

## Parents with teens (13-18yo) & young adults (19-24yo)

In many of our parent-and-teen workshops, time and again we hear parents' concerns about their teens and young adults. One of them that top the list is sleep. "My teen is always on the computer all night. It's as if he doesn't need any sleep!" said one of the mothers.

Indeed today's teens and young adults are not getting enough sleep. Research has shown 85% of teens and young adults are getting only 6 or fewer hours of sleep per night. So, exactly what my teen/young adult child is up to?

Parents of teens and young adults are facing a lot of challenges and frustration. Be it matching up to societal, familial & self expectations in raising *good* children, meeting work KPIs, providing for the family, caring for their aged parents and other seemingly endless parenting woes, being a parent is definitely not an easy task. Likewise, being a teen or young adult is also not easy too. Like parents, they have plenty to cope with. Academics, Core Curriculum Activities (CCAs), sports, community services, first job, new colleagues, bosses, friends, change of environment, physical & emotional changes in self are just but some areas to begin with. And these can be really overwhelming to teens and young adults with all the increasing demands, peer pressures and parents' expectations in measuring up to all the standards.

In a worklife class with a group of young adults, when asked about how to have a balanced worklife, a young lady replied in a matter-of-factly manner – Just.Sleep.Less. When prompted, the class collectively agreed that sleep is the only factor that they can "afford to sacrifice" because, as they put it – "We are young". They make use of this "sacrifice" to get away for the overwhelming stress faced in the day, catching up with their personal time out with friends (both locally and globally), having unstructured fun or simply catching up with the day's work. In the mean time, parents are worried about their teens and young adult children not having enough rest to function and also the increased risks of health issues that are related to lack of rest.

With technology advancement, people are now more wired up than ever and in an easier and faster way. It is a common sight to see individuals, friends, colleagues, couples and family members sitting next to each other and all wired up to gadgets. Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter etc. are allowing teens & young adults the freedom to stay connected, exchanging and sharing information anytime and anywhere. Friends that your teens and young adult children make may not be just from the local community. Virtual games, academic exchange, trips have allowed them to make friends all over the world. It seems the only time to stay connected with the world is at night where all the academics, CCAs, work and whatnots are over and done with (hopefully) and where they can then catch up with friends or play games to unwind and de-stress.

Like it or not, technology is here to stay and it is this world that our young generation now grow into and which is second nature to them. One of the things that parents can do to help themselves and to further strengthen their relationship is to get into the world of their teens/young adult children. Update and upgrade yourself in the areas of all these tools and gadgets to better connect with them in their world. Today's teens and young adults are attracted to and do things that are popular or acceptable in society. Apart from wanting autonomy now that they are grown up or constantly being told to grow up, they are still forming their own values and opinions. With a weak relationship, many do not see the value of being accountable to their own parents in terms of who they are out with, what time they will be home, etc.

However, despite the challenges in parenting teens and young adult children, the good thing is they still want to come home, they still want to connect with the parents and they wished the parents would listen to them more. As such, parents still play a critical role in influencing their teens and young adult children. By listening to them, respecting their views, empathizing with their challenges and sharing their burdens, parents can work their way into their child's heart and rebuild the broken pieces again. Another area and a major one is learning to let go. When to back off, when to come in, allowing them to make mistakes, encouraging and supporting them through the setbacks are skills to hone in the areas of building them up to be independent, responsible and resilient individuals.

With our teens and young adult children growing up and moving on, parents need to also recognize the next life stage that they themselves are transiting into i.e. the empty nester stage. Having dealt with a full nest, the house can suddenly become empty. Loneliness may start to creep in, questioning the purposes, understanding the meaning of what is to come and many more nagging worries and concerns about the future and what it holds. It is at this stage that couples need to come together and reflect, realign and redefine once again their roles and expectations.

In conclusion, life will always have its challenges. Be it young or old, big or small, all of us pass through the many ages and stages of life. With children, parents will always worry about them. Continue to influence them. Learn to choose your battles wisely. Update and upgrade to stay connected with them. Stay tuned always with your spouse in keeping up with your changing roles and expectations with and for one another. And when things go wrong, look for ways to make it better and not for someone to blame.

Written by: Ms Evelyn Khong,  
Principal Consultant  
Family Central - a service by Fei Yue Community Services