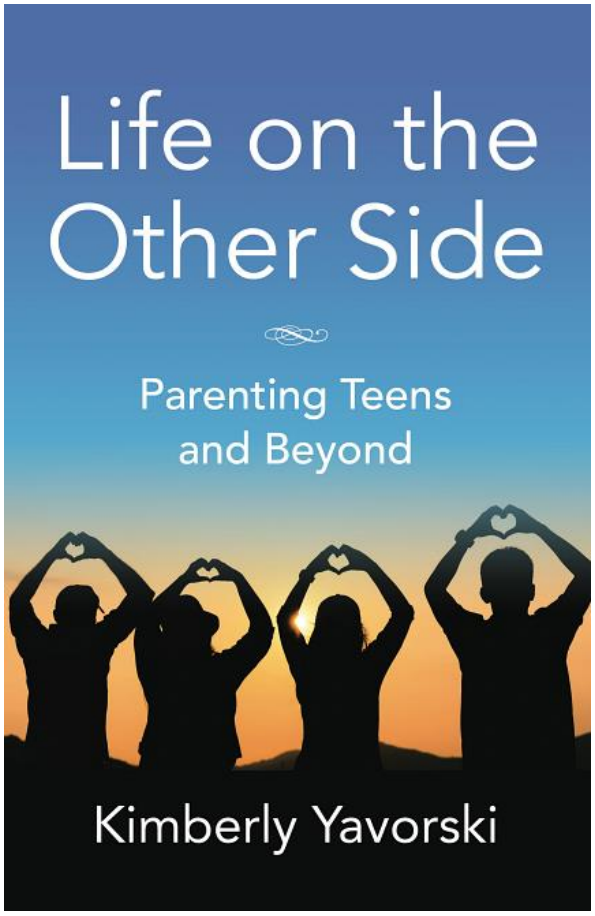


Life on the Other Side, Parenting Teens and Beyond gently offers the kind of advice you might expect to find while chatting with a good friend, one who not only has been there, but who has also done much of the research for you.

Life on the Other Side: Parenting Teens and Beyond
By Kimberly Yavorski

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Life on the Other Side

Parenting Teens and Beyond



Kimberly Yavorski

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First Edition

What people are saying about
Life on the Other Side

"Sometimes an author has the capacity to read a mom's heart and sense exactly what she needs. In the case of parenting teens, Kimberly Yavorski is that astute, insightful author coming to our rescue. From family stories that sound awfully familiar (as if she read our journals) to bright, simple advice that's easy to digest/apply (and find success at) you'll be grateful to have this soothing balm to access at all times of the day and night. It's a bible for parents of teens, and I have no doubt it will become your go-to source for sanity and survival. Yavorski found the secret sauce and she's willing to share it. Like a weighted blanket on our hardest parenting days, this book is the blessing you've been waiting for."

-Lisa Leshaw, author and mental health therapist

"When raising teenagers, we all need a friend who has been in the trenches, survived, and will share all the knowledge they learned along the way. *In Life on the Other Side, Parenting Teens and Beyond,* Kim is that person for parents of adolescents. In a relatable, honest, straight-talking way, she guides parents through this challenging time so we can have stronger relationships with our teens and young adult children. If you are feeling lost, lonely, or overwhelmed, as we often do as parents, this book will help."

-Whitney Fleming, author and owner, ParentingTeensAndTweens.com

Raising teenagers is beautiful and hard and sometimes we just need someone to remind us we're going to be okay. Kim does exactly that. This book feels like a conversation with a friend who's been there, gets it, and has so much wisdom to share.

-Leslie Means, founder of Her View From Home and author of *So God Made a Mother* and *So God Made a Grandma*

"Kimberly Yavorski understands that parenting doesn't end when our kids grow up. It simply asks something different of us. *Life on the Other Side* is a warm, honest, and deeply practical guide to letting go, staying connected, and becoming the kind of parent our teens and adult children still want beside them."

-Esther Joy Goetz, founder of Moms of Bigs, author and motherhood coach

"With her trademark candor, insight, and experience-born wisdom, Kimberly Yavorski reassures parents of teens and young adults that the other side is a place worth getting to. Her thoughtful, practical book is full of hope and encouragement for what comes next."

