



HERVIEWFROMHOME®



Do More Than Just Survive Your Tween/Teen Daughter

A Collection of Essays and Inspiration
for the Mother-Daughter Relationship

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PREFACE

Sheryl Gould

Moms of Tweens and Teens

The mother-daughter relationship. It's complicated. It's confusing. It can even be painful.

Such inconsistencies and extreme contradictions would be highly abnormal at any other time of life—unless you're trying to raise a tween or teen girl.

I understand first-hand how complex mother-daughter relationships are. I am the proud mom of two daughters, and I'm pleased to say I survived the teenage years.

I prayed from the day my daughters were born that we'd have a close relationship and that they would feel comfortable coming to me with their problems. Then my oldest daughter hit the tween years, and not only did I wonder if my prayers were heard, but also if we could even get to the other side of the roller coaster of adolescence and everything that comes with it.

As a parenting coach, moms often share how much they struggle parenting their tween and teen daughters. They feel like they're failing. They constantly doubt themselves. They admit they have no idea what they're doing. If there was a strained relationship with their mothers, they don't want to repeat the same mistakes.

And we find ourselves constantly humbled by what our own parents endured in raising us.

We want a daughter to be confident and to know who she is, but it's tough when she is different. We want her to be strong, but not become a mean girl. We want her to find her unique voice, but not be so outspoken she ostracizes others. We want her to be independent, but safe.

How do we untangle the emotional knots we get caught in with our teenage daughters?

I've learned a few things over the years about how to strengthen your relationship with your daughter:

She needs you even if she doesn't act like it. You are her safe place in a stressful world filled with confusing messages about what it means to have worth, value and to be beautiful.

When she pushes you away, remember it's not about you. Try not to take it personally (I know it's hard, and your feelings will get hurt). She's searching for her own identity and trying to figure things out where she fits in this world—and who she is apart from you.

Her behavior may be irrational, and yet take comfort that it's normal. She is a ball of hormones, and her brain is still developing. Remember, she doesn't understand what's going on with her either.

Give her permission to be an emotional mess some days. Instead of trying to get her to calm down or to feel better, give her space to feel whatever she's feeling in that moment, whether it's anger, sadness or anxiety. Lean in and listen instead.

She needs your praise. Instead of pointing out her shortcomings or what she's doing "wrong" look for all that she is doing right, and recognize that (no matter how little it may seem).

Loosen up and have more fun. It's easy to take things way too seriously when you're on an emotional roller coaster that feels like it's jumped the tracks. Understand that this too shall pass. Be silly. Dance in the kitchen. Make sure to have fun and laugh a lot.

Most importantly, be an unconditionally-loving presence. Be as kind, patient and non-judgmental as possible as you journey through these years. Don't allow fear to drive your actions (because it's easy to do). Show up for her. Accept who she is at each juncture and offer compassion, even when you are both at your worst.

Your daughter needs you more than ever right now. Don't ever forget that.

I hope this collection of essays by moms who have been or are currently in the trenches of raising tween and teen daughters inspires you to work on your own mother-daughter relationship, but even more importantly, assures you that you can come out on the other side with a stronger bond.

Warmly,
Sheryl

Sheryl Gould is a nationally recognized parenting expert, speaker, author, and founder and CEO of [Moms of Tweens and Teens](#). Join her on [Facebook](#) or get more information on membership to the [Moms of Teens and Tweens Inner Circle here](#).

God Gave Me Daughters

Elizabeth Spencer

[Guilty Chocoholic Mama](#)

I am a mom of daughters and only daughters.

By “only” I don’t mean there is anything missing or lacking or incomplete about our family. I just mean that all the children given to my husband and me are of the girl variety.

I don’t know what it’s like to have little boys running around the house, yelling and climbing on things and jumping off things and tackling things and wrestling each other and having bodily-noise contests. I’ll never know what it’s like to have a strong, strapping son who’s protective of his mama and who walks me down the aisle when he gets married.

But oh, I do know what it’s like to have a daughter.

I know what it’s like to hear the doctor announce, “It’s a girl!” and to feel a piece of your heart you didn’t know was waiting for anything fall into place. I know what it’s like to have a baby who might one day have a baby of her own. I know what it’s like to kiss a soft head adorned with a crocheted flower on a crinkly satin band. I know what it’s like to pat a tiny bottom layered with ruffles. I know what it’s like to shop for swimsuits with tutus (finally . . . bathing suit shopping that’s fun).

