



Being in the Other's Shoes: Very Difficult to Teach

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One of the most difficult tasks that parents have is to teach their teen to be in the other person's shoes, in other words, to see life from another person's perspective. This is actually taught rather than merely being born with. One may think that a teenager needs to see life from other people's perspectives in order not to be self-ish. This is true and yet, there is more to it.

A teenager needs to see life from others' perspective in order to establish supportive, lasting, and meaningful relationships and friendships. A teen needs to see the other's perspective in order to discern the value and direction of a relationship. Without this ability to discern between supportive and destructive relationships, teens can fall prey to abusive and damaging relationships, including excessive and overbearing peer pressure.

A teenager needs to see life from other's perspective for at least one other extremely important reason - *to appreciate oneself*. It is only in a hopeful, trusting, and supportive relationship that a teen can actually see and appreciate own worth and potential. It is only in such positive relationships that a teen gains the critique necessary to grow and progress without being constantly criticized. Only in such genuine relationships can a teen receive the hope and encouragement to grow without being lied to with empty flattery. Unless the teen can grow creatively in such relationships, he or she will remain stagnant and be bored with life.

Yet, before demanding of their teen to see life from the other's perspective, the parents need to be so themselves first. They need to teach their teen through their *own* example. It is up to the parents to teach their teen the *balanced* way of being in the other's shoes - being understanding, helpful, and respectful of others, while not being abused and taken advantage of by hypocritical people. How can the parents do this? By sharing with their own offspring how they treated their own parents when they were teens. We are often humbled when we realize how rebellious we were when we were teens ourselves, and the claims we made to our own parents. By sharing with our teen how rebellious we were as teens and now as adults how we appreciate our parents, it opens up for our offspring a new window of possibilities. "If my parents treated their parents in that way and now appreciate them, maybe there is another perspective about my parents that I need to appreciate." If the teen starts thinking this way, then the entire family is on the right path.