

INTRODUCTION



What Happened To My Sweet Child?

Have you ever wondered what happens to children when they reach junior high school and high school? Adolescents, ages eleven through fifteen, can be happy and miserable, then angry and frustrated all in the same hour. They can be incredibly responsible and then totally irresponsible within a half hour. They can be loving and tender, then irritating and disappointing all within ten minutes. There are many moments when you don't know whether to hug them or yell at them.

**IS THERE ANYTHING A PARENT CAN DO
TO HELP THEIR CHILDREN
GO THROUGH THIS PERIOD IN THEIR
LIVES IN A CALMER WAY?
YES, PARENTS CAN HELP!**

Adolescents with a high emotional intelligence (EQ), not only survive during these years, but they continue to thrive throughout them. They grow into capable young adults ready to go out into the world and meet life's challenges after high school. Adolescents with a high EQ don't become overwhelmed by the disappointments and hurts which inevitably take place in the social arena during

these years. Young adolescents with high emotional intelligence know they will survive the betrayed trusts, the friendship disappointments, the perceived failures, the embarrassing and humiliating moments, and the broken hearts which all too frequently happen during this time. A high EQ is the key to healthy adolescent years, which means if you do the SkillBuilders suggested in this book your adolescent will be able to recognize his or her own emotions and the emotions of others. He/she will be able to respond to those emotions in a healthy way.

Our adolescents today face more stress than any other generation. The media bombards our adolescents with messages of how to look, how to act, and what they need to do to be accepted and popular. TV and movies show our adolescents the best and worst of life. The media often mistakenly implies there is a happy ending to drug and alcohol use. All too often movies imply that having sex at an early age isn't a "bad thing." In fact, one might even find love everlasting at fifteen or sixteen. Rock stars and major-league athletes are often our adolescent's role models. When these heroes make bad choices the media sensationalizes them, and the life consequences these heroes face rarely seem to back up a parent's struggling efforts to teach their adolescents strong values and morals.

On any given day, our young adolescents can read or hear about a well-known star being photographed, accused, or arrested for drug use or possession. A famous movie star's husband or wife might be caught cheating with a costar. A well-known actor or actress might be photographed as a proud new parent—the story may tell of the baby being born out of wedlock and might even identify an ex-girlfriend or ex-boyfriend as the other parent. "Life is good," "Use drugs," "Cheat on your spouse," or "Have a baby." A well-known actor, local teacher, scout leader, priest or minister being accused of child molestation or sexual abuse and identified in the headlines of the local paper are negative examples that are put out by the media. These stories imply drugs and alcohol use might temporarily disrupt your life, but you will get over it and survive. They say that it is okay to commit adultery and if you happen to get pregnant with someone else besides your spouse, life will still be okay and you will have a beautiful baby.

Our adolescents listen to debates and arguments over a controversial war. They listen to new threats of terrorism all over the world and at home. Almost weekly, they hear about children being kidnapped, molested, or murdered.

Our educational systems throughout the United States are experiencing budget cutbacks while the competition to get into colleges is at an all-time high. Adolescents today know that if they work hard in high school to get good grades there are no guarantees they will get into a good college. If they are accepted into the college of their choice, they realize that because of the financial insecurities

of today's world and job layoffs there is no guarantee their family will be able to afford the college tuition.

There are more divorced families today struggling to find a healthy way to raise their children. The reality of divorce is often two working parents struggling to provide a nice home and to pay the bills while trying to find the time to be involved in their children's lives, such as friends, social activities, homework, and sports. At the same time, these parents are trying to heal from a failed marriage and move on with their own lives.

At the end of a day, a parent—single or married—often doesn't have the energy to connect on an emotional level with their teenagers. Our world today often finds parents and their adolescents tired and stressed by six o'clock in the evening. They are just looking to find solitude and peace rather than interaction with each other that could lead to a potential conflict over homework, messy rooms, or undone chores. Many families find it less stressful for individual members to go off in their own direction and avoid any interaction with other family members. This avoidance, if it becomes a pattern, may feel safe to each individual, but if this avoidance happens on a regular basis, it creates an emotional distance between family members. This emotional distance creates an emotional disconnection, which ultimately damages or even destroys relationships. To have a close relationship with anyone there must be interaction whether it takes the form of dialogue, shared activities, or a combination of both. It is this emotional closeness or emotional distance in the relationship of a parent and teen that is the key to a adolescent making good decisions throughout his or her adolescent years. When an adolescent has an emotionally close relationship with at least one parent, it will be the potential loss of that relationship and the respect they feel in that relationship that will influence the daily decisions made by that adolescent. If an adolescent does not feel emotionally connected to his parent, he will feel no value in his relationship with his parent. If this is the case, there is nothing to lose by getting in trouble. If the potential for trouble includes feeling a sense of belonging and acceptance by a peer group or gang membership, then the risk of trouble, even of arrest, is usually perceived as well worth it.

