

Shut Up *and* Act Dumb

A Parent's Guide To Staying Close And
Connected To Your Teens and Tweens



NIKKI NERETIN, MD

Shut up and Act dumb

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and connected to your teens and
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Nikki Neretin, MD



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This book is a non-fiction "how to" book so the characters and stories are all true and happened in real life.

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Preface

Newton's law of motion: a body in motion stays in motion, a body at rest stays at rest. If you have already taken steps to figure out how to get close with your children, you're 99% there! Keep reading.

I remember when my daughter Lili was starting high school; I wanted to make sure that we were the house where her teenage friends congregated so I could oversee all. I started with organizing the house, so there was physical space for everyone with the KonMari method, which brought them over to the house, but they still ended up staying in her bedroom with the door closed. Next, I started to cook and offer food, and they came out to eat, but anytime I opened my mouth to talk, they disappeared. Then I realized if

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I said nothing and acted as if I didn't understand anything they said, they would stay longer. I am a family physician who has been taking care of homeless LGBTQ youth for the last 25 years and I thought I knew everything, but anytime I acted like I knew better, they were gone. I decided to shut up, act dumb and wait for the information to come to me. The idea of acting dumb was not to patronize or minimize what they were saying but to acknowledge that I don't completely understand the true meaning behind what was being said. (For example, I would reference a story previously shared by one of my children and they would tell me I had gotten their meaning all wrong even though I thought I had paraphrased it exactly). I thought I had listened and heard but clearly misunderstood the intention. The longer they stayed, the quieter and dumber I got and ended up getting a lot of important information and insight into the struggles that really needed attention, like alcohol, drug issues, anxiety, depression, sex, to name a few. I realized this

was the golden ticket to staying close and connected to my kids.

Anytime I speak to parents about raising children, most will say: It's all easy until they become teenagers! (We can throw a little terrible two action in the mix but they are still small enough to swoop up and strap in a stroller). First of all, those early years weren't easy; there was a level of attention that needed to be paid at every moment or a finger would land in a socket or a hand on a hot stove. It was tiring, but they had little autonomy, and we had all of the say about their daily decisions. Is there some mystical magical force that somehow takes away the child that you have known so well and raised so thoughtfully and turns them into a two-headed disrespectful teenage monster, or is it that we are worried about giving up any control and getting push back for fear that something will go very wrong? It seems to happen overnight with one small rebellion about what they want to do that's different from what we tell them to do. Any show of independence is a tell-tale sign that you're losing them and heading for

trouble. You assume that the bad things that happened to you as a teenager (or anyone else for that matter) or any ways in which you acted out will be the direction your children are going. It seems to be an inevitable truth, and you're just biding your time until all goes to hell. Here are some popular sayings about teenagers: They are disrespectful to everyone, they are all addicted to social media, they're ungrateful and lazy. (These are the kinder ones). We also stay with the assumption that somehow, they don't want to talk to us. That we're uninteresting, boring, judgmental and don't know anything. Anytime we try to tell them something, there's usually an annoyed-looking side glance and a snarky comment. What if I told you that your child always wants you even if they say otherwise? That you are the only person that they can show their deepest, darkest, hardest feelings that you wouldn't want them showing anywhere else? Unless they had the ability to show you this difficult stuff, it would leak out in other parts of their life and be destructive? What if I told you that it's only when things are going well, and

not in survival mode, that they can show you the most difficult parts of their lives? Most young people, whether we think they're spoiled or not, always have to do what the adults tell them to do. Their opinions are usually ignored, treated disrespectfully and not given much decision-making power. Generally, young people are always treated as if they've done something wrong, are about to do something wrong, or will definitely do something wrong in the future unless we "keep them in their place" or share our hard-earned negative experiences. There is never a time when your child doesn't want you to have their back and support them even when they hit bumpy roads in their decision-making. Remember that young people's oppression is the first oppression where someone bigger can rule over someone smaller and sets us up for all of the other societal oppressions, so it is important to keep this in mind if we are headed towards a more peaceful, kinder world.

Here are some questions that every parent should ask themselves: What is your purpose in having

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children? Are you trying to repair the mistakes made with you as a child and become a better parent than your parents were? Create mini versions of yourself in order to continue your thinking and legacy to encourage future generations? Have someone to take care of you in your old age so that you are not alone? Create individuals ready to change the world and help it evolve into a better place than it is now? I think we carry a little piece of all of those reasons, and that is OK.

