

# My Teen Team

Article #1: What are they hearing from you? (5 min read)

## Your teenager...

- Desires affection: a fond or tender feeling toward another.
- Needs affirmation: emotional support or encouragement.
- Wants attention: the action of dealing with or taking special care of someone or something.

## When's the last time you...

- Hugged your teenager?
- Vocalized how proud you are of them?
- Asked them about their passions?
- Listened to their frustrations?
- Spoke to their strengths?
- Bragged about them to someone else?
- Told them you loved them?



“I’m difficult but I promise I’m worth it.”

- Your teenager’s heart

## What do you see?

Attitude >>> Character

Bossy >>> Leader

Ditzy >>> Silly

Emotional >>> Passionate

Hyper >>> Excited

Lazy >>> Selective

Loud >>> Boisterous

Mean >>> Guarded

Quiet >>> Processing

Rebellious >>> Independent

Reckless >>> Ambitious

Sassy >>> Witted

## Are you missing the point?

*"My parents think I'm out doing drugs when I'm not at home and not at school because I told my parents about the ONE time I tried marijuana. I hated it and it was literally the worst experience of my life. I literally spend all my free time at the library because I genuinely love to read. My parents think that's my excuse to get high. I will never tell them anything again."*

-17 year old

In 2012, I started my professional career working in a youth behavioral treatment facility. It was my dream job! A few years later, I accepted an advancement opportunity that led me away from working directly with that population. Recently, I accepted a position working in adolescent substance prevention. My first day on the job I was quickly reminded of how much I missed working with teenagers. I missed overhearing the immature and pointless conversations with no reason, wisdom, or grammar. I missed the arguments comparing abs, social media platforms, or over exaggerated party stories. I missed the random left field remarks that make you scratch your head because of the lack of context. I missed the tidbits of unfiltered genius that shines through conversations. But most of all, I missed their authenticity.

Have you ever been in a straight up honest and heartfelt conversation with a teenager? They hold no punches. They let you know what they think and why they think it, even if there is zero logic. They flood open the gates of their passions without filter and will openly share their deepest hurts and pains because society hasn't yet taught them how to be a chameleon and hide what's really going on inside. Despite what you see or hear your teenager has passion, they want to impress you, and they deeply desire affirmation and encouragement from you.



Thank you for reading this far and I hope you see my heart. I love this age group and nothing breaks my heart more than

when I speak to a teen who has been broken to their core. Unfortunately, most teenagers experience an internal shift when brokenness occurs and are left with strong feelings of insecurity and self doubt. As a parent, I strongly encourage you to remember everything you say to your teenager about your teenager matters. Harsh words unaccompanied by a soft approach produces a broken spirit.

Not too long ago, while conducting a substance abuse prevention class I quickly picked up that one of the girls in the class didn't think much of herself. She kept calling herself names like *stupid*, *ditz*, and *idiot*. She even stated multiple times, "I'm not smart enough for school. School isn't for me." On top of that, the other kids picked up on her settle hints of low self confidence and like sharks after blood they attacked with playful jabs salted with comments about *her not having common sense* or *smoking her smarts away*. I tried to find as many opportunities as I could to encourage her by telling her she was smart and bright in front of the rest of the class. However, every time I complimented her, she gave me a quick look before turning away and acting like she didn't hear what I said... but I knew she did.

At the end of that class, the students shook my hand before receiving their certificate of completion as they left the room. She happened to be the last one in line and I seized the opportunity to make one last comment of encouragement. I simply called her by her name, made eye contact, and said, "You are a very smart and wise girl with potential to do amazing things. I really think you're going to shock a lot of people." With unbroken eye contact and tears welling in her eyes, she stared back at me and responded, "Thank you very much." I only knew that girl for the few hours I spent with her in that classroom but my heart dropped because I had this sense she has never heard a compliment or encouragement like that. I wondered what she hears at home? Or better yet, what doesn't she hear?

The truth it's a lot harder to be a teenager right now than ever before. Teenagers today have a tougher time with identity more than any past generation. With all the social media out there, they can't help but to compare themselves to the fake profiles on the internet. They are constantly hearing and seeing, "You're not good enough." I have a ten year old daughter. I have picked up the practice to go out of my way everyday and tell her how pretty and intelligent she is. Because when the day comes and she sees a private social media conversation or a text message between two

people breaking down what they don't like about her, I want my voice to overpower any other voice she hears. What is your teenager hearing from you?



**A Note From the Author**

Hi everyone! My name is Lonnie Ridgeway and I'd like to thank you for taking the time to read this article. I hope you found it to be encouraging and helpful. I wrote this article because I want to address a consistent yet often overlooked relational issue within the family dynamic, teenagers and their parents. My heart truly expands for the teenage population and I want to help parents better connect with their children. If you have any comments, suggestions, and/or questions please contact me at [lonnieridgeway@yahoo.com](mailto:lonnieridgeway@yahoo.com).

**About the Author**

Lonnie Ridgeway is the current Coalition Director of Health & Prevention at VOA Alaska. His passion for youth grew out of overcoming difficult circumstances during his teenage years and a desire to uplift and motivate adolescents who find themselves in the same circumstances he grew up in. Despite having high Adverse Child Expectation (ACE) score, Lonnie has a growing list of achievements to include college graduate, collegiate athlete, father, husband, business owner, and community activist. Lonnie is not shy about talking about his story and freely shares his experiences, lessons learned, and words of encouragement to anyone who asks. Lonnie has a sincere passion and love for ALL people.