

## **Guiding Teen Girls On The Rocky Road To Womanhood**

A psychotherapist specializing in women's issues discusses how older women can guide teen girls into becoming strong, healthy, happy, and confident women.

In this article, I'd like to discuss a topic very dear to my heart- guiding teen girls into womanhood. Why do I feel so passionate about this subject? Well, I was one once many moons ago and I can't believe I made it out alive and am now a well-adjusted, mostly-healthy woman. One of the things I say to teen girl clients a lot is, "I hope there's no such thing as reincarnation because I wouldn't want to have to come back and be a teenager all over again!"

I'm sure you're sitting there nodding ferociously thinking, "I hear you, sister!" And I'm also guessing that your teen years were far from easy and idyllic. I'm also guessing that whether you're a mother, an auntie, a teacher, a counselor, or just plain 'ol friend of a teen girl who is near and dear to your heart, you'd love to be able to give her something, *anything*, to make her journey along the rocky road to womanhood a little less difficult.

"But what can I possibly give her?" you ask.

My answer: MORE THAN YOU WILL EVER KNOW.

Why do I say this?

Because having worked as a therapist with teen girls and women for over a decade, I have learned one very valuable thing: teen girls need guidance from their 'elders' (that's you and me!) in order to navigate their way through the myriad experiences and choices that face them in their adolescent years.

I think that we, as women, constantly negate what our gifts are and what we're capable of, and being a role model to a young woman who needs help and guidance is no exception. I have experienced this first-hand with my 18-year-old sister (huge age gap between us as you can figure out). When she was born, I had never felt a love so deep and so great. Our bond was immediate. I can still remember holding her little 8-pound body in my arms at the hospital and looking into her face and realizing that this little person was a miracle.

Because my mother was on her own and I still lived at home, I became a sort of 'second mother' to my little sister. We were a family of three girls (and still are!) and I cannot say enough about the bond we all have with one another- three generations of women with similar genes, great intellect, compassion, beauty, and elegance (I'm saying these things in order to encourage you to also sing your own praises and those of the women in your family- it feels really good- try it!). However, we are all very different and unique

and have learned how to honour our differences and even celebrate them in ourselves and each other.

How is this possible? Well, I believe that it has a lot to do with the fact that all three of us are highly inquisitive, open-minded, loving, and thoughtful women. And then add that we all see the virtue of learning from one another. And while a big part of this involves learning from our ‘elder women’; it also goes both ways. I know for a fact that my sister is one of my greatest teachers, and that I am also one of my mother’s...and vice-versa. That’s the beauty of it- it flows in many different directions.

I believe that this phenomenon is as natural to girls and women as breathing, but somewhere along the way, we lost it. We are however, en masse, reclaiming this beautiful style of learning by the evidence of countless rites-of-passage ceremonies for girls and women being performed and added in many spiritual faiths.

As well, there are some fabulous books out there which speak to this innate need to both initiate, and be initiated into, womanhood and there are too many to list here, but I urge you to check them out and find the ones that speak to you and the teen girls in your life.

One that I have recently completed is based on this concept entirely, featuring 20 women’s stories of their teen years and the wisdom they have gained since then. It is called, “What Your Mama Can’t or *Won’t* Teach You: Grown Women’s Stories of their Teen Years” and can be ordered at: [www.guidebooktowomanhood.com](http://www.guidebooktowomanhood.com)

I want to leave you with something to get you started on the path to guiding teen girls in a positive way.

### **“Esther’s 10 Tips to Being a Guide and Mentor to Teen Girls”**

1. Make room in your life for at least one teen girl who you feel a bond with and spend time with her regularly.
2. Let her guide your interactions and conversations and don’t assume that you need to be in control. In fact, the more you let her control the time, the more empowered she will be to take charge of other areas of her life.
3. Remind her often of her wonderful qualities and attributes and PLEASE focus mostly on *who she is as a person*; not what she looks like.
4. No matter what she says or does, love her unconditionally and release the temptation to judge. If she even sniffs a hint of judgment coming from you; you run the risk of losing her trust.

5. Never tell her what she SHOULD or SHOULDN'T do- when you are with her, leave your preaching at the door and just be a friend. (A caveat to mothers of teens- you can't really expect to be your daughter's friend but it still helps to not "should" her.)
6. Wipe the horror off your face if and when she reveals things in her life that freak you out (trust me, there can be many). Instead, practice the Zen concept of "loving detachment" and just "be" with her without reacting (this can be most challenging even for those of us who meditate everyday!)
7. Share stories of your own teen years with her, even if it makes you uncomfortable- she will probably learn a lot anyways. Remember, this is for her; not you. Girls need to hear what other women did in similar circumstances and situations in order to make informed choices.
8. Be critical of the media and it's representation of women and encourage the teen girls in your life to do the same. If you want some help with this, get the book, "All Made Up" by Audrey Brashish- it's fabulous and it's written especially for teen girls.
9. Do fun things with her that you both enjoy! Let out your own "inner teen girl" and have some fun! Teens are usually quite good at this and you'll both have a hoot (and a holler if you're lucky!)
10. And lastly, RELAX and be yourself when in the presence of said teen girl. You can lower your standards and be imperfect, fallible, and even downright goofy if need be. Girls don't need "perfect" role models- there are enough of those out there who lead them to starving themselves to death and other dangerous behaviours. Be real. Be authentically you. Be genuine and proud of who you are. I can't think of a better role model than that!