



# Mentoring Matters

**Tips and ideas to encourage young people to become the  
best they can be**

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## INTRODUCTION

Mentoring Matters, especially when young people journey through adolescence to become a young adult.

There is more and more adolescent brain research highlighting how important it is for our young people to seize all the opportunities they can, as their brains continue to mature and develop until they are in their mid-20s.

There is a specific region of the brain called the **amygdala** that is responsible for immediate reactions such as fear and aggressive behaviour. The **Pre-Frontal Cortex**, the key area of the brain that controls reasoning and helps us think before we act is still developing and, therefore, the young person's brain will work differently from that of adults when they make decisions or solve problems.

Their actions will be guided more by the emotional and reactive amygdala and less by the thoughtful, logical Pre-Frontal Cortex. Therefore, we see inconsistent behaviour patterns, emotional outbursts, engagement in risky, even dangerous behaviour and the misreading or misinterpreting of social cues and emotions.

Research undertaken in 2011 by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, with a special focus on how the emerging adolescent brain research could impact the journey of young people transitioning from foster care, highlighted some important information about adolescents: "It is during adolescence and early adulthood that we develop a personal sense of identity, establish emotional and psychological independence, establish adult vocational goals, learn to manage sexuality and sexual identity, adopt a personal value system, and develop increased impulse control and behavioural maturity. Chemical changes in the brain that prime adolescents for risk-taking present rich opportunities for them to learn from experience and mistakes and, with adult support, gain greater self-regulation, coping and resiliency skills."

I developed a Golden Rule which I have shared with many, many adolescents: if you are feeling as though you are about to explode, pause and count SLOWLY to 20 and you will probably avoid saying or doing something you regret later. By taking such action, the young person is allowing the Pre-Frontal Cortex to get to work.

The good news is that, by the age of 15 most young people are capable of reasoned behaviour, though even before that age, if there are caring, non-judgmental adults walking beside them, they will learn how to react to situations around them, hence the importance of the volunteer adult mentor in their lives.

I have found that adolescents really enjoy discussing how their brains work and understanding what's going on as they journey through some of the most confusing times of their lives.

In this brief ebook, I am sharing the ideas and opinions of a variety of people which I have collated into a user-friendly booklet as an encouragement to anyone working with young people.

So, Mentoring Matters and the work that I am undertaking involves sharing matters of mentoring with all who want to invest their time in the lives of young people.

The satisfaction gained when one sees a wobbly young person get back on his or her feet with the encouragement and support of a non-judgmental Cheerleader is impossible to put into words.

Please join me on my Facebook Mentoring Matters pages and share your experiences, join discussions and stay in touch with some of the latest youth mentoring and adolescent research: [www.facebook.com.robincoxmentor](http://www.facebook.com.robincoxmentor)

## 36 Tips to develop a resilient and inspiring Mentor of Adolescents



As we move further into the 21st Century, researchers are telling us the need for Mentors is going to be a significant factor in the development of people. As things stand now, we don't even have sufficient Mentors for all the young people in need of a non-judgmental, empathetic wise guide to walk alongside them for a while, help them set some realistic, measurable and achievable goals and just be that person who cares for them unconditionally, values their opinions and helps them find a purpose for their lives.

Mentors, though, need to look after their own health and wellbeing and, through doing so, they will role model what life can be like for their mentees. They will have true stories to share with their mentees describing their life journey, the ups and downs and how they have reached the place where they are mentoring other young people.

I stumbled across some useful tips for parents some years ago. As I have reflected more and more on them, I think they also embrace the spirit of mentoring, so, with a tweak here and a tweak there, perhaps they will be an encouragement to all who have the spirit of mentoring within their hearts.

Parenting experiences, like Mentoring experiences, will differ from person to person, though there is enough research to suggest that strong, stable countries are built on the nuclear family. In the politically correct world in which we live, few will take ownership of this point - maybe it's time more of us did :-)

Author and clinical professor, Daniel J. Siegel, suggests that, if he had to summarize in one word all the research on what kind of parenting helps create the best conditions for a child's and adolescent's growth and development, it would be the word, "presence." He writes, "... *being present means being open to what is. Presence involves being aware of what is happening as it is happening, being receptive to our own mental sea, and attuning to the inner life of another person. Being present for others means we resonate with what is going on in their inner worlds, creating the essential way we feel their feelings. This feeling sensation is at the heart of how we can help one another feel seen, safe, soothed and secure. Feeling felt is the basis for secure attachment. It is also the essence of healthy relationships in all domains of our lives.*"(1)

These words embrace the Spirit of Mentoring as well.

