



excerpt from
WISE-MINDED PARENTING

FOREWARD

by **Daniel J. Siegel, M.D.**

Parenting is a challenging long-distance course that can also be one of the most rewarding adventures we have in life. The transition from parenting in the early years of childhood to adolescence is huge. This book will make that transition smoother, and the experience of being a parent more effective and enjoyable for you.

The journey of parenting becomes more complex and confusing as our children enter the preteen period, or “tween” years, when transformations in their bodies and changes in their social worlds bring on new requirements for how we approach our parenting role. As these children move on into the teen years, maturation of the body continues with important reconstruction of the brain itself, making teens prone to abrupt emotional shifts that can be confusing for any parent.

What can we do with these new ways our sons and daughters are behaving, thinking, and feeling? Given that research clearly demonstrates that what we do as parents matters greatly in shaping the development of our children’s and teens’ minds, how can we parent them so that they are equipped with the essential abilities to not only survive this challenging period, but also thrive? In *Wise-Minded Parenting*, you have a magnificent tool kit to help you become the parent you will be proud to be—one who knows what can be known during this beguiling period, and understands how to interact with your adolescent so that they can be given the best opportunity to become resilient in the face of stress, kind and compassionate to themselves and others, and prepared with a lifelong inner strength to face the complex and rapidly changing world. With these skills, your tween and teen will emerge from these years not only able to meet life’s demands, but to find meaning and purpose in their lives.

Reading such offerings about a single book, you might think I am the author’s brother! But the truth is that I am a parent of two adolescents, as well as a child and adolescent psychiatrist, and an educator in the field of mental health, working within an interdisciplinary approach called interpersonal neurobiology. I am not Dr. Kastner’s brother. In her clear and well-planned book, written with Kristen Russell, you will find a rich source of easily understood information that draws on a wide array of sciences to support the question: What is the best thing I can do as a parent for my tween and teen? Science and clinical practice are woven seamlessly together

in the chapters ahead to provide you with one of the most articulately expressed, useful sets of research-validated parenting strategies you’ll ever find.

In these pages, you will learn the basics of how the parent-child attachment relationship forms the internal foundation that sets the stage for how adolescents move through their important transition from child to adult. You’ll explore vital ideas about the brain and how our ability to develop self-control—how we regulate our feelings, thoughts, attention, impulses, and behaviors—is formed by the experiences we have at home and in school. When this self-control is applied to our “work” at school, we learn to become disciplined in our efforts and to realize that how we try shapes how we academically succeed. That is a lesson that can be generalized in everything an adolescent will do later in life, from work settings to interpersonal relationships. Effort is needed for success in life. Parents are the first teachers for this important life lesson.

You’ll also discover how research has shown that relationships shape nearly everything in our lives, from our physical health to our mental development. We thrive socially when our connections with others are honored and cultivated.

Wise-minded parents learn to provide the kind of authoritative guidance—filled with warmth, limit setting, and the age-appropriate honoring of the child’s growth of autonomy—that research has repeatedly shown, across cultures and socioeconomic status, to be the best approach to helping our offspring grow well in their emotional, social, and intellectual lives. Being authoritative, and not excessively permissive or authoritarian, is a skill that you can learn, if you are not already there. Science has demonstrated that when you bring this authoritative approach to your children, it raises the likelihood that they will flourish emotionally.

And if all of this were not enough, the book goes even further to explore the science of how personality is formed, and what we can do as parents to help our children develop key character elements, such as kindness, honesty, love of learning, optimism, collaboration, and even social and emotional intelligence, that support a healthy life in adolescence and adulthood. We learn how to bring more positive emotions into our family life, filling our inner and interpersonal lives with gratitude, a sense of



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generosity, and a feeling of connection to others. Character is built on a foundation of solid physical health, and in the final chapter you'll find an excellent overview of the crucial elements of daily life, including sleep, eating, and physical activities, that support a healthy lifestyle.

