Navigating the Road: Hope-Filled Tips for Parenting Teens

By Karen Gauvreau
Author at Lightly Frayed
Ah, tricycle days.
Walking beside chubby feet pedaling to the next adventure.
Within arms reach.
When a hill arrived, our hand gently nudged the seat.
When a curb blocked the way, we lifted the handles slightly.
*Simple.*
*Slow.*
*Safe.*
Which is not quite like parenting teenagers.
[ahem]
Parents of teens may more likely say:
*Complicated.*
*Fast.*
*Risky.*
As much as we savor the tricycle years, we know next steps are important.
So we try to loosen our grip.
We change the way we nudge up hills.
And we coach from a few steps away.
His tricycle has barely been put away. Suddenly, my boy is learning to drive and also strengthening my prayer life. *Please Lord, don’t allow him to live with the guilt of wrecking my minivan.*
*Amen.*
To prepare for his test, we learned everything about road signs and hazards. And this book was born.
Can you see me waving?
I am travelling with my husband and four boys, in the lane right beside you.
We are learning as we go.
If you pull over at the next stop we can sip coffee and swap stories. We’ll find common threads of sharp curves and wide open roads.
My treat.
TRUTHFULLY SPEAKING

Wouldn’t it be easier to let our teenagers sit in the driver seat, if we were right beside them, holding the actual steering wheel?  
#missingthetrike  
#kiddingnotkidding
When my gas light blinks at me, I know I can still drive to church, stop for groceries and drop off library books before I need to fill up.

[if you tell my husband, we can’t be friends]

I know it’s irrational. I could conquer my list after filling up. The only thing I’d be missing is the chance to spend time at the side of the road flagging down strangers.

But I keep pushing, never wanting to slow down.

The lights on the dashboard serve a purpose. We know we shouldn’t ignore them, but we don’t always listen. We try to squeeze out one more task. Cross one more thing off the list. Do. And do. And do. Instead of paying attention to the gauges.

The best way to care for our teenagers, is to make sure we are not running on empty.

Find a way to fill up today. Ask someone to hold you accountable to get your levels in order, to prepare for this important leg of the journey.
READING THE SIGNS

EST.

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CONSTRUCTION AHEAD

There is never a convenient time to be stuck in a construction zone. Ever.

We know it is necessary, but why does it have to take so long? Painfully slow speeds. Sudden braking. Stops and starts.

Forming character and healthy habits in our families can resemble a never-ending construction zone.

Patience \[\textit{the jack hammer whirs}\]
Perspective \[\textit{metal clangs}\]
Self-control \[\textit{trucks reverse}\]

Frustration can mount when it seems we are dealing with the same issues on repeat.

Their and ours.

But the final results are worth the struggle.

And we may soon forget the effort it took to get there.

New projects will need attention, but for now we celebrate our beautifully paved road.
If you ask teenagers which road sign represents a parent’s role, I suspect they will say ‘Stop.’
It often feels like we are answering no, not yet or not ever.
When my kids complain about this, I flip it back to them:
*So ask me a question I CAN say yes to. I beg you.*
Is there any more important sign for our safety?
No *(oops – there’s that word again).*
Beyond a restriction, stop signs can mean much more.
Cease movement.
Look both ways.
For parents, stopping can mean...
*I need to calm down before we can discuss this further.*
*I’m pausing to consider my answer.*
Stopping is necessary.
Stopping protects our teenagers and also our relationship.
Because flying through an intersection, or conversation, without a brief stop can lead to much regret.
In fact, I’m considering a marketing campaign to bring back the beauty of ‘Stop.’ With pom poms I will cheer, “Goooooooooooo Stop!”
Which is not even a bit confusing.
“Mom. You still treat me like I’m a kid and I can’t stand it.”
Hard truth to hear.
My tongue is ready for a rebuttal while my arguments are forming.
But if I can yield, and defer to my teenager’s perspective first, we may be able to avoid a collision.
Yielding is...
Thanks for being honest. That must have been hard to say.
Help me understand what that looks like for you.
I will try to change in this area. Will you be patient while I learn a new way?
Yielding is also...
I’m not sure I see it the same way. Can I share my point of view once you’re finished?
Make room.
Defer.
Listen.
Inhale proudly when you follow the yield sign.
But don’t worry. If you misstep, there will be other opportunities.
Probably even by tomorrow.
Speed bumps are not intimidating, but they are important.

How do we drive over them?

Slowly.

With fear and white knuckles?

Goodness no.

After the bump, we know we will return to level ground.

Speed bumps may be inconvenient, but at least they are temporary.

Parenting teens is filled with speed bumps and in our family we call them blips.

*Grumbling.*

*Moodiness.*

*Off days.*

Realizing these will pass allows us to handle them calmly and without panic.

Be mindful of this sign.

Slow down.

