



I love teenagers. Before staying home with 3 kids I was a high school teacher who loved every moment of the job. I find teens thoughtful, energizing and tons of fun. And as a teacher, I was really calm and encouraging and optimistic. No matter how badly a student failed or struggled, I honestly believed that it was going to work out in the end. I once sat on the floor of a hotel lobby in Quebec, consoling a hysterical girl who had to call home and tell her parents she was busted (by me) for drinking on a school extended field trip. I spent all night telling her that this was an awesome learning opportunity and that every time we screw up, it's a chance to grow and learn something about ourselves.

Fast forward 20 years to my own parenting. I flip out when my own kid brings home a D on a test. I daily lecture on the evils of reality tv and can only see doom and destruction in the future with every small mistake. Available? Calm? Not me. When it comes to parenting, I am a lot better in theory than in practice. Perhaps for this reason, John Duffy's book, ***The Available Parent: Radical Optimism for Raising Teens and Tweens*** really spoke to me. Dr. Duffy encourages parents to calm down, take deep breaths and believe that everything really is going to work out. He doesn't think this will happen by magic, nor does he advocate letting our kids do whatever they want. Rather, he encourages parents to do the hardest work of all: to build a relationship that includes non-judgmental, open discussion. He asks us to be loving and self-aware enough to keep our own emotions in check when dealing with our volatile teenagers and to avoid many parenting styles that only serve to alienate our kids. Duffy wants us to trust the process of adolescence, to set clear limits, but to expect our kids to fail and rather than admonish, punish or panic, to help our kids through the rough patches. He asks us to believe in them and-- most importantly-- to like them.

The book is divided into three sections; the first is a review of adolescence in general. Duffy's observations of teens in his therapy practice provide the basis for many of his assertions but they are in line with many other parenting books on the subject of adolescence. Part Two is devoted to What Never Works and I identified myself in many of these descriptions. Included in what never works are lectures, vicarious living, micro-managing, snooping, coddling, judging and smothering. Duffy both describes the behavior and tells parents in no uncertain terms the consequences of each of these ineffective parenting tactics. Finally, in part 3, Duffy tells us what does work and why. These parenting approaches include checking your own ego at the door (a very powerful concept of letting go of the child of your dreams and opening your eyes to the child you are blessed with), gaining traction through emotional bank deposits, clear communication and connection, and calm, clear consequences.

There is a lot to like in this book and much of it is common sense. My copy of the book is scrawled with underlines and starred with reminders to myself to approach my teens in a positive manner that exudes my underlying love and compassion for them. He reminds us to have five to one positive to negative interactions with our teens and to enjoy the process of their becoming independent, strong individuals. It's a tall order but well worth the effort.