Teen Time

Teenagers need their parents more than at any other stage, yet too often they are left to their own devices.

The Myth of ‘I don’t need you’
Ken and Margaret Mellor, in their wonderful book *Teen Stages*, dispel the myth that teenagers don’t need their parents. The authors state that teenagers need their parents, but they won’t let on.

My experience raising three teenagers supports the fact that teenagers want their parents to succeed in managing, guiding, nurturing and supporting them. Adolescence is too hard for them to go through on their own. They benefit from the close physical presence of a parent – not in a smothering way – but someone who is monitoring their wellbeing and supervising their behaviour.

This can’t be done by mobile phone. Yet most teens won’t show their gratitude if you provide the close parenting they need. It’s not until they reach their early to mid twenties that they come clean and deliver a sort of belated apology to their parents. In the meantime, you need to hang in there.

Minimise Being Home Alone
Late afternoon is a recognised danger zone for adolescence. Toddlers stay in long daycare and primary-aged kids use after-school care or are happy to be picked up by others. However, for teenagers who are testing their independence this is a tricky time.

Teens who are left to their own devices are more prone to engage in risk-taking behaviours, lose themselves online or in some cases become addicted to computer games. The world is trickier than when we grew up. Cyber-bullying, self-harm and depression are now part of the adolescent landscape.

Teenagers still need supervision, whether it’s through structured activities such as sports training or after-school or holiday programs. They also need parents who check up on them, make sure homework is completed and ensure that they have fulfilled their family obligations including completing their chore list.

Turn Conventional Wisdom On Its Head
It’s time to turn conventional wisdom on its head and start dedicating more rather than less time to raising teens. That way we’ll go a long way to giving them what they need, that is, parental guidance, management, nurturance and support to help them safely negotiate the twists and turns of the developmental journey from childhood into adulthood.