THE INSTITUTE FOR
LIFE COACH TRAINING

TOMORROW'S
LIFE COACH

Volume 3, Issue 6 June 2004

Navigating Adolescence: Coaching Teens and Their Parents

Coaching parents and families through life's ups and downs is an inspiring experience. As a therapist turned coach, I find that many families are seeking the immediate relief that a coaching approach provides. This is particularly true with the parent/teen dynamic. The initial phone call that I receive is usually the same: "My teen has been through three therapists already and nothing has helped. My child needs someone to help him/her get a clue about how to make decent choices and get it together. We are not interested in rehashing the past—we need to move forward and make progress. For that matter, I need help figuring out how to manage all of this. Can you help?" My answer is usually a resounding, "YES!"

Parents of teens, and teens themselves, are drawn to the coaching model because it provides them with the opportunity to set concrete goals with someone who will support them through the process in an unthreatening way. Please don't misunderstand; I know there are plenty of therapists who might take this same approach. However, as coaches, we truly walk alongside our clients and support them in their process. The coaching relationship is simply different, and both teens and their parents love it.

If you are considering venturing into the wonderful world of coaching teens and their parents, here are a few tips to keep in mind. First, always keep the parent informed of when you will be dialoguing with the teen and what the goals for that coaching session will be. A quick e-mail can take care of that.

Second, it is important to strike a good balance between maintaining a confidential relationship with the teen while respecting the parent's desire to be kept in the loop. Openly discuss with the teen what he or she is comfortable with in terms of relaying information to the parents. Then, explain your personal policies on this issue to both the parent and the teen.

Third, it will be important to establish accountability. Developmentally, most teens have not reached a maturity level that allows for them to fully understand how their decisions today impact results days or weeks from now. Given this, it takes patience on the part of the coach and an ability to effectively relay this concept to the parents so that the teen feels supported and not unnecessarily pressured.

Finally, parents of teens often feel confused and frustrated as their otherwise loving and cuddly kids turn into independent, opinionated people. Having a coach in the picture provides them with a sense of reassurance as they work to develop and strengthen their skills of raising an adolescent.

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It is a great feeling to assist parents and teens as they make their way through the often tenuous years of adolescence. Being invited to join parents on their journey and to play a part in the wellness of families as a coach is quite an honor.

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