

March Pastoral Spotlight

10 Top tips on helping your child to be happy in school - by experts



I read an interesting article in the 'Parent Power' section of 'The Times' recently in which experts from the worlds of education, social media and mental health suggested ways in which parents can help their teenage children to be happy.

The article starts by reminding us that 'however tough we think we have it as adults, it's hard to compare with the sheer turbulence of teenage life. In just a few short years teens have to cope with exam pressure and peer pressure, juggle homework and seek their own identity — all while at the mercy of hormonal and emotional upheaval.'

As we are well aware, today's teenagers face an additional complication, growing up in the full glare of social media and there are also tips here for supporting your child online.

The following suggestions come from:

- Sir Anthony Seldon, educator, author and headmaster of Epsom College
- Zac Moxon, Head of Music at Chiswick School and recipient of the Gold award for Outstanding New Teacher of the Year at the 2023 Pearson National Teaching Awards
- Niki Cooper, Clinical Director at [Place2Be](#), a children's and young people's mental health charity
- Dr Kirren Schnack, TikTok influencer and author of *Ten Times Calmer: Beat Anxiety and Change Your Life*

I have selected ten top tips from the panel to share with you:

1. "You can get 14 9s at GCSE and five A*s at A-level, but you don't know who you are. Good parenting is about helping your children to become independent, to take their own decisions, to be free. Even if they're going to make mistakes, let them choose what they want to do. In that way they will always build their confidence."

2. "How do you reason with teenagers? Well, if you're having an argument and you're trying to get them to agree to your side, it's not helpful to think of it as winning or losing. If you don't want your child to grow up into one of those people who always have to be right, show that you can be wrong."
3. "Make the most of family moments with the children — of birthdays, their special events, precious times playing games, going on trips, for walks, playing games in the car and being silly with them."
4. "Talk a lot. Inquire about their day, every single day. Can they tell you three things about it? Be open and embrace your children's individuality."
5. "Walking is a fantastic way to get to know your child. When you're all getting puffed out the defences come down."
6. "Don't abandon extracurricular activities for exams. Teenagers need something outside of the curriculum that inspires and motivates them. Sport and exercise are also key for overall wellbeing. This reminds them that, during these incredibly stressful years, their exam results are not the only thing that will come to define them."
7. "Be consistent in your actions and in what you say you will do. Following through on promises or commitments demonstrate trustworthiness and reliability, which teenagers value so much in their relationships with parents."
8. "It can go wrong. The great parents are those who let their child make mistakes, they're the coaches who allow their children to make their own decisions."
9. "Keep phones off for an hour after getting up. Imagine eating a Mars bar the moment you wake up every day for a month. You would feel horrible, groggy and your cravings for sugar would shoot through the roof. The exact same is true for phone and social media usage. Our brains are totally unprepared at that time of day to process such a huge amount of information, and it leaves us permanently craving more notifications as the day progresses..... Make sure all phones in the house are charged in a communal area like the kitchen or living room and stay there overnight."
10. "Continually reiterate that you're doing this because you love them. Any of these strategies will inevitably lead to strong pushback from your child. But they're teenagers: it's exactly what they're programmed to do. They may not reciprocate it in the moment, but they need to be constantly reminded of how much they are loved and cared for by you, even if they only realise it years later."

Mike Critchley
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