My children are adults now, but I could vouch for many of the following tips which remind us to look after ourselves if we want to be effective parents and Mentors and to ensure that we have some sort of routine in our lives, thus enabling us to always be present in the lives of the young people we interact with every day.

1. Reflect with a special focus on being thankful for all you have, who you are and how you can most effectively reach out to others with unconditional love and care.
2. Go to bed on time and make sure you have the sleep your body needs (this differs from person to person).
3. Get up on time so you can start the day unrushed.
4. Say 'No' to projects that won't fit into your time schedule or that will compromise your mental health.
5. Delegate tasks to capable others.
6. Simplify and unclutter your life.
7. Less is more. (Although one is often not enough, two are often too many.)
8. Allow extra time to do things and to get to places.
9. Pace yourself. Spread out big changes and difficult projects over time; don't lump the hard things all together.
10. Take one day at a time.
11. Separate worries from concerns. If a situation is a concern, find out what God would have you do and let go of the anxiety. If you can't do anything about a situation, forget it.
12. Live within your budget; don't use credit cards for ordinary purchases.
13. Have backups; an extra car key in your wallet, an extra house key buried in the garden, extra stamps, etc.
14. K.M.S. (Keep Mouth Shut). This single piece of advice can prevent an enormous amount of trouble, most especially when working with confused and vulnerable teenagers).
15. Do something for the Kid in You every day.
16. Carry a spiritually enlightening book or eBook with you to read while waiting in line.
17. Get enough rest.
18. Eat right ie, healthy!
19. Get organized so everything has its place - this also involves planning well and prioritising.
20. Listen to a CD while driving that can help improve your quality of life.
21. Write down or electronically capture thoughts and inspirations, not only to keep fuelling your energy, but also to share with your mentee.
22. Every day, find time to be alone and with all technology switched off. Not only do you need to master reflective time, you also need to be able to coach your mentee to develop this special time in a day.
23. Having problems? Talk to God on the spot. Try to nip small problems in the bud. Don't wait until it's time to go to bed to try and pray.
24. Make friends with Godly people; people you trust and who are non-judgmental.
25. Keep a folder of favourite Scriptures and motivational sayings on hand - can be a great discussion starter with a mentee.
26. Remember that the shortest bridge between despair and hope is often a good, 'Thank you GOD' - then seek to be a messenger of HOPE in the life of every teenager you interact with.
27. Laugh.
28. Laugh some more! Teach your mentee how to laugh at himself or herself, too!
29. Take your work seriously, but not yourself at all.
30. Develop a forgiving attitude (most people are doing the best they can) and coach your mentee about the importance of forgiveness and positively resolving conflict.

31. Be kind to unkind people (they probably need it the most).
32. Sit on your ego and practise humility.
33. Talk less; listen more.
34. Slow down - make a point each and every day to pause and reflect; smell the roses - it's a discipline your mentee needs to learn as well.
35. Remind yourself that you are not the general manager of the universe.
36. Every night before switching off the light or blowing out the candle, think of one thing you're grateful for that you've never been grateful for before.

(Adapted - Source unknown)

Hopefully, these thoughts will serve as an encouragement to you; provide some tips to hold on to and to refer back to when you might be wobbling along yourself, reminders pointing to your unique gifts and talents which at least one teenager will appreciate you investing in his or her life.

Source (1): Brainstorm – the Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain; Daniel J. Siegel MD, Scribe; 2014



## 10 Principles of Good Parenting

**Does your child have behavior problems? Your relationship with your child likely needs some attention.**

In his book, *The Ten Basic Principles of Good Parenting*, Laurence Steinberg, PhD, provides guidelines based on the top social science research -- some 75 years of studies. Follow them, and you can avert all sorts of child behavior problems, he says.

After all, what is the goal when you're dealing with children? To show who's boss? To instill fear? Or to help the child develop into a decent, self-confident human being?

Good parenting helps foster empathy, honesty, self-reliance, self-control, kindness, cooperation, and cheerfulness, says Steinberg. It also promotes intellectual curiosity, motivation, and desire to achieve. It helps protect children from developing anxiety, depression, eating disorders, anti-social behavior, and alcohol and drug abuse.

"Parenting is one of the most researched areas in the entire field of social science," says Steinberg, who is a distinguished professor of psychology at Temple University in Philadelphia. The scientific evidence for the principles he outlines "is very, very consistent," he says.

Too many parents base their actions on gut reaction. But some parents have better instincts than others, Steinberg says. He goes on to state that children should never be hit -- not even a slap on a toddler's bottom. "If your young child is headed into danger, into traffic, you can grab him and hold him, but you should under no circumstances hit him."

Ruby Natale PhD, PsyD, professor of clinical pediatrics at the University of Miami Medical School, couldn't agree more. She offered a few of her own insights. "Many people use the same tactics their own parents used, and a lot of times that meant using really harsh discipline," she says.

