

*STRIVING AND THRIVING:
Opening the Doors
to Adolescent Growth*

Dr. Brad Sachs, Ph.D

www.drbradsachs.com

Jewish Education Project

March 16, 2017



"O.K., I admit it, we're lost, but the important thing is to remain focussed on whose fault it is."

The Blind Men and the Elephant



Social Pressures



Family Pressures



Cyber-Pressures



Academic Pressures



Neurodevelopmental Pressures



An Ecological Approach



Adolescent Vulnerability



Adolescent Resourcefulness



Adolescent Development



What you see *in*
them is what you are
likely to get *from*
them...

Adolescent Development



*...and what they are likely to
find within themselves*

Adolescent Development



Teens need us the most
when they are the least
pleasant to be with

Adolescent Development



*The adolescents who need
the most love will tend to
ask for it in the most
unloving ways*

Adolescent Development



Nothing important comes
easy—pain, discomfort, and
disruption are necessary
counterparts to growth and
change

Adolescent Development



Adolescence should be a
preparation for
adulthood, not a
performance for adults

Adolescent Development



Life's most important lessons are

learned, not taught,
discovered, not imposed



The adolescent journey
is ancient and eternal

Developmental Grief



Developmental Grief



DEVELOPMENTAL GRIEF



- Mourning for what has been lost
- Becoming open to the New and Unexplored
- The capacity to understand and appreciate the mixed emotions that have been aroused by loss and change
- Freedom to evolve

ANGUISH



Anguish results when developmental grief is avoided, ignored, dismissed, invalidated, or unrecognized by adolescents and the community within which they reside

Suicide



A NOTE OF ANGUISH...



This note should be pretty easy to understand...I haven't felt the excitement of listening to as well as creating music along with reading and writing for too many years now. I feel guilty beyond words about these things...I'm too sensitive..I need to be slightly numb in order to regain the enthusiasm I once had as a child...I have a daughter who reminds me of who I used to be...it makes me feel too fucking sad...

Neglected Aspects of Teen Development



Every Teen needs to say goodbye to adolescence in order to prepare for adulthood

“I’m a loser...”



THE TOMB

BECOMES

THE WOMB

Developmental Grieving...



To create a *future*...

The teen must grieve for the
past, which means she
must:

Adolescent Grieving...

- a. Forgive adults for their limitations
- b. Recognize the irreversible nature of growth
- c. Acknowledge that she is unique but ordinary
- d. Come to terms with aloneness
- e. Relinquish fantasies of invulnerability, immortality, omnipotence and self-importance

Adolescent Grieving...

“I can look back, but I
can't go back”



“Like a Rolling Stone”



How does it feel?

How does it feel?

To be on your own

With no direction home

A complete unknown

Like a rolling stone

Challenges to Healthy Grief



- Achievement and Accomplishment
- Competition
- Academic supremacy
- Activity-based Virtuosity

Challenges to Healthy Grief

- Acquisition and Materialism
(having goods vs. being good)
- Obedience and Conformity/Uniformity
- Meaninglessness
(valuing trivia/information over wisdom, valuing entertainment over play)

Still, diving for it
would look good
on my college
application



Neglected Aspects of Teen Development...



Teens must paradoxically grow up
and away while simultaneously
strengthening the connections that
keep them close

The Book of Jeremiah

*“Before I formed you in
the womb, I knew you;
before you were born, I
separated you for myself.”*



No teen

is your teen

*Teens Often Feel They Must
Become...*



*Our narcissistic
ambassadors to the
world*



"I am not your do-over."

YORKER, SEPTEMBER 20, 2010

*The Two Most Aggressive Words
in the English Language*



I am....

The Book of Genesis



“...Therefore shall a man
leave his father and his
mother, and shall cleave unto
his wife.”





