

New Zealand
Psychological Society

Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa



LOVE PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology Week 15 – 21st May

Psychology Week is run by the New Zealand Psychological Society (NZPsS) each year to celebrate psychology, psychologists and showcase the practical ways psychology can be used in everyday life. The theme for 2023 is 'Love Psychology' and as mothers we wanted to introduce the framework of attachment and how this can be useful in connecting with your teenager.

Understanding and Connecting with Your Teenager

To understand any relationship, it is important to be aware of the neurobiological process of attachment. For humans, connecting and belonging is a fundamental need. This need comes from our caveman brains and is about survival. Although the survival of the human species is no longer in doubt, babies have an innate need to belong and to be taken care of by key caregiver(s) who is usually, but not always, a parent.

When we can mostly understand and be responsive to a child's needs, be emotionally available, and act as a safe haven then a strong, healthy connection can form. This is technically referred to as a secure attachment between the caregiver and child. Secure attachment will most likely lead to the child having a positive view of themselves and to see others as trustworthy, having the confidence to explore their environment and the belief that they can rely on significant others for help or comfort. Approximately, 65% of us are securely attached. The remainder are considered insecurely attached which can show up as consistently being emotionally shutdown, extremely independent and turning away or being emotionally overactivated, demanding and chasing connection (see links below to find out more about insecure attachment styles). However, as with most things human, it's not straightforward. Although attachment patterns are stable over a lifetime they can be modified by stressful situations, experiences with caregivers, peers, and intimate partners.

Adolescents are growing into maturity, transforming from a child into an adult which is confusing and challenging for everyone. We are their best chance of survival into adulthood, yet they resist our input. They become more attached to their friends. They need us yet need to not need us.

For us to attempt to navigate through these turbulent times it's important to establish or reaffirm your safe haven status. To attempt to form a secure bond with your teen regardless of the emotional storm or freeze out you experience. To actively get to know the teen in your care and to keep demonstrating a desire to connect with them despite their pushback or non-engagement. It is about remembering to comment on the good things you notice they are doing not just what they are not doing. To accept them as they are; allowing them to stretch out from the family, and support them when they make mistakes. It is being available to listen when they want to talk,

and respecting their privacy when they don't. The biggest thing, is showing them you are there, no matter what.

Ways to Improve Your Safe Haven Status

Prioritise spending time with your teenager

<https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/parenting-teens-spending-quality-time-together>

Asking quality questions that are more likely to land well with your teenager

<https://www.claireeaton.com.au/quality-questions-better-connections/>

Try different ways to communicate to your teenager that you care

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/ten-ways-to-show-teenagers-you-love-them_b_13430444

Look beyond your teens behaviour and amplify the good

<https://drgabormate.com/what-you-should-do-when-your-kids-are-bickering/>

Understand why parents matter to teenagers

<https://drgabormate.com/book/hold-on-to-your-kids/>

Learn about some of the changes that are happening in your teen's brain and why

<https://brainwave.org.nz/research/articles/>

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_the_teen_brain_transforms_relationships

Learn more about attachment styles in relationships

<https://youtu.be/PF7g4K8fDvo>

<https://traumasolutions.com/attachment-styles-quiz/>

All we can do is our best; and our challenge is to never give up trying to create the very best emotional environment for our teen to grow up in.

*By Arlene Conway, Registered Psychologist, Mother of James, 40 and Ella 17 and Nana to Ollie 9
Susan Wall, Registered Psychologist, Mother of Jacqui, 34; Julia, 25; Tilly, 22 and Nan to Raffie, 6; Òral, 3 and
Coco, almost 2.*