

Families and Negativity ^[1]

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Your family is one of the most important units you are part of, whether or not you like that. They provide a lot of behavioral models for you and are the baseline for your personal development.

Whether you are a parent, a child, or in between, your family is a part of who you are. That is why any negativity, related to the family, will likely have direct negative consequences for your life. Unfortunately, not every negative event can be avoided, but there is a lot you can do about turning the downsides into advantages.

Adolescent Negativity

You have probably heard many young adults say, "I wish I could be a teenager again, everything was so dramatic, but it was a lot of fun!"

A lot of our past experiences have been illuminated by the light of selective memory, and so we tend to idealize them. However, adolescents also often suffer from negativity and even depressive disorders.

Teenage Behavior

During puberty, individuals intensely search for their identity, and so it is expected to feel a bit lost. However, as you probably know, this period, is a crucial one in a person's life, since it is when a lot of the attitudes towards life, love, and oneself are formed.

Although the stereotypical teenager may be grumpy and rebellious, it is vital to distinguish between normal adolescent behaviors and the interference of negativity.

Many parents report that their children change during adolescence. They become more hostile, withdrawn, and may engage in rebellious acts. Although this behavior is often worrisome to the parents of teenagers, it is a regular part of growing up.

To learn more about themselves, their reactions and abilities, teenagers need to test themselves and the reality they live in.

Parents Provide a Safe Space

Since parents and caregivers often provide the safest environment for teenagers, one where

they can be themselves, it is easiest for adolescents to start testing the boundaries in that environment.

Of course, this is a subconscious process, and your teenager is not getting involved in it on purpose – it is simply a natural behavior.

Positive Reinforcement

In that sense, it is vital, for the emotional growth of teenagers, that they are provided with a positive environment, where they feel safe and accepted.

Parents may be inclined to react negatively to their adolescents' rebellious behavior, but that could only create more problems. Yelling, screaming and punishing is more likely to turn teenagers away, rather than to teach them anything.

So, to keep them away from developing a permanent negative outlook on life, it is best to talk to teenagers, on topics they are interested in. More importantly, the key is to try to understand where they are coming from, and explain your point of view calmly.

Expressing Yourself

For instance, if your daughter has broken curfew, you may want to say something along the lines of, "I felt very afraid when you didn't come back on time.

Could you please let me know why you felt like you needed to break curfew?" Talking in this way may seem counterintuitive and difficult, especially when you are angry at your child and they are rude.

However, if you do your best to change your communication style so that you are calm and understanding, yet firm, your child will follow in your footsteps.

How Can You Help Your Teenager?

- **If you want to help your child, let them help you understand, and try not to judge.** Try to change the way in which the two of you talk. Be a confidant, not an almighty and all-knowing director.
- **Do not pretend to understand, when you don't.** Instead, be interested in your child's life and let them explain how they see the world. Be on their side, by listening to their side of the story.
- **Find the time to talk.** Even when you are tired, be available If your child needs you.
- **Do not judge the way your child chooses to look.** If you don't want to alienate your child, do not be aggressive about the way they dress and look. Instead, try talking about different points of view, as well as mental and physical health.

- **Let your child know he/she can always ask for your help.** Trust is the ultimate therapy for adolescent negativity.
- **Give them freedom, but be the authority.** Your children need to make their important decisions. All you can do is tell them about your experiences and opinions.

The "Sandwich Generation"

This is a term used to describe those people, who are at a time of their lives when they need to care both for their children and for their elderly parents. They are sandwiched between the needs of their family members, which can cause a lot of stress and negativity.

If you or someone you love is in the position of a member of the “sandwich generation”, there are some key aspects to keep in mind, to preserve one’s mental health intact.

Take time to care for yourself.

It may feel demanding and overwhelming to have both your children and parents depending on you. If you are in this situation, then you know how important it is to keep calm and make smart, well thought-out decision.

Of course, that would be impossible unless you are well-rested and happy. Therefore, you always need to remember to take some time, every day, or at least a few times a week, just for yourself. Do what you enjoy, or simply relax, away from any disturbances.

Empower your parents and children

They may not realize how much they can do on their own. As a result, both their self-esteem and your mental health may be suffering.

An effective solution might be to empower your loved ones, by encouraging them to take the initiative, where appropriate, and do more on their own.

Establish boundaries

When living in the same space with other generations, it is imperative, for everyone’s sake, to establish firm boundaries. Everyone should have their own, separate space, as well as time alone.

As much as you love each other, it is easy to become fed up and agitated, if you are constantly involved in each other’s business. Naturally, it is crucial to try and find a healthy balance between independence and sharing.

Make sure everyone has their role to play.

Even though you, and perhaps your partner, may be the main caregiver in the household, that doesn’t mean that others can’t help. To take a bit of the load off of yourself and increase

others' self-esteem, by allowing them to feel needed - design a chore schedule, where everyone is involved.

It should certainly be in compliance to everyone's age and physical abilities, but even small tasks can provide your loved ones with a lot of positive emotions and pride.

Smarter budgeting can be of great help

If both your parents and children rely on you for financial support, that may be putting a huge strain on you. Household budgeting may help you stay away from negative outbursts, and create a more stable environment for everyone.

Furthermore, it is always helpful to encourage your children to contribute financially, if they are over 18.

The “Empty Nest” Syndrome

This refers to the time when grown children leave their parents' homes, to go to university, or to start their path to adulthood in another way.

Parents may find themselves overwhelmed by the feeling that their home is empty, and nobody needs them any longer. This experience may bring quite a lot of negativity into a parent's life, if not handled properly.

Preparation Is Key

To prevent this syndrome, you might benefit from preparing for the event. Before your children leave home, spend more time together, talk and engage in mutually entertaining activities.

Make sure you spend quality time together – even if you are in the same room, that doesn't always mean you are together. When you've built a strong bond with your child, you will both keep your confidence in the relationship, and will have an easier time when you separate.

Return to Your Hobbies

Once your children have left home, you may want to engage in activities, which you have either neglected, or have always wanted to join, but haven't had the time. Think about the hobbies you had in your youth, or all the things you wished you could do, over the years.

Feel free to take up anything you find enjoyable – after all, you have raised another human, so now is your time to have fun!

When Sadness Is Actually Depression

While it is normal for parents to feel sad when they are left alone, it is important to pay attention to the intensity and length of the sadness.

If you feel like your life does not make sense anymore, if you don't get pleasure out of seeing friends and engaging in activities you previously enjoyed, then you might have developed depressive tendencies. In that case, it is best to visit a therapist, to make sure that you will remain mentally healthy.

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