I know what it’s like to nurture someone who will one day be a nurturer herself. I know what it’s like to look into the eyes of a smaller version of yourself and to see both your past and her future there.

I know what it’s like to play Princess Memory. And to be really, really glad when you move on to the chick-flicks and lunch-and-shopping days. I know what it’s like to finally have a use for all those old prom and bridesmaid dresses you kept around just in case you could wear them again. (As if.) I know what it’s like to give someone a gift in an adorable polka dot bag and have her exclaim, before she even gets to the actual present, “What an adorable polka dot bag!” I know what it’s like to be reminded of what you loved as a little girl but to see your little girl loving things you never even dreamed of liking.

I know what it’s like to have a closet stuffed with purses and bags in every imaginable size and color. I know what it’s like to buy bobby pins and hair ties and tank tops in bulk. I know what it’s like to understand hormones and mood swings and crying because you’ve been there yourself. (Usually recently.)

I know what it’s like to look across a room and see a tall, beautiful girl there and to realize, in awe and amazement, that she is your tall, beautiful girl. I know what it’s like to raise your best friend. I know what it’s like to have three of your favorite words be “that’s my daughter.”

Someday, maybe, I will know what it’s like to watch my daughter walk down the aisle on her father’s arm. But until then, I’m so thankful I know what it’s like to have a daughter. I love it so much.

There’s nothing like it.

Elizabeth Spencer is mom to two daughters (one teen and one young adult) who regularly dispense love, affection, and brutally honest fashion advice. She writes about faith, food, and family (with some occasional funny thrown in) at [Guilty Chocoholic Mama](#) and avoids working on her 100-year-old farmhouse by spending time on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Dear Daughter, Do Not Be Perfect

Sherry White

[The Messy Christian](#)

My child.

I don't want you to be perfect.

People will say that you are when you are quiet and sit in your chair without fidgeting. When you get top marks or come in first. When you meet their every expectation.

But you are not perfect. Do you hear me? **You are NOT perfect.** And I'll never expect you to be. Ever.

It's important for you to know this because it's so easy to believe that THAT is what is expected from you. But it's not. It's so important for you to know this because you're going to mess up. Yes, YOU. You will. In small ways and big ways, too. And when you do, if you think it's your perfection that makes you who you are, then this will be devastating to you.

You'll cower and hide and shame yourself. You'll double down out of fear and try even harder to reach that which you can never attain. You'll start to think that THAT is what makes you valuable. And it will follow you everywhere. It will cause you to crave control and let anxiety rule your thoughts. It will trap you in a never-ending cycle of people pleasing and feeling not good enough. **And I don't want that for you. EVER.**

It's so easy to believe that what makes you a treasure is your perfection. But it's not. It absolutely is not. You are a treasure regardless. Do you hear me? You are fearfully and wonderfully made, and there is so much grace for you. SO MUCH.

I don't want you to spend one ounce of your precious life running after elusive perfection. Spend it pursuing Godliness. Yes. Spend it pursuing the passions and talents that God created within you. Yes. Spend it chasing your dreams, taking chances and leaving your comfort zones. Yes. Spend it learning from your mistakes and acquiring the lessons gained. Yes. But, please, don't ever think that perfection is the end goal. Because that will keep you from walking out this life on shaky legs. And there are some paths you just can't go down unless you're willing to do that.

It will keep you from loving others because all you will ever see is their imperfection and you will hate them for it. It will keep you from loving yourself, too. It will keep you hiding your struggles and never letting anyone in to help. It will keep you from really ever knowing God. Because you'll never let His strength be made perfect in your weakness.

Be fearless. Be kind. Be respectful. Be brave. But please, don't be perfect.

Sherry White writes about the messiness of life, parenting, and faith at her blog [The Messy Christian](#). She tries to add her own brand of humor and insight into everyday issues we all face, reminding us that even though we find ourselves in countless messes, God's grace lights the way. She would be thrilled if you follow her on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

4 out of 5 moms agree that
nothing is harder than
parenting a teenage daughter.

The 5th mom clearly does
not have a teenage daughter.