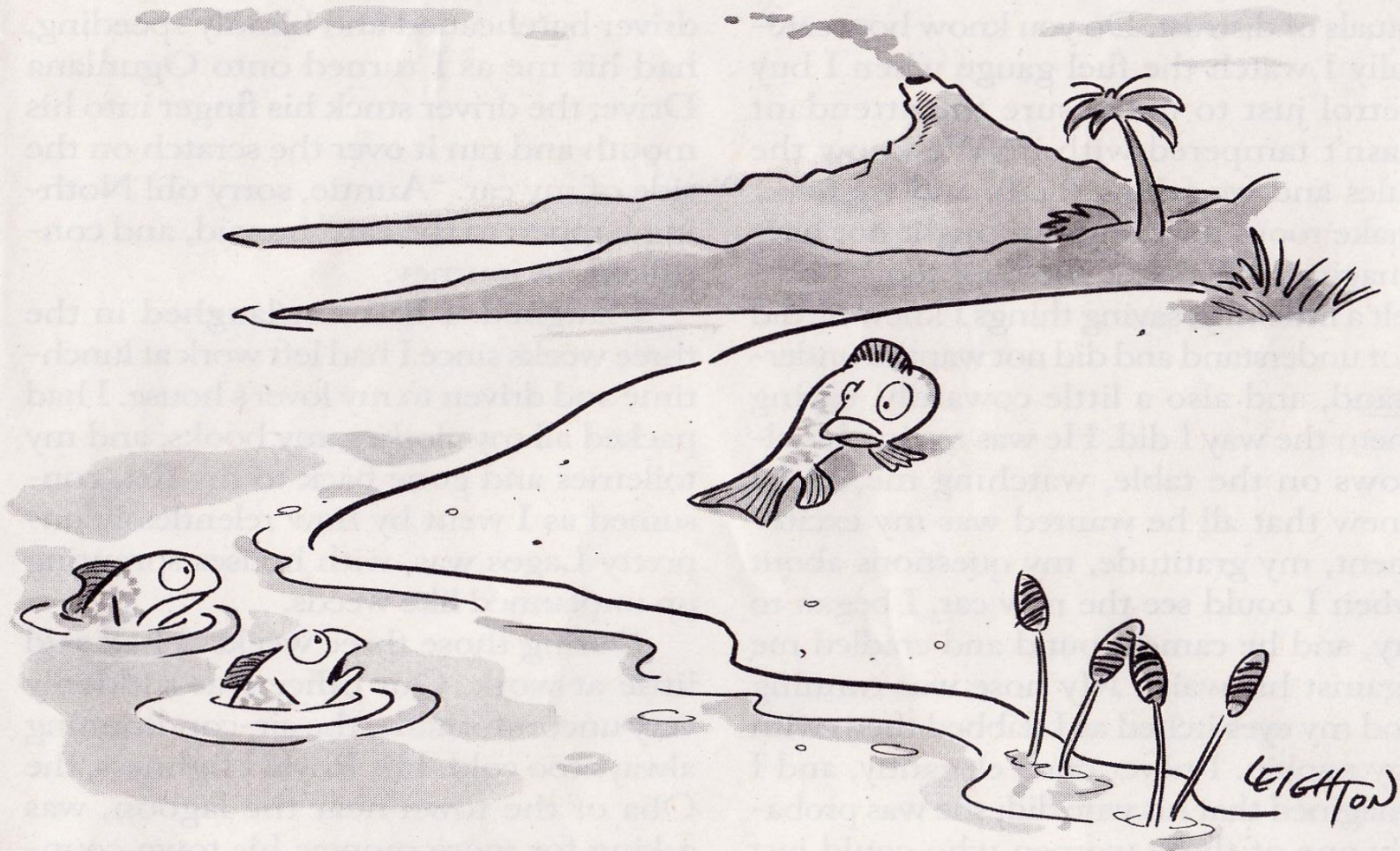
“Leave me alone!”

Da Vinci “Madonna and Child”

