



# Teen: Not A Dirty Word

**Guest columnist Siobhan Mason considers teenagers, those stropky, spotty, hooded, phone-addicted layabouts that hang out on street corners. Cross the street if you see them coming and don't let them into your shop more than two at a time!**

**Ah, poor teenagers.** Demonised by the world and the media. Yet how others see my teen is not how I see him at all. When I look at my 14-year old boy, I see every age he ever was: the gorgeous baby; the chubby-faced nursery-rhyme-singing toddler; the five-year-old collecting his certificate in assembly; as well as the game-obsessed, fuzzy-faced adolescent he is now. I see him as a Beaver, a Cub and a Scout. I see the child he was and the man he is becoming.

The contrast between how we and how the world views our own teens was aptly depicted on my Facebook timeline recently. A pic of a small child dressed up as a bunny was captioned 'How I see my teen on Halloween'. Under 'How other people see my teen on Halloween,' was a menacing monster – not someone you'd open your door to.

Even we adoring parents have a tendency to awfulize the approach of the teen years. I've long feared the day when my sweet children, who used to run and throw their arms around my neck with joy, would become annoyed by my presence

and pick apart everything I say.

That day has come. Feeling for them as they oscillate awkwardly between childhood and adulthood, I'm trying to do my bit by not demonising those teen years. It's really not that bad. I'm at the start of my journey and like to think I'm being optimistic, not naïve.

The first year-and-a-half of teen life with my introverted boy probably hasn't prepared me for the adolescent years ahead with my exuberant daughter who is more inclined to push boundaries. But I have my manual at the ready. This is the book 'Untangled - Guiding Teenage Girls Through The Transitions into Adulthood' by US psychologist Lisa Damour.

It's already taught me that her not letting me into her room is a developmentally normal desire for privacy (and doesn't mean she's up to no good) and that being annoyed at the way I breathe, speak or dance is her subconscious way of 'parting with childhood.'

The parent of a teen is, according to Damour, like the edge of a

swimming pool – a place for them to catch their breath when the deep waters of life get too much. And just as you're enjoying that warm fuzzy reconnection with your child, they will push off into the centre of the pool again without warning and give that concrete edge (ie you) a good kick as they do so. Understanding this has already been surprisingly transformative.

Untangled has gems of wisdom on how to communicate with teenage girls in a way that acknowledges their emotions and offers help in a non-know-it-all way. I put this into practice the other day when my daughter was going through a drama that "you just wouldn't get, Mum."

"Is there anything I can do to help that won't make things worse?" I asked, smugly using one of Damour's lines.

"God, Mum, stop being so reasonable. It's sooo annoying," she replied. I can't win. Oh, the teenage years: part of the rich tapestry of parenthood.

This is going to be fun! ■