The 7 Biggest Teen Problems And How To Turn Them Into Strengths

Bobbi DePorter

HANDBOOK—Teen Strengths

Congratulations! You not only read the book you're taking action by getting the HANDBOOK. We get what we focus on. When we focus on building strengths, that's what we get – strong, positive relationships, confidence, and skills to take us forward in life.

When we make agreements about what we'll use and practice as a family – and most important, MODEL these strategies for our children so they see that we hold them as important, they will want to use them themselves.

Let's get started.

1. **Turning Troubled Relationships into Confident Communications** *("Tell me more ...")*
2. **Turning Emotional Hurt into Personal Esteem** *("How do you feel? How do you CHOOSE to feel?")*
3. **Turning Negative Self-Image into Self-Empowerment** *("What would it take ... for you to go from here to here?)*
4. **Turning Fear of Disruptive change into Accepting Change** *("What's the worst that could happen? What's the best?")*
5. **Turning Poor Grades into Excelling in School** *("Remember – people learn differently. How do* you *learn best?")*
6. **Turning Lack of Focus into Organized Study Strategies** *("Adjust your physiology!")*
7. **Turning Low Motivation into Goal Achievement** *("What do you want to do?")*

1. Turning Troubled Relationships into Confident Communication

"Tell me more ..."

There is nothing that builds relationships faster – and nothing potentially more damaging – than what we say. Our communication is what furthers relationships, or tears them down.

The ability to create positive relationships is the highest indicator of our success in life. Here are some suggestions to help your family to become more confident and effective communicators.

STRATEGIES

Tell me more ...

A great communication tool for building relationships with teens is ***Tell me more.*** If you ask your teen how his or her day was and get a nonchalant answer like *okay* or *fine*, respond with *Tell me more,* and then wait. Giving teens some space to answer – and showing that you want to hear the answer – can turn a dead-end response into a chance for meaningful communication.

Use Visible Communication

Discomfort or upsets can occur when communication is not *visible*. Often teens react negatively when a parent asks them a question without telling them what they really want or mean. The same can apply the other way around.

As a family, commit to being *visible* in your communications with each other. That means stating the facts – what you want, why you want it, etc. – before asking the question. Model it for your children. Instead of asking, *Are you doing anything Friday night?*, say what you have in mind, such as a family event you want them to attend or asking your daughter if she'll baby-sit her younger brother, etc. Pay attention to what you are really asking. Say, *Your dad and I have been asked to attend a function on Friday night and it's important we be there. Can you watch your brother?* People hang awkwardly when asked if they have time, or the classic line, *Would you do me a favor?* And they're thinking, *What's the favor? Something I want to do, or maybe not? Something I'll be embarrassed to say no to? Something that will make me feel trapped?*

Useful responses to invisible communication are *Why do you ask?* or *What do you want?* When people approach you with, *Gotta minute?*, respond with, *What do you want?* Discuss this concept with your family and agree to use the line, ***What do you want?*** as a signal in the family to use visible communication.

OTFD

OTFD / Open the Front Door (Observe, Thought, Feelings, Desire) is a form of visible communication. It can be used to clear upsets and also gives more meaning to positive observations and acknowledgements. Practice OTFD with your family using real-life situations. Notice the differences you see in the responses of your teen. After using it yourself, teach it to your teen and others in the family. When you all know about OTFD, you can even say to each other, *I have an OTFD for you*, or you can be subtle where the other person doesn't even notice you're using it. They just notice that the communication went well.

> Many studies have been done on the impact of family conversations including one well-sited study about the number of negative and positive comments said around the average family dinner table – 75 positive and 460 negative – " ... and we remember downbeat comments far more often, in greater detail and with more intensity." (Goleman)

EXAMPLES

Here are some examples of OTFD.

Chores:

Denise welcomes her child Alison home from school. After chatting for a few minutes about her day, Alison heads to her room. Denise reminds her daughter to do her chores before dinner. At dinner, the chores are still not done. You can resolve this using OTFD.

> *Denise, I told you that your chores needed to be done before dinner. My thought is that you chose to ignore my reminder. I feel frustrated that you didn't do your chores. I want you to do your chores right after dinner tonight and in the future I want you to complete your chores before dinner.*

My Space:

Angelo's son Sean is constantly on the computer. He budgets little time for his homework. Angelo knows that a change must happen so he uses OTFD to let his son know how he feels about this problem.

> *Sean, you have been on the computer for two hours and you haven't done your homework. My thought is that you're getting too involved on the computer and forgetting about your homework. I feel you are abusing the privilege of using the computer. I want you to complete your homework before chatting on My Space.*

Life is good:

Your daughter's report card came in the mail. Good grades again. Also, her room is neat, and she's been on good behavior. You are proud of your daughter and want to tell her. Try it with an OTFD.

