



Getting to Calm: Cool-Headed Strategies for Parenting Tweens + Teens

Laura S. Kastner , Jennifer Wyatt

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Parenting a teenager is tougher than ever, but new brain research offers new insight into the best way to connect with teens. With humor, wisdom and a deep understanding of the teenaged brain, noted teen expert Dr. Laura Kastner shows parents how to stay calm and cool-headed while dealing with hot-button issues everything from rude attitude and lying to sex and substance use -- with clear, easy-to-follow suggestions for setting limits while maintaining a close and loving relationship. Find out why Dr. T. Berry Brazelton calls Getting to Calm required reading for any parent who struggles with their teen!

Getting to Calm: Cool-Headed Strategies for Parenting Tweens + Teens Details

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Teens Laura S. Kastner , Jennifer Wyatt**

From Reader Review Getting to Calm: Cool-Headed Strategies for Parenting Tweens + Teens for online ebook

David says

This has some great tips on what to expect from teens (trouble) and how to cope with it. It's uncanny how accurate some of the description of behavior patterns are—my daughter shows many of the same patterns, uses the same strategies, and even repeats some of the same arguments nearly word-for-word, as though she were reading from a script. The author reveals that this is all in an effort to break me down so she can get what she wants, or make me feel miserable if she doesn't. I ended up with about three typed pages of notes and reminders. Bottom line: don't expect a teen to be reasonable or pleasant when they don't get what they want. Don't step into anger or an escalating cycle of emotional reactions, or try to fix them in the passion of the moment. Stay calm, resolved, warm, and out of the eye of the hurricane. Face up to the fact that this will be hard, and then act judiciously later. Not only will this help you hang onto your sanity, but will send them a message that rage, bitterness, and emotional tirades don't work.

Lori Lynn says

If you have teenagers, Getting to Calm will help you think through scenarios that you may encounter as you navigate the often uneven terrain of the teen years. The advice is helpful and explained clearly. It presents some of the reasons for teen behavior in a less in-depth way than some other books (such as The Teenage Brain), but it provides some of those basics and also offers tools to parents who may, without guidance, be inclined to an approach that could actually be counterproductive to the goals the parents are trying to accomplish. In the words of the friend who recommended the book to me, it also helps reassure the parents that they are not crazy. While not every chapter applies to every teen, odds are good that every parent will find some useful advice in this book. Some of the topics include surliness, uneven grades, drug use, hanging with the "wrong crowd," and setting clear boundaries for kids. I plan to keep it around as a reference manual and refer back to it over the next several years.

Bailey Caskey says

A very helpful and insightful book on how deal with Tweens and Teens and their crazy, un-avoidable ways. I found the science interesting on why teens act the way they do. It helps parents to understand the inner workings of their child's mind and helps give strategies in how to lead their teen down the right paths of decision making, responsibility taking, etc. while keeping their relationship in tact.

Bruce says

I tend to pretty skeptical of self-help, pop-psychology kinds of books. I typically view these "for dummies" manuals as bookshelf bait for desperate or lazy fish. The best I can say for them is that at least the authors assume suckers can read. The only reasons I picked *this* one up are: (1) a friend of ours recommended it,

(2) my wife read it and handed it off to me with what I guiltily mistook for a knowing glance, and (3) now that I have a teen-to-be tween, anxiety is starting to overpower my bliss. So Drs. Kastner and Wyatt can take it as high-praise when I review this book with a solid, “Meh.”

As psychological models go, I’ve been a fan of Transactional Analysis since reading *Games People Play* by Eric Berne. Sure, Berne’s book is rife with mid-‘60s sexism, and his description of TA suffers a bit from its thinly-veiled adoption of a Freudian model (read “parent” as “superego,” “adult” as “ego,” and “child” as “id”), but his classification of the ways people typically interact based on hundreds of repeat observations is pretty compelling. I like that he suggests strategies for breaking out of particular behavior patterns and defusing potentially toxic misunderstandings. When Yutz says this, counter with that. (Oh, yeah! nonviolent Bam! I just *rocked* your world! What?!? Er... whoops.) Nor does it hurt that Berne’s condensation of each of these escalating interactions into pithy scripts and plots is downright hilarious. Hey, absent empiricism, I pick my prevailing psychological models primarily on the basis of their entertainment value. If you have a better method, by all means share.

So anyway, Kastner and Wyatt score some points with me by following the TA model, breaking down dialogues of teens and parents into the underlying dynamics of text and subtext as in this excerpt from p. 131:

Cora: “Emma and Stacy went to the mall without asking me. What kind of friends are they, anyway? I hate them, but all I can do is think about how I want to be invited to join them.”
Cora is experiencing the classic social bind – wanting inclusion, feeling terribly vulnerable about exclusion, and having the mixed feelings of love and hatred for complicated friends.

