**Teenage troubles**

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Ever since my only son turned 13 it seemed like a devil has invaded my angelic boy (maybe angelic is an overstretch here) but yes, almost-angellike son. The good boy that he always was seemed to have left for a very long vacation leaving behind this stranger who is angry, acting out, unreasonable and has only one defence to all these unacceptable behaviours, “well what do you expect mom I am a teenager now!”

As a parent I feel frustrated, helpless and angry, amongst a few other emotions, trying to make sense of his behaviour and my own to understand where the conflict lies. As a therapist I cannot, like any other parent, see his behaviour as typical disobedience, ungratefulness for all that we have done for him or blame social media. I also don’t believe in responding by just reward or punishment for promising him an extra hour of TV or banning his Xbox, which yes, are good tools to discipline our children, but a deeper understanding is required in parenting a teenager.

[Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed made interior minister as PM Imran Khan reshuffles federal cabinet](https://nation.com.pk/11-Dec-2020/sheikh-rasheed-ahmed-made-interior-minister-as-pm-imran-khan-reshuffles-federal-cabinet)

Erik Erikson, a developmental psychologist divided a man’s life in 8 stages of psychosocial development. He believed that social interactions and relationships played a vital role in the development of the self and the attitudes, beliefs and skills an individual masters in his life. He referred to teenage as the fifth stage of a human being’s psychological development and referred to it as identity vs. confusion. This stage he said occurred between ages of 12 and 18 respectively. During this stage the teenagers are exiting childhood and entering adulthood and exploring the fantasy of independence and developing a sense of self.

The question that deeply troubles a teenager is ‘who am I?’ It’s a time where the teenager is suffering from immense confusion and having an identity crisis. “Should I act like a child or be the young adult the world wants me to?”

Teenage or puberty is an overwhelming time with physiological and psychological changes taking place. Physical changes like breast development in girls, pimples on the face, facial hair may lead to a time when self-esteem can take a real bad hit and cause insecurity.

[EU agrees to cut greenhouse emissions by 55% by 2030](https://nation.com.pk/11-Dec-2020/eu-agrees-to-cut-greenhouse-emissions-by-55-percent-by-2030)

Important decisions are also being discussed at this stage like which career path to choose. New relationships outside the home life are also being explored like friends or social groups like football clubs etc.

During this time, with so much happening inside, anger seems to be the most acceptable emotion for this young adult to express. Anger is something that can keep up with the macho image but it’s a secondary emotion, masking the hurt and confusion of this stage.

Also during this stage suddenly, as they discover friends via more freedom and interaction with the outer world, a moral dilemma also starts. Should I follow my parents’ value system or should I give in to peer pressure with diverse value systems being carried from their families. Most drug uses start at this stage, mostly if the home life doesn’t make the young teenager feel safe to explore his identity crisis.

If at this stage, parents support the adolescent, a strong sense of self can develop. Support would mean not reacting to the tantrums and acting out, but maintaining silence when an outburst is taking place. And once the spell is over, you reach out and hear your teenager out. They might resist initially expressing how they truly feel but eventually with your calm response they will feel safe enough to express what’s actually bothering them without using anger as a way to be heard.

[Senior Indian diplomat summoned as protest over LoC violations](https://nation.com.pk/11-Dec-2020/senior-indian-diplomat-summoned-as-protest-over-loc-violations)

Let the teenagers experiment with ideas at this age. Choose your battles carefully. A nose piercing is less harmless than your child acting out by self-harming herself. Most clients I work with who have self-harmed themselves report that it started out in their teenage years. It is important to understand that their unpredictable and impulsive behaviour is all part of finding a personal identity. Lack of support at this stage can lead to low self-esteem and a poor self-image for the rest of their lives. Encourage their journey of exploration with the right balance of being their parent and friend.

Let adolescence explore and find its own unique identity through its own personal beliefs, goals and values. Parents have to allow the teenager to do that rather than imposing their own value system, scared of their child going astray. Have faith that your child has absorbed what you tried to teach him since his infancy and he has internalised that.

So let’s support our teenagers in this difficult time of their lives with love, empathy and tolerance and take the tantrums with a pinch of salt.