Wait for level ground to return.
Years ago our 5-year-old launched a dog walking business. With wobbly crayon letters, he printed:

If we are here, come in and I will walk your dog. If we are not here, go away.

In any other context, ‘Go away’ can really sting. Our teen may make it abundantly clear that they do not want us to enter.

Perhaps they no longer want us in their room. Or we have to be invited in. Or they suddenly pull away and leave us wondering what is going on in their lives.

How are we able to help them navigate when we are not allowed in?

**Respect their boundaries.** They need to pull away from us. It is actually their job. It can feel personal but it is necessary for healthy development. And as we support their boundaries, we give our teenagers confidence to set limits beyond our homes.

The more we force our way into their lives, the more teens pull away. But we can stay available. When we least expect it, our teens will raise an Enter sign and we will be ready.
Without warning, teenagers can hit icy patches and wipe out. They live in a frosty, harsh world, with many pressures causing them to lose balance and crash.

How can we prepare together, so we are not caught off-guard?
Warn of black ice – the danger that is hidden until it does damage.
Reassure them you will always be available to help them reset and regroup.
To find their bearings.

It is futile to yell at the ice. Or begrudge obstacles that push our teenager down. We can not control their environment. But we can train them to spot hazards others believe are inconsequential.
Be alert to your teen’s mood when you connect at the end of the day. The cues may be obvious or require discernment. Do they seem bruised or beaten?
Reach a hand down and lift them back to steady ground. Assure them they can process the fall in a productive way and learn from their wounds.
They may even warn the next in line of hazards.
COURSE CORRECTIONS

What do we do when we realize we’ve made a wrong turn?
We have been too protective. Or too lenient.
We have let things slide.
Or overreacted.
The possibilities are endless.
Hope says it is never too late.
We can always make course corrections.

Turn the wheel a little, and revisit a small area of parenting.
Or crank the wheel hard and reinstate important boundaries.
Give yourself permission to be human.
To change and grow and reset the GPS accordingly.
It is never too late.

Although there may be pushback because new directions can feel uncomfortable.
Admit that you were veering off-course, even slightly.
Have a tough conversation and apologize for any confusion a change may bring.
Own your new perspective and steer purposefully.
There is a time to reflect on mistakes we have made. But *focusing* on the rear view mirror can make us miss our right now life. Or hit a deer.

Karen Gauvreau
At the end of a tough day, you may find me in an unexpected place. Sitting outside my teenagers’ bedroom door while they sleep. This began years ago during a chaotic season of a short fuse and immense guilt. It is the place I go to forgive myself. I reflect on the day and the apologies I offered. Or plan the apology not yet spoken. I pray for peace and the wisdom to move forward. When I stand up, I try not to look in the rearview mirror again.
...I remember what day it is. It is today. Not yesterday.

Rachel Macy Stafford
When my husband and I were dating, he had a health scare. While waiting for test results, we faced a scary unknown. Driving through fog, on my way home from the hospital, visibility was dangerously low. I could only see the patch of road right in front of me. Panicking, I did something I knew not to do. I used my high beams. The light reflected back on the fog droplets and I could no longer see the road. At all.

God whispered:

*Trust me. Really trust me.*

*I know you can’t see in front of you, but I’m here.*

*Don’t try to take control by using your high beams.*

Parenting teenagers can certainly be a foggy journey. With uncertain next steps. Trying to take control is futile, and often makes things worse. Much worse.

Ultimately, we cling to this truth:

*God cares for our teens even more than we do.*

We can trust Him when fog closes in. Low beams. Prayer. And trust.
Blue skies and level ground.
Without an obstacle in sight.
After slippery bits, speed bumps and construction, this is the time to roll down the windows and relax.
Inhale an optimistic breath.
Celebrate smooth travelling and don’t waste a minute dreading the next curve.
Glance over at your teenager often.
Steal glimpses of who they are becoming - the beauty of their present selves.
Maybe even hug them if you’re feeling really brave.
Phew.
We have covered a lot of ground together.
Tending to our dashboards.
Using our mirrors wisely.
And navigating road signs.
While this book is almost finished, more road awaits.
I would love to stay in touch.
To learn about your family, and how I can support you.
Simply send an update on your current adventure to:

karen@lightlyfrayed.com

I treasure each email and promise to respond as soon as I fill up with gas....
Almost forgot. May I send you a practical tool to say thanks for staying until the end?

24 Ideas to Connect With Our Teenagers: 
*Almost* Guaranteed to Not Induce Eyerolls

To get your free copy, simply head to:

https://lightlyfrayed.com/momcon

Moms who have been traveling with me for a while say...

“Thanks for putting words to things we often think but don’t have the courage to say ….the world needs your words.” Jessica, mom of 3

“So many of us feel a breath of fresh air in the smothering business and strain of raising our kids when we read your words.” Carlene, mom of 3