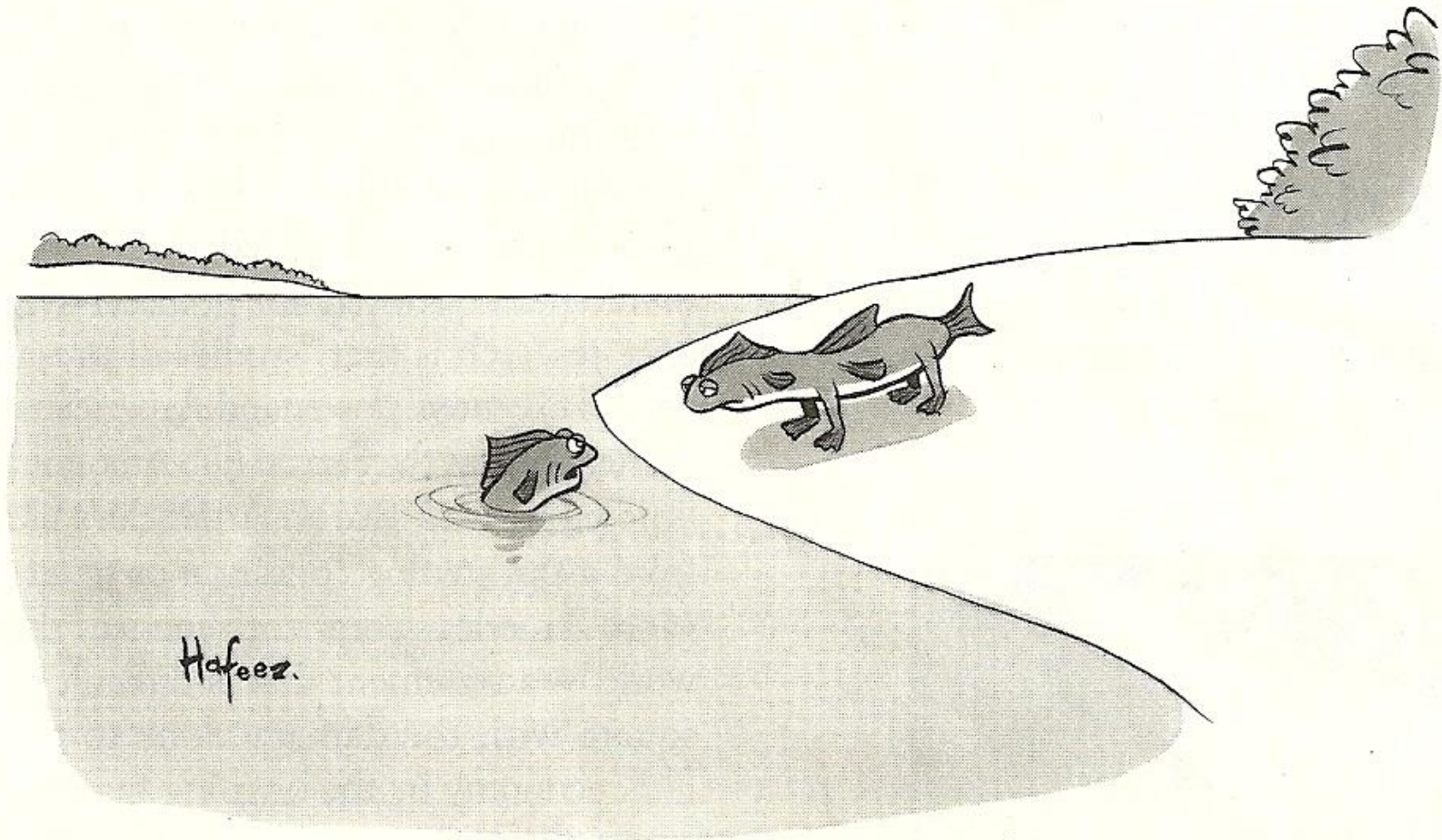


Da Vinci's "Benois Madonna"