Throughout the book, you'll come upon sections that help you practice what is taught, learning how to reflect on what things are like in your family, and how to make your approach as a parent more effective and more rewarding. There are numerous immersions in important topics, such as how we can deal with the onslaught of digital media in all our lives and how changes in sexual behavior have been altering the nature of friendships during this important period of life. The authors leave no stone unturned, and we, the readers, are the immediate beneficiaries of this beautifully constructed book. The next in line to reap the wonderful gifts this work offers are our tweens and teens, whose lives will be greatly enhanced by the skills and knowledge we acquire as their parents. What better gift to give to our children—and to ourselves—than this comprehensive and scientifically based set of effective strategies to help our adolescents thrive?

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INTRODUCTION

Do seemingly benign interactions with your tween or teen often inexplicably turn nasty? Does a simple, offhanded comment trigger a response dripping with sarcasm or rudeness? Does it sometimes feel as if you are living in a powder keg of pent-up anger? If you answered yes to some or all of the above, take heart; you are probably the parent of a normal teenager. For those parents lucky enough to live in a still-harmonious home, take a deep, appreciative breath and know that someday soon, your child might just change the game, leaving you scratching your head over the complicated—and emotionally loaded—new ground rules.

Navigating the tween and teen years is a challenge for any parent, and even the calmest and wisest among us struggle with this crucial phase of our child's development. Raising a happy, healthy, and successful teenager is a serious undertaking, and doing so requires all sorts of skills that most of us don't naturally possess.

As if that weren't enough, the whole thing seems to sneak up on you. You've made it through the sleep-deprived infant phase, the busy, boundary-testing toddler and preschool days, and the ever-changing elementary school years. You have a little more freedom, maybe a little more "me" time; you can even squeeze in a date night here and there. Your child is probably more and more independent, but still affectionate and generally does as you ask. This is what you've been waiting for: All that hard work has finally paid off!

And then one day, your family life becomes tumultuous. Your good parenting is no longer enough. Your best efforts meet with failure. You are made to feel that everything you do is intensely annoying, irrelevant, and uncool.

It's a hard landing for most parents, and it can leave many of us feeling defeated, frustrated, and as unsure of ourselves as when we first held our newborns. The good news is that you have far more—and far better—resources to draw upon than ever before; new research in the fields of neuroscience, child development, and psychology offers greater understanding and insight into our children's development. And that's where this book comes in, merging the most recent information on adolescence with a unique framework to help parents navigate this new phase in their child's life—and their own.



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Recent research shows that negotiating the inevitable family minefield of the tween and teen years is infinitely easier for parents who develop a certain set of skills. We call these parents “wise-minded,” borrowing the term from an emerging system of treatment called dialectical behavior therapy (DBT). In the following pages, you’ll learn much more about DBT, and about compelling new research on adolescents, families, and neuroscience, which, along with my thirty years of clinical practice, inform this book.

Simply put, wise-minded parenting is what happens when you balance both sides of your mental equation: rational thought and emotion. You become wise-minded when you combine the power of thinking with a keen understanding of your emotions—and your teen’s—to come up with thoughtful and effective ways of handling difficult, upsetting, and emotionally complex situations.

To do this, however, you must first reach a calm physiological state. This allows you to access both cool-headed decision-making (in DBT, this is called “reason mind”) and the ability to quell the intense distress of your emotions (or “emotion mind”). Mindful parenting, a popular style of child rearing these days, is a start, because it emphasizes the importance of empathy and emotional awareness. Building on that awareness, wise-minded parenting allows you to nurture your child with a steady hand, informed by a deep understanding of his or her inner emotional landscape and a clear idea of what’s reasonable to expect. Learning and utilizing this practice can restore harmony to your home by helping you avoid emotional firefights with your kids. You’ll discover how to contain blowups, to respond to them effectively when they do happen, and to develop deeper empathy for your continually evolving—and sometimes downright chaotic—child.