> *Sally, your room is clean, your grades are outstanding, and you've been so kind and respectful to the whole family. I think you have really been making a great effort. I feel happy and proud of you! Keep being the amazing daughter that you are!*

EXERCISES

Take the opportunity to practice handling real-life situations with your teen.

Think of a negative occurrence – something you noticed that your teen was supposed to do and didn't, a time when your child said something that upset you, etc. Now fill in the blanks below to clarify what you could say to your teen in each situation:

Negative situation:

_____

OBSERVATION: (What happened? What did you observe?)
I (*observed you/saw you/heard you ...*)

_____

_____

My **THOUGHT** is that you (*were only thinking of yourself, didn't think, assumed, weren't paying attention ...*)

_____

_____

My **FEELING** is (*I feel, I felt…*)

_____

_____

DESIRE: What I desire/want is (*for you to apologize, not do it again, next time if this comes up I want you to respond with/tell me ...*)

_____

_____

Now think of a positive event, something like your daughter got a B+ on a paper in a class that was a real struggle for her and you noticed how much effort she put into it, your son passed his driving test and you got comments from the official saying what a nice and conscientious young man he is, your youngest son did the dishes without being asked, or your two children worked well on a project together, without any bickering.

Positive situation:

_____

OBSERVATION: (What happened? What did you observe?)
I (*observed you/saw you/heard you/saw that you ...*)

_____

_____

My **THOUGHT** is that you ...

_____

_____

My **FEELING** is (*I feel, I felt.…*)

_____

_____

DESIRE: What I desire/want is

_____

_____

2. Turning Emotional Hurt into Personal Esteem

> ***"How do you feel? How do you CHOOSE to feel?"***

You've probably heard the rebuff, *Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me.* Well, we now know that words can hurt, and hurt deeply.

Daniel Goleman, author of *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships,* notes a UCLA report that says: "When we feel rebuffed or left out, the brain activates a site for registering physical pain. To the brain, social rejections sting the same as a bodily injury."

We can't control what people say, but we can control how we respond to their words.

STRATEGIES

What if your daughter is told by a teacher that she is stupid? What if a coach tells your son the he will never make the team the way he hits the ball? What if a peer calls your daughter a name or goes off with other friends, leaving her behind? How do you help your daughter to understand that she is not stupid? How do you convince your son that he can make the team? How do you convince your daughter that in spite of what her friends said or did, she is a good person?

Reframing

It's not about what happened. What's important is how teens feel about themselves as a result of what happened. Remember that there are both internal and external consequences. Remind your teen that how we feel and think about ourselves is a CHOICE!

What happened? How do you feel? How do you CHOOSE to feel?

> **Speak With Good Purpose** applies to what you say to yourself as well as to what you say to others. Remember to correct those voices in your head that are telling you negative things about yourself or misinterpreting things that others may have said or done to you. In this way you can CHOOSE how you feel about yourself.

EXAMPLES / EXERCISES

Here are some examples and exercises for reframing emotional hurt.

External: This is what happened. The situation.	**Internal: How I felt. My thought about myself. The negative label.**	**Reframe/Flip it: How do I *choose* to feel. How do I *choose* to think about myself. The positive label.**
Example 1: I got a C and my teacher said I don't belong in gifted English.	I'm stupid and will never make it in this class.	I am smart. With other strategies and study I can make an A.
Example 2: I tripped and fell down. The kids called me a klutz.	I'm clumsy, uncoordinated. I'll never make the team.	I am athletic. I will make the team if I practice and focus.
Example 3: My best friend ditched me and went off with other kids. I heard him laugh about me.	*Fill in ...*	*Fill in ...*
Example 3: My dad told me I'll never amount to anything.	*Fill in ...*	*Fill in ...*

Now, ask your teens about a situation or incident and go through the exercise with them. You might pick a few mild incidents to practice. Then move on to bigger issues. You can walk through this with your teens or suggest and encourage them to go through the exercise using this worksheet. **Remind your child that how we feel and think about ourselves is a CHOICE!**

External: This is what happened. The situation.	**Internal: How I felt. My thought about myself. The negative label.**	**Reframe/Flip it: How do I *choose* to feel. How do I *choose* to think about myself. The positive label.**

3. Turning Negative Self-Image into Self-Empowerment

> ***"What would it take" ...***
>
> ***for you to go from here to here?"***

The previous chapter was about someone else saying something negative about us and how we can reframe it and *choose* how we feel. In this chapter we take a look at what we say to ourselves and eliminate any negative thoughts by discovering how "great" we are. "What would it take for you to go from here (negative self-image) to here (self-empowerment)?