-Elizabeth Spencer, author and founder of Guilty Chocoholic Mama

"Reading Kimberly Yavorski's book is the next-best thing to having an in-depth conversation with an empathetic, experienced parent who's parented four teens and distilled her experience into practical guidance. Filled with anecdotes, realistic action steps and suggestions for further reading, *Life on the Other Side* is a welcome and reassuring resource to help parents navigate the whitewater years of parenting teenagers."

-Lisa L. Lewis, author,
The Sleep-Deprived Teen

"As a mom of young adults who has dedicated significant time to thinking and writing about mothering in the teen years and beyond, I still found fresh perspectives and invaluable insight on the pages of *Life on the Other Side, Parenting Teens and Beyon*d. Kim shares with honesty and vulnerability from her own experiences and from extensive research she's compiled, and this helps us to understand, navigate and embrace these years with our teens and young adults, and beyond."

-Sydnei Kaplan, founder of Mom in the
Moment and author of *The Heaven Phone*

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Contents

Introduction 1
1 – It's a Teenager! Congratulations!? 5
2 – Too Big to Be Kids, Too Immature to Be Adults 13
3 – Choosing Your Battles 17
4 – Sleep – A Commodity More Valuable Than Gold 21
5 – Get Schooled by Your Teen – And Love It 27
6 – I Don't Care What Everyone Else's Parents Are Doing – Or Do I? 31
7 – Dating and Other Tricky Relationships 35
8 – Navigating Friendships, Theirs and Yours 41
9 – Teens Will Be Teens 45
10 – Do I Always Need to Know Where They Are? To Track or Not to Track 49
11 – Navigating Social Media and Finding a Balance with Technology 55
12 – Being Present 63
13 – Let's Talk About Sex, Early and Often 67
14 – Rethinking Our Views on Alcohol 77
15 – Drugs? Not *My* Kid! 89
16 – Did You Know You Need to Have a Gambling Talk? 99
17 – Lessons in Independence 105
18 – Parenting Your Mini-Me or Anti-Me 109
19 – Your Job Is to Be a Parent, Not a Friend – Why Not Be Both? 115

20 – Keeping One Step Ahead 119
21 – Boundaries, Yours and Theirs 123
22 – Stress Seems to Be an Epidemic – Are Parents Partly to Blame? 127
23 – Counting Down the Days 135
24 – Money Matters 139
25 – Navigating Post High School Plans 145
26 – How Did My Kid Not Know That? 151
27 – The First Goodbye 155
28 – The Revolving Door 159
29 – Pushing Them to Fly, When All You Want to Do Is Hold On 163
30 – Just Like a Boomerang – They're Back 171
31 – The Next Chapter – In-Lawing 175
32 – Grandparenting 181
33 – Some Secrets 187
Resources 193
Acknowledgements 195
About the Author 197
Notes 199

1
It's a Teenager! Congratulations!?

Savor the moments. Every mom of young kids has heard that they should enjoy each minute, that they will miss these days someday. Not really. There are moments I miss, but overall, I have no desire to go back in time. I am beyond thrilled to be past the stage where I need to carry a diaper bag everywhere or consider renting a U-Haul to carry the necessary items (the portable bed, booster chair, stroller and toys) to keep my kids safe and occupied (and the adults sane) for a weeklong trip. I am excited to not have to plan out activities to make everyone happy during school breaks. I am happy to not have my every moment dictated by my children's activity and social calendars. I am happy to be done with much of the chaos, *but* I am nostalgic for bits and pieces of those days.

I miss the soft snuggles while my baby drifts off to sleep, the gentle pats while nursing. I miss the goofy grins while telling knock- knock jokes. I miss seeing the lightbulb go off when something clicks and a concept is mastered. I miss having a small person reach up to grab my hand in the park. I miss being able to make things better with a kiss and a hug.

But I also remember days when I wished they were all self-sufficient, that I could have just one moment to do what *I* wanted. I love that all my kids can now do things for themselves. I also love that there are days that they ask me to do things for them anyway. I love that despite the fact that we all know that they are grown-ups, I still get to be Mom.