To My Daughter at 9

Whitney Fleming

Playdates on Fridays

OK, dear daughter. Bring it in. Time for a halftime pep talk. Soon, you'll be turning 9. I know. I can't believe it either, but your birth certificate doesn't lie even if I haven't aged a day past 35.

We are at the halfway point of this "raising" you thing. We've been pretty focused on just keeping you alive up until now, teaching you the basics of how to get through this thing called life.

You've learned some pretty important stuff in the process. Like how you smell is important, so take a shower at least every other day—and always assume you have morning breath. Or eating a rainbow does not necessarily mean a pack of skittles, although sometimes that is an acceptable lunch alternative. Or nothing good ever comes from sticking anything up your nose . . . or your sisters' noses. Or in their ears.

You've also learned some pretty important life skills, such as learning to help your friends who struggle in the classroom. Playing on a team can be fun even if you sometimes lose. And perseverance and hard work pay off, especially when trying to learn the elusive cartwheel that took years for you to master.

We've made a great team and rocked this first half of your life, but we only have nine short years left before I'm no longer your coach, before you take this game on all on your own. I'll always be there for you, but before you know it, you'll be flying out of the nest just like those other baby birds.

In this next half, you'll have to make more play calls by yourself, and there are going to be a lot of distractions. Girlfriends, boyfriends (ack!), cell phones, social media, hormones and so many other things will ring loudly in your ears. It is going to be tough to hear me—and sometimes you're not going to listen—but I'll never stop trying.

Although other moms have warned me that the second half is the hard—perhaps the hardest—part of having a daughter, I think we're ready to tackle it. Like any good coach, I've got a game plan, and I know what worked in the first half—no matter how great we did together—probably won't work in the next.

So, as we move into this second half, here's what I want you to know:

1. **Your decisions are important.** One decision can change the trajectory of your life. It takes courage to decide you are not ready for something, and courage to decide to make yourself vulnerable and try something new. Always be courageous.
2. **Maintain your digital privacy.** If you would not walk into the lunchroom and shout it out, don't ever text or share it on social media. Your "friends" list will not adhere to the same standards of discretion about your life as you expect, particularly when hitting the forward button is so simple. And never hit send on an email before double checking who is in the "to" field. Trust me.
3. **Use the right measurements.** Life is not measured in the amount of likes you get on Instagram, numbers on a scale or even your GPA. And there isn't a "thing" you can buy with the money you make that can fill a void in your soul. Always remember that life is about the impact you have on others, so work on building your brain and growing your heart, and the rest will fall into place.

4. **Always believe the best in people.** Girls can be mean. Well, really, people can be mean. There will be a million times when someone says something or does something or you are told about something that rips your heart to shreds. Give that person the benefit of the doubt, and then offer them grace—because when this stuff happens, it is not about you, sweet girl. It says infinitely more about them.
5. **Use your voice.** Never sit idly by while someone else is being treated poorly. Period.
6. **Don't pretend to be something you're not.** I often feel that all those cheesy sitcoms on the Disney channel have watered down your brain cells, but this is one lesson they constantly show that I hope has resonated with you. It feels good to fit in and it feels good to be liked, but you will find that being accepted only when you are pretending to be something you're not is an exhausting, unfulfilling experience. And if I ever catch you acting dumb or helpless to attract a boy, I will ground you. Just kidding (not kidding.)
7. **Take charge of your own happiness.** No one can make you happy. It is a choice you have to make and it is hard. Trying to fill a void in your life with a person—or with another tangible such as food, alcohol, drugs, etc. is a lost cause. Find out what makes you the happiest, and then do that. A lot.
8. **Never diss your sisters or your girlfriends.** You need them more than you know.
9. **You are enough, exactly as you are.** At a minimum of 50 times each day, you will be told you are inadequate, and Photoshop will change what you think is normal. You will feel that your teeth are not white enough. Your hair is too flat. Your boots are cheap. Your thighs touch. Your makeup is wrong. Your voice is too high. Your face is too thin. Your boobs are too big. I wish I could say it gets better, but it doesn't. Do not let these feelings break your spirit and fight against the urge to conform. Love yourself for who you are in this exact moment, because you are perfect. This is a lesson that most of us learn after having kids, but I'm letting you in on it now. You are a gift to this world, and if you ever forget, just ask. I know I'm just your mom, but I have a long list of compelling reasons why you are awesome.
10. **The best is yet to come.** The next nine years will have a lot of highs and lows, but rest assured that no one wants to peak in high school, and you have the best that life has to offer sitting before you. And as it becomes less often that you reach back to grab my hand or beg me to lay with you for just five more minutes, or think I'm the smartest person in the whole wide world, I'll always be there for you — even when I let you fall before raising you back up.