Mom (Franny): “These kinds of binds are the worst. I know all teens go through them, but it doesn’t make it any easier. What about doing something with Lizzy?” *Mom tries to offer the best medicine when responding to a young teen’s upset: empathy, a rational perspective, and an attempt at solving the problem.*

Cora: “I don’t want to be with Lizzy! She’s irritating. All she does is talk about her orchestra friends. She’s a total nerd. Why do you always push me toward Lizzy? I want to hang out with Emma.” *Mom can try her best, but when a teen needs to unload her emotion on the nearest safe and secure relationship, she’ll find a way. Moreover, she has detected Mom’s agenda to encourage a friendship with a nicer friend.*

All of which I guess is to say that Cora’s only really looking for a sounding board, not a problem-solver. So it stands to reason that even well-meaning (but unsolicited) attempts to offer suggestions will come across as patronizing. Especially in a teen who’s already hormonally-triggered to establish an independent identity and instinctively ready to reject at face value anything her mom has to suggest. This particular dialogue continues along in this vein for another two pages. It’s a believable scene, but nothing much gets resolved.

In fact, I’d like this book more if the good doctors had offered more constructive suggestions on how to handle the situations they present. As it is there are far too many “don’t”s here and not enough “do”s. Plus, the weakness of any dialogue-dependent work is that its credibility rests largely on the perceived universality of its scripts. Unedited transcripts tend to read like awkward gibberish. If it seems as though most face-saving ripostes happen only in literature, it’s probably because your average author is in the best position to come up with them. After all, they’re not just steering the conversation, they’re contriving the very road. No doubt the authors here are genuinely and liberally borrowing from therapy session transcripts, and yet many of their reported breakthroughs come across as inauthentic. Take for example this excerpt from pp. 58-59 (italicized subtext deleted). Conflict builds to this parental outburst:

Mom: “She never speaks ill of you. How dare you!”

Kastner (interrupting): “You were watching your parents pretty closely there, Jameel, before you chimed in to side with your dad. What would happen if you didn’t jump in like that?”

Jameel: “I don’t know. I guess we’d get to watch them drive each other crazy, like Mom said.”

Kastner (to Jameel): “How helpful of you to draw off the fire. It seems like you are pretty good at drawing a lot of fire...”

“Yeah, I guess that’s what I’m real good at – drawing fire.”

Group hug! The thing about the TA approach to relationships is that it places great emphasis on negotiation, whether or not the participants are (capable of or even intent upon) communicating their needs directly. While those needs can be as simple as “I need some attention now,” just following social convention (“I’m hungry, but culture dictates I not ignore you in pursuit of food”), inarticulate (“I need a diversion that stops me from feeling scared and spares me the ongoing embarrassment of showing fear”), or even layered (“I’m hungry and I want company and...”), every interaction represents a quid-pro-quo (that’s the transaction), which, once deciphered, can then be accepted, rejected, or modified. But then, there are far better books out there on negotiation, beginning and possibly ending with Roger Fisher William L. Ury’s bible *Getting to Yes*, which in theory ought to allow you to ju-jitsu yourself reasonably out of every messy bind you find yourself in (or just cut bait, which Fisher & Ury admit is sometimes necessary).

If, like me, you’re not of a mind to abandon your kids then quitting on the negotiation isn’t an option for you. What you want to do is delay it or prolong it so that you can either “agree to disagree” in a way that doesn’t permanently poison the relationship or else sweetly papers over the fact that you’ve totally steamrolled your kid’s crazy desire to have 14 bloodshot eyeballs permanently tattooed on her face. *Getting to Calm* doesn’t get you there. It just reminds you not to yell. If you have to drown your insecurities in this kind of literature, you’re better off picking up *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, which juxtaposes its “bad” dialogues with trouble-defusing “good” scripts so you can figure out for yourself what works and why. (Hint: it’s about establishing and observing a commitment to mutual respect, so no finger-pointing... not even *that* finger.)

Knowing what to say and when is only part of the game, of course. Ultimately everything comes down to execution. The folks who can (genuinely) fake sincerity may be lousy at making emotional connections, but I bet they skate by as parents on a short-term basis. The rest of us who aren’t completely sociopathic are probably better off just realizing that all this gets thrown out the window in practice.

Laura says

Practical and concise! Organized into chapters based on specific types of challenges faced by many parents of teens, you can either go just to the section you need or read the book cover-to-cover. It is a useful blend of the latest neuroscience research on teen brains with level-headed advice. It was interesting to see how many “helpful” remarks parents commonly make actually come across as undermining to teens.

K says

I am looking for books that will aid me in guiding my tween into her teenage years and eventually into adulthood. I am hoping to hit as few bumps in the road as possible, knock on wood. In my daughter’s earlier

years books like *raising emotionally intelligent children* and *kids parents and power struggles* were my go to resources. I am expanding my library with more parenting references, ones that speak specifically to raising a tween/teenager.

I liked *Getting to Calm: Cool Headed Strategies for Parenting Tweens and Teens* because it seems to support the integrity of the parent child relationship. Like the previous parenting books I have read, this book encourages parents to be authoritative, not overly permissive or controlling, in parenting styles. This book also encourages parents to be understanding of their teenagers' sentiments, not dismissive or rejecting.