No matter what your reasons are, if you follow the “Shut Up and Act Dumb” philosophy/method, you will have the kind of relationship that will propel you to a much more loving, hopeful and connected future. The philosophy and exercises in the book are ones that I have done with my two young adult children not only for the last 10 years but for their whole lives and it has kept the door open for close connection even during the hardest times. It won't feel easy, and your negative thoughts will make it feel uncomfortable, but there is no growth or learning in comfort. Remember, a feeling

is just a sensation in your body, and if you know you can handle any feelings without falling apart, then you will make it to the promised land of a lifelong stronger connection to your teens and tweens.

If you are still reading this, it is a testament to your openness to learn new ideas. I feel excited about the possibilities.

“Remember you are just the right parent and they are just the right children; nothing has gone wrong and nothing is necessarily better.” Nikki Neretin, MD

Chapter 1

Shut up!

When you feel the need to impart wisdom
or teach a lesson, don't do it. Shut Up!!!



Unless your child is asking for advice, they will most likely perceive any advice given as a lecture or a criticism. I remember when I swore I was saving my son a lifetime of failed relationships by pointing out his foul body odor. I could justify it as a mother's love and just an observation. It actually did the opposite. I hadn't had all the facts straight. He had just played soccer and was planning to shower but that small statement kept him doubting himself and distrustful about when I was going to throw in my two cents about anything that might be less than up to my standards. If anything, my thought about his future possible failed relationships put us on the path of stinking up our relationship. Really decide if it is absolutely necessary to say every critical thought you have in your mind.

Make sure that you listen three times the amount that you talk. We generally aren't listening fully to our children's meaning because of our desire to have our own opinions heard. We feel like we need to impart this negative wisdom on our children in order to spare

them the hurts we have suffered. Most of how we think is based on our hurts accumulated through day-to-day life and the people who raised us. Our intent is good and we come by these thoughts honestly, but our children are not us, and they are not living our childhoods (lucky them), although we might be repeating it in our heads over and over again and projecting it on our children. Hopefully, most of us have tried to improve the parenting style enacted on us so that their childhoods are not the same. Do you remember when you would get a lecture from your parents or teacher about something you did wrong or could do better and how quickly you tuned it out? Or had to listen to the never-ending stories about how much harder their lives were than yours, until you could finally leave the table? You've had your chance to talk, now let the young people show us what they know. Say less, listen more, and learn!

Exercise: Do a thought download, which is just a dump of all the thoughts in your mind. Put it on paper, and notice the negative thoughts that you are thinking. Look

at all the statements and decide whether saying these thoughts out loud would get the desired outcome you are looking for. The result you want is a close and connected relationship with your teens and tweens.

“Learn to fail forward, take continued action even in the face of discouragement, fail 10 new times this week but not by inaction. Revel in the failures of your children when trying big new things rather than protecting them from disappointment. Don’t create pre-traumatic stress disorder.”

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Chapter 2

Throw Away The Manual.

Throw away your manual about how and whom you expect your children to be.

Don't pin your hopes and dreams on anyone else but yourself. They are not the cause of your discouragement or disappointment.



Each person comes into this world with his or her own set of ideas, interests and personalities. Add in birth order, societal and historical oppression, and family of origin, and you get a complete individual with no two people the same (not even identical twins). If you have a rigid idea about how they are supposed to be and act, you are setting the relationship up to fail with constant criticism and disappointment. Be interested and curious about every aspect of their mind. Ask non-judgmental open-ended questions or requests, like, “Help me understand what you mean,” “Explain that to me again, it is so fascinating,” or “That’s such an interesting way you are thinking about that. I never would have thought of that.” It is important to practice these curiosity questions without judgement or tone but out of true interest. It will have to be practiced often because we have become so accustomed to asking negative questions that they are the default. Studies show that it takes three positive statements to combat one negative one. Remember the special and unique human beings that your child or children are. Remember, too, the special and unique

human being that you are.

Carry around a picture of your child and of yourself at an age younger than 12 so that you can remember the unchanging perfect essence. That person is deserving of unconditional love and honoring no matter what your superficial thoughts and judgements are. Remember how that baby was deserving of love unconditionally and never had to do anything to get it. Even when they pooped, it was endearing. Look in the mirror and look past the superficial signs of aging. Honor that being for the true essence of who they are. Remember, it is important to do work on ourselves so that we don't pin all our hopes and dreams on our young people. Live out your dream and know your true essence that is worthy of being loved unconditionally.

Exercise: Practice thinking three things you love about your child for every negative thought that pops in your mind. We have 40,000+ thoughts a day and many of them judgmental. You'll have so many good ones to choose from.

