

TEEN DRAMA QUEENS

Keeping the Mother-Daughter Bond Strong

by Meredith Montgomery



For many, the strong mother-daughter bond seems to suddenly unravel when adolescence appears. “Parenting is exasperating and wears you out,” sighs Heather Thomas, of Houston, Texas, a mother of three, including 16-year-old Mary Meghan.

Mothers can gain some comfort in the biological reasons for the onset of emotionally charged arguments and repeated curfew violations. It begins with changes in the brain caused by an increase in the hormones that stimulate girls’ ovaries, and by age 10 or 11, the hormones become elevated to levels comparable to those of postmenopausal women.

Dr. Christiane Northrup, author of *Mother-Daughter Wisdom*, points out that in addition to experiencing mood swings and temperature changes similar to those of menopausal women, girls’ rising estrogen, unbalanced by progesterone, may likewise produce brain irritability. “It’s no wonder girls are both cuddling with and screaming at you in the same day,” she points out.

Nurse Practitioner Sil Reynolds,

“Actively engaging with my mom has enabled me to balance my independence with a dependable bond, which helps me grow into my true self. Plus, it allows my mom to know the real me.”

~ Eliza Reynolds

who co-authored *Mothering & Daughtering* with her daughter Eliza, gently reminds mothers, “The mother-adolescent daughter relationship is asymmetrical. Mothers are responsible for being the adult in the relationship as their daughters grow up. Understanding this can be a relief to both of you.”

Part of the responsibility of being an adult is to provide a safe psychological and emotional environment for children without taking things personally. The frontal cortex responsible for making decisions is still developing in the adolescent brain. Weathering mood swings and reactive outbursts, mothers can learn to remain steady, understanding that teens are not capable of giving back equally because their minds have not yet fully matured.

“That’s how teens learn to return to a calm place, by seeing our mom remain steady through our storms,” Eliza observes.

Powerful Role Models

Northrup believes that a daughter’s peers play a large role in her success-

fully navigating the teen years, but emphasizes that, “A mother’s influence wins. Be consistent in your loving and clear about rules and boundaries, while encouraging a sense of their own worth and autonomy.”

Teenagers are anxious to grow up and do their own thing, but until they have internalized safe and reasonable boundaries, they need someone else to establish them. Northrup reports how teen clients that were given too much freedom... “come in aching for boundaries and feel that their parents don’t care about them. It is the parents’ job to create healthy, though not rigid, boundaries.”

What has worked for Heather is to casually join Mary Meghan in her room with an intention to be present and actively listen to her. “I say something simple like, ‘I have missed you,’ and then allow her to open up to me without being critical or judgmental,” she explains. “Sometimes we listen to music or look at outfits in magazines together.”

“Girls know when you’re paying attention, and your tone and body language speak louder than words,” confirms Eliza. She also notes that, “How was your day?” doesn’t work as well as the more specific, “How did your test go?”

As with any relationship, there are occasional conflicts and misunderstandings, but there’s always potential for repair. Eliza and Sil encourage mothers and daughters to reconnect through the repair process; with heartfelt restoration, the bond grows stronger.

Helpful Activities

Everyone benefits from regularly scheduled quality time together. Sil advises,

“For households with siblings, this can mean 10 one-on-one minutes a day for each kid. When both parents aren’t under the same roof, technology can help—face time is better than texting, whether it’s through a screen or not.”

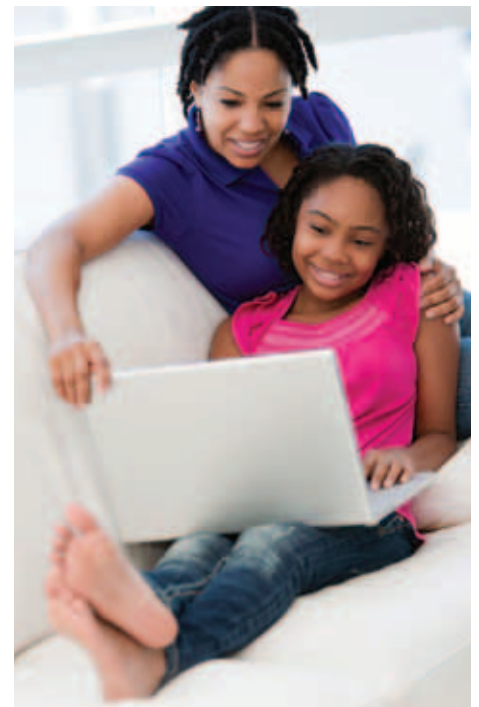
Some mother-daughter teams enjoy taking dance classes together, having movie dates or pairing up as volunteers. At their weekend workshops, the Reynolds engage in projects and conversations about what it means to invite spirituality and a sense of sacredness into one’s life. Sil sees firsthand how many mothers and daughters are “hungry for spiritual depth.”

Heather’s family makes dinners, school vacations and church activities a priority, including a youth program. She says, “Through our church, we are blessed to have caring, Christian adults we trust to help guide and raise our kids and help formulate their morals. It’s a place where it’s okay to question beliefs and share differing viewpoints.”

Many moms seek better bonds with their daughters than what they experienced as teens. Heather notes, “I only see my mother a couple times a year, and when I do, I give her an extra hug and apologize [both jokingly and seriously] for my own teen years. Now, having teen girls of my own, I get how hard it is, and I tell her that every time I see her.”

For more information and tools, visit MotheringAndDaughtering.com.

Meredith Montgomery publishes [Natural Awakenings of Mobile/Baldwin, AL](http://NaturalAwakeningsOfMobile/Baldwin,AL) (HealthyLivingHealthyPlanet.com).



A Daughter’s Go-To Guidelines

by Eliza Reynolds

Don’t give up. When you give up, you are asking your mom to give up on you. Instead of stating, “She’ll never get me or trust me and she’ll always embarrass me,” help her to meet the real you.

Stay real. Be authentic and genuine (no BS). If you want to talk, try starting with a simple, “Hey, Mom, I’ve got something I want to talk to you about. Could just the two of us consult for a minute?” Yes, your mom may be eerily on point sometimes, but she can’t actually read your mind (Surprise!).

Build the relationship you want and need. It’s the one where you get along. She listens when you’re talking and you want to listen, too. It’s normal for this to take work. When you choose to be half of this two-person team that’s key to your well-being, teenage life becomes easier. I call it the art of daughtering. Just imagine what life could be like if your mom was your greatest ally.

Connect with Eliza Reynolds via MotheringAndDaughtering.com.

Key Family Communication Tools

Avoid the use of absolutes (never, always, everyone, forever) because they leave no room for differing opinions or shared responsibility for problems. For example, replace “always” with “often,” or “everyone” with “a lot of people.”

Softening statements by turning heated one-liners into “I” statements. Say, “I feel like you don’t call when you say you will,” rather than, “You never call when you say you will.”

Instead of open-ended questions, try a three-word check-in. Both mother and daughter share three words that describe their current emotional state honestly and authentically. Take turns sharing. There is no need to explain why these words were chosen, but it can give both parties a better glimpse into each other’s current state of heart and mind.