Helping teens navigate peer culture wisely

By Kenneth Ginsburg, M.D., and Susan FitzGerald

S o many disturbing things are written about today’s youth culture. But if you walk into the cafeteria at your teen’s school, it will probably feel like a familiar place. You’ll see the same sort of cliques as there were in your day, though the labels may have changed.

The swirling dynamics of peer culture can be tough and unforgiving, no matter what group or groups your teen subscribes to and regardless of whether he or she tends to lead or to hang back. In fact, most kids worry that they don’t quite belong. That’s why it is such a big deal to adolescents what their friends or “frenemies” think of them and why pressure is so deeply felt. Much of the drama and even pain of adolescence is caused by kids needing to prove they belong.

Peer pressure isn’t all bad

Peer pressure is nothing new. It has always been a factor in teen life and it can also be a positive force. Your son may work hard to boost his grades because he wants to stay with his friends in honor classes. Your daughter may choose more positive behavior because she knows that other teens follow her lead.

The social milieu of teens can also be a supportive place where kids are protective of each other and where they learn to follow rules and maintain relationships in an often hyper-charged atmosphere. Teens can shift from group to group and try on different personas when a lot of other young people are experimenting too. That allows them to develop important life skills under the protective umbrella of family, school and community.

Three essential teen survival skills

As you can see, adolescents face conflicting forces. They want to do the right thing, but there is so much stress and frenzy in the peer world that sometimes it’s hard for them to think on their feet. All teens worry to some degree that they might lose their friends if they don’t go along with the crowd, and even the brightest and most mature teenager finds it difficult to think through options when he or she is in a panic.

Here are three survival skills that we can teach adolescents to help them make good choices in a peer-charged atmosphere. Having these skills also helps parents feel...
Come to me when you're in hot water or you sense a friend is in trouble. Again, this means reaching an agreement that your teenager will not be punished for seeking your help to get out of an uncomfortable or potentially dangerous situation. There are some things young people simply aren’t equipped to handle. Getting adult help is the best thing they can do.

Reinforce the idea that the greatest act of friendship—the highest form of loyalty—is keeping someone safe.

Being smart in the cyberworld will make your life easier. Follow the 24-hour rule. Don’t respond immediately to a highly charged text or IM. Know that anything you post online can be used against you by your peers or in the future by a potential employer. Reputations can be ruined in a minute. Salacious photos or gossip, true or untrue, can damage a person’s psyche. Stop and ask yourself: “Would I want someone to do this to me?”

Be a good role model

Our kids learn how to treat their friends by seeing how we treat ours. Focus on the qualities you like in your friends, not on what car they drive. Demonstrate how much you rely on them for pleasure and advice when you need it. Avoid unkind gossip. Don’t be overly critical and show forgiveness. It will help your child to understand that your friendships don’t always go smoothly, that you work to maintain them and that they do sustain you, no matter what. Be a good friend and your child will be one too.

—Adapted from “Letting Go with Love and Confidence” by Kenneth Ginsburg, M.D., and Susan Fitzgerald. See We recommend on page 8.

Saying no and keeping your friends. Many teens have not learned the effective use of “no” because they’ve grown up amid confusing signals. “No” can end up meaning “maybe,” “okay” or “why not?” Girls especially must be empathic, because a halfhearted no can be misinterpreted as push a little more and you’ll get a yes.

Many parents hedge and apologize to their kids, “I’m sorry, I know how much this means to you, but I really have to say no.”

There’s no need to apologize about taking a stand. “No, you can’t have the car tonight because it’s rainy (or foggy). I’ll be glad to drive you.” Make your “no” clear and your reason specific.

Teens need to recognize when they are being pressured. They need to be able to say no politely but firmly and then suggest something else to do either now or in the future to signal that they want to be friends with the person. For example, “No, I can’t hang out in the park tonight. Do you want to do something tomorrow?”

Shifting the blame. Teens are more likely to get through a sticky situation if they can shift the blame for making a difficult decision to Mom or Dad or some factor that seems out of their hands. For example: “Don’t even think about smoking in this car. My mother checks it like you wouldn’t believe.” This strategy allows your son or daughter to save face, an all-important goal when you’re living in a world where no one wants to stand out.

A nightly “check-in rule” at your house can help. The rule is, your teen says goodnight to you, no matter what time it is. You know that your child is safe and he or she has a face-saving reason to not drink or miss a curfew.

