



NAVIGATING THE STORM

Empowering Parents to Support Their Teen's
Journey Through Depression

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Introduction

If you are worried about your teen and don't know how to best support them, then this book is for you! If your teen or tween is **struggling with Depression, and/or Anxiety or Bipolar** or even if their mood and behavior have changed recently and you're concerned about their mental health this book is for you.

Parenting is tough...especially when your kids become teenagers...and when your teen is struggling with depression it can be downright scary!

I had been practicing and teaching positive discipline for 5 years when my daughter started struggling. I thought I had parenting down. I had already raised my two older boys through adolescence. **I was a Positive Discipline Parent Educator.** Positive Discipline is a parenting program developed by Dr. Jane Nelson and Lynn Lott based on the work of Adolf Adler and Rudolf Dreikers. Adler taught that all humans strive for a sense of belonging and significance and a misbehaving child is a discouraged child. **Positive Discipline** teaches parents how to nurture connection and give children opportunities to feel significance. Practicing Positive Discipline in my home had a tremendous positive impact on our family and teaching Positive Discipline kept me accountable.

Yet, I was unprepared for parenting a teen struggling with Depression.

I am a single mama to five children. I had been a Positive Discipline Parent Educator for five years before my daughter started struggling with Depression. I finally had a grasp on what it meant to practice positive parenting. I was facilitating classes on Positive Discipline. I was putting it into practice in my home. I felt confident in my parenting skills...then my daughter at age 14 started struggling at school... getting into fights... being bullied... decided to go to a drinking party...

All of a sudden I found myself in a scary place...parenting a teen who had lost her way... suddenly I lost all confidence. **What did it mean to practice kind and firm parenting when your teen seemed out of control?**

My daughter was struggling with her sense of self. She had been a competitive gymnast for 10 years. Her life was gymnastics. It was all she knew. She would leave school and go directly to the gym to work out. They pushed her hard, as they all had high hopes for her. Suddenly, the sport that was her life passion became overwhelming. She didn't feel she could give it her all. She didn't feel it was worth sacrificing friends and family. So, she gave it up. It was a very hard decision, that I felt was hers to make.

After leaving gymnastics behind she struggled to find her identity. Who was she, if not a gymnast? We had moved to a new town so that I could be closer to the college I was attending. She found herself without friends, without passion, struggling to make a new path. Then, she decided to go to a wild party and consume too

much alcohol. The night ended with me very fearful of the well-being of my daughter. I was grateful my daughter was alive and well and she felt the shame of how much she had worried those that loved her.

Out of that extreme guilt and overwhelm of how life had spun out of control she felt she couldn't cope and took a handful of my anxiety medication. I thank God everyday that she told me what she had done and I had rushed her to the ER.

Let me be the first to tell you that **parenting classes don't prepare you for the realities of parenting a teen with depression.** I had struggled myself with depression as a teen. My mother had struggled with life with bipolar. I had done all the things...and I still found myself at loss...

What does kind and firm parenting look like when your teen is engaging in risky behaviors?

How do you hold firm boundaries when your teen tells you they want to end their life?

I get how complicated it can be. I get how difficult it can be to know the best way to support your teen.

I also know what I did to support my teen that I truly believe helped support her through the most difficult time of her life. **I believe that the tools I had learned in Positive Discipline truly helped me to support her on her journey and also in my own parenting journey.**

Now, I am happy to report that my daughter, Karissa, is living her best life. I believe the way that I was able to support her through that journey has a big part to play. It definitely has a big part to play in the amazing relationship that we have today!

This is why I wrote this book. I hope that it will help you and your child as the tools in this book helped me to support my daughter.

Much Love,

Kristina

Chapter One

Powerful Connection



As a mother, I've always strived to create a nurturing, connected relationship with my children. When kids reach adolescence and start giving the teen attitude, I recognize this is not always easy! When it got tough with my daughter, I always reminded myself to focus on the relationship.

I firmly believe quality time is the foundation of any strong bond, so I made it a priority to spend dedicated moments together.

We started by establishing a weekly “mother–daughter” day, where we engaged in activities we both enjoyed. Whether it was giving each other manis and pedis, taking a walk together, or simply curling up on the couch to watch a movie, these special moments allowed us to connect and to deepen our understanding of each other’s passions.

