

# Why Does My Teenager Push Me Away?

The challenge of letting go without letting go of them

There was a time when your child wanted to be with you.

They wanted you to read the bedtime story. They wanted you to watch them play. They told you about their day, asked your opinion, climbed onto your lap, or simply wanted you nearby.

And then, almost without warning, something seems to change.



The bedroom door seems to become a barrier between you. Conversations become shorter. “Fine” becomes the standard answer. Your attempts to help are met with irritation. You ask a simple question and somehow find yourself in an argument.

You may begin to wonder:

**What have I done wrong?**

**Why doesn't my teenager want me anymore?**

**Have I lost the relationship we once had?**

Perhaps the hardest part is that you still see the child you love beneath the teenage behaviour. You want to protect them, guide them and help them. But the closer you try to get, the further away they seem to move.

It can be confusing, frustrating and, at times, deeply painful.

But perhaps there is another way of looking at what is happening.

**They are not necessarily pushing you away — they may be trying to find themselves**

Growing up involves a strange tension. Your teenager still needs you, but they are beginning to need you differently.

They are discovering who they are. Their friendships become increasingly important. Their opinions develop. They begin to question things they once simply accepted. They want greater freedom and independence. And sometimes, the easiest way for them to establish that independence is to create some distance from the people who have always been there.

That doesn't necessarily mean they don't love you.

It doesn't mean they don't value you.

And it certainly doesn't mean you have failed as a parent.

It may simply mean they are growing.

The problem is that growing up can be uncomfortable for everyone.

## The push and pull of adolescence

Your teenager may want independence one minute and your help the next. They may say, “Leave me alone,” and then become upset because you weren't there when they needed you. They may reject your advice but still expect you to be available. They may insist they can manage everything themselves and then quietly look for reassurance. This can leave parents feeling as though they are walking a tightrope.

**How much should I step in?**

**When should I back off?**

**When should I challenge them?**

**When should I simply listen?**

There are no perfect answers. Because your teenager is changing, **your relationship with them has to change too.** And that can be one of the hardest things for a parent to accept.

## Sometimes our love gets in the way

This sounds strange. Surely love should make things better? But when we love someone deeply, we naturally want to protect them from pain. We see the mistakes they are making. We see the dangers they may not yet recognise. We can see consequences that they cannot. So we warn. We advise. We question. We remind. We try to fix things. And underneath all of it is something very good:

**“I love you. I don't want you to get hurt.”**

But what your teenager sometimes hears is:

**“You don't trust me.” Or: “You think I can't do anything right.” Or: “You are still treating me like a child.”**

The intention and the message can become very different.

## So what can we do?

Perhaps the answer isn't to try harder to get your teenager to talk. Perhaps it is to make it easier for them to want to talk. There is a difference.

### Listen before you solve

When your teenager tells you something difficult, our natural instinct can be to offer an answer. They tell us about a friendship problem, and we immediately explain what they should do. They tell us they are struggling at school and we start offering solutions. They make a mistake and we tell them how they could have avoided it.

But sometimes they aren't asking for an answer. Sometimes they simply want someone to hear them. Try saying:

**“That sounds really difficult.” Or: “I can understand why you're upset.” Or even: “Do you want me to listen, or do you want some ideas?”**

That simple question can change the whole conversation.

## **Choose relationship over being right**

There will be times when your teenager is wrong. There will be things you need to challenge. Boundaries still matter. Safety still matters. Respect still matters. But not every disagreement has to become a battle. Ask yourself:

**“Is this something that really matters, or am I reacting because I don't like their choice?”**

Sometimes we can win the argument and lose the conversation. And the conversation may be far more important.

## **Give them somewhere safe to come back to**

Your teenager needs to know that they can make mistakes without losing your love. That doesn't mean removing consequences or pretending everything is acceptable. It means separating **behaviour from belonging**.

You can say:

**“I'm disappointed by what happened, but I'm not disappointed in you.”**

**“We need to talk about what you've done, but you don't have to face it alone.”**

**“Nothing you do will make me stop loving you.”**

Those words can become an anchor. Because underneath the confidence, independence and sometimes difficult behaviour, there may still be a young person wondering:

**“Am I good enough?”**

**“Do I belong?”**

**“Will people still love me when they see the real me?”**

Home needs to be the place where the answer is yes.

## **Don't mistake silence for rejection**

Sometimes your teenager may not want to talk. That's okay. You don't have to fill every silence. You can leave the door open without forcing them through it. **“You don't have to talk about it now. I'm here when you're ready.”** And then keep being there. Make the cup of tea. Offer the lift. Watch the film. Sit in the same room. Ask about something they care about. Sometimes connection happens indirectly.

A conversation in the car may be easier than one across the kitchen table. A walk may be easier than sitting face-to-face. And sometimes the most important conversations happen when neither of you planned to have one.

## Look beneath the behaviour

This may be one of the most important changes we can make as parents. Instead of asking only:

**“Why are they behaving like this?”** try asking: **“I wonder what is happening underneath?”**

Anger may hide hurt. Irritation may hide embarrassment. Withdrawal may hide uncertainty. Defiance may hide fear. Silence may simply mean they don't yet have the words. We don't always get it right.

But curiosity is often more helpful than judgement. Instead of: **“What's wrong with you?”** try: **“Something seems to be bothering you. I'm here if you want to talk.”** It leaves the door open.

## And what about us?

Perhaps we need to acknowledge something uncomfortable. Our teenager is not the only one going through change. **We are too.**

We are learning how to parent a person who is no longer a child but isn't yet an adult. We are letting go of some of the control we once had. We are learning to trust.

We are discovering that our role is changing from **doing everything for them** to increasingly **walking alongside them.**

That can feel like loss. But it can also become something beautiful. Because if we allow the relationship to grow, we may discover that we aren't losing our child. **We are getting to know the person they are becoming.**

## The goal isn't to stop them pulling away

Perhaps this is the biggest shift of all. Our goal isn't to make our teenager dependent upon us. Nor is it to prevent them from becoming independent. Our goal is to help them become confident enough to leave the nest while knowing there is somewhere safe to return to.

They need space.

They need boundaries.

They need freedom.

They need guidance.

And above all, they need to know that behind all the changes, arguments, mistakes and growing pains, **the relationship remains secure.** So when your teenager shuts the door, don't necessarily see it as a door being closed on you. Sometimes it is simply a young person taking the space they need to work out who they are.

Keep the light on.

Keep the door open.

Keep loving them.

And when they are ready, **be there**. Because perhaps the most powerful message a parent can give a teenager is not:

**“You need me.”** It is: **“You are becoming your own person – and I will still be here.”**

**Perhaps you recognise some of this in your own family.** You don't have to have all the answers. Sometimes understanding what is happening beneath the behaviour is the first step towards finding a different way forward.

*Versions of Me* was created to help parents navigate these difficult years, strengthen relationships and better understand the teenager behind the behaviour.

**Find out more and explore the resources at [www.versionsofme.co.uk](http://www.versionsofme.co.uk)**