Shifting the blame can be a signal to parents that a child is caught up in a bad situation. For example, your teen is at a friend’s house, and someone shows up with a case of beer. She would like to tell you she’s uneasy and ask to be picked up but doesn’t want to say that in front of her friends. So if you get a call or a text that says, “I forgot to take out the dog,” you know that’s your signal to “come and get me now.”

Practice conversations so your teen can feel comfortably saying, “My mom’s making me come home right now.” Of course, this works best when it comes with an agreement that your teen will not be punished for reaching out to you, even if she was involved in something you don’t approve of.

Of everything I’ve written about parenting, I get the most feedback on the “code words.” Parents have told me that this idea saved their child’s life.

Try role playing

Role-playing is a rehearsal for real life and a helpful way to practice the words kids can say in different situations. Be casual and as spontaneous as possible. Don’t talk about your own kids. Refer instead to other people. Keeping it objective will decrease your child’s defensiveness.

Watching a movie together, for example, you might say: “What a line that guy is using. What do you think she should say back?” Or you might ask more directly: “What would you do if...?” Or “What if someone says...?”

Some conversations to have with your teen

We want our children to cultivate healthy, fulfilling relationships that will bring out the best in them. Here are some topics to cover with your teen, both in heart-to-heart talks (not lectures) and by seizing teachable moments that will allow your child to reach his or her own wise conclusions.

It’s quality, not quantity that counts in relationships. It’s nice to be popular, but what you really want are a few people you can trust to bare your soul to. Good friends allow you to be comfortable with who you are and sometimes challenge you to stretch to be even better.

Being exposed to diverse thought is great preparation for life. We tend to gravitate to people who are like us, but people with different backgrounds can enrich us even more. They allow us to see and experience things from another vantage point. Give examples from your own life and your own friends.

Peer culture...
‘Here I go again with a new boss…’

A reader writes:

Q Just found out that I’m getting another new boss, my third in two years, I know I’m good at my job, but I still feel a little shaky starting off on the right foot with a new manager.

—R.M., Detroit

A Here are a few ideas that may sound familiar, but they’re worth trying. They work better with some people than with others. Just don’t forget that you too are growing and changing with each new situation.

☐ Try to ignore the rumors. Don’t believe everything you hear. It will only make it harder to form a positive relationship. Demonstrate your support and trustworthiness as soon as you can (see On the Job, page 6 on gossip).

☐ Be cooperative. Offer to help make your new boss’s first few weeks go smoothly. Repeat the offer, if need be. Some new managers are reluctant to ask for or accept support.

☐ Be proactive. Request a meeting to clarify your responsibilities. Make sure your job description fits your new manager’s expectations of what you should be doing.

☐ Don’t expect a new boss to honor previous commitments that were made to you. Those decisions may take some time to reevaluate.

☐ Don’t talk about the “good old days.” Keep comparisons between supervisors to yourself.

☐ Focus on communication. Find out how the new person would like you to give and receive information: by e-mail, in-person reports, etc. Make necessary adjustments in your own style.

☐ Be aware of the larger picture. There may be internal changes at your company that you don’t know about. Has the balance of power shifted? Your new supervisor or department may have less (or more) leverage than before.

Teaching kids to take a ‘good guess’

How many passengers can be transported in a day on New York City subway trains? How tall is a ten-story building? How many barrels of oil does the U.S. import each year? Most of us Google the answers to questions like these, but that may not be the best approach—especially for the parents of school-age children.

Researchers who have studied the science of learning describe “estimation” as the essential foundation for more advanced math skills. The ability to make a good guess is important for the abstract reasoning students need to do in order to get good grades in school and, later on, jobs in a knowledge-based economy. Estimation can also sharpen one’s ability to use logic.

Of course, we all know how to “guessimate.” We do it all the time. And parents can foster a child’s guessing skills in many ways. For example, you might ask your child to predict how many M&Ms there are in a package or how many different cereals there are on the shelves at the supermarket.

Another way is to play board games. Flicking a spinner, rolling dice and counting out spaces to move forward can help kids “adjust the number line that they carry around in their heads,” says Sharon Griffin, a professor of education at Clark University. She found that a board-game intervention program produced large and lasting improvements in students’ math performance.

In his book Numbersight, Sanjoy Mahajan of Olin College suggests applying “human-sized numbers” to an unknown quantity. For example, think of a soccer field as “85 Dads long.”

