



# TGWAC:(Teenage Guide with Aunty Comfort)

RAISING A GODLY GENERATION

## FOSTERING A STRONG CONNECTION WITH YOUR TEENAGERS

By Aunty Comfort

**T**he teenage years can often feel like navigating a landscape of rapid change, not just for the teenager but for their parents as well. One area where friction can arise is in understanding and engaging with the interests that captivate your teen. While it's natural for parents to have their own perspectives and concerns, fostering a strong connection begins with a deliberate and thoughtful approach. I will take you through three (3) key steps that ensures at every time, T, you and your teen remain on the same team:

**Step 1: Acceptance - Lay the Foundation of Connection.** The cornerstone of any healthy relationship, especially between parent and teenager, is acceptance. This doesn't necessarily mean you have to instantly love or even fully understand your teenager's passion for the latest video game, a particular genre of music, or a specific social media trend. Acceptance, in this context, means acknowledging the validity of their interests to them. Think of it this way: your teenager's interests are a part of their developing identity. Dismissing them outright can feel like a rejection of who they are becoming. Instead, strive to adopt an open and curious stance.

**Ask yourself:** What does this interest mean to my teenager? Does it provide a sense of belonging, a creative outlet, a way to de-stress, or a path to learning new skills?

Can I try to understand it from their perspective? Even if you find it unfamiliar, try to see the appeal. Watch a short video, listen to a song, or ask them to explain what they enjoy about it. Am I communicating respect for their choices? Avoid sarcastic remarks, dismissive language, or eye-rolling. Even if you have reservations, your initial response should convey that you value their thoughts and feelings. Showing acceptance creates a safe space for your teenager to share their world with you. It builds trust and demonstrates that you are willing to engage with what matters to them, even if it's outside your comfort zone. This initial acceptance is crucial for moving towards the next stage.

**Step 2: Win Them Over - Build Bridges of Engagement.** Once you've established a foundation of acceptance, the next step is to "win them over" – not in a manipulative sense, but by actively showing interest and finding ways to connect with their passions. This is where you move beyond passive tolerance and begin to build bridges of engagement. Consider these strategies: Ask open-ended questions: Instead of "Why do you waste so much time on that?", try "What's the most interesting thing about that game?" or "Who are some of your favorite artists in that genre and why?" Participate in small ways: If they love a particular movie series, suggest watching one together. If they're into a sport, ask them to teach you a basic skill or watch a game with them. Even small gestures show you're making an effort to enter their world. Find common ground: Look for any overlaps between their interests and your own. Perhaps the strategy in their video game reminds you of chess, or the themes in their music connect to historical events you're familiar with. Highlighting these connections can create a shared point of reference. Attend their events (when appropriate): If they're involved in a club, performance, or competition related to their interest, make an effort to be there and show your support. Your presence speaks volumes. Be genuinely curious: Your teenager will likely recognize insincere attempts to engage. Approach their interests with genuine curiosity and a willingness to learn. By actively engaging with their interests, you demonstrate that you

value what they value. This can significantly strengthen your bond and make them more receptive to your guidance in other areas. You're no longer an outsider looking in, but someone who is trying to understand and connect with their world.

**Step 3: Provide Guidance - Navigating Their Interests Responsibly.**

Once you've established acceptance and built a connection through engagement, you've earned the right to offer guidance. This stage is about helping your teenager navigate their interests in a healthy and balanced way, without dismissing the importance they hold. Your guidance can focus on: Time management: Help them balance their passion with other responsibilities like schoolwork, chores, and social interactions. Collaboratively create schedules that allow for their interests without neglecting other important areas of their life. Critical thinking: Encourage them to think critically about the content



they consume or the activities they engage in. Discuss potential risks or negative influences in a non-judgmental way.

**Safety and well-being:** If their interest involves online activities, discuss online safety, privacy, and responsible digital citizenship. If it's a physical activity, ensure they understand safety precautions. Potential pathways: Explore if their interest could lead to future learning opportunities, hobbies, or even career paths. This can help them see the long-term value of their passions. Open communication: Maintain an open dialogue about their interests. Encourage them to come to you with questions or concerns related to their hobbies. The key to providing effective guidance is to do so from a place of understanding and respect. Because you've taken the time to accept their interests and win them over through engagement, your teenager is more likely to listen to your advice and see it as coming from a place of care, rather than just parental control. I believe that by prioritizing acceptance, actively seeking to understand and engage with their passions, and then offering thoughtful guidance, you can bridge the gap that sometimes forms during these crucial years. You'll move from being an authority figure standing apart to a supportive friend walking alongside them, fostering a stronger, more trusting relationship that will benefit you both.

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