Parents are encouraged to understand their teenagers on an emotional level while taking into account their current physiological state. This book discussed the problem with the dichotomy of the teenage brain having an overly functional emotional brain and only a developing emotional- impulse-control-center of the brain. Teenagers have the ability to feel strongly, if not intensely, but without an ability to control the impulse to act on their feelings well. This books points out that the teenage brain is in transition, and not all parts mature at the same rate. I enjoyed this aspect of the book, it helped me understand that at ten years old my daughter's brain is starting to prune and rewire itself – creating a lot of circuitry issues and resulting in her sometimes 'dramatic flair'.

Getting to Calm is set up in self-contained chapters. I loved this, as certain chapters did not pertain to my family yet (if I am lucky maybe they never will). As with all parenting books some of the 'acted out' dialogue can be a bit contrived – but all in all a fine read.

If I got nothing else from this book the simple reminder that my daughter is physiologically in need of special care is never a bad thing.

JaNel says

There were so many things that I wanted to copy down and remember that I just need to buy it. In my notes, I just started writing down references and page numbers. Although it's geared for dealing with teens, the psychological strategies will help in every relationship. It gives very practical advise that I can implement immediately even with my younger children. I'll definitely put it on my read again list. Hey, I should add that as one of my shelves!

Mark Ballinger says

I found this to be a frustrating series of "just so" stories, sometimes done in very irritating side-by-side "she said"/"she meant" columns. I know there is research behind some of the suggestions. The book read, however, like parenting magazine articles with tips 'n tricks rather than deeper ideas.

Melissa says

This book was actually a very good book with some very useful insights. It was nothing I hadn't really heard before. I think I liked it because it reminded me of what I already knew, but had gotten out of the habit of using with my kids. A similar book that I prefer is "How to talk so Kids Will Listen, and How to Listen so

Kids will Talk." I also didn't agree with a few of the strategies given by the author. I felt they were oversimplifying more complex matters which require more complex interactions and strategies. I will admit however, parenting a teen is new territory for me, so I am by no means an expert!

Gwen says

Possibly the best parenting book I've read. I ended up buying it after reading a library copy, then gave that away because I thought it had so much great advice and now I need another copy!

Connie says

Like others who have read this book or who are reading it now, I wish I had read it earlier in my parenting career. Wise, practical and grounding. Middle school can be a bumpy road. This book encourages parents to not take it personally while their kids pull away, to continue to support them, set limits and focus on what is important to you and your family. There is great letter example from parent to teen on how to talk about drugs and alcohol without revealing every weird choice we ourselves made as teens when times and expectations were different and less was known about teen brain development.

Michelle Morrell says

Really good information in this about dealing with teenagers, from a physiological standpoint (your teenager's brain is developing like this, therefore, this strategy will not work and this one will). But man I hate to read non-fiction, just not my favorite thing to spend my precious book time on.

Sue says

This book contains nothing new for me but it is framed in a way that is very helpful at a pivotal time in my parenting journey as I face the onset of adolescence with my 11 and 13 year old. It combines some very basic science of brain development with effective (empathetic) communication tips, child development and family systems theory plus a dash of positive behavior reinforcement. I highlighted half the text in the first half of the book to save for future reference.

Like most self-help books it has a solid kernel of wisdom which is summarized in the use of the acronym CALM

C--Cool down (self-soothe; control yourself-without trying to control anyone else).

A--Assess options (what are the issues? would it be better to keep talking or postpone?).

L--Listen with empathy (without any "buts" and when you re-engage, start over).

M--Make a plan (consider ways to handle the meltdown and move forward).

And it then, like most self-help books, it flogs that kernal of wisdom into a powder. I totally skimmed the

second half and felt the stuff about internet and screentime, sexuality and drinking/drug abuse were somewhat condescending unless you are completely naive about modern culture and then you probably aren't gonna pick up a book like this. Anyway, the first half gives you all the tools needed for coping with the issues normal teens face. When I say normal, the authors say at the end of each bit of advice, you need professional counseling if it ever becomes unmanageable. I have definitely found that using the ideas, particularly a systematic CALM approach to parenting has had instantly positive results for us.

Favorite quote: *"Sometimes damage control is all you can expect in a difficult situation. If you've stayed calm and haven't added fuel to the flames, you've done your best, because you've kept your own negativity out of the mix."*

Lynn says

I've only just begun reading this book, but I'm hooked. What makes this book special is its perfect blend of enlightening information about how to interpret what kids are really saying and/or trying to accomplish with their verbal assaults and very practical strategies to diffuse potentially explosive situations. This is the kind of clear advice that a parent like me (read: a parent who struggles to keep it cool) can immediately put into action. I'm very grateful to have found this book.

Rita says

Great read that tells it like it is with teens! It is broken into chapters, so if you don't want to read it straight through, you can easily find what you need. The example dialogues between parents & teens have an extra column which explains the process behind each comment.... very entertaining, and very useful! I read the book with a pencil and I enthusiastically underlined sections to be revisited periodically until my kids emerge from teen-hood. This book reaffirms and reminds us of our role with kids who are anything but clear about their role.