Remark on the many different dimensions you encounter in your daily routines, Dr. Mahajan suggests. This can help children “acquire mental benchmarks” that can be useful. For example, ask questions like “How many miles is it to Grandma’s house?” Let everyone chime in with an answer. Kids also benefit from hearing a range of others’ estimates.

Just remember that the goal of estimation is not to come up with a “right” or “perfect” answer. If it’s close enough to be useful much of the time, that’s what really counts.

—Adapted from Time Magazine

Survey shines a new light on elder caregiving

Last year, for the first time, the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ daily Time Use Survey started asking how much time Americans were spending on elder care. The survey found that, during the previous three months, 39.8 million people over age 15 cared for someone over 65 “because of a condition related to aging.” The majority of caregivers were women, but it was a smaller majority than earlier studies have found.

The survey defined “caregiver” very broadly. You qualified if you provided unpaid care of any kind (including companionship or “being available to assist when help was needed”) more than once in a three-month period, regardless of how long you spent doing it. So a teenager who paid two 20-minute visits to a grandparent qualified.

While this may change the face of caregiving, it’s good to have the data. Elder care has been a largely unmeasured activity in the U.S. for far too long.
My older relative wants to join a clinical trial’

“MY OLDER RELATIVE WANTS TO JOIN A CLINICAL TRIAL’

We often hear about clinical trials that are required by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to make sure new medications and treatments are effective and safe for people to use. And you may have an older relative who was asked or is thinking about participating in one.

But before anyone agrees to join a study, there’s a lot to learn—and some of the information can be difficult to understand. It’s important to talk to your relative’s doctor and do your own research as well, to be aware of the risks and possible benefits.

Start with the rules

- Clinical trials follow a plan called a protocol that describes all aspects of the study. Each person who takes part in a study must agree to the rules set out by the protocol, including the doctors and other health professionals who run the study.

- The Informed Consent agreement that you must sign is for your protection. It should be clearly written so you can understand it. If you don’t, ask your doctor or other medical person to explain it. Just be aware that the agreement is not a contract. You may leave a clinical trial at any time, for any reason.

Many studies require that neither the participant nor the doctor knows who is receiving the standard treatment, the experimental treatment or a placebo that only looks like the drug being tested. In other words, many people in clinical trials are getting no treatment at all.

Some study drugs have side effects that can be unpleasant, serious and even life-threatening. Some side effects go away when the treatment is stopped but others can be permanent. Some appear during treatment, while others may not show up until after it’s over. The risks depend on the treatment that is being studied and should be fully explained in the Informed Consent materials.

In the past most drug testing was done on white men. Major groups of the U.S. population—women, Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans—were underrepresented in the testing. Because drugs work differently on different people, the FDA wants to include individuals from as many groups as possible in clinical trials.

Questions to ask before you say yes

- What is the study trying to find out?
- What kinds of tests will I have to take while I am in the study? What specifically is involved with each?
- How much time does it take?
- How often will I have to go to the doctor?
- Will I be hospitalized? If so, how often and for how long?
- What are the costs to me? Will my health insurance pay for it?
- How long will the study last?
- What follow-up will there be?
- What will happen at the end of the study?
- What are my other treatment choices? How do they compare with the treatment or drug being studied?
- What negative consequences or side effects can I expect from the treatment?
- What are the risks to me if I were to receive a placebo? How do they compare with side effects of standard treatment?

For more information

To learn about clinical trials now underway, check out the website www.clinicaltrials.gov. It’s an online database from the National Library of Medicine with a wealth of available information about federally and privately supported clinical research on volunteers.

The website gives each trial’s purpose, eligibility, locations and phone numbers to call for more information. Other sources of information include:

For cancer: (800) 422-6237 or visit www.cancer.gov.

For Alzheimer’s: visit www.alz.org and search for the key words “clinical trials.”

New drugs go through four testing phases

1. Testing begins with a small group of 20–80 people to evaluate a drug’s safety, determine a safe dosage range and identify side effects.

2. The drug is given to a larger group of 100–300 volunteers to see if it is effective and further evaluate its safety.

3. The drug or treatment is given to 1000–3000 people to confirm its effectiveness, compare it to commonly used treatment and collect information necessary to determine its safe usage.

4. After a drug or treatment has been approved and marketed, testing continues to collect more information about its effects in various populations and any side effects associated with long-term use.