Shut Up and Act Dumb

Carry around the picture of your child and yourself under the age of 12 and look at it every time you are feeling confused about yours and your child's goodness.

“Nothing has meaning except for the meaning you give it.” T Harv Eker



Chapter 3

Combat Your Own Fears and Worries.

Combat your own fears and worry; Stop
putting them on your children!



Unless there is a risk of losing a life or limb, you have to assume that your worry and fear is internally generated based on your own fears and not the reality of the situation. My mother, who was a swim teacher, always said that the children who were most afraid of the water were handled by parents who were also afraid of the water. These fears are generally unfounded and cause more stress and worse outcomes. Even if there is a possibility of a bad outcome, we can share the lesson without all the extended worry. The worry is supposed to propel us into action if necessary but not keep us in a constant state of fear. Think of the pain you feel when you put your hand on a hot stove. The pain is useful to rapidly remove your hand but you don't want to keep it on the stove for an extended period or you will be significantly burned. Remember, struggles will happen as part of living a human life but suffering is optional. Even if something harmful happened to you in the past, you still get to choose how you decide to think about it and how much time and attention is spent on worrying about something that isn't happening at the moment.

Remember, your children won't want you to worry and won't give you important information if they are concerned that you will be overly worried, which will probably allow the uncontrolled part of your brain to make up things to worry about. One of my friend's recently had a traumatic experience on the job which she couldn't share with her mom. When I asked "why" she said "my mom is already so worried I wouldn't want her to worry more". This is the time when she needed her mom's love and support more than ever but wouldn't share her experiences and felt lonelier and more distant than ever. Her mom's fear was also heightened because she wasn't calling her as much leaving her mom to imagine and even worst scenario. It isn't your kid's job to take care of your feelings; that is something you will be able to figure out for yourself, with the support of the "Shut Up and Act Dumb" method and strong support systems. Being fearful and not managing your own worry and fears independently will either make your children more worried and anxious or secretive and distant. For example, if you

voice your concern every time your child gets behind the wheel to drive, your child might stop telling you when he or she is driving somewhere. Or maybe you ask your teen about homework everyday. At some point, perhaps, your kid will begin to resent the intrusion into schoolwork and just lie to you about projects or homework.

Just a special note to the parents of the global majority and particularly of African heritage: I understand that institutional racism in this country has created a much more dangerous environment for your teens and tweens going out in the world. They are more likely to be met with harshness and violence that can't be foreseen. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't prepare them for the possible dangers in the world. Those dangers are real. The purpose of this book is for us to not duplicate the harshness at home in order to have your children in as close contact as possible. It is possible to try to keep your children close and connected so that they are more prepared with an internal and connected strength to face the external

struggles with a rational mind. When kids feel safe and supported at home it enables them to face the challenges and dangers in the outside world in a much more responsible and constructive way.

Exercise: What are the worst feelings you can imagine and really try to experience them fully—shame, embarrassment, anger etc., don't try to fight them. You will notice that these feelings won't kill you when you just allow them to be. Feel where they are in your body, what they look like, is there a temperature etc. Continue to experience them until they lose their charge in your body and mind. It might take a while but it will be worth it to know that you can work through any feelings. Once you get through the feeling fully without acting on it, or trying to buffer it, put a little stone or marble in a jar and watch the jar fill up. When the jar is filled you will know that you can handle any feeling head on

“The struggles of life are real but suffering is optional; you have control of what you want to make any situation mean,” Brooke Castillo, The Life Coach School.

Chapter 4

Intercept Your Judgements.

Intercept your judgments about your
children, yourself and the circumstances.



The “judge” is the main internal critic that criticizes you, your child and your circumstances. Your judge is constantly present and working to sabotage any positive feelings that come up with stress, worry, shame and embarrassment. Evolutionarily, the judge was there to keep us discerning danger that could really kill us. Now, without the constant threat, it has been left in place to emotionally confuse us about our goodness, the goodness of other people and the danger of our circumstances.

Here are easy techniques that are scientifically proven to stop the judge and start the love. It’s been shown to increase the positive part of your brain rather than reinforcing the primal brain that is acting without thought and in negative patterns.

