



Rochester & Genesee Valley Parent



DIRECTORIES CALENDAR PLACES TO GO PREGNANCY+BABY **PARENTING** EDUCATION

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- Local Calenc
- Area Attractions
- Preparing for Baby
- Ages 3-5: Pre
- Back to School Tips
- Kitchen Time
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- May/June 2016
- ant's Health
- Ages 6-11: Sc
- Educational Articles
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- Education Directory
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- rformanc
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- o Do with Bab
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- Book Nook
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- November/December 2015
- Issue
- Health + Wellness
- Crafts & DIY
- omit to Co
- Fall
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- Places to go during the Winter Months
- Parenting Pointers
- Budget Friendly
- Buffalo/WNY
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- Go Green
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- Video of the Week
- Seasonal Activities
- Get Listed



Have you watched Mean Girls (SNL Studios, 2004) with your teen daughter? There is a memorable line in the movie when Mrs. George states, "I'm not like a regular mom. I'm a COOL mom." Of course, Mrs. George is a caricature of a mom trying too hard to be "one of the girls." She makes mocktails for "happy hour," wears skimpy clothing, and allows her daughter to occupy the master bedroom suite. Are "cool parents" more in tune with their teens? What does it really mean to be a "cool parent?"

A cool parent is someone who can relate to teens but still establishes a position of respect and authority. A cool parent might occasionally forego a night out with her spouse so her teen can invite friends over for pizza. She might shake her thing to the latest version of Just Dance (Wii video game) with her teen daughter and her girlfriends. However, it's not so cool – and will likely embarrass her teen – if she suddenly decided to talk like a rap artist or wear a string bikini during her teen's backyard pool party.

Cool Parents are Truly Connected

Cool parents know that the key to staying on the same page as their teenagers is to stay involved and interested in their dreams and goals. Ilene Val-Essen, PhD, author of *Bring Out the Best in Your Child and Your Self: Creating a Family Based on Mutual Respect* (Quality Parenting, 2010) and creator of the "Quality Parenting Program" (www.qualityparenting.com), believes that teens want to stay connected with their parents even though, at times, it seems that they prefer their own world. "Respect is the link," she explains. "Respect yourself, your children, and those with whom you interact." She says that teens will be naturally drawn to parents who are powerful role models.

Christina G. Hibbert, PsyD, a clinical psychologist, mother of six, and author of *This is How We Grow* (Oracle Folio Books, 2013), points out, "One of the worst things parents can do is try to be their teen's friend. They have plenty of 'cool' friends. Instead of trying to be like your teen, focus on being open to your teen. Do activities with them that they enjoy. Make time to listen whenever they need you." Grace Malonai, PhD, LPCC, a psychotherapist specializing in parenting and family relationships, explains, "It is common for people to think that in order to connect with their teens they need to get down on a teen's level by wearing similar clothing or talking the lingo. However, parents are older and different than their teens, and trying to look and sound like them may seem fake. Parents can connect with teens by being authentic and empathetic.

"Parents should be aware of the latest teen trends, both good and bad. Educate yourself about new social networking sites, music, movies, as well as anything illicit or unhealthy teens might be exposed to. You can't advise your teen if you don't know what is going on. Staying connected with your teen also means that you are familiar with his current circle of friends and his social activities. Allow your teen to have friends over regularly so you can get to know them on a more personal basis. Take your teen on regular outings, and spend time doing something your teen loves, even if it makes the hairs on your arm stand tall (e.g. waiting for the first car on a hyper coaster, etc.).

What's the Buzz?

Communication is the key to all successful relationships. Teens don't always talk to their parents about what is going on, but parents must keep trying to break that barrier.

Malonai, recommends, "Listen to your teen with all that you have, and make sure you are available when the time is right." She also advises parents to show interest in their teen's feelings without using accusatory language. For instance, a parent might say, "The words in that song tell a sad story, yet you are smiling. This makes me curious." She explains that empathetic listening takes practice but is necessary.

Val-Essen advises, "Wear an antenna! Show an interest in their world. Also, share openly about the meaningful aspects of your day to create an atmosphere where exchange is natural."

"Know what is happening in their lives and who is important in their lives. Even if they seem bothered by your questions, keep asking," Hibbert says. "They need you more than they will admit, and they want you to be interested in them." "Cool parents are parents teens can be proud of," says Val-Essen. "Parents engaged in meaningful activities – those that keep them alive and passionate about life – are cool parents teens admire." Being a cool parent shouldn't mean you morph into a middle-aged adolescent. Instead, it should mean that you haven't forgotten what it is like to be carefree and you can still find your sense of humor. Perhaps it means that you understand your teen is changing and you embrace those changes and his need for more independence. However, at the same time, you still insist that he follows a set of rules and expectations. Now, that's cool!

Myrna Beth Haskell is a freelance writer and monthly contributor to Rochester & Genesee Valley Parent Magazine who lives in Salt Point, NY. She is the author of LIONS and TIGERS and TEENS: Expert advice and support for the conscientious parent just like you (Unlimited Publishing LLC). Visit www.myrnahaskell.com.

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