A parent's relationship with his or her child will be reflected in the child's actions -- including child behavior problems, Natale explains. "If you don't have a good relationship with your child, they're not going to listen to you. Think how you relate to other adults. If you have a good relationship with them, you tend to trust them more, listen to their opinions, and agree with them. If it's someone we just don't like, we will ignore their opinion."

Steinberg's 10 principles hold true for anyone who deals with children -- mentor, coach, teacher, babysitter, he says.

### **The 10 Principles of Good Parenting**

**1. What you do matters.** "This is one of the most important principles," Steinberg suggests. "What you do makes a difference. Your kids are watching you. Don't just react on the spur of the moment. Ask yourself, 'What do I want to accomplish, and is this likely to produce that result?'"

**2. You cannot be too loving.** "It is simply not possible to spoil a child with love," he writes. "What we often think of as the product of spoiling a child is never the result of showing a child too much love. It is usually the consequence of giving a child things in place of love -- things like leniency, lowered expectations, or material possessions."

**3. Be involved in your child's life.** "Being an involved parent takes time and is hard work, and it often means rethinking and rearranging your priorities. It frequently means sacrificing what you want to do for what your child needs to do. Be there mentally as well as physically."

Being involved *does not* mean doing a child's homework -- or reading it over or correcting it.

"Homework is a tool for teachers to know whether the child is learning or not," Steinberg says. "If you do the homework, you're not letting the teacher know what the child is learning."

**4. Adapt your parenting to fit your child.** Keep pace with your child's development. Your child is growing up. Consider how age is affecting the child's behavior.

"The same drive for independence that is making your three-year-old say 'no' all the time is what's motivating him to be toilet trained," writes Steinberg. "The same intellectual growth spurt that is making your 13-year-old curious and inquisitive in the classroom also is making her argumentative at the dinner table."

For example: An eighth grader is easily distracted, irritable. His grades in school are suffering. He's argumentative. Should parents push him more, or should they be understanding so his self-esteem doesn't suffer?

"With a 13-year-old, the problem could be a number of things," Steinberg says. "He may be depressed. He could be getting too little sleep. Is he staying up too late? It could be he simply needs some help in structuring time to allow time for studying. He may have a learning problem. Pushing him to do better is not the answer. The problem needs to be diagnosed by a professional."

**5. Establish and set rules.** "If you don't manage your child's behavior when he is young, he will have a hard time learning how to manage himself when he is older and you aren't around. Any time of the day or night, you should always be able to answer these three questions: Where is my child? Who is with my child? What is my child doing? The rules your child has learned from you are going to shape the rules he applies to himself."

"But you can't micromanage your child," Steinberg says. "Once they're in their middle years of schooling, you need let the child do their own homework, make their own choices, and not intervene."

**6. Foster your child's independence.** "Setting limits helps your child develop a sense of self-control. Encouraging independence helps her develop a sense of self-direction. To be successful in life, she's going to need both."

It is normal for children to push for autonomy, says Steinberg. "Many parents mistakenly equate their child's independence with rebelliousness or disobedience. Children push for independence because it is part of human nature to want to feel in control rather than to feel controlled by someone else."

**7. Be consistent.** "If your rules vary from day to day in an unpredictable fashion or if you enforce them only intermittently, your child's misbehavior is your fault, not his. Your most important disciplinary tool is consistency. Identify your non-negotiables. The more your authority is based on wisdom and not on power, the less your child will challenge it."

Many parents have problems being consistent, Steinberg says. "When parents aren't consistent, children get confused. You have to force yourself to be more consistent."

**8. Avoid harsh discipline.** Parents should never hit a child, under any circumstances. "Children who are spanked, hit, or slapped are more prone to fighting with other children," he writes. "They are more likely to be bullies and more likely to use aggression to solve disputes with others."

"There is a lot of evidence that spanking causes aggression in children, which can lead to relationship problems with other kids," Steinberg suggests. "There are many other ways to discipline a child, including 'time out,' which work better and do not involve aggression."

**9. Explain your rules and decisions.** "Good parents have expectations they want their child to live up to," he writes. "Generally, parents over explain to young children and under explain to adolescents. What is obvious to you may not be evident to a 12-year-old. He doesn't have the priorities, judgment or experience that you have."

An example: A 6-year-old is very active and very smart -- but blurts out answers in class, doesn't give other kids a chance, and talks too much in class. His teacher needs to address the child behavior problem. He needs to talk to the child about it, says Steinberg. "Parents might want to meet with the teacher and develop a joint strategy. That child needs to learn to give other children a chance to answer questions."