During our time together, I made a conscious effort to truly listen to my daughter. I asked her curiosity-driven questions about her dreams, fears, and aspirations. By showing genuine interest in her thoughts and feelings, she felt heard and valued. **This open communication laid the foundation for a safe space where she could share anything without judgment.**

I also recognized her mistakes as opportunities for growth and learning. Instead of chastising her for missteps, I embraced a mindset that encouraged her to view mistakes as valuable lessons. We engaged in meaningful conversations after setbacks, discussing what went wrong and how she could approach similar situations differently in the future. This empowered her to develop resilience and to take ownership of her actions.

I continuously looked for ways to empower my daughter. I never undermined her capabilities but, rather, sought opportunities for her to shine and to discover her strengths. I encouraged her to take on new challenges, supported her endeavors, and celebrated her achievements—no matter how big or small.

By fostering an environment of trust, curiosity, and empowerment, our relationship flourished. We grew to understand each other's unique perspectives, and our connection deepened with every shared experience.

Through it all, I learned the keys to nurturing a resilient, connected relationship with my teenage daughter were investing time, encouraging her, and committing to open communication.

Building a powerful connection with your teenager is crucial because it fosters trust, genuine connection, open communication, and understanding.

It allows you to better support and guide them, protects them from negative influences, and promotes their overall well-being and mental health. **This connection acts as a protective shield, safeguarding them from life's challenges.**

When your teenager feels supported and connected to you, they are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, or premature sexual activity. Instead, they will make decisions that prioritize their well-being and set them up for long-term success.

Nurturing a positive relationship with your teenager also promotes their psychological resilience. When they have a secure attachment to you, they experience higher self-esteem, improved mental health, and enhanced coping skills. This emotional competence equips them to manage stress effectively, navigate relationships, and overcome setbacks. These skills benefit them not only during their teenage years but throughout their adult lives as well.

Having a powerful connection with your teen is the foundation for successful parenting, but how to achieve that is not always intuitive.

Here are some practical, actionable tools to help you nurture your relationship with your teen.

Tool 1: Quality Time

As a parent of a teen, you know the teenage years are a unique time of growth and development. During this time, teens often become more independent and autonomous from their parents, meaning you might find it difficult to get through to them. **During this period of transition, though, it's imperative you build a connection with your teen and create an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. This establishes a strong bond.**

One way you can do this is by **spending quality time with your teen.**

Special moments spent together help strengthen your relationship and allow your teen to connect with you in new, meaningful ways. **Quality time is essential for both teens and parents.** It allows you to build a lasting relationship that will support them through their adolescent years and beyond.

When planning special time with your teen, take into consideration both what you and your teen need and want from the experience. Participating in an activity you both enjoy or one that's designed specifically for the two of you creates the opportunity for meaningful conversations. **This, in turn, has long-term positive effects on your relationship.**

Some ideas for activities include any of the following:

- Going out to eat together
- Playing sports
- Going bowling
- Having movie nights
- Playing board games, such as chess or Monopoly
- Taking walks in nature or going on bike rides
- Attending events that expose them to different cultures or customs, such as local plays or concerts
- Visiting museums or art galleries
- Visiting family members or friends
- Camping or going on weekend road trips together
- Exploring a new city or town and local attractions together
- Volunteering at a local charity event or animal shelter
- Teaching your teen how to cook a favorite recipe from scratch
- Hosting game nights with friends or family members who share common interests with your teen
- Having conversations about goals, aspirations, or current events
- Taking classes together, such as cooking classes
- Reading books aloud together
- Exploring fun science experiments, such as homemade lava lamps
- Having a picnic in the park on nice days
- Visiting the beach on weekends during warmer months
- Doing art projects, such as painting canvases, together
- Going on shopping sprees

These activities are great for fitting in some fun, making memories together, and showing your teen how much you care about spending time with them. They also offer opportunities for deeper conversations around career goals, future plans, college choices, hobbies, current events, or personal interests affecting your teen's life.

Any activity that gets you bonding over shared experiences is beneficial, so feel free to mix it up! As long as everyone involved feels comfortable with the plan and enjoys themselves, you're sure to have successful quality time with your teen.

Don't forget, even simple moments, such as reading books together before bedtime, taking breaks from work or school together, or having lunch outdoors, count toward quality time and provide much-needed bonding. These little moments might not seem like much, but they are just as effective at developing a strong relationship with your teen during this pivotal phase of life.

It might be hard sometimes for busy teens (and adults) to fit quality time into their schedules, but I encourage you to put it on the calendar. Make this time a priority every week. **Investing in quality time now can save you time spent in conflict later!**

Whether it's ten minutes after dinner or an entire day out of the house, setting aside dedicated time each week shows your teen they are valued and appreciated.