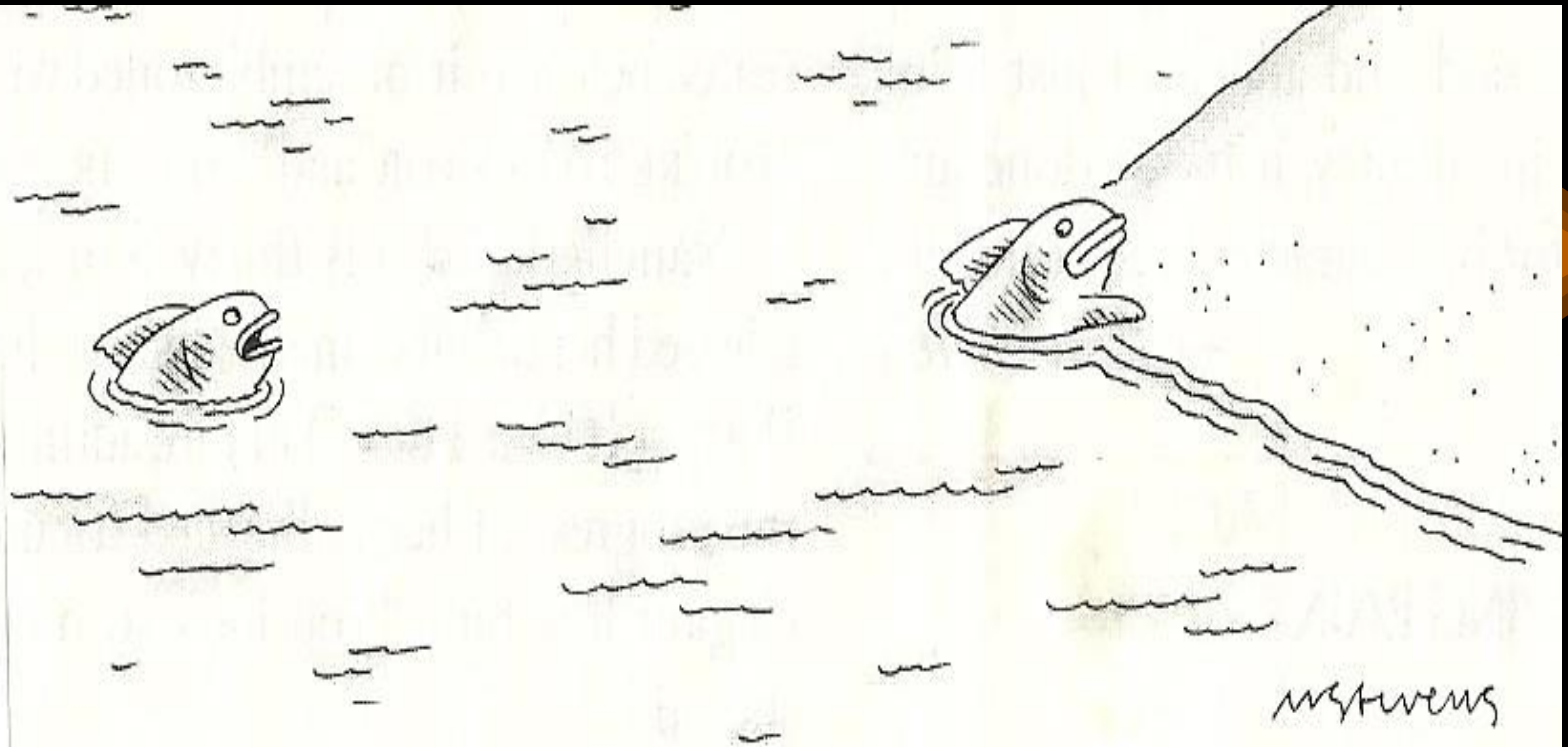




"Go. Evolve. Don't worry about me."



"I don't know who you are anymore."



“Why don’t you just stay and work on being a better fish?”

Neglected Aspects (cont.)...



Discovering an “I”

while

Maintaining a “We”

The Challenge



Apart

Vs.

A Part




“Zits” Frame 1...



“Zits” Frame 2...



NEGLECTED ASPECTS...



Teens need to say “No” to significant adults in order to know more about who they are, and who they aren’t—

NEGLECTED ASPECTS...



They

Defy

in order to

Define

What does “Israel” mean?




WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE




STORY AND PICTURES BY MAURICE SENDAK

NEGLECTED ASPECTS...



Adult-Teen battles are a necessary way to acknowledge attachment to each other and come to understand each other...

NEGLECTED ASPECTS...



...the *worst* fights are usually created by the collective effort to *avoid* fights



NEGLECTED ASPECTS...

Teens elicit in and project onto adults all of the discomfiting emotions that *they* are feeling

NEGLECTED ASPECTS...

They prefer to fight with *others*
rather than with themselves

Psycho-Dialysis



NEGLECTED ASPECTS...

