

"Living with Grunting Teenage Boys"

I live with two boys aged 14 and 17, a husband and 2 dogs. Actually I should say some days I live with them, other days we co exist in the same house. It depends on whether they have had a run in with a teacher, not enough sleep, feel bored, are just feeling cranky or my husband and I have done something hideously embarrassing like saying more than "hello" to their friends. Let alone if my husband has made a joke!!

"I had to learn a whole new language... Their usual chatter about the day had turned into guttural grunts and gestures that I had to learn how to interpret."

Even though I had worked for many years counselling young people, it still **surprised** me that one day my boys turned from talkative family members full of love, excitement and respect for me, to over 6 foot tall "rock stars" with underpants showing, fringes that covered most of their faces and ear phones permanently planted in both ears.

Their chatter about the day had turned into guttural grunts and gestures that I had to learn how to interpret. I also had to become a **detective** to find out anything about what was going on in their lives.

I have had to learn a whole new language. It isn't just my boys who communicate like this. They also bring home others who dress like they do and communicate similarly. They have their own jokes and language and it is obvious that I am way too old and uncool to understand.

It can be very easy to feel disheartened and to think that as a parent you don't have a role any more (aside from providing practical assistance). It is easy to take their rejection personally. I hear it all the time from friends and clients.

But let's have a think about what it's like for them. Growing up to become a young adult is difficult. They have to manage new relationships, responsibilities, feelings, new tasks and new roles. They also have to develop a new relationship with us parents. We most importantly have to **lead the way** there, and help them develop that new relationship. Letting go of control isn't easy. Particularly if you're not sure how hard they will crash and burn.

One thing is certain, kids will grow into adolescents and **adolescence is not easy**. Another thing that is certain is that living with adolescents will force us to move on to the next phase of our lives.

Here is some of the advice that has kept me going:

- Look for growth and development and comment on those (you may get the eye roll, but everyone - even a long-fringed teenager - wants to hear genuine praise)
- Don't worry so much about the small stuff (messy rooms, how long their fringes are etc)
- **If it isn't working don't keep doing it** (try something different and unexpected)
- Enjoy the small moments of connection (sometimes is just the tone of the grunt or a "mum smells" comment with a twinkle in their eye)
- Know that they will return to being "human" again one day (and it happens gradually as the adolescent hormone-induced fog lifts off)
- **Laugh loudly and often**
- Create your own life and identity; it's a process for parents as well
- Work together with your partner (or their other parent) in creating boundaries and flexibility within the boundaries (being too strict or too accommodating doesn't help)
- Pick your battles and also pick the times to have them (not when you are emotional or they are emotional, and only when you have love in your voice and heart)

This week my 14 year old decided that he would speak during dinner. He laughed at his fathers joke and even sat on the couch next to me and snuggled up whilst we watched TV. I have carried that with me all week.

Having the chance to be present when you see what's inside is an honour and a treat.

Yes, he was back to grunting this morning but I know that inside that growing adolescent body is my wonderful human being just trying to grow up. Having a chance to be present when the window opens and you see what's inside is an honour and a treat.

Please seek permission from Parent Line before reproducing this article, by contacting us on 1300 1300 52 or info@parentline.org.au