

# **A QUICK + SIMPLE GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS**

**“How To Create An  
Environment For Teens  
To Thrive!”**

**UNDERSTANDING TEENAGERS:  
THE FEARS THEY HAVE,  
THE QUESTIONS THEY ASK,  
AND THEIR 6 CORE NEEDS**

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# HOW TO CREATE AND ENVIRONMENT FOR TEENS TO THRIVE

Young people are weird and wonderful creatures. They don't often understand themselves let alone anyone else, and when it comes to adults understanding them, well that's a whole other story. It's certainly nothing new and if you're concerned that young people today are getting worse, then don't stress too much. In 400 BC Socrates said:

“Our youth now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for their elders and love chatter in place of exercise; they no longer rise when elders enter the room; they contradict their parents, chatter before company; gobble up their food and tyrannize their teachers.”

More recently Michael J. Fox suggested:

“Teenagers blithely skip off to uncertain futures, while their parents sit weeping curbside in the Volvo, because the adolescent brain isn't yet formed enough to recognize and evaluate risk. “

Throw away all of your preconceived ideas about the behaviour and nature of teenagers. New research suggests that without our turbulent teen years the human race would be, as Dr. David Bainbridge puts it in *Surviving The Teenage Brain*, “short lived and stupid.”

“The brain continues to change throughout life, but there are huge leaps in development during adolescence,” said Sara Johnson, an assistant professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who reviewed the neuroscience in “The Teen Years Explained: A Guide to Healthy Adolescent Development” (Johns Hopkins University, 2009) by Clea McNeely and Jayne Blanchard.

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Teenagers are in a crucial stage of life - here are just a few important facts to think about in relation to the teenage brain:

The teenage brain is in a critical period of development.

As teens become better at thinking abstractly, their social anxiety increases, according to research in the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences published in 2004.

Because an adolescent brain is still developing, it retains much of its plasticity, which allows it to be molded by the environment.

The last part of the brain to fully connect up—well past the teenage years—is the frontal lobe, which houses judgment, insight, dampening of emotions and impulse control.

The brakes come online somewhat later than the accelerator of the brain,” said Johnson, referring to the development of the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system respectively.

At the same time, “teens need higher doses of risk to feel the same amount of rush adults do,” Johnson said.

Taken together, these changes may make teens vulnerable to engaging in risky behaviors, such as trying drugs, getting into fights or jumping into unsafe water. By late adolescence, say 17 years old and after, the part of the brain responsible for impulse control and long-term perspective taking is thought to help them reign in some of the behavior they were tempted by in middle adolescence.

All of these factors make it crucial for creating positive environments and communities which engage young people in strategic and meaningful ways, to ensure they have the best chance at discovering who they are and where they fit in life.

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## 3 UNIVERSAL HUMAN FEARS

According to Gregg Braden, all human beings (including teens) go through life addressing 3 Universal Fears which can also be represented by these 3 questions.

1. Am I loved? (Fear of not being loved)
2. Am I enough? (Fear of being found out)
3. Do I belong? (Fear of abandonment)

The first universal fear underpins all fears as it is directly related to 'self worth', which comes from our survival instinct and the need for love and connection.

The second fear, that we are not enough, that we will be found out to be an imposter, a fake, a phoney is what often drives teenagers to compare themselves to others. Teens are very quick to compare and judge their worth based on looks, labels, brands, clothes, how much money their family has and any number of other external factors. This just increases the anxiety of not being enough because when we compare ourselves to anyone else, we're always comparing the worst we see in ourselves to our best 'impression' of others (it's not even reality we're comparing).

The third fear or the need to belong, comes from the fear of being abandoned. We all have this need to belong, especially teens in the formative years of life. The need to be accepted as part of a tribe or group, to have a family we can feel that we belong to and we have similarities and commonalities.