More resources are available on the Web

www.fda.gov Click on the “Clinical Trials” link for the FDA regulations on “Good Clinical Practice.”

www.centerwatch.com Information about clinical research and a list of clinical trials.

www.parkinson.org The Parkinson’s Foundation website. Search for key words “clinical trials.”

www.stroke.org The National Stroke Association website. Search for key words “clinical trial information.”

www.medicare.gov The official U.S. government website has information about clinical trial options and opportunities.

By the numbers

Each year about 2 million Americans volunteer to participate in more than 80,000 clinical trials. The FDA reports that 1 in 30 volunteers typically experience a serious side effect, and 1 in 10,000 die due to the effects of a study drug. From 15 to 20% of drug-test participants are over age 65, and 85% of all study participants reported that their doctor did not provide needed information regarding clinical trials.
Guiding 7 to 10 year olds’ use of online media

By James P. Steyer

A t what age is it appropriate for your child to have a smartphone? What about access to YouTube? When do kids need to be told not to share personal information online? Now, more than ever, parents can use help in navigating their children’s media-saturated lives.

In last month’s front-page article, Kids’ media use needs parent guidance, we looked at children from infancy through age 6 and their use of technology. Now let’s move on and see how the picture changes.

At ages 7 and 8

Kids this age are developing their own interests, stronger ties with peers and a fascination with popular culture. They are growing up amid an explosion of electronic devices, digital content and media options. The media habits they form now can make a big difference as they get older.

■ Be selective about online games. Kids 7 and 8 are attracted to interactive media, games they can play online, smartphones or any device with Internet access.

Check reviews and ratings (www.commonsensemedia.org) and play the games yourself before you let your child spend time on them. Portals boast that their games are “addicting” and it’s true. Set firm time limits on gaming.

Keep your child away from violent games. Studies link them to aggressive behavior and lack of empathy. Have your child play where you can see the game, and not at bedtime. Digital stimulation can cause sleep problems.

Say “no” to multiplayer games where kids compete and chat with friends or strangers. At 7 or 8, they need to be learning face-to-face social skills in the real world.

■ YouTube isn’t meant for kids

UNDER 13. Kids 7 and 8 may find episodes of a favorite TV show, but they can also come across mature content and crude comments. If your child does go on YouTube, it should be through a kid-friendly browser like KidZui, which links to prescreened postings. Or watch a clip together. A Safety Mode box at the bottom of each YouTube page allows you to filter suggestions and search results, but inappropriate posts do slip through.

■ Teach online behavior. Go online with your kids when they set up an account to explore Club Penguin, for example, or play on a gaming portal. Help them make up a screenname that doesn’t give away their real identity and a password that not even a sibling or a friend can guess. Avoid nicknames, a pet’s name, birth dates, family address or phone number.

■ Make sure your kids know never to share personal information with anyone on the Web.

People can and do mask their identities online.

■ Kids should get your permission to download. Many free, easily downloadable games and videos are filled with viruses and spyware. A money-saving tip: don’t let kids know your iTunes password, so they can’t make app purchases without your okay.

At ages 9 and 10

At this age, kids are tuned into media stars, music, edgy content, gaming and connecting with their peers. Impressionable and aware, they are immersed in a culture that is dictated and defined by digital media.

■ TV and movies. Popular shows like Glee and Gossip Girl are full of sexual themes but rarely mention the risks and responsibilities of sex. Many movies suggest that profanity, smoking, drinking, drug use and sexual activity are normal behavior. Limit and supervise your child’s screen time. Prolonged exposure to violent media content is desensitizing. Regular exposure to sexualized content increases the odds kids will have earlier, riskier sexual experiences.

■ Hold off on giving kids a cell phone for as long as possible. Most phones these days are “smart.” They are also addictive and distracting. Kids use them for going online, downloading, taking photos and playing games—when they should be paying more attention at home, at school and to other people.

Giving kids a smartphone before they have the judgment to use it wisely can be dangerous. They can send or receive inappropriate messages and communicate with anyone privately—out of your sight and with no supervision.

If your child needs a phone for safety reasons, make it a simple, inexpensive, prepaid, no-texting model. Program the numbers and teach the basics of phone safety such as: don’t answer a number you don’t know, charge it at night and turn it off in class, at the dinner table and before bedtime.