When an adolescent has a high emotional intelligence, it usually means one or both of his or her parents have a high EQ. It is even better if this adolescent lives in an emotionally intelligent family.

Emotional intelligence can be increased at anytime during a person's life. People with a high emotional intelligence can continue to challenge themselves to increase their EQ throughout their lifetime. In fact, we must practice EQ skills consistently to stay at our best.

Life will constantly present us with challenges to our EQ. It might be new

people coming into our lives: new family members (in-laws, newborns), new neighbors, new bosses, new coworkers, and the list goes on. Our adolescents might introduce us to their new friends, new teacher, or new coach. Each of these new persons changes our lives in some way. The challenge to our EQ might be in the form of health problems: our own, our significant others, our parents, or our adolescents. We might be faced with new challenges in the workplace or even potential job loss. Any financial change in our lives offers an EQ challenge with our own personal EQ response to the situation and our EQ response and interaction to our family members because of the change.

We respond to each of life's challenges emotionally whether we want to or not. We respond to each of these challenges in an emotionally intelligent way or not. As long as we continue to work on our emotional intelligence to increase it, we will find our response to life's stressors more satisfying.

In the ideal world our EQ would continue to grow stronger and increase throughout our lives. For the most part, this is what happens. Occasionally though during our lives, we might find ourselves physically exhausted. When we are physically tired or worn down, we become more susceptible to being emotionally worn down.

This can happen as a result of an illness or a change in the demands of our life. When we become physically tired, we can find ourselves exhausted by life in general. When this happens, it is important to be aware that now, more than any other time, we are vulnerable to being beaten down emotionally by adolescents.

Eleven- through fifteen-year-olds are especially perceptive of their parents' weaknesses. By age eleven, our children seem to know us almost better than we know ourselves. They know how to make us feel loved and they definitely know how to push our buttons. Whenever I go into a classroom of fifth, sixth, and seventh graders, I ask the children if they know how to get what they want from their parents. Almost every student in the classroom raises his or her hand and says, "Yes" with a smile—you could almost call it a smirk.

These are the years that we try to tell ourselves that we've done a good job and now we can take a break or at least take a rest from constantly "being on call" as a parent . . . WRONG!! These are the years we begin to parent differently, but we definitely still need to parent.

Our adolescents need us more than ever to be a role model for high EQ. Our adolescents work harder at eleven, twelve, and on to wear us down to get what they perceive they need more than they did at two, three, and four. Children during their adolescent years test their parents daily. This is the individuation process. It isn't about the parent. It is about the adolescent. Our adolescents do not want us to be worn down, not really, but it seems to be their job to try and they are very good at it. In fact, if they have older siblings, they are even better at

it. I think the younger adolescents take notes. It is important for you to take care of yourself, emotionally and physically, now more than ever or everyone loses!

This book is written to be a companion for all parents who have an eleven-through fifteen-year-old. Unlike *EQ and Your Child: 8 Proven Skills to Increase Your Child's Emotional Intelligence*, you will not be sitting down and working the EQ SkillBuilders with your adolescent. I will teach you, the parent, proven and successful interactions you can do with your adolescent. These interactions will increase your adolescent's EQ without them even being aware of it. I do this in sessions every week with adolescents and families. You simply have to be willing to work the EQ SkillBuilders. Trust me—it always works!

The most positive reward you will receive from reading and working through this book is that your entire family's emotional intelligence will increase. This means you will experience more peace and overall harmony in your family. Your individual relationships with family members will be deeper and more intimate. You will accomplish the needed emotional connection and respectful relationship with your adolescent which is the key to his or her successful adolescent years.

Let's review the benefits you and your family will receive from reading and working the EQ SkillBuilders interactions in this book:

- Your personal EQ will increase.
- Your family's EQ will increase.
- You and your adolescent will build an emotionally connected relationship which is the key to healthy adolescent decisions.
- You will be proactively helping to keep your adolescent safe during his or her adolescent years.
- You will help reduce the stress in your adolescent's life.
- You will be better able to enjoy your son's or daughter's adolescent years.