Whitney Fleming is a freelance writer, social media manager, and mom to three teenage daughters. You can find her on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

Dear Daughter as You Move On To Middle School

Valli Vida Gideons

My Battle Call

There are a few things I want to share with my daughter about the strangely awesome rollercoaster ride she's about to take called middle school.

1. **Wear a bra.** Otherwise known as an over-the-shoulder-boulder-holder. I know you're going to feel self-conscious about it at first, but boobs are part of growing up. Everybody (if they're lucky) has them. And you were born to me. So, Ummm . . . hello? You might as well accept it. Strap 'em in and move on.
2. **Sex: don't believe what your friends say.** Trust me when I tell you they are clueless on this subject, and probably don't know what the heck they are talking about. Instead, ask me anything and everything, no matter how much it makes us blush. After all, I know a few things when it comes to sex because I've done it (at least twice) which makes me smarter than most 12-year-olds.
3. **Sports: keep playing them.** No matter which ones you choose, you are less likely to engage in sex, drugs, and other kinds of high-risk behaviors if you play sports. Show up ready to play with passion, heart, joy, and effort. Always.
4. **Boys: don't believe anyone who tells you a boy being mean to you translates to him liking you.** Getting attention through hurtful actions, physically or mentally, is not love. Plus, you're too young for serious relationships, anyway. Boys can be just friends. And NO always means NO.
5. **Booty shorts: Cover your butt.** That is all.
6. **Humble pie: learn to eat it.** Frequently. Say sorry when you are wrong. Accept responsibility for your mistakes. Have confidence and opinions but know you don't know it all.
7. **Moods: they are gonna swing.** Sometimes minute-to-minute. Take a deep breath and know it'll pass. And I will love you even when you feel unlovable and are mean to me.
8. **Be you.** Continue to be a square peg. Because your uniqueness is what will ultimately allow you to change the world. Never conform. Don't bother trying to fit in. Keep beating to your own drum.
9. **Drama: nobody has time for that crap.** Walk away from situations that don't serve you. But, never be indifferent. Speak up for those whose voices are softer. See it, own it.
10. **Social media: it's not happening.** Our house, our rules. You will thank me someday. Get "likes" through real relationships. Friends aren't made to be collected by way of followers. Instead, work to make authentic ones.
11. **Be kind.** You never know who may need a light in their life. Try being someone's ray rather than putting others in your shadow. You don't have to be friends with everyone. In fact, you should choose wisely. But, be inclusive. Leaving others out is mean. Extend grace and compassion to others.

12. **Be aware.** Invite those outside your circle to join you. Reach out to the kid sitting alone. Make eye contact. Introduce yourself. Be bold. Don't give a darn what others think.
13. **Explore.** Play an instrument. Try out for the school play. Always have a good book handy. Understand math and writing are muscles; the more you use them, the stronger they will get.
14. **Know you've been given many gifts, most of which will take you decades to realize.** You will flub up. Sometimes embarrass the heck out of yourself. But keep trying new things. Embrace your failures and learn from them because it's all part of being uniquely YOU!
15. **In the end, know you are a child of God.** Pace yourself. Greatness awaits.

Valli Gideons is a military bride who writes about raising children with cochlear implants and other things from the heart. You can find her at www.mybattlecall.com or on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

Dear Kids,

My love will wrap itself
around you whether you
want it or not.

There's nothing you could
ever do that would
make it stop.

Not ever.

Jess Johnston

Dear Daughter, Hide These Truths in Your Heart as You Become a Woman

Heather Duckworth

Love, Faith & Chaos

I was typing at my computer from the back porch when the sounds of giggles interrupted my thoughts. I looked up to see my daughter jumping on the trampoline with her friends. I watched them for a few minutes, marveling at how easily they get excited over the simplest things.

She is only 11—balancing between childhood and the teenage years. Innocence and joy radiate from my daughter and I don't want the world to change her. Peer pressure and social media and TV can influence young girls and although I will do everything in my power to protect her, I know these things can eventually seep into her life. I am just now beginning to feel the weight of the responsibility in raising a girl—teaching her to be strong and confident, yet also be kind and giving. There are so many things I want my daughter to know deep in her heart as she grows into a young woman.