From this side, the time went fast. One day I was getting things for my son that he couldn't reach. I blinked, and now he is getting stuff off the top shelf for me. I was opening his yogurt, and blink, he is opening

stubborn jars for me. One day I was brushing my daughters' hair and helping them dress. I blinked, and now they're giving me makeup and fashion tips. I was a sounding board for their thoughts and dreams and helped them talk through relationships; I still do these things, but now they're giving me career advice.

My four children were born over the span of ten years. This means that I was parenting at multiple stages and ages for two decades. When I was expecting my third child, I read that children enter a new stage every three to three and a half years, where they assert their independence and challenge the status quo. At the time, my first two were seven and three and a half. (Oh, how I wish I had gotten that memo sooner!) Over time, I found this concept to largely be true, with ages 3+, 7, 10+, 14, and 17 to be especially challenging ones.

When my oldest became a teen, my youngest was a toddler. (I had a teenager and a threenager at the same time!) Maybe because I was still wrangling a preschooler and didn't have time to think about it, I never considered that the teen years would be any different than any other stage. I was *very* wrong about that, but I discovered that the teen stage can be incredibly fun. I loved those years! Despite the hormones and the drama, the teen years have been my favorite stage of parenting.

This admission sometimes stops conversation. People are so used to hearing the bad about teens that they seem shocked that anyone would actually *enjoy* them. Around the time my oldest turned 13, I became a Girl Scout leader. Everyone (and I am not exaggerating; no one had anything positive to say) asked me what I was thinking. I mean, why would anyone want to do that? Why would someone willingly spend hours with teenage girls? Oh, the hormones!

Pfft. Teenage girls didn't scare me. I said it would be fine. To be honest, I felt this wasn't really a choice. I was stepping up because no one else would. But my experiences up to that point had been mostly positive. My house was always full of kids. I was pretty sure I knew

what I was getting into. Besides, it had to be better than a bunch of kindergarteners (seriously, there is a special place in heaven for kindergarten teachers).

And this was one case where I was able to say "Told you so." Not only was I okay with this age group, I *loved* it. These girls were fun. Yes, they were sometimes moody, often boy-crazy, sarcastic, flighty, and experts at the eye-roll, but they were, most of the time, also a lot of fun to be around. We had moments of cattiness, but quickly established that such behavior would not be tolerated, and we moved on.

I love teenagers. I love the conversations. I love sharing activities and watching them grow into adults. I love that they have their own thoughts and opinions. I especially love that they can take care of their own basic needs.

I spent more than 15 years working with teenagers, in this and other settings. As a result, I have a few more gray hairs, and many more laugh lines in my face. I have been challenged as a parent and as a person. They made me a better me. I agreed to try things that scare me and learned from them. Not much has been off the table. If they suggested an activity, we considered it. Zip lining, white-water rafting, rock climbing -- we tried all of these within the span of a few months. Check, check, check, off my bucket list. I learned and grew, alongside them. Though I knew they were still children, for the most part, I treated them as young adults worthy of love and respect. My role was to guide, not control.

As these kids grew up, new teens moved into their places. I volunteered with other youth organizations and spent time with teens in different settings. Through it all, my beliefs were affirmed: Teenagers are fun. They have a lot on their minds and much to say, if you care to take the time to listen to them.

Life with teens: Sometimes it's like life with toddlers

Remember that some behaviors are developmentally normal. Try not to overreact when your teen is forgetful and scattered. Rather than yell and punish, help them find strategies to be more organized. Teen brains are very busy. They are deciphering new social rules and body changes, while hormonal changes interfere with normal mental processing. They may leave items in strange places that made sense to them at the time (for example, gym clothes going home in the lunchbox). They "forget" to do things they willingly agreed to. Rather than jumping to the conclusion that they are trying to get away with something, remind them and give them a deadline. These memory lapses are generally not intentional or manipulative, and may frustrate them as much as, or even more than, they do you. Deliver their forgotten items to school, or let them learn from natural consequences. (I've done both, depending on my mood, the severity of the consequences, and/or their level of distress).

