

# Thinking About and Being with Your Teenager

## *Thoughts and Intentions to Improve Your Relationship*

By Michelle Seely Lang LMFT

### Development and Expectations

- ❖ Adolescents are IN PROCESS—it is not a stable time—we must neither foreclose on their process nor find only rigid responses to it. It is taxing to patiently foster what is unformed—that is our job.
- ❖ By letting go of how we think he *should* be—the adolescent as other is welcomed into our awareness
- ❖ Adolescents need us to step aside where it is safe to, so that they can hear their own values and authority as they emerge in their own voice. If we talk too loudly or too much about what they need to do and when to do it, our adolescents will not hear their own voices, and will not learn to look to themselves for guidance when we are not around.
- ❖ The parent is encouraged to be thoughtful and not to feel s/he is the victim of the teenager's challenges.
- ❖ If we have developmentally reasonable and appropriate expectations, we can get to know our 'new' child by developing our communication and observational skills. For example—**an adolescent will act out**—how do we respond?
- ❖ **All** behavior is communication—by holding on to the small scraps of communication and wondering and thinking about the possible meaning we do not feel so lost.
- ❖ Parents can facilitate the adolescent's work at ego strengthening by helping them to **name** and **accept** and **contain** their emotions
- ❖ Learn to be a non-judgmental presence—help them to predict anger, articulate annoyances, and process feelings of aggression without hurting themselves or others.
- ❖ Walk your talk.
- ❖ After containment is possible—more insight can be encouraged.

**Work hard to continue to care about and value this person, your son or daughter, as they grow into their wonderful adult self.**

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### A Collaborative Conflict Resolution Model Working It Out Together

From How to Talk So Teens Will Listen and Listen So Teens Will Talk by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlis

*Parent:* this is the second time you missed your curfew! Well, you can forget about going anywhere next Saturday night. You're in for the weekend.

#### **Instead:**

##### **Step 1: Invite your teenager to give her point of view.**

*Parent:* Something is making it difficult for you to meet your curfew.

*Teen:* I'm the only one who has to be home by ten. I always have to leave when everyone is having fun.

##### **Step 2: State your point of view.**

*Parent:* When I expect you home at a certain time and you're still not here, I worry. My imagination goes into overdrive.

##### **Step 3: Invite your teenager to brainstorm with you.**

*Parent:* Let's see if there are any ideas we can come up with that would give you a little more time with your friends and give me peace of mind.

##### **Step 4: Write down all ideas—without evaluating.**

1. Let me stay out as long as I want and don't wait up for me. (teen)
2. Never let you out again until you're married. (parent)
3. Move my curfew up to eleven. (teen)
4. Extend your curfew to ten-thirty—temporarily. (parent)

##### **Step 5: Review your list and decide which ideas you want to put into action.**

*Teen:* Ten-thirty is better. But why temporarily?

*Parent:* We can make it permanent. All you have to do is prove you can be on time from now on.

*Teen:* It's a deal.