Positive Quotient Reps or PQ reps, as taught by Shirzad Chamine, author of Positive Intelligence, are small 15-30 seconds exercises that can get your mind out of a negative thought loop and push it into a calmer, thoughtful or what he calls “sage perspective.” When you are thinking a negative and judgmental thought,

first acknowledge your thought lightly and say, “oops, there are those thoughts again.” Then focus very intently on an internal or external sensation. For example: rub your thumb and forefinger together with such attention that you can feel the fingerprint or ridges. Notice something outside of yourself that you hadn’t seen before and really focus on all aspects of it. Breathe in and out through your nose and notice the temperature differences between the inhale and exhale. These small exercises are done throughout the day. Whenever the negative thoughts come, they are a neuron muscle-building tool that increases the myelin sheaths and nerve transmission to make it the preferred frontal brain pathway. It has been shown to take 15 minutes of practice a day for at least 6-8 weeks in order to develop the muscle to intercept the judge! Once the judge of your child, yourself and your circumstances are quieter, you will be able to appreciate the positives.

Exercise: Do a 15 second PQ rep every time you have a negative thought about your child and see if you can shift out of the

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judgmental mindset. Write down when you have had to intercept the judgment and what kind of sensation exercise you like best.

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Chapter 5

Listen. Listen, Listen.

Listen to your children's feelings without
having to do anything!



In this chapter, you will learn how to manage your own thoughts so that you don't confuse your children's thoughts with yours. This will allow you to listen to any feelings your children emote without experiencing them with as much intensity. The hurt has already happened and it is the outpouring of feelings or emotions that will help them on their way to healing. We have all felt so bad that we needed to cry, shake, laugh or get mad. Those feelings are generally met by well-meaning people using distraction to get your mind off the feeling by offering food or video games, or harshness: "you're so dramatic" or "stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about" or isolation where kids are sent to their room until they look "happy." Stopping the feeling doesn't actually mean that the hurt has gone away; it just gets buried deeper and attached to other aspects of their lives. Remember, if you know that a feeling is just a sensation in your body and won't kill you, there is a possibility that you will be able to listen and handle any emotion that comes your way. Your children's feelings aren't your feelings and it is not an act of kindness for us

to take them on as our own. I remember when my daughter was telling me an upsetting event that happened to her in school and I started to cry. I thought I was being empathetic but she was mad that it became all about me and felt responsible for taking care of my upset rather than being able to get the support she needed in that situation. Their feelings are not about you and it doesn't necessarily mean that something is wrong. It will be hard to share difficulties with you if you allow yourself to experience them as intensely as they do or try to interrupt them. We can guess how they feel but we honestly don't know for sure what it feels like to them. Stay out of the pool with them or you will both drown. Once you know that you can handle any feelings; there is nothing you can't accomplish.

Exercise: Let's get in touch with a feeling so that it won't be so terrifying and you won't need to try to white knuckle through them. Name a frequent feeling you have that cause you distress. Where is it in your body? What color is it? What shape, size and texture? Does it move fast or slow? How do you feel like reacting? Once you really allow your feelings to happen fully you will

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realize it is just a sensation in your body and you can handle any sensation and any feeling. Once you know you can handle any feeling at all there is nothing you can't do or change.

~***~

Chapter 6
Manage Your
Thoughts and
Feelings.



Often, we think that our circumstances are absolute and they clearly mean that something is wrong. A circumstance is generally neutral until you have thought about it. For example, if your child wants to stay out late, your thought might be, “they will get into trouble if they stay out late.” We know that’s only a thought because other people might have different thoughts about their child staying out late. For example: I often thought “it was great that they have friends to hang out with” or “they must have been having a good time” or “that’s wasn’t late at all.” This is when you get to examine all of those thoughts, especially the ones that are brought on by fear and worry. Our minds have been trained to worry because previously, that is what kept us alive in a day where we needed to remember the harmful things. Nowadays, the situations are generally not quite so dangerous. If you are having thoughts that don’t serve you or your relationship and bring on tremendous amounts of worry, then decide if you would like to practice a new thought. It doesn’t have to be a completely opposite thought that you don’t believe. I am not a proponent of

unicorn and rainbow positive thinking; It just has to be believable enough to create a feeling that won't make you take those actions that you had been taking previously and creating a division between you and your child and chaos in the house. For this, we will use the Life Coach School model developed by Brooke Castillo. The idea is that the circumstance is always neutral until you think about it and then you will analyze the thoughts you have. Pick one of the thoughts and see what feelings it brings up. Generally, a feeling will lead us to a certain action. Write down all the actions that you take when you have those feelings based on that thought. And then see what the result is. If that is the result you want and is sustainable, then it might be a useful thought to practice. If it isn't the result you want then practice a new thought and see what that brings up. All new thoughts need to be practiced as consistently as the negative ones that have been practiced so thoroughly before.

