



Everything Michigan

Weathering the storm of adolescence

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Decades later, Patricia K. Bloom well remembers the "attitude" her then-teen daughter exhibited.

"Jennifer, she was the typical teen," recalled Bloom, 57, of Merrill. "She really went through a hard time. I was kind of at a loss with how to help her."

For some parents, raising teenagers is one of the most challenging, toilsome and perplexing experiences they will face, experts agree. The onslaught of raging hormones, the struggle for independence and peer pressure can -- and does in some instances -- push reasonable folks to the edge of sanity.

"We weren't as active in church when our daughter, now in her 30s, was a teen. I know now that prayer and having a faith life does make a difference," she explained.

Bloom and her husband, Rex Bloom, consider themselves "blessed" that their faith, friends and fellow members of Saginaw's Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church proved invaluable when they became guardians of their infant grandson, Robert Bloom, now 17, son of Jennifer Sumerix of Pinconning and Alan Meyers of Saginaw.

"I don't know what the formula for success is, but having a church family really helped," Patricia Bloom explained. "We didn't feel like we were raising him alone. And the best part is Robert has a spiritual life, too."

Some parents don't fair as well. After struggling with her own teen and hearing story after story from other parents dealing with seemingly endless arguments from their surly teens, Raleigh, N.C.-based author Christina Botto, 51, took action.

The widowed mother of two simply wanted to understand the minds of teens to create a better relationship with her daughters. Her findings, from working with teens and their parents for more than 14 years, however, resulted in the book "Help Me with My Teenager," a guide to parental success.

"I had incredible trouble with my first teen daughter," Botto, an accountant, explained. "I was experiencing such frustration I thought there had to be a better way."

The paperback book (published by Booksurge Llc., a www.Amazon.com publication, \$12.99) offers tips to help parents communicate and motivate teens as well as encourage cooperation instead of resistance.

"The book is meant to give parents a basic understanding of how teens see the world and how they feel, which is totally different from the way adults process information. Unfortunately, those differences are the source of much of the conflict.

"Parents have to give teens choices that make them part of the process and develop consequences for unacceptable choices. There's information on ways to deal with curfews, how to interact with your son's friends and how to deal with teens who are hanging out with untrustworthy people," she said.

Some of the topics covered in the book's six chapters include:

t Understanding why teenagers behave the way they do and what motivates them.

t How to foster open lines of communication with teens.

t Ways to help youths navigate adolescence.

t How to build unobtrusive relationships and how to set limits and boundaries.

Setting boundaries is the key that enables retired Saginaw School District educator Ethel B. Shaw to continue to make headway and assist youths. She works with the Saginaw County Department of Public Health's Family Youth Initiative and at Holy Communion Gospel Center, 1245 E. Genesee in Saginaw -- dubbed "Safety Net Around Our Youth."

"One of the things that worked for me and my husband, Bobby Shaw, with our son, Elgreco Shaw, and in the classroom was to follow the Bible's guide of 'train up a child in the way he should go and they will never depart from it,' " said the Saginaw Township resident, who also helped establish Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church's Day Care Center, 535 Cathay in Saginaw.

In addition, the educator, who retired last year, worked for 13 years with preschoolers and for more than 20 years with high school students.

"Boundaries and consequences are very important. The one thing I'm encountering a lot is too many kids have taken on the role of the parent," Shaw said.

"Children have to know the adult has the authority, period. And it really works. I was my son's first mentor, we set examples, gave love and we had to be good listeners.

"I participated in the things that interested him. Parents, church, school and community have to work together to raise a child. And all are necessary."

Unfortunately, some stressed-out and stretched-for-time parents don't know how and where to start, she said.

"I start by telling them to get a mentor. Don't just sit and complain. Do something about it today. It's better to plant the seeds when they are small because they will keep it. But it's never too late to start turning the tide.

"It's going to take a lot of patience. And it's so easy to get off focus. Kids need encouragement, too, because it's hard for everyone.

"Parents need to know there are people out there who care and are willing to help. And the kids need to know there is hope," Shaw said. v

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