COLLECTION

The Essentials of Applied Psychology

Adolescence in Crisis



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Introduction — Being the Parent of a Teenager in the 21st Century

You are holding this book in your hands, and perhaps that simple act already reflects a form of courage. The courage to acknowledge that you are overwhelmed, exhausted, sometimes at a loss when facing this person you brought into the world, whom you rocked, fed, and comforted — and who, today, seems to push you away with a force you never anticipated.

If you are here, it is probably because something has changed in your household. Perhaps your teenager locks themselves in their room for hours, eyes glued to a screen whose content you do not understand. Perhaps conversations have been reduced to monosyllables, when they do not escalate into confrontations. Perhaps your child, once joyful and curious, now shows signs of anxiety, sadness, or anger that deeply worry you.

I would like to begin by telling you something essential: you are not alone. And above all, you have not failed.

A World We Never Knew

Being the parent of a teenager has always been a challenge. Throughout history, adolescence has been a period of turbulence, questioning, and confrontation with parental authority. The Greek philosophers already complained about the lack of respect shown by the young. But it would be dishonest to pretend that nothing has changed.

The world in which our teenagers grow up today is fundamentally different from the one we knew. When we were young, social interactions were limited to the family circle, school, and the neighborhood. Social comparisons existed, but they were contained within a restricted perimeter. You could go home and find a refuge, a space for decompression.

Today, a teenager carries in their pocket a device that permanently connects them to billions of people, to uninterrupted streams of information, to constant solicitations. Bullying no longer stops at the school gate. Role models are no longer the neighbor or the teacher, but influencers whose lives appear perfect — a perfection carefully staged, but which the adolescent brain struggles to deconstruct.

The figures speak for themselves. According to a study by Sante publique France published in 2023, 13% of French adolescents experience a characterized depressive episode, a figure that has been rising steadily since 2017. Emergency room visits for suicide attempts among girls aged 10 to 14 increased by 27% between 2020 and 2022 (Observatoire national du suicide, 2023). Social anxiety now affects one in five adolescents, according to data from Inserm.

Faced with these realities, it is natural to feel helpless. This book does not claim to transform your relationship with your teenager overnight. But it aims to give you concrete keys, grounded in the latest research in neuroscience and psychology, to better understand what is happening in your child's mind — and in yours.

Why This Book, Why Now

As a cognitive-behavioral psychotherapist (CBT), I see parents in my practice every week. Parents from all walks of life, from all social backgrounds, united by the same distress: "I no longer recognize my child." "I no longer know how to talk to them." "I am afraid for them."

What strikes me in these conversations is the depth of love these parents carry for their child. They do not come because they are indifferent. They come precisely because they love, and that love crashes against a wall they do not know how to breach.

Over the years, I have observed that certain patterns repeat, that certain mistakes — entirely understandable ones — recur systematically, and that certain approaches, when properly applied, produce remarkable results. I have also noticed that the scientific literature on adolescence has made considerable progress over the past two decades, particularly thanks to advances in neuroimaging, but that this knowledge struggles to reach the parents who need it most.

This book was born from that observation. It is the fruit of my clinical practice, but also of extensive reading of the work of researchers whose names you will encounter throughout these chapters: Laurence Steinberg, Daniel Siegel, Jean Twenge, Thomas Gordon, William Miller, Stephen Rollnick, and many others. Each of them has contributed to illuminating an aspect of this very particular period that is adolescence.

What You Will Find in These Pages

This book is organized into eight chapters, each addressing a specific dimension of contemporary adolescence.

The first chapter will immerse you in the adolescent brain. Not in an abstract or academic way, but in a concrete and applicable manner. You will understand why your child takes senseless risks, why they seem unable to envision the future, why their emotions are so intense — and why all of this is perfectly normal from a neurological standpoint. This knowledge will fundamentally change the way you view their behavior.

The second chapter tackles the question of social media, probably the subject that generates the most anxiety among parents today. We will examine the scientific data — not the anxiety-inducing headlines, but the actual research — to understand what is truly harmful and what is not. You will find concrete strategies for accompanying your teenager in their digital life, rather than simply trying to tear them away from it.

The third chapter is devoted to anxiety, that silent affliction affecting more and more adolescents. You will learn to recognize the signs of pathological anxiety, to distinguish it from normal stress, and to use tools from cognitive-behavioral therapy to help your child tame their fears.

The fourth chapter deals with communication, that fragile thread still connecting you to your teenager, a thread that is vital not to sever. We will explore the methods of Thomas Gordon and the principles of motivational interviewing, two approaches whose effectiveness has been validated by research and which can transform the quality of your exchanges.

The following chapters will address academic disengagement, risk-taking behaviors, building a solid family framework, and finally — because it is equally important — the need to take care of yourself throughout this journey.

How to Use This Book

I encourage you to read this book in order, as the chapters build upon one another. The understanding of the adolescent brain, covered in Chapter 1, is the foundation upon which all the strategies presented later rest.

Each chapter contains case studies inspired by my clinical practice. The names and situations have been changed to preserve anonymity, but the dynamics are authentic. You may recognize yourself in some of these accounts. That is normal and desirable: recognition is the first step toward change.

Each chapter also ends with a practical exercise. I earnestly ask you not to skip them. Reading alone is not enough to transform a relationship. It is putting things into practice, even imperfectly, even clumsily, that produces change. As I often tell my clients: "You don't learn to swim by reading a book about swimming. You have to jump in the water."

A Word About Guilt

Before going further, I wish to address a feeling you are probably experiencing right now: guilt. "Did I do something wrong?" "Should I have been more present, more firm, more gentle?" "Is it my fault my child is struggling?"

Guilt is a common emotion among parents of troubled adolescents, and it is almost always disproportionate. Most of you have done your best with the resources available to you. Adolescence is a storm that even the most loving and competent parents cannot prevent. Your role is not to suppress this storm — that is impossible. Your role is to be the lighthouse that guides your child through it.

The psychiatrist and researcher Daniel Siegel, whose work on the adolescent brain is authoritative worldwide, puts it this way: "Adolescence is not a disease. It is a period of intense transformation that prepares the human being to become an autonomous and creative adult." (Siegel, 2015). This perspective is liberating. It does not deny the difficulties, but it places them in a broader context — that of human development.

So, if you are willing, set the guilt aside. It will be of no use to you in the pages that follow. What you will need is curiosity, openness, and a healthy dose of kindness — toward your teenager, but also toward yourself.

A Reciprocal Commitment

By opening this book, you are making a commitment: to look at the situation differently, to question some of your certainties, and to try — even just once — the approaches I propose.

For my part, I commit to never judging you, to always basing my advice on evidence, and to remaining concrete. You will not find grand abstract theories or moralizing lectures here. You will find tools, examples, strategies that you can put into practice this very evening, in your kitchen, facing your teenager who rolls their eyes when you ask how their day went.

Let us begin.