■ Seek out positive media. Get recommendations at www.commonsensemedia.org. Check out movies, TV shows, games and websites to make sure they are a good fit for your child. Keep a suggestion list of stimulating, fun, educational and challenging media. Encourage your child to read! If your 7 or 8 year old hasn’t started the Harry Potter series, now’s the time.

Digital tips for kids of all ages

Limit the amount of time your child can spend on gaming and other online activities. Be consistent and firm.

■ Do your homework. Look at the media your child is interested in—before he or she does. And set age-appropriate controls.

■ Minimize your own digital distractions. Turn off your phone. Close your laptop and switch off the TV when you spend time with your child. It’s the best way to convey that digital media is never more important than human connection.

Teach your child that the rules for online and real-life behavior are exactly the same: Play nicely. Don’t act like a bully. Never say or do something to others that you would not want someone to say or do to you.

—Adapted from the author’s book “Talking Back to Facebook” (Scribner).
Can gossip at the workplace can be a good thing?

It seems that gossip is a universal human trait. We all do it. Studies have been done on the gossip patterns of Pacific Islanders, rural Mexicans, the residents of Newfoundland and U.S. middle-school children, among others.

Researchers have found that people devote as much as two-thirds of their daily conversations to gossip. And men are just as eager as women to hear the “inside skinny.”

What’s interesting is that researchers by and large have a newfound respect for gossip. They see it as central to our understanding of group interaction. Gossip can actually help keep people working smoothly together, in part because it conveys information that might not otherwise be available.

Among its advantages

Among the lessons they said they learned were: “Infidelity will eventually catch up with you,” “Cheerful people are not necessarily happy,” “Everyone doesn’t follow the same rules in the same way” and “Don’t be a hypocrate.”

If we accept that the office grapevine (about us, our jobs and the people we work with) is a fact of life, we can try to make it work for us. Here are some suggestions:

Stay off the gripe circuit. No one likes listening to chronic complainers, blamers and fault finders. Resist the urge to share every annoyance you experience with your colleagues.

Give some thought to the moral dimension. Breaches of confidence and lies are unacceptable. And before you pass on information, ask yourself: Is it a lie? Does it violate someone’s rights? Does it disregard someone’s claims? Does it promote more harm than good? If so, keep it to yourself.

Don’t fall for everything you hear, especially if it defies your own common sense. Rumors often can be someone’s wishful thinking or “trial balloon.” And just because a lot of people are saying it doesn’t make it true. Know the difference between a fact, hearsay, an opinion and just plain speculation.

Say nice things about people and they will be more likely to say nice things about you. But don’t say it if you don’t mean it. Insincerity is not a character trait that anyone wants to be known for.

Know your audience. This is more important than you might imagine. Keep in mind who you’re talking to. For example, you wouldn’t want to pass on internal department gossip to someone from the outside or chatter about a colleague to his cousin in IT. And don’t forget, when it comes to gossip, timing can be everything.

Build relationships at many levels. Good information about what’s coming down the pike can come from your colleagues in human resources, the computer center, purchasing and housekeeping. Whatever the source, handle it with discretion.

Be able to keep a secret. You may be surprised to hear that the best gossips are also very adept at keeping some information in confidence. Nothing will get you ejected from a social network faster than spreading a piece of closely held information.

Don’t blab your sources. A good gossip knows how to protect the original source of his or her information. This is particularly true if you’re the original source.

Don’t be wrong too often. We’ve all passed along bad information from time to time. It’s unavoidable. But if the information you pass along is consistently unreliable, pretty much everything you say—even when you’re right—will be discounted.

So it’s important to know the source of your information. And remember: once you pass it along to someone else, you have become the source.
Getting the jump on exercise hurdles

Try as we might, most of us do not manage to squeeze into our busy lives the amount of physical exercise that’s recommended to maintain good health and fitness. But regular exercise is not as daunting as it seems.

Here are the common hurdles and steps to overcome them:

I don’t have enough time. Make your daily routine more challenging. Try walking or biking part or all of the way to work. Park your car farther from your destination or take the stairs instead of the elevator. The Healthy Lifestyles Research Center at Arizona State University has found that breaking up exercise into small, manageable segments performed throughout the day can work as well as one longer, continuous bout.

I’m too old to start. It’s never too late. One study followed inactive men who began exercising at age 50. By age 60, they had achieved survival rates comparable to men who’d been active for much longer. No matter how old you are, your muscles will respond quickly to training.