The Model as taught by Brooke Castillo of The Life Coach School:

Circumstance: always neutral, even if you can't tell it's neutral. It has to be agreed upon by everyone in a court of law. It isn't subjective.

Thought: a sentence in your mind created by your brain based on your own experiences and history.

Feeling: a sensation in your body brought on by your thoughts.

Action: the steps you take based on your thoughts and feelings.

Result: what you create in the world.

Remember that you will be very attached to your circumstance as the cause of the thoughts, feelings, actions and results. It is hard to change a fixed thought. If there is no wiggle room to believe that the thoughts are creating the results you have and not the circumstances, then it will be hard to change the results. The results you are looking for are close

connections to your children, so let's consider practicing new thoughts.

Exercise: Every day, do a thought download which is a dump of all of your brain's thoughts:

Take one thought that you can tell is producing a negative outcome and do a model as described above.

Circumstance: My kid left his dishes in the sink

- *Thought: What a lazy, unhelpful child*
- *Feeling: Frustrated*
- *Action: Making snarky comments, ruminating negative thoughts, being taken away from other important tasks*
- *Result: Things don't get done and there's no improvement, I become unhelpful in making the situation better.*

Perhaps a better thought would be:

- *Circumstance: My kid left his dishes in the sink*
- *Thought: He could have been distracted or tired*
- *Feeling: Empathetic*
- *Action: Offering to help or offering a timeframe to clean the dishes*

- *Result: Mutual respect and understanding*

Don't expect perfection; showing up and continuing to grow and evolve is more than enough



Chapter 7

Stop Complaining And Being Defensive.

Stop being defensive and stop
complaining about your kids, especially
in front of them.



Remember that you are doing the best you can! If you can listen to where they feel they have been wronged and not take it personally, you will get a lot more information about how they have been mistreated in the outside world. Try not to get defensive and listen with an open heart. Stay inconfusable about how good you and they are. Get curious about what they are saying and take it as an opportunity to know their mind and how they perceive the world without judgement. Being defensive cuts all lines of communication with everyone but definitely with your teens and tweens.

A few words about complaining: Nobody, especially your kids, wants to hear a litany of complaints about what is wrong and how we are all not measuring up. It isn't fun at all and not the responsibility of your kids to take care of your disappointments.

Stop complaining about your children in front of them. Could you imagine if somebody started complaining about you in front of other people? It's

very disrespectful and hurtful to the relationship. I know that you want a hearing on everything that's hard, and you want to make sure that they hear what's hard for you but take that someplace else, not in front of your child. You also wouldn't want other people to think badly about your children so don't implant negative ideas in their heads.

Ensure that you have a good support group of other moms, dads, family, friends, Facebook groups etc., so you have a private place to work on this without your kids. Make sure that you can tell your support group how awful your kids are making you feel and they will remain inconfusable about how good you and your kids are.

Exercise: Try to find one facebook or community parent group that you can join in order to have a large network of people with similar situations and varied experiences. Parents, especially moms, have a hard job that is unpaid and under-appreciated. We are made to feel like we have to do it all alone but the best way to fight that is to find your right- enough group.

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“Listen to your inner voice and tune out the judgement from others and society.”

Stephanie Gimán

~***~

Chapter 8

Play, Play, Play.

Play with your children and get interested
in their interests even if it's boring to
you!



The theory and practice of Special Time as taught by Patty Wipfler at Hand in Hand Parenting.

As we get older, we believe that play is a non-important part of our lives. That in order to “grow up,” we have to give up that light, fun part of our lives and become serious adults. Special time is an active form of listening in which your child’s play becomes the way in which they can safely share intimate aspects of their lives. It is a prescribed amount of time that you devote specifically to paying attention to your child individually without your own agenda. This is the best time to be curious, interested and fascinated: It is where they get to be in charge and you get to follow their lead in order to stay as close and connected as possible. This can be done with children of any age but we will focus on teens and tweens. Your teen might choose to watch a movie that will test your patience or play games that you might find annoying or boring (If I had to play, and lose badly, another game of fortnight I might have had to take out my own eye with a spoon). Stick with it, and don’t complain; your approval will build closeness and connection that

both you and your teen or tween need and enjoy. It will foster conversation that you wouldn't have facing each other one on one. Don't interrogate your child at this point! There is no need to win at any game, they already have the disadvantage of less experience given their age.