Offer guidance in learning new skills. I remember my three-year-old wanting to select her own clothes and dress herself. At times, it was difficult for me to sit back and let her. Ten years later, the tasks were different, but the struggle was the same. Talking to the teacher, making an appointment, scheduling a driver's test, filling out job and college applications -- all these skills need to be mastered, *by the ones who are most impacted by the results*. Parents can make suggestions to make these tasks easier, (these suggestions may or may not be accepted), but by the teen years, the days of doing everything for them is coming to an end.

Put tantrums in perspective. Although outsiders frequently see tantrums as demands to get one's own way, these emotional outbursts are often simply an expression of frustration. Where toddlers are

frustrated by their inadequate communication skills, teens may be angry and resentful that many aspects of their life are beyond their control. (They also may lack good communication skills.) They are in that in-between place where they look like an adult, but still have the thoughts and emotions of a child. I've often found the answer is to simply wait it out. Reacting to outbursts at either age sometimes makes the situation worse.

Regularly evaluate limits. Like toddlers, our teens want to do everything adults do. They want to be independent and not treated "like a baby." They don't want to follow rules. As parents, we sometimes don't notice that our teens are capable of more than they were just a short time ago. It's wise to periodically revisit the limits we impose to see if they still make sense. If they do, keep them, with a promise to re-evaluate the situation at a later date. Make sure you follow through on this promise.

Accept that teens are self-centered. Toddlers are unaware of other people and the effects of their actions. At some point in childhood, they start to realize they are part of a bigger world. They interact with others and can be very loving, kind, thoughtful individuals. At least until they hit puberty, when this awareness seems to diminish or even disappear. (Fortunately, this lapse tends to be temporary.) Try not to take this to heart; teens are simply oblivious to anything outside their personal world. Walk into any venue that high schoolers frequent, and you will quickly feel invisible, even to the point that you need to dodge out of their way to avoid a collision. (They talk as if you are not there as well; this is particularly baffling and sometimes more enlightening than you would expect or wish.) Of course, we can (and should) point out any inappropriate or rude behavior (I've found that there's not much teens hate more than being called rude), but ignoring much of this will help keep the peace.

Get used to friends coming and going. Toddlers are friends with everyone, unless they are mad at them. Teens are also quick to declare that they are no longer friends with so-and-so or will never talk to them again. Like toddlers, this can change, sometimes on a daily basis. Keeping up becomes a challenge. A best friend one day can be the enemy the next, and back to the BFF again the day after that. For this reason, don't contribute to the noise; listen to them, provide hugs (and chocolate if necessary), and move on.

Consider ignoring some of the backtalk. Toddlers are still learning that some things are not nice to say or that a tone of voice has meaning. Teens know better, having tried that tone and those words before, but somehow (thanks to hormones and a still-developing frontal cortex) they can't seem to help themselves. Like tantrums, choose wisely when reacting. Sometimes it's better to ignore this behavior as well.

Enjoy watching them grow. No matter their age, our children have their whole lives before them; they are a new book, waiting to be written. Although watching them can be frustrating, it's also wonderful to share in their enthusiasm as they explore options and discover new things. I marvel at the fact that I had anything to do with creating these no-longer-small humans that I share space with, that I have influenced what they do and who they become. I am proud of the people they are growing into and look forward to what they do next.

Sometimes it's better

Enjoy quiet mornings. You no longer wake up at dawn on Saturday mornings, because someone is staring you awake or worse, jumping on you with a cheery "Wake up!" Instead, you wake up early (because after a dozen years, your body is finally trained to this schedule) and start your day. Maybe at lunchtime, you see a bleary-eyed person

requesting breakfast. You may or may not comply. After all, how consistent are they when you make requests?

Make them responsible for their own things. With young children, parents have to make a plan to leave home: gather a day's worth of assorted snacks, a change of clothes for each child, and an assortment of toys. Teens can handle all of this themselves. If you're feeling generous, feel free to remind them to bring chargers and headphones for the car ride, but otherwise let them do the remembering themselves. (As someone who experiences "hanger," I also keep snacks in my purse and share if I'm asked nicely.)

Occasionally make them fend for themselves. Take a spontaneous night out with your spouse. You may be met with gaping stares. "But what will WE eat?" Odds are, your fridge looks like mine. When you have teenagers, unless it's shopping day, there's plenty of food. The problem is that some of it, gasp, needs to be prepared. Tell them to figure it out (they will have to someday anyway), and skip out the door.