The older the child, the more you can negotiate the rules and boundaries. Your child will feel that you are trusting him and respecting his thinking. At the same time, you are developing valuable life skills.

**10. Treat your child with respect.** "The best way to get respectful treatment from your child is to treat him respectfully," Steinberg writes. "You should give your child the same courtesies you would

give to anyone else. Speak to him politely. Respect his opinion. Pay attention when he is speaking to you. Treat him kindly. Try to please him when you can. Children treat others the way their parents treat them. Your relationship with your child is the foundation for her relationships with others."

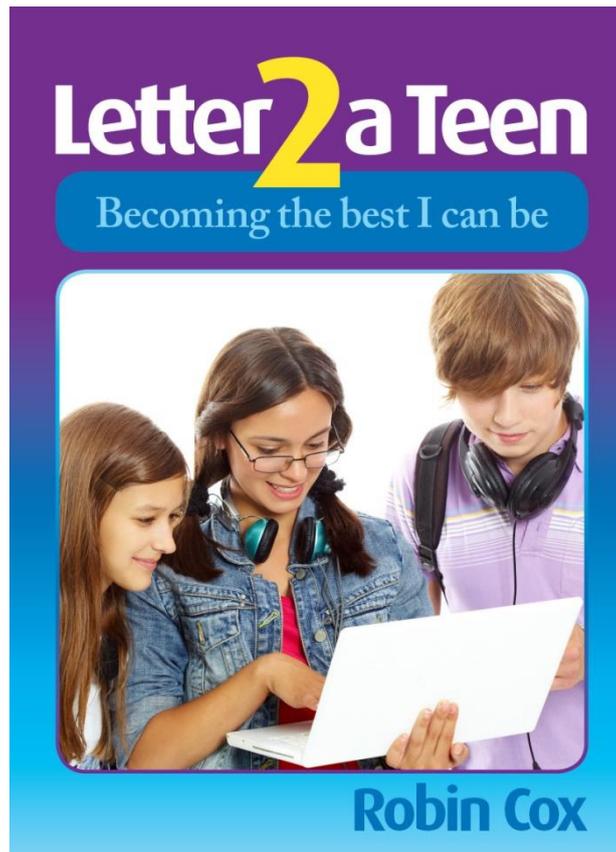
For example, if your child is a picky eater: "I personally don't think parents should make a big deal about eating," Steinberg says. "Children develop food preferences. They often go through them in stages. You don't want to turn mealtimes into unpleasant occasions. Just don't make the mistake of substituting unhealthy foods. If you don't keep junk food in the house, they won't eat it."

Likewise, the checkout line tantrum can be avoided, says Natale. "Children respond very well to structure. You can't go shopping without preparing them for it. Tell them, 'We will be there 45 minutes. Mommy needs to buy this. Show them the list. If you don't prepare them, they will get bored, tired, upset by the crowds of people.'"

"Parents forget to consider the child, to respect the child," Natale says. "You work on your relationships with other adults, your friendships, your marriage, dating. But what about your relationship with your child? If you have a good relationship, and you're really in tune with your child, that's what really matters. Then none of this will be an issue."

There are so many valuable tips here that overlap with the spirit of mentoring. Sometimes the mentor might find himself or herself *in loco parentis*. These ideas might help those mentors know how and where to draw boundaries and how best to communicate effectively with mentees.

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Conscious of the fact that most teenagers live in a virtual world of instant gratification and entitlement, seldom taking time out to reflect, Robin wanted to write something that any teenager could pick up, flick through, find words of encouragement and feel challenged and inspired by. He regards the book as a self-empowering journey, containing many tips, ideas and illustrations and communicates a strong message that we have some control over our destiny through the choices we make. “One choice involves building a web of support around ourselves and identifying different cheerleaders and non-judgmental mentors we can turn to at different times.”

### **Be a dreamer**

Robin encourages teenagers to go after their dreams, yet understands that most do not have a clue how to begin this journey. “When they become goal getters and start achieving these goals, their self-confidence and self-esteem increases. They learn that it’s okay to fail if they are giving something their best shot and the importance of taking positive lessons from all their life experiences.” In a user-friendly way, he gives teenagers invaluable tips about how to approach people for encouragement and assistance as they explore career interests, how to communicate effectively with others, write a resume, develop a portfolio, approach a job interview with confidence, handle stress and build quality relationships with positive friends and family.

The tips and ideas shared are supported by the evolving neuroscience research linked to the development of young people, something Robin continually researches and Robin’s personal experiences individually mentoring over 1000 boys and girls from different socio-economic backgrounds over his extensive teaching career. He regards this book as his greatest contribution to encouraging young people to become the best they can be. The book is available on Robin’s website: [www.yess.co.nz](http://www.yess.co.nz)