



PARENTNET®

**Contributed by The Berkeley Prep School, Tampa, FL
Permission to copy granted to ParentNet member schools**

To: All fathers of teenagers
From: A father of a teenager
Subject: How a few dedicated hours a year can make a difference

When I was a teenager, which of course seems centuries ago, I distinctly remember my Dad remarking to my Mom “children and times are so different today.” I guess I’m guilty of becoming my Dad because I’ve spoken the same words to my wife and I have discovered in the last couple of years how often my male friends have said the exact same words to their spouses.

I have been fortunate to be able to communicate with quite a few of my male friends on the raising of a teenage child. To my ecstatic joy, I discovered that I was not alone and that my child was acting like most normal teenage children. I learned that the behavior I had a difficult time relating to was indeed typical. This revelation was a giant step forward for me and opened new ways of helping me better relate to my child.

Due to the valuable lessons and insights I garnered during my talks with other fathers, I realized that the more interaction and communication I had with other parents, both Moms and Dads, the better relationship I might have with my own child.

I made a decision to attend ParentNet meetings with my wife in an attempt to get even closer to an understanding of all the machinations involving our teenage child. The sharing of age-related issues has truly benefited me. As a result, I feel positive about turning the already good relationship I have with my teen into a great one.

Over the years, I have been a public speaker all over this great country. I have spoken to every type of audience imaginable and I have learned many helpful lessons. One of the most valuable is that we always seem to stumble, “when we don’t know what we don’t know.” Sounds kind of silly. I promise you it isn’t. If you can’t fly an airplane, that’s something you know without ever being told. You never flew one, you never took lessons and you don’t have a pilot’s license. You get the point; you know without a doubt you can’t fly an airplane.

But how about relating to today’s teenager? No one ever told you, “you can’t relate to a teenage child.” So like everything else that comes new into our lives, we give it our best shot; we learn, we relearn, we make mistakes, and hopefully we eventually relate. But

how long does that take? How old is the child when we begin to get it? Have we lost their trust? Do we wish we could start over? Do we have verbal battles and major disagreements because we should have handled something differently than we did? Since we never had a teen before, we plunged ahead based on our past experiences and realized we had taken a right turn, when a left turn would have created a much more pleasant conclusion. I'm sure you've learned over the years, like me, that only "hindsight is an exact science."

Simply stated, "We didn't know what we didn't know." As a caring and interested father, I am strongly suggesting that you attend the very next session of ParentNet. Set aside a few hours to go to a meeting, listen, and participate. I guarantee you will learn simple and effective ways of interacting with your teen that will make this journey much more meaningful and worthwhile.

Coming from a successful track record in life, I surely believed I knew about raising a child and didn't feel I had to attend any meetings at school. After my very first ParentNet meeting, it became clear that I needed wisdom and insight that can only come from those who are going through a similar journey. Come to a ParentNet meeting and learn more about your teenager. Get to know what you don't know and see how much of a difference you can make in the life of a teenager...your teenager.

Sincerely,
Neil J. Cantor

(Neil is a father at the Berkeley Preparatory School, Tampa, Florida where ParentNet was begun in 1999.)