

## Welcome to the world of paradox!

If you have a preteen or a young teen living in your home, you gain a whole new appreciation for the concept of paradox. These wonderful kids completely embody every meaning of the word. In so many areas, they seem to be both one thing, as well as the polar opposite! (This can be quite maddening, and paradoxically, quite exciting!) It's all about transition, baby.

*Here's a list of a few you might notice:*

*Young teens can be incredibly trusting, but will only listen to someone who's honest and transparent.* Young teens (and especially preteens) don't have the jaded skepticism of their older teen brothers and sisters. They are very willing to trust – a wonderful characteristic that shouldn't be missed. This time of life is, in many ways, a last-stop refueling station into the long desert drive of adolescence. Take this opportunity to build on that trust, to show that your word is good.

At the same time, they are beginning to develop a more adult sense of the baloney-detection. If you want to be an example to your young teen, if you want to continue in a role of impacting their lives, it's essential that you do so through a commitment to honesty and vulnerability. This can be pretty tough, even threatening. When you're wrong, it's crucial that you admit it. If they sniff out insincerity or hypocrisy in your or your words, you'll quickly lose your place of leadership in their lives.

*They'll catch less than you'd think, yet they're savvier than you'd expect.* This is a tricky one, but so true! Because the life of a young teen is all about change (physical, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, psychological), they have a huge tendency to “in-one-ear-out-the-other” behavior. You've certainly experienced this! You explained to your daughter why a certain behavior is a bad choice, and two weeks later, she seems to have no memory of that discussion. Often that's because she really doesn't have a memory of that discussion!

But at the same time, young teens are developing a very savvy ability to see through charades, to understand when they're being marketed to, and to be aware of consequences. Often what happens with kids this age is that they are savvy enough to understand a situation, but not enough to apply it to their lives.

*They want to be treated like adults, but have the opportunity to act like children.* This has enormous implications. They're caught in an in-between world. They know where they want to go: they know they want to be treated like adults, to have more freedoms, to make more decisions on their own, to not be treated as if they were 4th graders. It's important to talk to young teens with an adult voice, and to begin the move to a come-alongside perspective.

But at the same time, they are still very much children, and need the opportunity to act that out, without pressure to grow up too soon. A girl may move out of her childhood music choices, but still love to play with Barbie dolls. Allow her to live in that place. A boy may desire to sit at the adult table at family gatherings, but still keep a childhood stuffed animal on his bed. Don't rush them into adulthood, but don't treat them like little kids anymore either.

*Some are really young adults, while some are really children, and most are both.* The reality is this: it's not that the young teen living in your home is either a child or a young adult (with some magic line being crossed at some point); it's that she's both, at the same time. Young teens aren't just in-between, they're in an overlap zone – childhood remains, while they've already stepped into the young adult world.

Living with paradox isn't easy! But it's not only the reality of the young teen years, it's somehow part of God's wonderful design for this transition to healthy independence and adulthood. Have fun!