

Amy McCready – TODAY Parenting Team

1. Be the sleep police. Most teens are running on empty when it comes to sleep; but we all know they need sufficient shut-eye to think straight, make solid decisions, keep cool under pressure, and to enjoy the moments. While controlling how much sleep your teen actually gets is, well, an impossible dream –make sleep a priority in your house. Encourage early light-outs time for everyone in the family and have rules in place for the “sleep robber” – technology! Keep electronics out of kids’ bedrooms after 9 PM for example and require devices to be charged in the common area. (Your teen may not like these rules – but remember, you own the technology and it’s your job to establish the boundaries.)

2. Don’t discount their stress. In today’s world, high schoolers are under more stress than ever - getting good grades, excelling at sports, preparing for SAT’s, part-time jobs, building their college “resume” (which starts as a freshman), steering clear of bullies, trying to have a social life and meeting *your* expectations. Sometimes a snippy remark or rolled eyes is a sign that your teen is overwhelmed. Seek to understand what’s going on below the surface and don’t take everything personally. 99.5% of the time it’s not about you. Be the sounding board and safe haven for the stress of high school life.

3. Listen more than you lecture. Like any of us, kids just want to be heard. They want to know that we “get them.” That we’re listening. Be aware of how much time you spend “ordering, correcting or directing” (a guaranteed recipe for power struggles) and instead, spend more time listening and understanding. There are times when you’ll have to sit down and have the difficult conversations – but MOST of the time, they just need you to be that place to land, the ear to bend, and the rudder that keeps them on the right course.

4. Don’t sweat all the small stuff. Bed’s not made? Room’s a mess? Towel lying on the bathroom floor AGAIN? Yeah, I know. It can be irritating, because if you’ve told them once you’ve told them a hundred times, right? So, tell them again if you must but please, please don’t sweat the little stuff. Pretty soon they’ll be out on their own and you’ll miss them. Wet towels, rumpled bedsheets and all. (Yes, this is an actual room in my house!)



5. **Go to every event.** Every single one that you can. They want and need your support. Even though they may not say it, they love to see the wonder and pride you feel as you watch your teen flourish and create their own accomplishments. Be there for those moments. Celebrate who they are. Let them know you are their biggest fan.



6. Spend one-on-one time with them as often as you can. Even though they are teens and are biologically wired to “individualize” – your kids still crave emotional connection with you. Spend one-on-one time with them on a daily basis if possible. (I call this *Mind, Body and Soul Time*.) Be fully present – no distractions and do *whatever they want to do* - maybe shooting hoops, watching funny YouTube videos, taking a bike ride or yes, even playing video games. You’ll both love the connection time and it will work wonders in making your teen more cooperative at other times. Score!

7. Push them out of their comfort zones. The middle school years are tough territory and for many kids - it’s all about surviving. Most kids play it safe and try to stay under the radar. High school is different. It’s the time for

kids to figure out who they are and explore their passions. Give your kids the encouraging nudge to try something new – whether it's in the arts, sports, volunteering - anything that sparks their interest. My husband gave my son - a life-long soccer player - a nudge (push!) to join the choir for his freshman year of high school. A year later he was singing and dancing in his first school musical and a year after that, he earned the male lead role of "Bert" in Mary Poppins. Now, singing is his #1 passion. You never know what will happen when they try something new.



8. **Create a “Decision-Rich Environment.”** This is one of the tools I talk about in my new book, ***The “Me, Me, Me” Epidemic - A Step-by-Step Guide to Raising Capable, Grateful Kids in an Over-Entitled World.*** High school is the time to learn *how* to make decisions and do for

themselves. Create as many opportunities as possible for them to make decisions – from which hotel to stay in on vacation (within your budget) to which classes to take to how to get the best financial return on their summer job money. The more practice they have making little decisions, the better they'll do making decisions when the stakes are much higher. But – be prepared. Your kids will make poor decisions along the way – and that's okay. Create a safe environment where mistakes and failures are what they are – opportunities to learn.

9. It will work out. Whatever it is. Breathe. Here's the thing – nothing lasts, not the good or the bad - so don't wrap every emotion and anxiety up in the problems. And please, don't try to control it all – because you can't. Your kids will make their own way. There will be missteps and consequences and lessons learned. They'll find the right path. They'll be just fine. That old saying, "Let go and let God" is powerful – because it works.

Enjoy these times – yet be prepared (with tissues). Know that there will be a lot of "lasts" in that final year of high school. Last games, last performances, last awards ceremony, and last dances. It's a time for celebration. Recognize your hard work all these years has resulted in a capable and responsible young man or woman heading out into the world! That's something to feel proud of!



And from files of “What would my kids say?” – here’s what my rising senior thought should be included in advice to parents of high schoolers:

- Feed us in the morning before school.
- Be sure to have food waiting for us when we get home from school/practice. (A reoccurring theme!)
- Don’t snap your fingers when you dance. In fact, don’t dance at all.
- Don’t ever say “hip”
- And when in public, don’t EVER text using Siri!

What would YOUR kids say??

Amy McCreedy's new book is **"The 'Me, Me, Me' Epidemic: A Step-by-Step Guide to Raising Capable, Grateful Kids in an Over-Entitled World."** Learn more at AmyMcCreedy.com.



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Parenting Expert and TODAY Contributor Amy McCready is the Founder of PositiveParentingSolutions.com and the author of “The ‘Me, Me, Me’ Epidemic” and “If I Have to Tell You One More Time”