Teens may refuse to ask for help, or may reject help that is offered, because help reminds them of their own remaining vulnerability, dependence and inadequacy

Illuminate vs. Eliminate



The Realities of Growth and Change



- True and enduring growth only occurs in a loving relationship
- Teens may not change until they see adults willing to make changes, as well

The Essential Paradox

Teens are more likely to *change for the better* if they know that they will be loved and accepted for *staying the same*

The Misery of Potential



*Adults Must Function as
Beacon...*



...and Mirror




**RABBI
NACHMAN'S
WISDOM**



Forgiving



“Look for goodness rather than dwelling on disappointment.”



We must have more
faith in them than
they have in
themselves

Effective Adults



Know that it's usually not firm action, but the *lack* of it, that pushes teens to extremes—your job is to *lead not to be liked*

(Set limits, establish rules, impose positive and negative consequences)

Effective Adults...



Allow teens opportunities
to succeed and fail without
rescuing them

Effective Adults ...



Work in partnership with
teens, gradually sharing
power, responsibility and
freedom in workable doses

POWER-GRAM



What decisions does the child have complete power to make?

What decisions do the parents retain complete power to make?

What decision-making do the child and parents share in?

Currently

One year ago

One year from now

RESPONSIBILITY-GRAM

What is the child solely responsible for?

What are the parents solely responsible for?

What responsibilities are shared between child and parents?

Currently

One year ago

One year from now

RELATIONSHIP-GRAM

What is the child entitled to do
on his/her own?

What are the parents entitled to do
on their own?

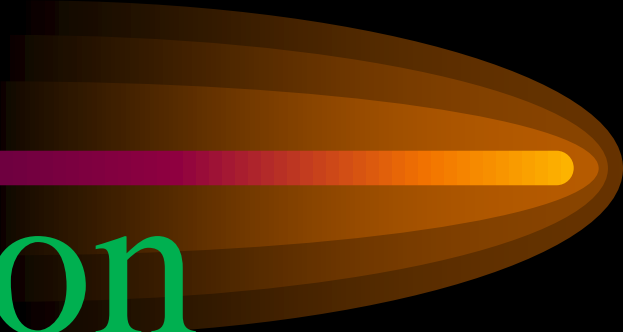
What are the child are parents
expected to do together?

Currently

One year ago

One year from now

Effective Adults...



Focus more on
modeling than
instruction

*Effective Adults Keep the
Emphasis on...*



Transforming

vs.

Performing

Effective Adults Remember that...



Teens prefer to

fail at living their own life

than to

succeed at living another's

life

Growth Means ...



Replacing the questions

“Who must I please/displease?”

and

“What image do I want to project?”

With ...



“Why do I do what I do?”

and

“Who do I want to become, how will I make that happen, and how will that make the world better?”

