

# Visit With The Utays

*School Psychology and Education Specialists*

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Dr. Carol Utay, also a graduate of Pitt, has experience as a Principal, teacher, computer trainer, national speaker, adjunct professor, author, and mother. With a doctorate in education, she has trained thousands of teachers and parents to help children achieve success and feel good about themselves. She is Executive Director of Total Learning Centers. Joe and Carol live and work in Wexford with their daughter Andrea.



## Parenting Adolescents: Four Tips

*My teenager will not listen. I don't know which is worse, when he mutters under his breath to leave him or alone or when he screams that I don't understand him. I know I am part of the problem. What can I do to help?*

As stressful as you feel, that's nothing compared to his frustration about you. Yet, it is during this time that it is crucial to strike a delicate balance between continued dependence and developing the young adult self concept and independence needed to successfully leave the protected nest.

So, what do you do? Read our four suggestions with an open mind. It will be easy to think, "Too simple. I knew those!" Especially in the heat of boiling emotional disappointments on the parents' side and hormonal confusion and teenage angst on the other, the basics are often exactly what are needed.

- 1) **Listen.** The number one complaint of adolescents around the country is, "My parents don't listen." You probably do listen but not always in the way he wants to be heard. Tell him you want to listen to him and need his help in knowing exactly how to do that. He might say, "I want to tell you about something that happened at school today but I don't want a lecture about what my friend and I should have done," or, "I don't want advice or a reminder of curfew – just listen to my plans for Saturday night." By working on improving your own listening skills he may respond by doing the same for you.
- 2) **Notice small changes, not just major red flags.** Illegal drug use, alcohol abuse, disturbing changes in personality, depression, anxiety, and failing grades are obvious signs of problems. However, you don't have to wait until you are sunburned before you start to take the time to notice how long you've been baking on the beach. A mention of a new friend, going down a half of a grade,

wondering aloud if a potential date will say, "Yes" are little things that you should take note of and respond to. Gently and respectfully of course, but respond and follow up later. It is always easier to deal with or even prevent a small problem now than a big one later. Be aware. Be involved.

- 3) **Offer parental guidance briefly and between rounds.** When everything is going well, there are golden opportunities to instruct. It may be at dinner, while shopping, or on a family trip. Think of your advice as a 60-second commercial between events, or else your adolescent will be quick to "push mute" or "change the channel."
- 4) **Get help.** Of course there are hundreds of other things to do such as family meetings, posting family rules and reminders around the house, etc. But, if you've tried everything you know, and going back to the basics such as listening and being aware and involved is "too little too late," it is time to get help from someone trained in counseling adolescents. This can be invaluable in helping you get your relationship with your adolescent back on track. Some professional counselors and psychologists use an approach called "brief therapy" that, as the name implies, does not take too much time or financial investment.

This is a precious and frustrating time in a family's life. There are no easy quick fixes but definite choices. There are always ways to improve as parents and those improvements, even attempts at improving, go a long way to helping our young people prepare today for success tomorrow.

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