Making an effort toward more meaningful engagement is one way to invest in the relationship with your teen now for dividends down the road. It's not always obvious how quality time affects your teen while they're still living under your roof, but **those effects are often reflected upon years later when your child looks back on all the fun experiences you shared together.**

Through positive parental influence during these formative years—especially during adolescence—teens learn valuable life skills, such as communication strategies, problem-solving techniques, decision-making processes, goal-setting methods, and resilience skills. These all help them become independent critical thinkers who are better equipped for adulting. And, most importantly, they know you value them enough to take time out of your day just for them. **They see that spending special quality time with them matters more than anything else to you!**

When planning quality time with your teen, think about their interests and passions first. **What do they like to do?** Start there when creating activities together. Find out if there's a new hobby they're interested in trying or if they need help with any projects. Think outside the box too. Brainstorm ways you can have fun doing something new together, such as hitting up an arcade for some friendly competition.

Make sure you leave room for conversation during quality time too. Ask open-ended questions about their day at school or their weekend plans.

This shows them you care about their life and want to get to know them better as an individual rather than just as your child.

Although it can be hard for parents of teens to relate to their children due to an increasing reliance on technology, there are still plenty of activities both parents and teens can enjoy together. These activities create lasting memories that help build and maintain strong family relationships during these teenage years.

Outdoor play is one activity that's a great source of bonding time. Whether it's hiking, camping, or fishing, the outdoors provides an opportunity for everyone in the family to get away from screens and technology and truly unplug for a while. **Spending time outside also has physical benefits.** Exercise helps reduce stress levels while allowing teens to practice teamwork and problem-solving skills. In addition, being outdoors provides an opportunity for families to discuss topics they might not usually talk about, such as politics or religion.

Another excellent way for parents and teens to bond is through **shared hobbies or interests**, such as sports, music classes, cooking classes, art projects, or theater performances. These types of activities provide great opportunities for conversations about current events or personal challenges. They also encourage creative expression and the acquisition of new skills.

For example, if your teen loves soccer, attending a game together could encourage interesting discussions around team dynamics, as well as provide an enjoyable experience overall.

When sharing hobbies or interests with your teen, it's important you both feel respected and heard during conversations. **Showing genuine interest in their opinions is key!** This type of dialogue allows each person in the family to feel appreciated, despite age differences between generations.

Another way parents can spend quality time with their teenagers is by **volunteering locally or doing charity work together**. This is beneficial in three ways. One, it gives each person the chance to show support for causes they believe in. Two, it builds collaboration between parent and teen as they work side-by-side toward a common goal. Three, when engaging in volunteer work, families learn how their actions have an impact on others. This helps promote empathy, compassion, and kindness among all family members involved.

One final way parents can build meaningful connections with their teens is by **participating in special traditions, such as holidays or vacations**. This could involve anything from taking weekend trips out of town to planning a summer vacation abroad. **Having these special moments creates memories that will last long after adolescence has passed.**

These experiences bring people closer together—no matter their generation!

The most important takeaway is that spending quality time with teenagers doesn't have to be difficult.

Quality time doesn't have to be expensive or involve elaborate outings. It can be as simple as going for walks, playing board games, or cooking dinner together.

At its core, spending quality time with your teenager is all about being present, listening without judgment, and showing love through your encouragement. Not only will this create strong bonds and open communication channels between parent and teen, but it will also provide teens with an outlet to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment.

Tool Two: Encouragement

Parents face a unique challenge when their children reach the teenage years. While it can be an exciting time of exploration and self-discovery for teens, this period can also be filled with confusion, rebellion, and conflict. One key to building successful relationships with teens is providing positive encouragement. Encouragement helps foster connection between parents and teens, improving communication and understanding.



Hear what my daughter had to say about this time in our lives...

Karissa's Take

I always used to wonder. Does Mom not know the irresponsible things I did? Or is she just not saying anything? I figured she had to know. There was no way she didn't.

She knew every single time.

But she also knew that, of course, I was going to do things she was not always happy about, and she let me have space for my mistakes. Her not breathing down my neck about every single small mistake made it easier to want to open up about what had been going on.

During the one-on-one time we shared together, she felt more like a friend, leading me to want to tell her everything about my life. I truly think that was one of the biggest factors for keeping our relationship strong. The sense of her feeling like a friend is one of the main reasons it was easy for me to share my thoughts with her. Having somebody in my life who was clearly making an effort to spend quality time with me made me feel loved and appreciated.

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