Special time guidelines:

- 1) Set up a prescribed amount of time with no interruptions whatsoever. If your teen/tween feels distant, just begin and end at the time you set aside to pay attention, without announcing that you are doing Special Time. If they seem to feel connected to you, you can use a timer to show that you will protect the time together.
- 2) Put your child in charge. Be willing to do anything they want. Follow their lead. The reversal of the balance of power will encourage your child to bring up thoughts and feelings they can't bring up during the everyday bustle of family life.
- 3) Let them know that you are loving the time you are spending with them. Don't stop and wait for gratitude or return of affection. They will show you

in their way and in their own time. You can appreciate yourself and any extra appreciation will be a bonus.

- 4) Be open to new things happening so they can show you their new struggles and life challenges.
- 5) Don't give in to the temptation to direct the play with your own ideas or teach how it can be done better. (I remember my kids making a cake during special time that completely flopped. It was still a success because they took pride in taking the lead and trying something new. I didn't have to intervene to make it perfect, it was just right and they were thrilled.) Your modifications will only keep you from fully understanding their ideas, their preferences and their enthusiasm. Modify play only if things are unsafe but figure out a way to still keep them in charge. Stay light about the modification and try not to use it as a way of teaching a lesson.

As you listen, your child's trust in you will build and a few things will happen.

-You might be tested with an activity that you will find

boring and irritating. (The 100th time I had to lose a game of chess, which I hate.)

-They might feel safe enough to explore new activities that will feel dangerous. (Slicing up vegetables in the kitchen to make dinner.)

-They might act out hard things that have happened to them with you as a target. (Telling me to go away because I was being so annoying and trying to remember that they always want me.)

-They might bring up hard issues. (Looking interested and unshaken even when they were telling me about failed relationships and I was dying on the inside.)

-They might become increasingly attached to you. (I love this one!)

-They might feel hopeful enough to bring up old difficulties that they haven't fully worked out. (Reminding me about disappointments with previous birthday presents.)

Don't stop whatever feelings your teens or tween brings up so they can work on them! If they show you feelings then you are doing it right. You can handle any

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feelings. You have tools to strengthen your mental muscle to handle any feelings.

Exercise: set up a time to do Special Time once a week for the next few weeks.

Look at an age 12 or below picture of your child before you start Special Time and remember what you love about them. After special time do a thought download with all the feelings that have come up for you. Try to stay nearby after Special Time because there might be some more feeling that come up at a later time.

“Be silly and don’t take the embarrassment personally,” Nikki Neretin

~***~

Chapter 9

Effective

Boundaries.

How to set up useful and effective
boundaries



It is important to set boundaries without either taking it personally or deciding that your child is bad, unfeeling or inconsiderate. Most people have their thoughts about what they are willing to do and the hope is others will be considerate about our wants and needs but often they aren't. It isn't personal; it is just not foremost on their list of what is important. A boundary is something that you set for yourself. For example, if you do not want your kid to curse at you then decide that is your boundary and create a consequence you know you will continue to be able to carry out each time. For Example, if you curse at me, I will walk out of the room for 10 minutes and then try to talk to you again after. Be ready to walk out of the room each time without fail. People will not make it easy for you to keep your boundaries; you will have to have to commit to your consequence and enforce it for yourself. Really look to see if you like the reason you are setting these boundaries. Sometimes we set them up so we don't have to deal with any uncomfortable feelings and then impose a lot of limiting rules. Setting a lot of boundaries just so we will feel better by controlling other people's

behavior needs to be re-visited. If you like your reason then set that boundary for you and make sure you follow through every time. The important part of this is that you are setting the boundary for yourself. We have no control over how others will act or if they can respect the boundary. The boundary is meant to be set so that you don't take violating the boundary personally, decide that your children are bad, unthoughtful humans, love them less and be mad at them. Generally, we get mad at people for overstepping boundaries that we have either minimally spoken about or somehow expected them to intuitively know. We cannot control the actions of most adults and most often, we can't control the actions of our young people. Setting boundaries is the way that we know what behaviors we can and can't handle. Consistently setting consequences is how we deal with the violation of the boundaries without all of our emotional drama.

Exercise: Pick a behavior that you would like to set a boundary for;

Decide if you like your reasons for setting the boundary;

Decide what you will do if the boundary is crossed;

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Can you do it 100% of the time?

Do a thought download on what feelings come up when the boundaries are broken.

Remember, violating the boundary isn't personal, our children have their own minds and we don't control them.

We only control how we show up in the world.



Chapter 10
Saying No Just
Got Easier.



