

6 Things that Teenagers Appreciate in Parents

What is it that teenagers really need from their parents? After interviewing over 40 young people at length, We report on what they said...

It didn't take long to notice the pattern. Most interviews seemed to go the same way. The teenager would sit down quite eagerly, keen to talk. For some it seemed that being asked their opinions so formally made them feel important. For others it was even more basic: they had a lot to say about family life and had little opportunity to say it. Both reasons are quite revealing if you think about it.

Whatever the way they approached the interview, all were shocked when they were asked what they appreciated about their parents. They looked bemused, blank...some had to stop to really think about, others complained they had never really thought about it before, still others got quite angry! They had a lot to off-load and they hadn't come to answer that sort of question!

So what did they think. Read on to find out what was said...and ask your own teenager what they think!

1. They appreciate what parents give

To be honest, one does begin to wonder how much young people appreciate what is given to them. They're not prone to be ungrateful, just somewhat naive as to how food magically appears on the table, clothes find their way from washing basket to airing cupboard clean and ironed and money appears in the family purse to pay for little extras!

It was surprising therefore to hear again and again how much these things were appreciated. They particularly valued the time their parents gave them...but it didn't stop at that.

"Mum and dad have often gone without for me. They never go anywhere, even on holiday...it was good to work with mum to look after gran. I do love them." Charlotte, 16.

The fact that parents sacrifices may appear to be taken for granted does not always mean they aren't valued by them. We are all guilty of taking our security for granted until we lose it. It's perhaps worth noting that appreciation seemed to be contagious and its expression most easily learnt by reciprocation. In other words, a young person learns appreciation in an appreciative home and learns the importance of expressing it when he or she receives it.

2. They want you to talk to them

"My Dad and I go for days without talking." Robert, 18.

"I wish I could talk seriously with my parents. It's partly my fault." Sarah, 16.

"I wish Dad and I talked more. I remember once talking for ages about cricket. I excited me to talk about something I didn't know very much about. But I don't talk about the way

I feel. I'm embarrassed about personal things. I've got this feeling that if I tell them something bad they will either give me forty questions or start a row. So I don't talk about what I want to talk about. So when a man sexually abused me, I bottled it up for three years." Richard, 16.

Most young people want to be able to talk to their parents a lot more...and yet most find it very hard. It may simply be down to their personality: they may be more independent rather than open and chatty. Often it's because they are afraid of rejection and being misunderstood. "I try to remember to say hello and goodbye...but any conversation must be neutral so that it doesn't rock the boat." Angela, 15. The problem is that an open communicative relationship takes time to build. Reticence on behalf of the teenager doesn't necessarily mean they don't want to share.

3. They appreciate openness

"Mum tells us we're precious, but recently we sat down to talk about small things and out it comes: she'd had four or five miscarriages before us. Things like this and pearls of wisdom come out. Mum talks about anything more or less. People say mum understands me. I didn't see it then but I do now. The more we talk the easier it is. We're very close." Justin, 14

All the teenagers I talked to seemed to appreciate it when parents were honest and up-front. More often than not they already suspected when there were problems financially or at work or whatever...and not being told directly made them feel frustrated and unimportant. Talking about parents past and being honest about their feelings was appreciated too. "Mum and dad and open and human: they admit they were young once and made mistakes." Shaenna, 16.

4. They want to be trusted

"I like the way my parents are trusting. They don't ask too many questions." Debbie, 15.

"Most of all I appreciate the way my parents trust me. They are happy to lend me the car even after I crashed it." David, 18.

"My parents are a soft touch and I can get around them by lying." Graham, 16.

Trust helps a young person feel valued. It demonstrates respect and engenders dignity. David concluded his thoughts on his parents' trust by saying: "My parents rely on me and I like it." It showed him his parents recognised he was growing up and their relationship with him was changing.

Where young people aren't adequately trusted and nurtured into growth, they can become bitter and rebel. "Little things bug me like mum asking where I am going. She wants to know little things when I'm growing up! I know she's doing it for my own good, but I wish I could make my own mistakes." Andrew, 15.

Obviously trust doesn't just happen. It is earned and built by both the young person and the parents over a period of time. Above all teenagers resented it when parents wouldn't

say “No” to something but would manipulate the situation so it was impossible anyway. Emotional blackmail did stop young people from doing whatever it was, but it didn’t build trust. “My parents make it quite clear what they think and then tell me it’s left to my conscience. But my mum gets very het up and I don’t want to hurt her more than I really have to.” Jo, 16.

5. They need your reassurance

Young people appreciate reasoned, reasonable restriction. It demonstrates caring and offers security. Catherine puts it this way: “I appreciate the way I’ve been brought up. I’ve grown at the right stages. I wasn’t out until 10pm when I was thirteen. If I had I would be bored now.

“I appreciate my parents love me. They give me hugs, cuddles and kisses, and I’m glad they do it. Love is rarely expressed verbally though. They express pride in your achievements but never love.” Abi, 16.

“I hug dad but he doesn’t hug me.” David, 15.

Young people seemed to crave reassurance from their parents even if they appeared confident and outgoing. The skill for parents is finding the right opportunities. Most of all young people wanted to be appreciated for who they were and not simply achievements at school or elsewhere. For many, this approach actually build up a sense of insecurity and a dependence on succeeding to be important to their parents.

6. They want you to understand their world

“The perfect parent is the one who understands the world I’m growing up in.” Rachel, 14.

“My parents understand me more than anyone else.” Peter, 15.

“I talk to my friends more than my parents because their experience is different.” Terry, 15.

Struggling to be understood by your parents must be one of the most common cries of a teenager. Their worlds seems, to both them and their parents, a million miles apart. Teenagers talked enthusiastically about parents who had tried to close this gap.

Sense of humour was an important area. John put it this way: “Mum and dad don’t understand our humour. They keep thinking me and my brother were getting at each other and would shut us up. Now we don’t bother to get on at all. They don’t want humour like that. they want me to change.” Gareth adds: “Mum and dad told my brother and I off when having fun for making too much noise so we don’t spend so much time together now.” Humour is very important in youth culture. Parents were urged by teenagers to try and understand the young person’s humour.

Likewise, language is something that can make parents realise their children live in a different world. “We speak different languages” says John, “They think I’m brash, arrogant and selfish. But it’s just the way of expressing myself.”

Talking to so many teenagers was not only enlightening, it was actually quite encouraging. After the initial shock of being made to think about the positive side of their parents, many teenagers were ready to wax lyrical for hours. You may feel you only score on three or four of the six, but the chances are, even if you miss on the others, you're a "pretty alright parent"...at least by these standards.