As trusted adults in the world of teenagers it's not just enough for us to understand these 3 Universal Fears, but in understanding that they exist in every young person we work with we can know that a lot of the behaviors we may come across can be directly linked to one

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of these 3 fears. The majority of the human behavioral issues that present themselves in our world can be directly linked to one of these 3 fears (or the 6 core needs as we will discuss shortly).

So think for a moment about a young person who you have had to deal with recently. They may have been displaying some negative behaviors, could it be that their behavior was a cry for help and a reaction to fear?

Which of the 3 Universal Fears do you think this young person may have been reacting out of?

How could you respond to the young person in a way that helps them feel - Loved, Enough or that they Belong?

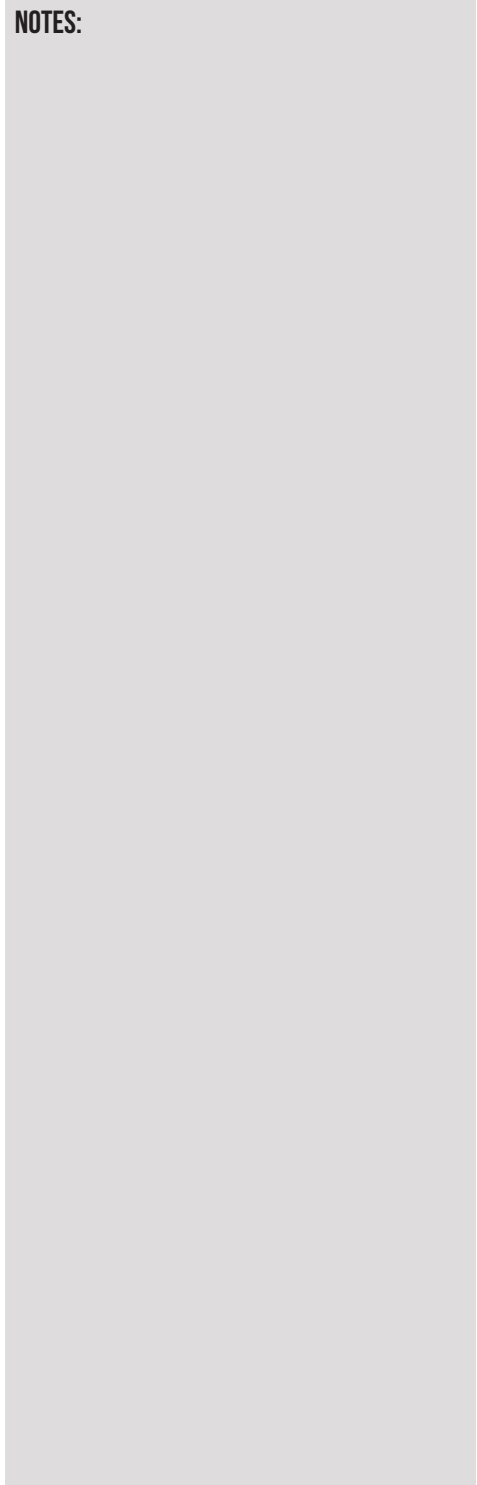
Working with teenagers we all realise that while in an ideal world these three needs would be met by a functional family environment and two loving and functional parents, the reality is we live in a world where not all young people have their primary needs met at home.

So while we might feel that its not our role to show the young person Love it is going to be vital to creating an environment for teenagers to thrive.

Just as a refresher - the 3 Universal Fears again are:

1. Am I loved? (Fear of not being loved)
2. Am I enough? (Fear of being found out)
3. Do I belong? (Fear of abandonment)

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## 3 QUESTIONS ASKED OF ADULTS BY TEENS

Deriving from the 3 Universal Fears every teenager who comes across your path as a student will be subconsciously asking themselves these 3 questions about you:

1. Can I trust you?
2. Are you any good?
3. Do you care about me?

For a teenager to accept you into their circle of trust, or circle of influence they will be asking these 3 primary questions of you.