I am sure you're wondering, with all of this shutting up and acting dumb, how could you ever say no to your children? The truth is if you allow your teens to show their feelings, it is easier to say no because it would be ok if they were disappointed without you having to either humiliate them into feeling bad or give in to their demands. If you could handle the feeling that they have about not having autonomy over their time or money, you wouldn't get confused about their disappointment. Just say no and allow them to be upset and disappointed. It's much harder to say no when you are worried about taking care of everyone's feelings, including your own. (I didn't allow my daughter to have a sleepover at her friend's house without their parents at home. She was really mad and disappointed at me but I was able to listen without having to give in or be defensive. That took a lot of practice!)

Exercise: Try saying no to some behaviors that you have been concerned about saying no to before. Be open to whatever feelings your child might present to you:

disappointment, anger, etc. Stay close and listen while they are upset for as long as you can. Do a thought download about all the feelings that come up for you. Remember, you can do some PQ reps if it starts to feel hard or take a break and revisit the situation at another time.



Chapter 11

Strengthen your surrounding relationships.

Work on the relationships around you and
your primary partner relationship if you
are raising your child with one.



This program will help you in any relationship. It is important for you to have close and connected relationships outside of your parenting role. It is good modeling for young people and the hopeful possibilities of their future relationships. Having strong support systems gives you the ability to work on your feelings about your children with other parents or adults going through similar situations. There needs to be a safe place away from your children where you share all of the times that parenting feels really hard. Parents are given very little support and no pay for the very important job we do. Until we set up a society that supports raising healthy families emotionally and financially, we will need to figure this out together. Once we have taken on this challenge, ideally, we will create a society that supports the hard work of parenting.

Exercise: try to set up a plan with other adults or friends once a week. Schedule the fun things first in your to do list.



Chapter 12

Peer-cheer.

Develop a Peer-Cheer group and start
Peer-Cheering.



Most likely, as a teenager you weren't treated with respect and kindness at every turn. Putting this program into practice for your teen or tween will feel hard. It's far more likely you will succeed if you work on the times when you were disrespected and not listened to.

It will be easier to enact this philosophy if you have a support group that will help you through the hard times of parenting. Having children and raising them is the quickest way for you to come up against all the feelings that you had at those particular ages. If you have a lot of struggles with your teen or tween now, it is possible that it was hard for you back when you were a teenager with nobody there listening to your hard feelings. Nobody listened when you needed to be heard back then but you can actually create the support you need now and go back and tell that just-right child that everything is going to be ok. You will need to start developing relationships with other parents and do some peer-cheering in order to get some clarity about

how good you are, and were, for you to remember that about your children.

How to start a peer-cheering relationship:

Peer-Cheering simply consists of two people taking turns listening to each other. It's listening without interrupting or offering suggestions or comments, just simply listening wholeheartedly.

It's simple to get started. It just takes two people. Find a friend, family member, co-worker or partner who will try it with you. This is not to be done with your children because they shouldn't have to take care of your feelings. Agree that you will take turns listening to each other without interruption for an equal amount of time, and agree how long that time will be. Then decide who is going to listen first. The other person then talks about whatever he or she wants to talk about. The listener just pays attention and doesn't interrupt to give advice, comment or tell how he or she feels. Your only job as the Peer- Cheerleader is to remember the essential goodness and brilliance of your

partner and their children. This is a no judgement zone. No curiosity questions either!

After the agreed-upon time, the talker becomes the listener. Trust that your co-cheerleader is just the right person for you to work on anything that your mind offers up and whatever you bring up is just the right issue to work on. It's a fair exchange.

Afterwards, both people usually feel refreshed and think more clearly. It's fun, too.

This is good to do whenever you get a chance. As you listen this way more times, you get to know each other better and like each other more and more.

You also get better at listening. The whole process becomes more effective the more times you use it. It will also help you develop the skills you need to listen effectively to your children. I remember when the girl group in my daughter's junior high class decided to kick her out of the friend group for that week. All of my hard times during junior high came flooding back. Instead of falling down the rabbit hole with her, I took a time out and called one of my girlfriends for a mini

peer-cheer session. It was only 5 minutes long but afterwards I could continue to stay interested and attentive to my daughter's struggle. While I listened, she figured out how she wanted to handle this situation and didn't need to take care of my feelings.

Peer-Cheer "turns" or "sessions" can be as long or as short as you have time for. Even a few minutes shared with your Peer-Cheerleader can make a big difference in how you are able to think, and two hours shared is that much better.