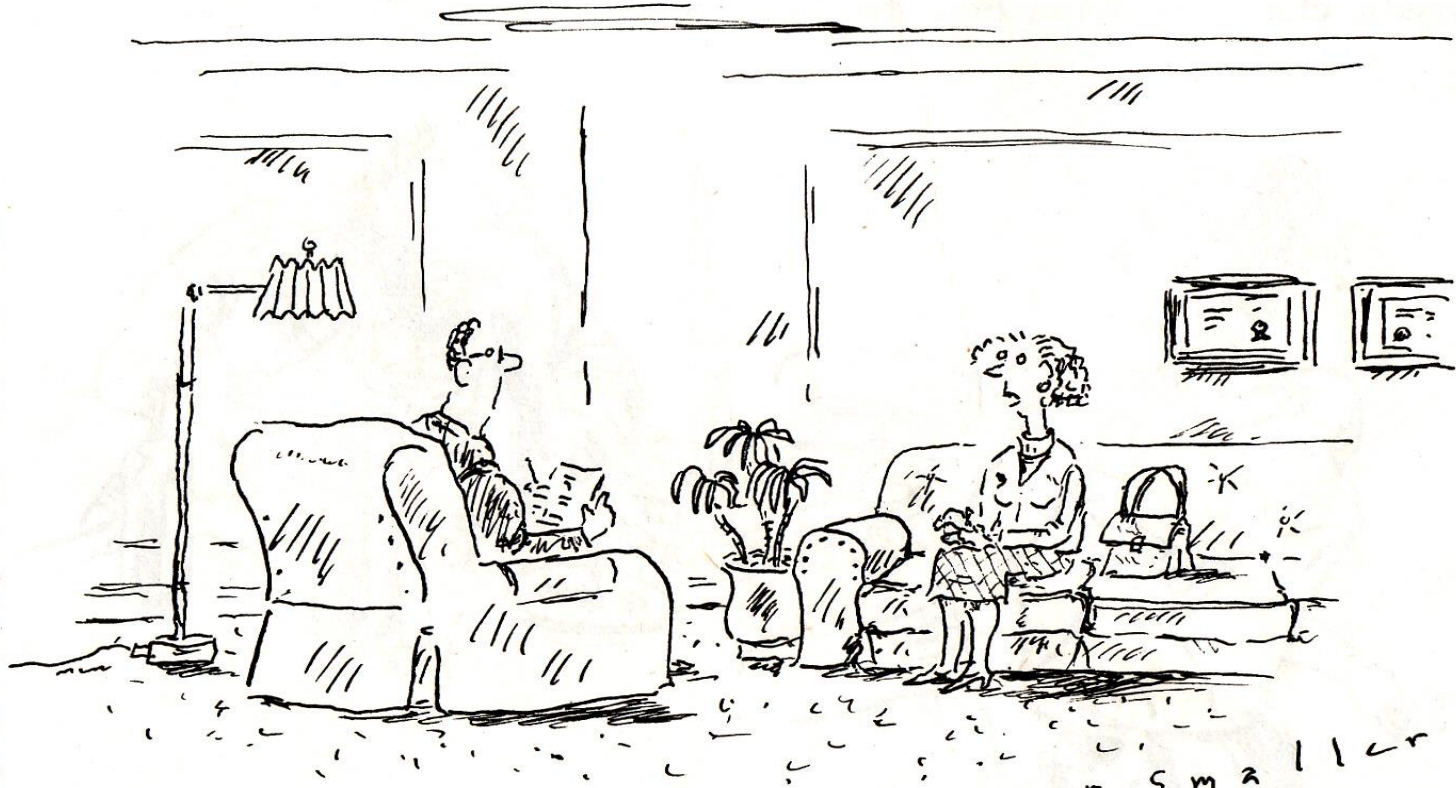
Growth Means Traveling From:



Compliance

To

Commitment



B. S m a l l e r

"First, I did things for my parents' approval, then I did things for my parents' disapproval, and now I don't know why I do things."

Adult-Teen Communication



The Curiosity Concept



Adult-teen conversations should be designed to *attract adolescents' curiosity* about who they are and why they do what they do so that they begin to discover a sense of meaning and purpose behind their actions

The Curiosity Concept



- Who do I become under the expectations that I impose upon **myself** and how do I develop those expectations?

The Curiosity Concept

- Who do I become under the expectations that **others and the world** impose upon me and how do I decide which ones to meet and which ones to relinquish?

The Curiosity Muscle



Communication



- *I am here and I hear you*
- *I care about you*
- *I respect your point of view, even if I don't agree with it*
- *I want to understand you and will hang in there in an effort to do so*
- *I do know what it is like to not feel heard and understood*

Adult-Teen Communication



They may not recall
what you said, but they
will never forget how
you made them feel.

Adult-Teen Communication...



As teens grow, it's not ultimately what you say, but *how you say it*, and *how well you listen*, that determines your influence

The Nature of the Journey



Adolescents are preoccupied with questions of purpose...

- To know that their life has meaning
- To connect the meaning of their lives with the meaning of other individuals' lives
- To connect that meaning with the universe as a whole...

The Nature of the Journey



- Make sense of and grow from the pain they have to endure
- Find and share mature love that softens their childhood pain
- Understand and be grateful for the sources of wonder, mystery and joy in their lives

The Bottom Line ...

We must convey to teens that it's not what you have and what you do, but *who you are* and *how you love* that matters

The Nature of the Journey



*All journeys have secret
destinations of which
the traveler is unaware*

Martin Buber

Man's Search For Meaning



Viktor Frankl



Ever more people today have the means to live, but no meaning to live for.

Challenging the meaning of life is the truest expression of the state of being human.

*The Two Most Important Days in
Your Life*



The day that you
were born...

*The Two Most Important Days in
Your Life*



...and the day you
figured out why you
were born...

Friedrich Nietzsche



He who has a *why* to live
can bear almost any how.