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Mother-Daughter Conflict

By CWK Network Producer

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-Judy Greenberg, licensed clinical social worker

The holidays aren't all pretty music, sparkling lights and beautifully wrapped gifts. When families spend a lot of time together, there can be conflict and often it's between two people who one day will be the best of friends.

Lauren and her mother had a good relationship, until she turned 13. “We fought all the time,” Lauren remembers. “And it was usually screaming, yelling, drag-out fights,” echoes Lauren's mother Terri Breach.

There was less conversation between the two and less time together. Lauren wanted more control over her life. Her mother didn't want to give it up. “All of a sudden I felt like I just didn't want to be with her anymore,” says Lauren. “I wanted to be with my friends. I wanted to do things on my own.”

“Which was hard,” says Breach. “It was very hard for me because I was like, ‘Wait, I'm still here.’”

“There's a degree of loss there, and moms have to prepare themselves for that,” says Judy Greenberg, a licensed clinical social worker.

Experts say conflict between mothers and daughters typically starts during early adolescence when girls begin to search for their own identity apart from their parents – *especially their mom*. “A lot of it that has to do with, ‘Do I want to be like her or how can I be different and do I want to be different?’” explains Greenberg. When daughters break away, she says, sometimes it hurts.

“It was very hard for me because I still wanted her to be my little girl,” says Breach.

But experts say it's really not personal. It is a normal part of development and what is needed is an extra dose of love and patience. That's what worked for Lauren and her mother. They are once again close to each other.

“Part of it,” says Lauren, now 17, “is that I aged and matured. I'm not a junior high kid anymore. I'm a senior in high school, and so I can understand where my mom's coming from now. And I feel like I enjoy her company more now.”

For Lauren's mother, the key was letting go of her little girl and embracing her emerging young adult. “She is an incredible, beautiful young woman, and I couldn't ask for a better daughter.”

Mother-Daughter Relationships

By CWK Network, Inc.

Many mothers fear a daughter's adolescent years. The mother-daughter relationship comprises conflicting feelings: love, anger, worry, resentment, envy and need. Its dynamics change as each female ages.

When daughters become young adults, the focus of the mother-daughter relationship is the daughter's efforts to become an adult. While this is rewarding for the mother, it is also a significant expenditure of time and energy that focuses on one person — the daughter.

Research shows significant variations in mother-daughter relationships exist between ethnic groups. Euro-American women want to do fun activities with their mothers but also want to maintain certain boundaries. Asian-Indian and African-American women generally turn to their mothers for support, wisdom and advice. Hispanic women tend to want to be dutiful daughters and help their mothers.

The once-prominent fear of growing up to be like one's mother is termed “matrophobia.” Today's mothers and daughters are changing. As daughters hit their 20s and 30s, many, if not most, mothers and daughters admire and agree with each other. In addition:

- Past literature shows that the mother-daughter relationship is considered the most significant of all intergenerational relationships.
- The teen years are difficult for a mother because her daughter is basically a child in a very adult body.
- Conflict arises in even the best relationships because both mother and daughter care greatly for one another.
- Estrangement between a mother and a daughter is a combination of individual, familial and societal factors.
- The reasons why mothers and daughters become estranged can be varied and complex.
- Celebrities such as Jennifer Aniston, Drew Barrymore and Meg Ryan have had well-publicized, toxic relationships with their mothers for a variety of reasons beyond fame and fortune.

There are several reasons why mothers and daughters undergo conflict during adolescence. The most common are:

- As the emotional caretakers of the family, mothers often feel responsible for ensuring each child survives and even thrives during adolescence.
- As daughters are blossoming into shapely young women, their mothers are often in or approaching midlife. Mothers may find it difficult to live with adolescent daughters who remind them of their ever-diminishing youth.
- A daughter's effort to develop her own individuality motivates her to examine her mother's every action. Mothers typically describe feeling scrutinized by their teens.
- In general, women find handling conflict and anger to be difficult.

What Parents Need to Know

Society expects women to be good mothers and holds them responsible, more so than fathers, for good parenting. Often, those who fail might be deemed "bad women."

As hard as it is for most, an important part of parenting is letting go. The best gift a mother can give a daughter — and in turn, as she becomes an adult, that a daughter can give her mother — is permission to be herself. For a mother self-awareness is important, as is not placing undue emphasis, worry and concern on how her daughter turns out.

- Even if you had a great rivalry with your mother, it doesn't mean the pattern must continue with your daughter.
- Realize that all relationships have downsides. A mother and daughter should focus on the positive aspects of their relationship.
- Invest time and energy in your relationship.
- Begin to give your daughter the tools to make her own decisions when she's young.
- Enter your child's world: Listen to her music, even if you hate it. Take a genuine interest in her motivations. Participate in activities together, and be sure some are what she likes, even if it's something you don't normally do.
- Start mother-daughter traditions — it's never too late to begin new ones — and make a promise to keep the traditions alive year after year.
- Trust and communication are key aspects of your relationship. Adult daughters reported that they wanted respect and trust in their relationship with their mothers.
- For minor conflicts, daughters should try to understand the life circumstances, challenges and choices of their mothers.
- When necessary, remind your daughter you are the parent.
- Join a women's group or look into family therapy together to help resolve serious long-standing problems.

Resources

- [Discovery Education](#)
- [iParenting Life](#)
- [Mayo Clinic](#)
- [Pioneer Thinking](#)

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