed. My kids know that if they are ever in a situation where they don't think they have the strength to do the right thing, they have my full permission to rely on me as their excuse.

Margo: I always told my kids that people are always hoping for someone to lead them in the way they really want to go. Sometimes they don't have the nerve to buck the crowd, so they long for someone else to do it and then they gladly follow. Not always, but sometimes.

Debbie: *"It's none of your business what other people think of you."* That's the best rule of life. Being Christians and living godly lives will get us judged a lot of the time, and even challenged. But live for Jesus and His mercy and His grace. It will prevail ... every single time!

Finally, I will add, "Be the example." As parents, we need to be comfortable with being uncomfortable in living for Jesus. Our kids are watching, and when they see us standing strong, they'll have an easier time doing the same!

YOUR TURN!

How have you helped your kids get comfortable being uncomfortable? What family rules or mantras have helped in tough situations? {eo}

Tricia Goyer has written more than 35 books, including both novels that delight and entertain readers and nonfiction titles that offer encouragement and hope. She has also published more than 500 articles in national publications such as Guideposts, Thriving Family, Proverbs 31, and HomeLife

Magazine.