To rewind back just a touch, with any human interaction we assess the amount of value we place on the words, actions and advice of others and how much we allow it to influence us.

In the early stages of life we create beliefs based on our interactions with the world, the words that are said to us, the examples of behavior that are modelled for us. As we begin to make decisions for ourselves we make decisions and express ourselves through our actions which come from our thoughts and feelings.

The cognitive behavioral model states:

What you THINK - Determines how you FEEL - Determines how you ACT (THINK > FEEL > ACT).

This directly relates to our belief system which we created early on in our developmental phase (0 - 7 years of age).

So... through teenagers observations of you, the way you engage with them, the way you speak to them, the way you engage and

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When you speak with others around them, your habits and your behaviors they will be assessing whether or not you measure up to become a trusted authority figure in their world who they will take advice from, can model their life on and will be influenced by.

It is through these 3 questions, which they are asking at a subconscious level, that the teen will base their evaluation on.

1. Can I trust you?
2. Are you any good?
3. Do you care about me?

If it feels like a test you're right, you're under evaluation from the first second they meet you.

So if you want to position yourself as a trusted authority figure in the lives of the teenagers you work with then make sure you're doing a good job of answering these questions.

Firstly with your BEHAVIOUR - then back it up with your words.

Teens don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care - Show then tell!

Show the teenagers you work with that you can be trusted.

I remember growing up hearing throw away lines like 'do as I say not as I do.' It's lines like that which will ruin any trust or integrity you may have developed with a teenager.

Show the teenagers you work with that you are good at what you do. You don't have to be the best in the world, but how good you are at what you do, the passion you do it with, a desire to be better and to grow, not only shows them that you're good and you can be trusted.

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Yes you're their teacher, but you're also a human being, a member of their community. The more we work together as a community to help each other be our best, the better our community and our world will be.

We show teenagers that we care by being genuinely interested in them, their world, their issues, their passions - and invest time and energy into helping them uncover the gold that is within them.

So my questions for you as you engage and interact with teenagers in your school and classroom:

1. Can they trust you?
2. Are you any good?
3. Do you care about them genuinely?

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## 6 CORE NEEDS OF TEENS

According to Anthony Robbins, who I had the privilege of coaching for at his Global Youth Leadership Summit in San Diego, all human beings are driven by the requirement to fulfill 6 core needs, which again is no different for teens.

They are not just desires or wants, but profound needs which serve as the foundation for every decision we make, they never stop driving us and they never go away.

So by understanding what drives Teens on a day to day basis (similar to the 3 Universal Fears) we can begin to determine how to help teens get to where they really want to be and have a better understanding of why they do the things they do, especially when some of those things are not so positive.

Every teenager is influenced and motivated by the order of importance they place on each of these 6 core needs, and will hold 2 as their primary core needs.

We all want to fulfill these needs in everything that we do on a daily basis, however it is not always in a positive way and not always in a resourceful and sustainable way. So the way that we try to meet these needs can shape our lives and determine our happiness.

So here are the 6 Core Needs of Teens:

1. Certainty
2. Variety
3. Significance
4. Love and Connection
5. Contribution
6. Growth

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## CERTAINTY

This core need may also be referred to as: Security, Comfort, Safety, Control, Stability and Predictability.

Having certainty in their life is linked back to the motivation for pleasure and the avoidance of pain. For some certainty can be boring and monotonous, while for others who have a deep need for certainty they will do their best to avoid the unexpected and attempt to create environments where there is little opportunity for change.

The need for certainty can be met unresourcefully by a teenager staying in a friendship even though they are being treated poorly, but they are happy to stay because at least they are comfortable and secure with not having to make new friends. The pain of staying in the friendship is not as great as the pain of finding new friends or being uncertain.

Helping teens who have a high need for certainty to have certainty in themselves can help them to meet this need for certainty 100% of the time no matter what circumstances are doing around them.

It is when we lose that sense of certainty of self that we search for it in external ways. Often the unresourceful ways are a short term fix that become a long term habit.