My health isn’t good. Exercise is a treatment for many health problems such as arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure and vascular disease. Many frail people with chronic illnesses assume that exercise isn’t safe, but very few conditions make physical activity out of the question. Supervised aerobics and strength training are mainstays of rehabilitation after a heart attack. Always consult your doctor before you start a new exercise program.

I’m too tired. It may seem contradictory to expend energy in order to increase energy. But dozens of studies have found that starting a regular exercise routine combats feelings of exhaustion, even among people with conditions associated with fatigue such as cancer and MS. Aerobic activity revs up your metabolism, lifts your mood, improves your sex life, and helps you sleep. Strength training makes it easier to do everyday tasks.

I’m not overweight. What’s the point? Inactivity ranks near smoking as a risk factor. Studies have shown that normal-weight people who were unfit were more likely to die prematurely than overweight volunteers who exercised enough to maintain aerobic fitness. Regular exercise works in many ways to boost your health and longevity. It keeps artery walls supple, helps you resist osteoarthritis, and even reverses some of the root causes of aging.

It’s painful. Exercise need not be overly ambitious. Walking briskly is enough for most people to reach the moderate level of intensity recommended by fitness experts, as are playing golf, mowing a lawn and biking at a leisurely pace. For those who suffer joint pain, water aerobics can be helpful. Many medical centers now offer exercise programs geared to people with arthritis or other chronic pain problems.

—Adapted from Consumer Reports on Health

Choosing the best produce at farmers’ markets

Those colorful rows of produce at farmers’ markets all look pretty great. How do you make the healthiest and most environmentally friendly choices? Here are some suggestions:

First, go local. Fruits and vegetables grown on small, nearby farms are less likely to be treated with the pesticide waxes so often used on produce that’s shipped long distances, according to Georgia Giannopoulos, a dietitian at the Weill Cornell Medical Center’s Department of Food and Nutrition. Buying local also reduces your “carbon footprint,” the so-called measure of the impact your activities have on the environment.

Opt for organic. When you’re shopping in a supermarket, you can look for the “USDA Organic” seal. But you’re less likely to see that at farmers’ markets. Take a moment and ask the farmers how they grow their produce. Often, their fruits and vegetables are organic though they may not have the official seal.

When cost is a factor. Granted, organic foods tend to be more expensive than nonorganic. If you can’t afford to buy all organic produce, Giannopoulos recommends going organic when the skin is thin such as with apples, pears, peaches, berries, cherries, grapes and peppers. It’s less important with bananas, oranges, avocados and pineapples, because their thick skins are removed. But give all fruits and veggies a good scrub before you start slicing and dicing, she says.

—Adapted from the newsletter “Mind, Mood & Memory”
Raising responsible, resilient, self-sufficient teenagers

It’s tough being the parent of a teenager these days. There are new pressures and opportunities for kids to grow up faster than they should. In this wonderful new book, Letting Go with Love and Confidence, renowned adolescent medicine specialist, Kenneth Ginsburg, M.D., and award-winning journalist Susan FitzGerald offer expert advice on almost every possible issue or problem that can come up during a child’s teen years.

The authors discuss smart phones, cyberbullying and handling issues around sex, dating, driving, staying home alone, parenting styles, communication strategies, discipline, kids’ friendships (see front page article) and more. As they explain, the everyday decisions and conversations around these ordinary but important issues have the greatest potential to foster resilience and build confidence.

Letting go is indeed a loving act, and this book will help your child along the road to self-sufficiency. Your job as parent, they write, is to serve as guide and monitor—with safety in mind and an eye toward ensuring that your child will become a responsible, contributing adult.

What’s so special about this book is that although it deals with many tough topics, the authors are strongly positive about teenagers. They firmly believe that “teens are wonderful people and that parents shouldn’t dread the approach of adolescence.”

And here’s a great piece of advice: “Sometimes you have to make a conscious effort to fall back in love with your teen—not because you don’t truly love him but because the day-to-day demands of parenting can muddy your feelings. You need to create moments that allow you to bask in your adolescent’s presence too. Letting go is in deed a loving act, and this book will help your child along the road to self-sufficiency. Your job as parent, they write, is to serve as guide and monitor—with safety in mind and an eye toward ensuring that your child will become a responsible, contributing adult.

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Letting Go with Love and Confidence (Avery, an imprint of Penguin Group, softcover, $18) is in bookstores, online and as an e-book.