I want her to know that she is the daughter of the King and that God loves her always and forever. I want her to trust in His plan for her life and know God will never abandon her. I want her to not only pray, but to have a relationship with God in such a way that she seeks Him out in all that she does.

I want her to never be afraid to use her voice, yet I want her to always speak with kindness and respect.

I want her to always feel confident yet never think she is better than anyone else.

I want her to always be kind, yet never let anyone take advantage of that kindness.

I want her to feel beautiful, yet always know that true beauty shines from within.

I want her to love her body and feel comfortable in her skin, yet respect herself enough to be modest.

I want her to know that she is worthy and valuable, yet she does not need a man to make her feel that way.

I want her to know that although I desire to be her friend, I will always be her mom first.

I want her to know she will have failure and disappointments but those do not define who she is and her reaction to them will be more important than her mistakes.

I want her to know true friends will never be jealous or hurtful, but will instead celebrate her successes and comfort her sorrows. I want her to find her tribe who will encourage, uplift, inspire and love her for who she is. And likewise, I want her to do the same for them.

I want her to know hard work and good grades are important, but never more important than how she treats others.

I want her to know she is deserving of love and respect and should accept nothing less. Ever.

I want her to help others without ever expecting anything in return.

I want her to believe in herself and dream big, but never sacrifice her integrity or morals to get where she wants to be.

I want her to know the power of positivity and hope and spread it to others.

I want her to love with sincerity and compassion, never judging or gossiping.

I want her to know that although she will never be perfect, she will always be good enough.
I want her light to shine bright in this world with God's love.
I want her to be happy, but know happiness is a choice she has the power to make.
I want her to work hard, yet know that fun and laughter are good for the soul.
I want her to live with gratitude and never take the simple things in life for granted.
I want her to take risks and be bold, yet always be safe and not reckless.
I want her to know there are mean people in this world, but she is not one of them. Never stoop to their level.
I want her to know she is brave and strong and confident, even on those days when she doesn't feel like she is.
I want her to know she always has the right and the power to say NO.
I want her to know she is my heart and always will be no matter how old she gets.
I want her to know I will always be her biggest fan, loudest cheerleader and her most faithful prayer warrior—even on those days when she thinks I am her biggest enemy.
But most of all, I want her to know how much she is loved, adored, and treasured. Always and forever. No matter what. And I hope she knows I will always be here—watching from a distance—praying for her every day as she makes her way in this world.
Oh, how I wish it was as easy as me telling my daughter these things and her believing them. But I know she will have to learn these things on her own as she experiences life.
In the meantime, I will keep whispering these truths into her ear, hoping they will eventually stick and she will believe them deep in her heart and soul, so she can grow into the beautiful warrior I already know she is.

Heather Duckworth is a wife and mother to 5 awesome kids, four on earth and one in Heaven. From having triplets, to losing a child to cancer, to adopting, to fostering, she has experienced about every joy, challenge and heartache of motherhood. She is beautifully broken and perfectly flawed, saved by God's grace every day. Heather writes about faith, family and the crazy chaos that is her beautiful messy. Find Heather on Facebook at [Love, Faith & Chaos](#).

Dear Mom, This Is What I Need You to Remember Now That I'm a Teenager

Elizabeth Spencer

Guilty Chocoholic Mama

Hey, Mom.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry I yelled at you this morning. I'm sorry for what I said.

I know I've been a little hard to live with lately. Or maybe a lot hard.

I know I'm moody.

I know my room is a mess.

I know we disagree a lot.

I know you don't understand some of the things I do.

I know you don't always like how I dress.

I know I let you down sometimes.

I know I'm expensive.

I know my schedule runs you ragged.

I know my music doesn't make sense to you.

I know you're never sure what version of me you'll see on any given morning.

I know it feels like I'm pulling away from you.

I know you don't know what to expect from me next.

I know I can drive you crazy.

I know you miss the days when I was little and fit on your lap.

I know this is hard for you. But the thing is, it's hard for me, too.

Do you remember this kind of hard?

Do you remember not knowing what kind of mood you were going to be in from hour to the next, let alone one day to the next?

