

Dear Mom and Dad, Please Stick With Me



by Helene Wingens | November 3, 2020

Dear Mom and Dad,

Please stick with me.

I can't think clearly right now because there is a rather substantial section of my prefrontal cortex missing. It's a fairly important chunk, something having to do with rational thought. You see, it won't be fully developed until I'm about 25. And from where I sit, 25 seems a long way off.

My brain is not yet fully developed

It doesn't matter that I'm smart; even a perfect score on my math SAT doesn't insulate me from the normal developmental stages that we all go through. Judgement and intelligence are two completely distinct things.

And, the same thing that makes my brain wonderfully flexible, creative and sponge-like also makes me impulsive. Not necessarily reckless or negligent but more impulsive than I will be later in life.

Please stick with me.

So when you look at me like I have ten heads after I've done something "stupid" or failed to do something "smart," you're not really helping.

You adults respond to situations with your prefrontal cortex (rationally) but I am more inclined to respond with my amygdala (emotionally). And when you ask, "What were you thinking?" the answer is I wasn't, at least not in the way you are. You can blame me, or you can blame Mother Nature, but either way, it is what it is.

At this point in my life, I get that you love me, but my friends are my everything. Please understand that. Right now I choose my friends, but, don't be fooled, I am watching you. Carefully.

Please stick with me.

Here's what you can do for me

1. Model adulting

I see all the behaviours that you are modelling and I hear all of the words you say. I may not listen but I do hear you. I seem impervious to your advice, like I'm wearing a Kevlar vest but your actions and words are penetrating. I promise. If you keep showing me the way, I will follow even if I detour many, many times before we reach our destination.

2. Let me figure things out for myself

If you allow me to experience the consequences of my own actions I will learn from them. Please give me a little bit of leash and let me know that I can figure things out for myself. The more I do, the more confidence and resilience I will develop.

3. Tell me about you

I want you to tell me all the stories of the crazy things you did as a teen, and what you learned from them. Then give me the space to do the same.

4. Help me with perspective

Keep reminding me of the big picture. I will roll my eyes at you and make all kinds of grunt-like sounds. I will let you know in no uncertain terms that you can't possibly understand any of what I'm going through. But I'm listening. I really am. It's hard for me to see anything beyond the weeds that I am currently mired in. Help me scan out and focus on the long view. Remind me that this moment will pass.

5. Keep me safe

Please remind me that drugs and driving don't mix. Keep telling me that you will bail me out of any dangerous situation, no anger, no lectures, no questions asked. But also let me know over and over and over that you are there to listen, when I need you.

6. Be kind

I will learn kindness from you and if you are relentless in your kindness to me, someday I will imitate that behaviour. Don't ever mock me, please and don't be cruel. Humour me - I think I know everything. You probably did as well at my age. Let it go.

7. Show interest in the things I enjoy

Some days I will choose to share my interests with you, and it will make me feel good if you validate those interests, by at least acting interested.

One day when the haze of adolescence lifts, you will find a confident, strong, competent, kind adult where a surly teenager once stood. In the meantime, buckle in for the ride.

Please stick with me.

Love

Your Teenager

From <https://grownandflown.com/letter-from-teen-to-parents>