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Parenting tip: Teens search for their own identities

by Michelle Aycock

A parent asked: "I am not as close to my teen daughter as I used to be. She seems to be pushing me away. What can I do?"

Many parents of teens go through this experience. Teenagers are attempting to form their own identity and, in order to do so, must separate themselves from their parents. Your teenagers may explore their identity through changing their appearance, friends, music or ideas. Experimenting with different identities is hard for your teenagers as they attempt to sort through different values and beliefs. The ultimate goal for your teens is identifying who they would like to become.

As a parent, watching from the sidelines can be tough. The best way for parents to help their teens is through communication.

However, all too often the parent wants to do all the talking.

Telling your teens how they should think, dress or act will only compel them to avoid any conversations with you. Allow your teens to discuss ideas and opinions with you, whether you agree or not. Again, listen to your teen's ideas. You don't have to agree.

Parents may struggle with their teens as the children becomes more independent, apparently needing them less. However, teens still need guidance and understanding.

Help your teens secure a strong sense of self by having open discussions, being accepting of their ideas, and acting more as a guide, not a director.

The most important thing parents can do is to listen, without judging, and to love their teens for the person they are now and will become.

Michelle Aycock is a licensed psychotherapist with an office in Savannah. Her office number is 912-233-4294, or you can go to her Web site for more information at www.coastaltherapist.com. You also can submit a parenting question for Michelle at michelle@coastaltherapist.com. She has a blog at savannahnow.com/blogs/parentingtip.