Do you remember feeling like you wanted to cry, laugh, scream, run, sleep, talk, and hide, all at the same time?

Do you remember wondering why you acted the way you did sometimes?

Do you remember feeling like your brain and your body were going at two completely different speeds?

Do you remember not being sure if the people who were your friends one day would still be your friends the next?

Do you remember having no idea what you were going to do with the rest of your life even though everybody seemed to expect you to have it all figured out?

Do you remember feeling awkward and ugly and unsure of yourself while everyone else your age acted confident and put-together?

Do you remember wanting to fit in and stand out all at the same time?

Do you remember wanting to be noticed but also wanting to be invisible?

I need you to remember all this. Because I need you to love me through this.

I need you to believe in me even when—especially when—I don't believe in myself.

I need you to guide me, even when act like I resent that guidance.

I need you to cheer for me.

I need you to trust me.

I need you to make me earn that trust.

I need you to have thick skin.

I need you to have a soft heart that can still give out tough love.

I need you to help my not-fully-cooked brain think farther down the road than it would on its own.

I need you to set boundaries.

I need you to let me deal with the consequences of my actions.

I need you to help me pick up the pieces of the consequences of my actions.

I need you to be proud of me, even when I'm ashamed of myself.

I need you to love me even if sometimes you don't like me.

I need you to remember that I care what you think of me more than I care what anyone else thinks of me, even if I tell you at the top of my lungs that I don't care at all.

I need you to remember that you matter to me—maybe more than anyone else in the world—even if I act like I don't want anything to do with you.

I need you to remember that I need you.

I need you to remember that I love you.

I know this is asking a lot. I know I'm asking you to give more than you're getting. I know I'm going to frustrate and fail and disappoint you sometimes along the way.

But when we get to the other side, I also think we'll know and remember this: we got there together.

Elizabeth Spencer is mom to two daughters (one teen and one young adult) who regularly dispense love, affection, and brutally honest fashion advice. She writes about faith, food, and family (with some occasional funny thrown in) at [Guilty Chocoholic Mama](#) and avoids working on her 100-year-old farmhouse by spending time on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Don't be your child's sun.
Instead, be her moon connected
by a force so strong that the
bond never breaks.
Follow her along providing light
in her darkest moments,
direction when needed.
Sometimes your presence is
large and looming,
and sometimes it is small
barely seen by the naked eye.
But the moon is always there.

Whitney Fleming

Your Teen Will Break Your Heart—But I Promise You’ll Survive

Whitney Fleming

Playdates on Fridays

I’ve truly enjoyed raising my kids. Sure, it’s been exhausting—the laundry, the cooking meals, the shuttling to all the activities—but mostly, it’s been a joy.

When my kids were little, it was easy to control their behavior. I put the television on the channels that I thought were best, made their meals, and purchased the clothes I wanted them to wear. I decided the playdates we would have and punished them for behavior I didn’t like. We thrived in our routine, and I may have even been a little bit smug in how smooth parenting was going for our little family.

I’d try to give them choices. “Do you want to wear the blue or pink shirt today?” Or, “Carrots or string beans tonight?” But, let’s be honest: I was the puppet master behind every scene.

Then it happened. It was slow at first—an eye roll here or a sarcastic comment there. It was when one pulled away from a hug in front of her friends or another started retreating to her room a bit more.

And little pieces of my heart began to break, bit by bit.

As my kids continue to grow older, their choices now become their own—and it is so hard when they don’t align with how you feel you have raised them. Worse, sometimes you wish you could do things differently.

Now, here I sit with three kids in the early stages of the teen years, and I wonder how we will get through it. We fight for control and gingerly pass trust back and forth like a carton of eggs.

And when that trust is broken, when they push me away, when one of those eggs splatters on the ground, my heart breaks a little bit more.

I know kids make mistakes. I know children will disappoint. I know it is all about the process of growing up and letting go. But knowing this still doesn’t prepare you for the surge of emotions you feel when it happens to you.

I wonder, Where did I go wrong? Or, I thought we had a better relationship than this. But mostly I think, Wow, I am really screwing this up.

So as I look at the pieces of my shattered heart scattered all around me, I want to pull away to protect myself, to protect my heart that has given so much to these three little souls. It’s tempting to walk away, to throw my hands up in the air and give up.

