

An Editor's Invitation: Parenting

Category: Parenting

written by Paul Gross | May 1, 2019

I just returned from a conference in Toronto. At one point, I was sitting at a table with three strangers—family physicians from distant locations. One was cradling a toddler. Another was visibly pregnant with her third child. Before long the four of us were passing around cellphone photos of our offspring, blessing one another with little cries of admiration. That's how long it took for us to go from strangers to intimate friends.

When I think of our nation's political travails, my fantasy is that someone will create a television program that brings together parents from diverse demographics and geographics—urban, rural, red state, blue state, Christian, Muslim, working class, middle class, dark-skinned, fair-skinned—and get them talking about what it's like to raise children.

In my fantasy, every parent agrees: Childrearing is a joy and a nightmare, the best and the most frustrating thing we've ever done, and—here's the bridge across our divided politics—every one of our children deserves the best chance that our society has to offer.

My two daughters are now their mid-twenties, and their age tells me something sobering—that I'm no longer as youthful as I once was.

Our children are often messengers of hard truths. They remind us that time has passed, that they are programmed to evolve out of our control, and that Dad, you are definitely no longer cool.

Or, as one of our daughters, at age thirteen, said to me, "Dad, you think you're funny, but you're really not."

Being a teenager, she had to finish the thought, reward me with her complete truth: "It's really sad."

The teen years are incredibly challenging. Little did I know when our daughters were eight and ten that I'd one day be reading a book called *Yes, Your Teen is Crazy!*—desperate for some shreds of advice.

At the Toronto conference I ran into two former residents who are thinking about having children, but aren't quite sure whether they should. I wanted to offer pearls of wisdom. At the same time, I wanted to remain silent and give them space.

What would I say? That parenting is the most important thing I've done in my life? That I would do it again in a heartbeat? That you don't realize how much you'll fall in love with your children until you have them?

At the same time, I'd want to say that it really helps to have a rock-solid partner and to be lucky—because so much of parenting isn't under your control. And you need to be prepared to be unlucky because, even with the greatest good fortune, there will be unlucky times.

As a family physician, I enjoy talking to parents. I spend a lot of that time trying to reassure them. "Yes, your child is healthy...Yes, your son's teeth will definitely grow in...No, you can't control your daughter's appetite. You decide what's on the table, and let her decide how much or how little to eat."

I also enjoy talking with my teen patients. Are they sailing along? Swerving all over the road? Will they end up in the ditch? Can I do anything about it? And I like sharing with their parents my own hard-won perspectives—Yes, *My Teens Were Crazy, Too!*

This month's *More Voices* theme is Parenting.

What's your experience of parenting—as a parent, as a clinician, as a grandparent, as a godparent or as a foster parent? As an onlooker? As someone who yourself was parented?

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