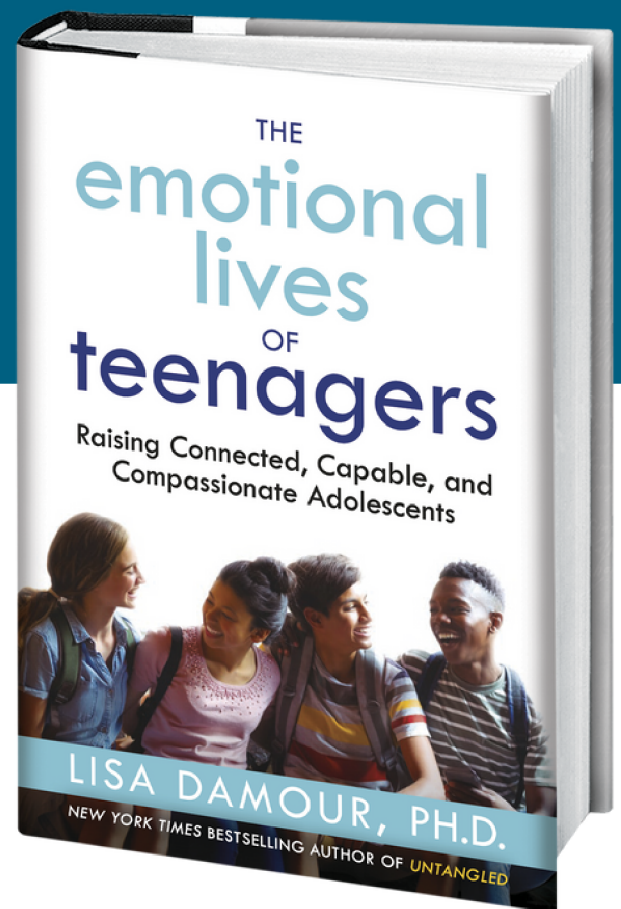


the emotional lives of teenagers

discussion
guide for
parents

Lisa Damour, PhD



Untangling family life.



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INTRODUCTION

- What is like for you when your teen expresses negative emotions? How would you describe your internal reaction? How do you tend to respond to your teen at these times?
- What is your initial response to the book's definition of emotional health, in that it involves:
 - having feelings that fit their context, and
 - being able to manage those feelings effectively?



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CHAPTER ONE

ADOLESCENT EMOTION 101: GETTING PAST THREE BIG MYTHS

- Do emotions serve as a helpful member of your teen's personal board of directors? How or how not?
- How might the information in this chapter on hot and cold reasoning change how you talk with your teen about risky situations?
- Have there been times when you went out of your way to try to prevent the possibility that your teen would experience emotional distress? If so, would you take the same approach if a similar situation presented itself again? Why or why not?
- Using the criteria presented in Chapter One, how would you evaluate your teen's overall mental health?
 - Do your teen's emotions (even the intense, negative ones) tend to fit and be proportional to the circumstances?
 - Does your teen tend to rely on harmless strategies to gain emotional relief?
 - Does your teen tend to employ defense mechanisms that ease psychological pain without distorting reality?



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CHAPTER TWO GENDER AND EMOTION

- What's your sense of how gender socialization has influenced your teen's expression of emotion?
- Does your teen tend to manage upsetting feelings by:
 - discussing them – as girls often do,
 - seeking distraction – as boys often do,
 - or by using a combination of these (and perhaps other) strategies?
- How does your teen express anger? Can they comfortably share feelings of vulnerability? Do gender roles influence how the adults in your home express and respond to emotions? If you are raising a teen who belongs to a marginalized group, how do you think that experience has shaped your teen's emotional life?
- If you are raising a Black teenager, how have you addressed the emotional impact of adultification on your adolescent? If you are not Black, what steps have you taken, or could you take, to address the impact of systemic racism on Black adolescents?
- How has becoming a teenager impacted your teen's self-esteem? What part have traditional, and perhaps nontraditional, gender categories played in your teen's emerging identity and sense of self-worth?



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CHAPTER THREE

SEISMIC SHIFT: HOW ADOLESCENCE PUTS A NEW SPIN ON EVERYDAY LIFE

- How is your teen coming along with the separation-individuation process? How does your teen respond to the similarities and differences in your teen's "brand" and your "brand"?
- What are the main points of friction between you and your teen? How has having a teen helped you grow?
- How do you feel about your teen's relationship with social media and digital technology? In what ways does technology make your teen's life better – and worse?
- How would you describe your teen's friendships? Knowing that the quality of adolescent friendships bears heavily on the health of future adult romantic relationships, do you have any concerns about your teen's ability to make and keep friends?
- How does your teen approach academic work? How might the "school-as-mandatory-buffet" metaphor influence how you talk with your teen about disliked aspects of school?



CHAPTER FOUR

MANAGING EMOTIONS, PART ONE: HELPING TEENS EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS

- What is your initial reaction to the framework presented at the start of this chapter: That emotion regulation involves two complimentary processes – finding ways to express feelings and, when needed, finding ways to bring them under control?
- How comfortably and fluently does your teenager put feelings into words? How have you typically responded when your teen describes being in emotional distress? Having read Chapter Four, might you respond differently going forward? If so, how?
- Under what conditions is your teen most likely to open up? If they tend not to talk about feelings, why do you think that's the case? Does your teen need time to reflect on emotions before talking about them or are they wary of being put on the spot? Might a past interaction with you have left your teen feeling cautious about sharing closely held thoughts and feelings?
- Does your teen express emotions non-verbally, such as making or listening to music, engaging in physical activity, or channeling feelings into creative activities? If so, what wordless strategies does your teen prefer?
- Do you worry that your teen relies on unhealthy strategies for emotional expression? If so, how have you addressed those concerns?



CHAPTER FIVE

MANAGING EMOTIONS, PART TWO: HELPING TEENS REGAIN EMOTIONAL CONTROL

- Teens often use distractions to manage their upset feelings. When in distress, does your teen tend to employ a preferred form of distraction? Are there times when your teen's use of distraction gets in the way of things that your teen needs to do? If so, how have you - or might you - talk with them about the upsides and downsides of distraction?
- What comforts does your teen turn to when upset? Are there ways that you can support their use of preferred comforts, such as the parent who brought the beloved family dog along to pick up her son at the end of what she suspected might be a very hard day?
- How much and how well does your teen sleep? Have you noticed a link between your teen's sleep habits and their ability to regulate intense emotions? If your teen needs more sleep, what steps might you both take to make that happen?
- Raising teenagers stirs up intense feelings in parents. What aspects of raising a teen have been most emotionally challenging for you? How well do you feel you've been able to manage your own emotions throughout your child's adolescence? Has having a teen changed your perspective on events from your own teen years? If so, how?
- Do you have concerns that your teen relies on unhealthy strategies for regaining emotional control? If so, how have you addressed those concerns?



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CONCLUSION

- Has reading **The Emotional Lives of Teenagers** changed how you regard and respond to your teen's emotions? If so, how?
- What questions do you still have about your teen's emotional life, or about adolescent psychological development in general?