Sit back and enjoy the moments your child does something *for you.* It's a sweet reward when your teen is making lunch and asks if you want some too, or walks in the house and hands you a Starbucks cup with your favorite brew. Even better, when you go to do a chore and discover it has already been done. Though you may wonder what they want, just say "thank you." You've done a good job.

But sometimes it's much worse

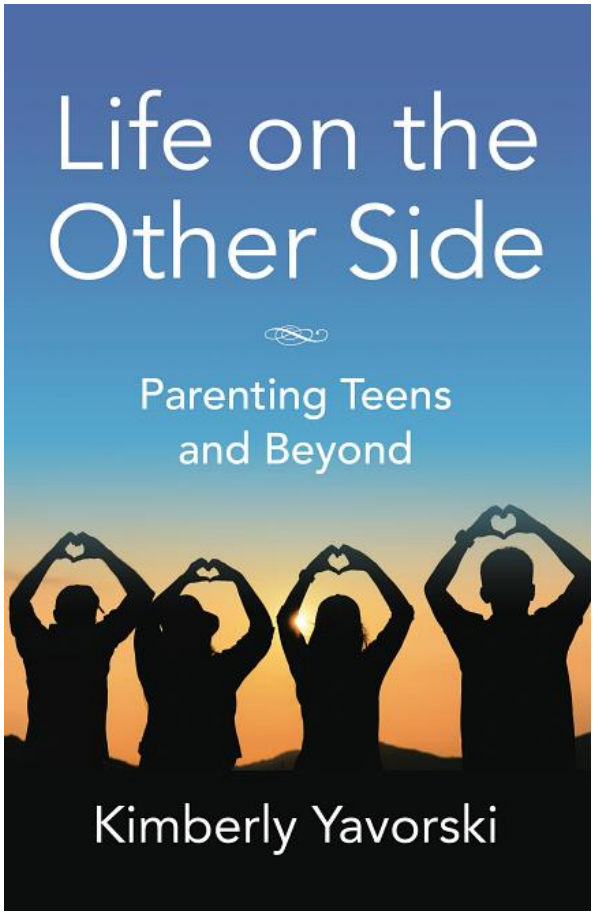
Prepare to lose some friends. When kids become teenagers, parents are less involved in day-to-day activities. You no longer see the parents you regularly chatted with on playgrounds and sidelines, and some friendships fall off. Or your child's friendship ends, and it's just awkward for you to continue a relationship with his or her parents

(more on this in chapter 8). Once teens start driving, your chauffeur days come to an end, as do the days of chatting with parents at pickup time, and you lose touch.

Take a step back. Being a parent sometimes means you have to watch your child get hurt. Unfortunately, this is part of growing up. When they make poor choices (for example, not doing their homework or forgetting a practice or other commitment), they need to face the consequences. Though a parent's instinct may be to "save" a child, it's often better for our kids to learn life lessons when the stakes are small. More difficult are the situations over which they have no control, such as a breakup, whether it's their first romantic relationship or the end of a childhood friendship. At these times, all we can do is be available, for a hug, a special treat, or if they are open to it, a heart-to-heart.

Force them to do "grown-up" things. This may be talking to a teacher or resolving a disagreement. They may resist making their own appointments or finding their own solutions, but remember that you want to be out of a job someday. Let them fail. Teach them to be self-sufficient. When asked for your opinion, instead of giving it, ask, "Well, what do *you* think?" (As a teen, this drove me crazy, but was one of the best things my parents did for me.) Don't always rescue them (this is a difficult call, because sometimes they really do need you to intervene), but offer guidance if needed. This can take the form of rehearsing with them, offering a script, or pointing out what they can expect in certain situations.

Call your mom. The teenage years are nothing if not unpredictable. Hugs and scowls can be expected on any given day (and sometimes both in the same hour). As a parent, your patience will likely be tested, time and again. When I hit this stage of parenting, I took the time to make many calls to my own mom – to apologize and to ask her how to get through it.



Life on the Other Side, Parenting Teens and Beyond gently offers the kind of advice you might expect to find while chatting with a good friend, one who not only has been there, but who has also done much of the research for you.

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