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**Quality Time with your Teen**

**By Rachel Paxton**

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It's sometimes difficult to find ways to be involved with your teen without totally intruding in his/her life. You want to talk to them, they don't want to talk to you (most of the time anyway). I've found the best way to connect with my teenage daughter is to enter her world and do the things she likes to do. There's a saying that if you want to understand your child's world you have to play with them, no matter how old they are.

You don't always have to be even directly interacting with your teen in order to be involved in their world. Just being around the same influences they are, and taking an interest in their activities, lets them know that you care and that you understand what they deal with from day to day. Then later, at home, you can talk about the things you have experienced together. It's a great way to connect. Here are some ways my teenage daughter and I have spent time together:

My daughter was involved in a music group that did a lot of fundraising that required a lot of involvement by the parents. At first I was really resistant to the time involved, but I soon realized how much fun it was to hang out with my daughter and the other teens and their parents.

School activities are another great way to be involved in your child's life, at any age. When they're younger there's field trips, class parties, etc., you can be involved with, but when they get older there are activities like school plays that parents are a very important part of. I've helped sell tickets, worked at the bake sale...where I didn't even spend time with my daughter at all, but it meant a lot to her that I was there supporting her.

Attending sporting events is also important to your child. When they get older it seems like they don't really care if you're there or not, but it is important to them even if they don't say so. It makes them feel like you care about what they do.

## Quality Time with your Teen

Helping my daughter with school projects has been a great way for us to spend time together. She gets to do the hard part of doing all the research and writing, and then I do the fun part of helping her put it all together in the end. Even with older teens, most of them don't particularly enjoy doing all this work by themselves, even if you know they're completely capable of it. I don't do the work for her, just help her by giving her feedback on her ideas and giving her a hand. Often beforehand even I will go to the library with her and help her sort through reference materials. I know it means a lot to her, especially when she's doing a huge project and is completely overwhelmed.

Another way I've been involved with my daughter is to be a youth leader in her church youth group. Again, I am not actually spending time with her there most of the time, but I am experiencing the same things she's experiencing and it's giving us something in common that we can both relate to and discuss. Those times together have been very meaningful.

As you can see, not all of these activities involve me actually talking to and hanging out with my daughter. You know as well as I do that our teens don't always want us hanging around them. I'm

happy for the time I do get to spend with my daughter, for the little time I have left with her. When we have things in common my daughter is much more likely to talk to me and share her feelings with me. When I don't know what she experiences, it is very hard for me to relate what she is going through. These shared experiences have opened up many more opportunities for us to share and connect that we wouldn't otherwise have.

Rachel Paxton is a freelance writer and mom who is the author of *What's for Dinner?*, an e-cookbook containing more than 250 quick easy dinner ideas. For more recipes, organizing tips, home decorating, crafts, holiday hints, and more, visit [Creative Homemaking](#) at

### **I've Learned To Love Teen Art**

**By Martin Stoleman**

I have loved art for as long as I can remember. As a child I spent hour after hour doing art projects of all kinds with my mother and my siblings. We would paint, practice sewing or create things out of clay for hours on end. I never knew that the amount of art projects we worked on was abnormal until I got a bit older and heard all of my friends and school talking about their years of playing with trucks and action figures or being outside building forts. I guess our mother wanted us to be well rounded individuals so she started us on all things art from the start. I don't remember exactly what kind of teen art I created during my formative years, but I do know that it wasn't until recently that I learned to appreciate teen art.

To the surprise of no one that I knew, I decided to become an art teacher when I went to college. I loved art so much that I couldn't think of a better way to spend my days than on teaching children and teens more about the things I loved. I enjoyed my elementary aged students immensely from the

beginning. I loved their curiosity and I enjoyed the way they saw art. It was the teen art that my junior high aged students were creating that took me a while to adjust to.

The thing about teen art is that it is less than traditional and often it needs to be classified outside of any established genres of art. The teens in my art classes saw art in a much different way than I expected, and hence their work was much different as well. I would give them an assignment and they would create work so unlike what I had asked for and yet so creative that I couldn't complain.

I have realized that teen art needs to be a genre of art all by itself. Why? I've determined that teen art is so unique because of the time of life that it represents. Teens are going through the ultimate time of transition, so it makes sense that their art would have a particular perspective and slant. And as different as teen art can often be, I have learned to appreciate it. I have learned to see it through the eyes of a teenager exploring the world and trying to make sense of their place in the world.

If you have a teenager who likes to play around with any art form, then you probably know exactly what I'm talking about with teen art. In fact, you've probably had similar issues in trying to recognize, define or categorize the art work that seems to make your teen come alive. My advice to you is this: teen art is something entirely of its own kind. Stop trying to make teen art into something else, and instead just enjoy it for what it is.

Martin Stoleman is an elementary and junior high school art teacher. He loves working with students and seeing what kinds of teen art they will come up with next. See

for more

details.

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