Can you think of teenagers in your world who appear to have a high need for certainty?

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## VARIETY

This core need may also be referred to as: Adventure, Uncertainty, Surprise, Novelty or Challenge.

Variety is a physical and emotional need that encourages us to bring the new, the unknown and sometimes chaotic into our lives. We all need some variety in our lives otherwise we go a little crazy. Our bodies, our minds and our emotional well being all require some sense of variety.

Much like the need for certainty or security can be reassuring, the excitement that comes from variety is necessary for us to feel alive.

People who have a deep need for variety try their hardest to do new things and keep the adventure alive in as many areas of their life as possible.

A teen who has a high need for variety may engage in taking drugs, binge drinking, creating drama, risky behavior, regularly changing relationships, always trying new things, new sports, never sticking to the one task.

Helping teens who have a high need for variety, in a resourceful way might involve helping them engage in new challenges and adventures which are not harming their health, opening them up to new ideas, new hobbies, giving them challenges and goals, setting them activities which get them outside of their comfort zone.

Can you think of a teenager in your world who would appear to have a high need for variety?

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## SIGNIFICANCE

This core need may also be referred to as: Recognition, Pride, Validation and Uniqueness

The need for significance is the need to feel special, important, needed and wanted. To satisfy this need, which we all have at some level, people find ways to feel unique or special and to prove or validate their own self-worth.

On the positive side the need for significance causes us to raise our standards and hold ourselves at a higher level of expectation, but if we are overly focussed on significance we can have trouble truly connecting with others and find ourselves doing things just to please people.

Teenagers will often look to meet their need for significance by expressing their uniqueness to stand out and be recognised - dressing outrageously, getting piercings, putting others down, gossip, significance from failure, violence, sad stories or problems about self and expressions of low self-esteem.

Helping teens who have a high need for significance meet their need in a resourceful way can be done by helping them to achieve or succeed at something where they will be recognised by others, helping them set and achieve their goals, being the best at something, standing up for others, helping people who can't help themselves.

Can you think of a teenager in your world who would appear to have a high need for significance?

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## LOVE AND CONNECTION

This core need may also be referred to as: Love, Approval, Communication.

Connection is represented by the human desire to communicate with, relate to and receive love from the people around us. We all need connection with other human beings and we are all motivated to share in and develop relationships with people to meet this need in our lives.

People with a deep need for connection will make different decisions to those who favour significance and often decisions can be based on connecting and being around others.

Teenagers who look to meet their need for Love and Connection in an unresourceful way may present as being needy, always rescuing others, doing things for others at the detriment of self, self harm, unhealthy relationships, connection through unhealthy habits (drugs, binge drinking).

Helping teens who have a high need for Love and Connection to meet this need in a resourceful way would be to help them to connect with themselves, help them with self discovery, learning about their own personality type, assisting them to create opportunities to share with and support others, spending time with loved ones, spiritual expression, connecting with purpose, connection with nature.

Can you think of a teenager in your world who would appear to have a high need for love and connection?

The first 4 needs are the needs of the personality or our physical needs, and how well these are satisfied defines how successful our life is. The final 2 are needs of the spirit or the soul and relate to living a fulfilled and happy life.

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## GROWTH

Through personal development, knowledge and learning we fulfill the need for growth in our lives. This core need is what drives us to mature and evolve as human beings.

If something is not growing it is dying so anything that you want to remain, or maintain in your life must be cultivated, developed and expanded.

To maintain and expand things like - money, health, relationships, happiness, love - it must be cultivated, developed and grown.

As humans we must constantly be developing emotionally, intellectually and spiritually to have a sense of fulfillment. Growth expands our skills, awareness and ability to help others, however the most powerful growth is in relation to contribution.

Everything in life is either green and growing, or ripe and rotting.

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## CONTRIBUTION

Finally, we all share the need for contribution. It is manifested in our desire to serve those around us and give love rather than just receiving it.