But instead, I choose to lean in, I choose to move toward the pain and the betrayals of trust and the mistakes. I choose to relinquish control of how their choices reflect on me. And instead of speaking my emotions, I choose words from my broken heart: “No matter what you do, dear child of mine, no matter the mistakes you make, there is nothing you can do to make me love you any less.”

Because I have to believe that with every action, with every mean-spirited word, with every effort my teens use to push me away, they want me—they need me—to be there for them, no matter what.

While I still may feel angry or disappointed or frustrated, I find other people to share those feelings with, so eventually, I can give my teens the love they need—and the consequences to know they must be accountable in this life.

And we keep talking and trying to navigate this growing up thing together—and in those moments, my heart starts to piece itself back together again, if only just a little bit.

Letting go of your kids is not just them physically moving away from you. Sometimes it's letting go of expectations or aspirations or even dreams. It's letting go of the control of their choices. It's letting go of your heart while trying to hold onto your values.

And when I let go, I hope an even more beautiful life will come to fruition for my kids than what I could have ever imagined.

I wish I could say this rough road for my kids and me is almost over, but in truth, I know it's just the beginning. I'm trying to develop a thick skin while keeping a tender heart.

Because my teens may keep breaking my heart, but I know it's big enough to carry us all through to the end of this journey.

When She's 15

Elizabeth Spencer

[Guilty Chocoholic Mama](#)

Today, my daughter is 15.

When your daughter is 15, you know you have been given a gift, even if she is a little hard to unwrap sometimes.

When your daughter is 15, you understand she is closer to being a young woman than she is a baby, but you also understand she will always be your baby.

When your daughter is 15, you grab your chance at the best mirror in the house when you can get it.

When your daughter is 15, you spend a lot of time in the car, driving her places and picking her up from those places, because she can't yet drive herself, but she has a lot of places to go.

When your daughter is 15, she starts talking about colleges and careers and you think you have plenty of time to think about those things "later" and then you realize "later" is pretty much next week.

When your daughter is 15, you get to watch her honing her passions and you start to think maybe you are catching a glimpse of her future.

When your daughter is 15, you look back on the years that have passed with gratitude . . . and on the years to come with hope.

And when your daughter is 15, you remember when she was born and how you thought at that moment you could never love her more than you did then . . . and you realize now you were wrong about that, because you do.

Elizabeth Spencer is mom to two daughters (one teen and one young adult) who regularly dispense love, affection, and brutally honest fashion advice. She writes about faith, food, and family (with some occasional funny thrown in) at [Guilty Chocoholic Mama](#) and avoids working on her 100-year-old farmhouse by spending time on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

God does not set
height and weight
requirements
for his beloved daughter.

He does not require
straight hair to win
His approval.

He would never suggest you quit
because you are not the fastest,
the prettiest,
the smartest,
the most popular.

He has already put you on the team.
You've made the cut, just as you are.

Jelise Ballon

Dear Teenage Daughter, I Will Be Right Here Waiting for You to Come Back

Whitney Fleming

Playdates on Fridays

The shift was slow and subtle.

First, you pulled away slightly as I put my arm around you walking out of the grocery store. Next, the door to your bedroom started clicking softly shut each time you walked into it. Then, you wanted to go to a friend's house more often than asking me to play a game or watch a movie or share a cup of hot chocolate.

I know it is to be expected. I know this is part of the growing up process, but it is hard not to lament over the days when I was the center of your universe. It was just a minute ago that you were clinging to the side of my pants whenever I dropped you off, and your favorite activity was walking around my closet in my favorite pair of black patent-leather stilettos.

Now, those shoes are too small for your size nine feet and your hair and makeup skills have outpaced mine. You don't need me to pick out your clothes or help you get the cereal off the top shelf or cut the crusts off your PB&J. You no longer hold my hand in parking lots or show up at my bedside early in the morning.

And a piece of my heart breaks off each time you pull away.

Sometimes you are so desperate for independence it is hard not to grab your arm to hold on for just one more second. It is the way you admonish me for tucking a piece of hair behind your ear or the deep sigh you exhale in response to a simple question about school.

Sometimes you are intentionally cruel and strike right for my jugular. It's a cutting comment about how dinner was not to your liking or an eye roll when I try to make a joke in front of your friends.

But mostly, watching you grow into your beautiful skin is such an unexpected gift, an exquisite source of pain and joy I could never comprehend before living through it.