Whether you are feeling increasingly disconnected from your teenager, seeing the first inklings of a troubling trend, or witnessing worrisome and unacceptable behavior, there are practical ways to turn the tide. It takes time and energy—both increasingly spare commodities in our fast-paced, modern lives—so *Wise-Minded Parenting* provides you with easy-to-use techniques, activities, and tips, and even mantras—simple phrases to hold in mind as you work to evaluate and improve your interactions with your kids.

Quizzes, tips, action plans, practice scripts, and real-life vignettes—all grounded in fifty years of parenting research and current evidence-based treatment models—will help you better support your teen as he or she develops the seven essentials for a healthy and successful future: secure attachment, self-control, academic success, social thriving, emotional flourishing, strong character, and physical health. You’ll learn why these are the seven essentials, and determine which are solidly under construction in your child and which are most important to work on right now.

As you progress through each chapter, feel free to write your answers directly in the book, or keep a notebook or journal handy. The work you do here will help you assess your family situation, prioritize tasks, and plot your course.

Unlike parenting books of the past, *Wise-Minded Parenting* offers vital material across multiple platforms—with companion mobile, online, and interactive elements—making it easy for parents to incorporate new skills into their busy lives. Through the mobile-enabled *Wise-Minded Parenting* website (wisemindedparenting.com), you’ll get free access to a program of “Wise-Minded Parenting Skills,” which features fifty-two exercises you can use to support your progress. The *Wise-Minded Parenting* website offers a meeting place where you can interact with other parents and the experts to swap ideas, share successes, and, sometimes, just commiserate. More information about adolescent development can be found in the Parent Resources section at the end of this book.

Our world is moving ever faster, and parents have to fit family life into an ever-narrowing window of time. Most of us are expected to simultaneously hold down a job, maintain a household, raise terrific kids, and uphold community obligations. That’s nothing new, but what is new is that in more families than ever, both parents work; in 2010, nearly 65 percent of all families had both parents in the labor force, according to the U.S. Census. That same year, more than nine million families with children younger than eighteen were being maintained by single mothers.

Teens are busier than ever, too, and hyperconnected to each other and to media in unprecedented ways. As a result, peer influences, always a crucial part of shaping self-perception and actions, are even more amped up. As teen-peer connectedness explodes in this technology-saturated world,



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teen-parent connectedness is taking a beating. We need new tools for addressing our kids' ever-changing social-media worlds, prioritizing family time, and competing for the attention of our already tuned-out teens.

And while we're at it, we need to remember that teenagers are on a thrilling—and often excruciating—ride. Understanding the fundamental social, emotional, and neurological dynamics is key. Why? Because with understanding comes empathy, and, for many of us, an increase in patience and peacefulness—two parenting skills that are so crucial, they inspired the creation of my previous book, *Getting to Calm: Cool-headed Strategies for Parenting Tweens + Teens*, co-written with Dr. Jennifer Wyatt.

Getting to Calm presented management approaches for “hot button” teen behaviors to help parents. In *Wise-Minded Parenting*, I've collaborated with co-author Kristen Russell to bring you the “best practices” of effective parents who help their teens master the seven essentials vital to future happiness and success. After reading this book, you'll better understand the unique experience of being a teenager and develop calmer, more resourceful ways of navigating these challenging years.

Raising successful teenagers is a lofty enough goal for any family. For those struggling with specific problems associated with depression, divorce, abuse, or disability, the skills presented in this book may not be appropriate, or go far enough, and professional assistance should be sought. But for most of us coping with the mixed, messy bag that is adolescence, the news is promising: Most teenagers turn out OK, even terrific.

From time immemorial, parents have sought help from any and all sources—friends, family, the experts—as they guide and support their teen. The aim of *Wise-Minded Parenting* is to provide that helping hand in the form of a research-based, user-friendly, multimedia support system as you work to reach the ultimate goal: a warm and loving connection to your happy, thriving, and successful teen.