Contribution is about sharing what we have with others as we all desire to go beyond our own needs and give to others.

It really is in the nature of human beings to want to give back, to leave a mark on the world. Giving to others may mean giving time to community service, making a charitable donation, planting trees, writing a book, or giving to ones children, family or friends.

Not only can everyone contribute in some way but contribution is essential to a sense of fulfillment and to happiness in life. The bottom line is that everything in the universe contributes beyond itself, or it is eliminated.

Which of the first 4 needs drive you the most in your day to day lives and decision making processes?

If you identify teenagers in your world who are trying to meet their primary needs in unresourceful ways do you think you can help them to refocus their energy into more resourceful strategies?

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## SECRET TO CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR TEENS TO THRIVE...

Now that you understand a bit more about:

1. The 3 Universal Human Fears
2. The 3 Questions Asked of Adults By Teens
3. The 6 Core Needs of Teens

My challenge for you, is to use those as a guide for creating an environment in your classroom and in your activities.

In the work I do with teenagers as a Motivational Speaker and Youth Development Coach - much of my approach is in addressing those 3 fears, answering the 3 questions and identifying the core needs to set a foundation to engage, inspire and empower teenagers to:

1. Know themselves
2. Be their best
3. Make the world a better place

Before you can have the right to speak into the lives of teenagers you need to answer the 3 questions (with your actions), address the 3 fears (with your words and your actions) - and THEN you will be positioned for the teenagers to receive from you as a trusted adult in their world.

If you'd like to find out more of the work I do speaking in High Schools, running workshops for teenagers, parents, teachers and youth workers and youth development coaching, please have a look at my website - [www.NathanHulls.com](http://www.NathanHulls.com)

Cheering you on!

Nathan Hulls

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# ABOUT NATHAN HULLS

**“REAL... ENGAGING... INSPIRING... INTERESTING... DYNAMIC... FUNNY... EMPOWERING... UPLIFTING... MOTIVATING!”**

Nathan Hulls is a teen behavior expert, motivational speaker and youth development coach. With more than a decade of hands on real experience, Nathan has earned a reputation as a leading authority on teen behavior, personal development and motivation. Seen on the TODAY show (Channel 9), in the Herald Sun, The Age, Daily Telegraph, PerthNOW, AdelaideNOW and a ‘Girlfriend Guru’ in Girlfriend Magazine, his inspiring personal stories and life changing message reaches thousands of teens every year - Say ‘Hi’ at [www.nathanhulls.com](http://www.nathanhulls.com)

## TEACHER FEEDBACK

“Nathan addressed my Year 12 students at their study camp. The message is a simple one, but delivered with the calibre of many a stand up comic. To get such an empowering, uplifting, motivational message across with laughter and engagement was a real feat without any of the cliched cheese or “whoop”. The message is being revisited in my year level meetings, and my addresses to parents on information evenings. What is the message? Now that would be telling. But in my 16 years teaching I’ve taught all-comers; from the brightest to the most damaged and damaging. This message is a key to fulfillment for all. I’ll be rebooking Nathan.”

**Justin Cooper, Bacchus Marsh Grammar, VCE Coordinator**

“It was great having Nathan at Mildura Senior College today. Speaking to our 900 students in two sessions, Nathan had them all captivated. The presentation was energetic, enjoyable and provided us all with some really important messages about finding the best in ourselves. Thank you Nathan...”

**Sandy Gunn, Assistant Principal, Mildura Senior College**

## STUDENT FEEDBACK

“To be honest, I was only going for free pizza, but I got so much out of your talk. You are a really inspiring and funny guy. I can’t remember your exact words, but I loved the apple seed metaphor, that we all have potential inside us, even if it’s really small!”

“You were amazing today mate, you made me realise how much potential i actually have. your quotes are exactly what people our age need to hear.”

“Thanks nathan for your talk today. it was inspirational, especially since i don’t know what i want to do!!”

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