I burst with pride as you tackle school and extra-curricular activities and your passions head-on with an enthusiasm I didn't even know possible. I am struck by the compassion you offer to others in endless bounds. I love seeing how capable you are of taking care of yourself and how your self-confidence is growing in lockstep.

You are pulling away from me in every way, and it pains me more than you. And this causes a palpable tension between us, a tug-of-war that has no end in sight.

And I'm a glutton for punishment, just like every mother is. I keep asking, "How was your day?" despite knowing I will only receive a grunt or a mumbled, "Fine." Or I invite you to go on a Starbucks run even though I know you'd rather be on your phone texting your friends or finishing your homework. I still ask if you want a snack when you're studying or quietly hover when you're sitting at the kitchen counter—even though I know you can do these things for yourself.

I know the answer will more often be no than yes, but I ask again and again. Because, sweet girl, there is something you should know. More often than not, daughters come back to their mothers, even after breaking away.

I know this because I was once a daughter, too. Almost overnight I went from feeling like my mother was always breathing down my neck to her becoming one of my dearest friends and confidants. I know this is hard for you to imagine right now, but it's true.

And despite the way I treated her in my teens, despite my pushing her away and fighting her affections and believing she was holding me back, she patiently waited for me to come back to her—just as I will be waiting for you.

Because ours is a tale as old as time, dear daughter, and while you continue to cut the last remaining strings of our bond, I desperately cling to the few I have left.

And I cling to the hope that one day, not too far off into the future, you will return to me. You will come back to me where I will be waiting with open arms.

Because that's what mothers do for their daughters who spend their teen years breaking free.

To My Teenage Daughter, How Do I Let You Go?

Amy Betters-Midtvedt

[Hiding in the Closet with Coffee](#)

How do I let you go?

When I look at you and still see the sweet baby we brought home from the hospital. We were so clueless about what we were getting into and also so awed by every bit of you we couldn't take our eyes away. You made our world so much bigger and yet you were small enough to fit perfectly in our arms.

When I still see the outline of that sweet four-year-old girl who dressed up each day as a princess and imagined the world at her fingertips. The day you would go out into that world felt so blissfully far away so imagining right along with you didn't feel a bit scary. And even then I believed with my whole heart you could reach all your dreams.

When I watch you with your hair all pulled back and still see that sweet ballerina all dressed up for her first dance recital. It was the first time you ever wore any makeup and the bit of blush on your soft cheeks and lipstick on your lips gave me a glimpse of the woman you are now. How did you become her so quickly? It takes my breath away.

When I look at you and still see the girl just entering her teens, unsure about how she fits in when everything she knew was changing. There is almost no trace now of the awkward adolescent and you are beginning to understand your place in the world. Oh how you have brought us joy at every stage.

How do I let you go?

When I'm blessed to reach over and hug you close right now, I don't want to let go. Not even a single bit. Not even when you try to wiggle free from me just as you did when you were so little and ready to jump off my lap and run and play.

How do I let you go?

When I look at you and see you are ready. So ready to move forward wherever life will take you, when I know your dreams will lead you where I won't always get that front row seat to your big moments.

How do I let you go?

I'm so thankful there is an answer. I remember God is with you wherever you may travel. I remember you are not really mine to hold on to. I remember He loved us both enough to send His only son out into the world. Good grief, how do I ignore the example He set with that last one? Impossible.

Letting you go is only possible because I know my Heavenly Father is also yours . . . this amazing gift He entrusted to my care for the last 18 years. For you do not belong to me my dear one. You belong to Him. And you belong in the world.

I'm so lucky I get to be here for all of it. For all you will give to the world and all you have already given. For all you have already given our family.

To God be the glory sweet child of mine. Now go and give the world your gifts. We'll be right here. Amen.

Amy Betters-Midtvedt is a writer, educator, mom of five crazy kids, wife to a patient husband, and lover of Jesus. She writes over at [Hiding in the Closet With Coffee](#). Her mission is to help parents find sanity and joy, and she knows sometimes joy is found hiding out in the closet with coffee, or hiding out on [Facebook](#). You can also find her hiding out over at [Instagram](#), [Pinterest](#), and [Twitter](#).



Motherhood is
the greatest thing
and the hardest thing.

Ricki Lake