Sometimes the person talking may begin to laugh, cry, speak loudly, tremble, yawn or get angry. This means things are going well. Don't panic! It simply means that she or he is releasing the tension. She or he is becoming "un-embarrassed," "un-sad," "un-afraid." Don't interrupt these feelings from coming up or try to stop them. The hurt is already there and if they are releasing it they're well on the way to healing. This is true of listening to your teens and tweens as well. Just reassure them that it is fine to continue to emote.

Exercise:

Find at least one person to exchange time with using the peer-cheer method. Start with 5 minutes each and work your way up. You can go up to an hour each if you want to. Set up mini-sessions, which are shorter exchanges of time whenever things become hard at home. You are always better off removing yourself from a very stressful situation and using any of the tools you've learned up to this point to gain some perspective.

You made it this far! If you like the results rinse and repeat. If not, pivot and try again. Remember, you either get the results you want or the lessons you need.

~***~

Chapter 13

Bonus Tips.

Some added bonus tips since you've come
this far:



Apologize open-heartedly when necessary:

It's ok to make mistakes and it is really good to apologize when you do. Don't be precious about your apologies. This will not be used against you and you won't seem weak but it will be greatly appreciated and keep the doors open for closer connections.

The nugget of truth rule:

When your kid talks to you, try to find the nugget of truth and expand on it before you start attacking it or bringing it down. You'll find that they will speak to you more about their ideas and what's going on with them if your initial reaction is to find the nugget of truth.

Stop assuming your kids are lazy just because they don't want to do what you're telling them to do.

We often want our kids to care about boring responsibilities that we know are essential but they don't, for example, homework and chores. This doesn't mean that they're lazy or they don't care about

anything. The truth is they probably don't care very much about these things and would be perfectly fine if the house was a mess or didn't do their homework. Remember the thought "my kids are lazy" is a sentence in your mind that you can choose to think or not think. Thinking that thought will not help foster a close relationship but foster resentment and ill will. It is ok that you ask for help with these chores but if they are not jumping up to help it doesn't automatically mean they are lazy or don't care about you. If you need the chores to get done, either set up a structured boundary with consequences or do them together as a fun activity so that no one is stuck doing boring chores alone. If it doesn't get done, try not to make their whole character about what they aren't willing to do.

Try not to buffer your feelings away.

Hard feelings feel really bad! The human experience comes with good and bad, and we have never been promised only good. The bad gets worse when we try not to experience or feel these feelings by

buffering or evading them because they will always come back. Our buffering often will leave us with consequences that make us feel even worse. We wouldn't want our children to resort to buffering when things get hard for them. Instead of grabbing a drink or eating that extra cookie, do a thought download, do some PQ reps or call someone for a mini peer-cheer session.

~***~

Chapter 14

Final thoughts.



You have done an amazing job sticking around until the end. Parenting is the toughest job you will ever love. It can be rewarding and worthwhile while also being miserable, challenging, unexpected and unpredictable. Continue to make small changes, tweeks and pivots until you reach your desired goal of a close connection with your teens and tweens. I have been creating and using the Shut Up and Act Dumb program with great success for the last 21 years with my children and with the parents I see in my practice, in the community and in my various parenting groups. I have practiced pivoting and tweeking so that I could share with you this revolutionary new method of parenting that will change the relationship with your teens/tweens quickly. No one is perfect. Give yourself permission to fail forward. The rewards of close and connected relationships and a more peaceful home will far outweigh any challenges you experience along the way.

As I Go You Go!!

Dr. Nikki Neretin

Podcasts:

Shut Up and Act Dumb: A parents' guide to staying close and connected to your teens and tweens with Dr. Nikki Neretin, on any podcast platform.

You can join my program, "Shut Up and Act Dumb" going from contention to connection with your teens and tweens at drnikkineretin.com. It will blow your mind how quickly things can turn around with your children and the relationships around you!

Spend each day trying to blow your own mind!!!!

~***~

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks for reading! Please add a review on Amazon and let me know what you thought! Please pass this book on to anyone you think can benefit from the “Shut Up and Act Dumb” philosophy and program in order to become closer and more connected to their teens and tweens.

Here is to your big connected life.

As I Go You Go!

This book could not have been written without the help and support of many people. Special thanks to my mom, Lynda, who stuck in there with me through all of my new parenting ideas that were so different from what she grew up and was comfortable with. Big shout out to my Coffee

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nikki Neretin is a family doctor for over 27 years, who splits her time seeing patients in Remote Alaska and NYC. She is married to Ted who has modeled shutting up and acting dumb (not to be confused with not caring). Mom to teens, Adam and Lili, who've thrived and survived this completely new parenting style and are still talking to her although often claim to be embarrassed.