

# What Teens Wish We Knew

A quick snapshot of a somewhat “normal” teenager in Western culture today would look something like this:

- Ages 13-19
- Underchallenged
- Overstressed
- Overcommitted
- Tired from a lack of sleep
- Highly motivated to achieve success
- Uncertain about the future
- Optimistic about his or her ability to make a difference in the world
- Looking for somewhere to belong
- Longing to find someone he or she can trust
- Still looking to parents as a major influence in his or her life
- Afraid that he or she will not measure up to his or her own expectations.

Granted, that is not an exhaustive list by any means, but it is a fairly balanced look at the overall life of most teenagers in our culture today. Based upon those statements above, we’d like to ask the question, what do teens wish we knew? Let’s take a look and see if we cannot get into the minds of a few students and figure out what it really is that they want us to know.

## Ten Things Teens Wish We (Adults) Knew

**1. Make up your mind.**—Please decide if we are to believe in right and wrong or be inclusive and tolerant of everyone.

“You are confusing us. When it comes to having to constantly debate my friends or just blindly accept that things are ultimately right or wrong, we choose to not have to be in conflict with those we spend the most time with during a normal day. Unless, you are willing to give us the reason why right and wrong are ultimate truth and will take the time to help us not only understand that by preaching at us, but by also letting us see you living out that truth in your life.”

**2. Put away the smoke and mirrors.**—Please decide to not only tell us how we ought to live, but also model how we are to live.

“It gets pretty old hearing you talk about what we ought to do while you model something else. We really are not looking for you to be perfect, but we are looking for you to have integrity in your own personal life. For example, why would you tell us that obeying the law is important, yet drive 70 mph in a 55 mph zone when we are headed to do missions in another state? Seems to be a double standard.”

**3. Do not take it personally.**—We can not attend every thing the student ministry offers.

“There are too many options and expectations for our time and energy. Parents, teachers, coaches, and church leaders are always expecting us to be at everything that they each offer. Many times our grades and future scholarships are tied to extracurricular activities. It is not that we want to skip youth group on Wednesday night, but at some point we have to rest. Can someone please get all of these folks together and ask them to plan some things together so that we are not expected to be at everything at the same time? Our pediatricians and therapists tell us that we need to get more rest (five hours a night just is not enough) but then everyone schedules stuff and expects us to be at their function. Please help us prioritize.”

**4. We are not junior Christians in waiting.**—We have the same Holy Spirit living inside of us that you do as a Christ follower.

“It is true that we may not be fully mature and developed in our spiritual pilgrimage, but we do have access to the same Holy Spirit that you do. Ask for our input and opinion in spiritual matters that affect us in your programming. Allow us to get involved in some leadership in worship, Bible study, and other church stuff. Please do not dump it all in our lap, but be willing to help us walk through some of these spiritual pilgrimage issues with some leeway, and at the same time, some guidance from you.”

**5. We do not think we are always right.**—Sometimes we do things because we do not know what else to do.

“Many of us are not afraid to take a risk without having all the information we need to make a good decision. We are OK with going with a decision, and if it does not work, then we will try something else. We do what we think and feel makes the most sense at the time. Some of you have modeled this approach for us and even though we have seen you make mistakes, we feel the pressure to make a quick decision, whether the decision we make is right or not. It goes back to that pressure thing. We are tired, stressed, and overwhelmed much of the time so making a decision can bring us temporary relief. Please help us understand to think about the long term effects of decisions without preaching at us. We are not stupid, we just feel pressured to make a decision and move on.”

**6. Don't try to look and act like us.**—We will be changing to something else soon anyway.

"We are not going to look and act like this very long, and by the time you start switching your style, we will move onto some other look. What we really want and need from you is some love, support, correction, and discipline. Make it as "easy-to-stomach" as you can, but we are looking for some standards and guidelines that are fair, but that you will not compromise on. Hold us accountable to reasonable standards and ones that we all agree on. We like to take part in determining what the expectations are for us. If you want to wear something sort of goofy, we do not care, as long as you really care for us. We may be embarrassed by some of your dress and actions, but we will connect with those of you who really care about us as individuals."

**7. Give us some space.**—But not so much that you let us feel abandoned.

"Most of us know that the younger we are the less responsibility you can give us on major things, but give us responsibility and authority to choose some things for ourselves. We know that we are not ready to tackle the world at 14, but we are ready to let you question some things we have always accepted. Be there to reassure us that this is a normal process, but do not hover over us if we ask some question that sounds goofy to you and think we have dropped over the deep end. By the same token, keep a watch on those people we hang out with who you feel might not be the best influences on us. Ask us about our activities while we are away from you and ask our opinions about the way we act in some situations. Please tell us and show us that you love us and will be there."

**8. We do not need all the stuff.**—What we really need is you.

"We know this sounds like a paradox, and we are thankful for the things you provide and do for us (even though we may forget to thank you), but we are really interested in knowing that you are interested in us. Not just providing stuff and activities for us. We need you to not get lost in providing the activities and not remember us. Do not let the programming become the main thing. Do not get us wrong, we like the stuff, but we would like to have you in our lives and showing us how to live."

**9. Be honest in all your relationships.**—We want to know that you can be trusted.

"We get dishonesty all the time from marketing ads to relationships with friends. We are OK when you make mistakes if you will be honest with us and admit that you made a mistake. Too many adults in our lives are not honest. Sometimes the boss asks me to change the deposit slip to the bank because \$10 went missing from the cash register drawer at his register. Tell us how to handle those kinds of situations according

to the Bible. We understand that you cannot be at every ball game, band performance, or recital, but be at the ones you say you will be at. Tell my parents to be faithful to each other because when this foundation of relationships in our lives is disrupted, many things get out of whack."

**10. Show and tell us you love and care for us.**—Accept us for who we are, but do not let us stay like we are.

"It is good to know that we can come and be around you and be accepted for who we are. Many times we find ourselves in situations in which we are expected to be something that we are not. Allow us to be who we are, but do not let us stay where we are. We cannot see the potential that God has given us and we need to be constantly reminded that God accepts us and still desires for us to continue to be more and more like His Son. We do not always know what that looks like or what we are supposed to do, so you need to help us know what that is, then tell us what we can do to be more like Christ. You will more than likely have to keep reminding us that we can become who Christ wants us to be. Sometimes we lose sight of that and get comfortable in just trying to get by and get our homework done and all that other stuff we have on our plates. Oh, yeah, when you do have to remind us, we are OK with an appropriate touch and some nice words about what you see God doing in our lives. We forget sometimes that God is at work through us."

These are just 10 things teens wish we knew. There are others, but this covers the biggies. Share these with parents of teenagers, adults in your church, and even your students. They will be glad to know that you have at least heard of some of the things they wish you knew.

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