STRATEGIES

Discover "Who Am I?"

A way to self-empowerment is for teens to get control of their internal voice, the one that's talking to them all the time – *Look what you just did ... Why did you say that? ... You'll never be any good.* At SuperCamp one of the most powerful things kids learn is, *I'm great the way I am. I can be the real me and be liked.*

To turn negative self-image into self-empowerment, teens start by discovering who they are. When they feel great about themselves, they are more willing to step out of their *Comfort Zone* and participate at a higher level resulting in greater accomplishments that build self-esteem. They're not so worried about what others think about them because they think great things about themselves!

Teens can discover *the real 'me'* – the positive me – by asking themselves, ***Who am I?***

> **Acknowledge Every Effort**
>
> A great tool for turning around negative self-image in teens is to acknowledge every effort. Often when our teens make an effort and complete something we breathe a sigh of relief and urge them on to the next task. Stopping to acknowledge every effort helps teens to focus on the positive and builds their desire for success. Acknowledging every effort and celebrating every success helps teens build a positive self-image.

EXERCISE

This exercise can be completed by your teen only or by the entire family where you share "discoveries" with each other. Whether or not the results are shared, most will feel very proud of who they are after completing this exercise.

Who am I?

- First the external *I ams*:

  I am a (*son/daughter, brother/sister, grandson/daughter, nephew/niece, cousin, friend…*) _____

  _____

  I am a (*student, ball player, team member, piano player…*) _____

  _____

- Now the internal *I ams*:

  I am someone who values (*family, freedom, honesty, education, being of service…*)

  _____

  I am someone who believes in (*the potential of all people…*) _____

  _____

- My strengths include (*math, writing stories, sports, making friends, making people feel comfortable, speaking…*) _____

  _____

- My interests/What I like to do are (*dirt biking, competing in sports, spending time on the computer/high-tech, listening to music, dancing, doing puzzles, planning parties, collecting, serving on committees...*) _____

  _____

- Something I care deeply about is (*health, politics, helping others ...)* _____

  _____

"I am awesome!"

4. Turning Fear of Disruptive Change into Accepting Change

> ***"What's the worst that could happen? What's the best?"***

Things are almost never as bad as we think they are going to be. We always survive – and what's more, we're stronger from going through the situation. You can help your teens change their fear of the consequences of change into expectations of positive outcomes by discussing "FEAR" with them.

STRATEGIES

FEAR = False Expectations Appearing Real

When you see FEAR in your teen, first acknowledge it so that he or she knows you understand – *I see that you look very worried and concerned about our move.* Ask, *What's the worst that could happen?* Really listen without judgment. Don't make comments like, *Oh, that's silly. You know that will never happen*. When your child has finished describing the feared result, ask, *What's the best that could happen?*

Accepting change is about getting control of our thoughts. Often when we anticipate change we paint a negative picture of what we think things will be like. We create false (negative) expectations telling ourselves it *will be horrible, my life will never be the same*. Accepting change is knowing that we don't really know the outcome – the only thing that's real is that anxious feeling in our stomach. Writing down the situation and the worst possible result as well as the best possible result helps us calm the anxiety and even look forward to the change.

We can't change what has happened and often we can't change what is about to happen. We can change how we perceive it and how we react to it. We can make it a *This Is It!* moment by looking for the possible positive outcomes and for the lessons. What can we learn from this? How can we use the information and how will it make us stronger?

> In any situation that we cannot change, the power is in having a *This Is It!* attitude – making the most of what we cannot change, making the most of every moment.

EXERCISE 1: A LOOK AT PAST FEARS

Think of some disruptive changes from the past and use the following worksheet to look at what happened:

- List the changes (*move to new house, change of schools, best friend moved away, divorce of parents or someone close, someone died, unexpected change of plans…*)
- What did you expect to happen?
- What could have been the best result?
- What actually happened?

What changed	**Worst Expectation**	**Best Possible Result**	**What actually happened**
Example: Move to another city	I'll be anxious and won't have any friends. I'll be lonely.	I'll meet lots of great kids who have the same interests as me.	Met a few new kids who like me and we hang out. I like it even better.

EXERCISE 2: "HOW I FEEL" LETTERS

Listen to your teens' fears. If they seem to be having trouble identifying and/or expressing what they are thinking and how they are feeling, suggest that they write about it in a letter or a journal. Even if teens can discuss their fears with their parents, it can still be helpful to write about them. You may want to get a journal and assure your son or daughter that what is written in it never needs to be shared with anyone. Just writing how they feel can help teens identify their feelings and fears and understand them better.

Here is a sample journal entry by a teen whose parents were divorcing.

> *It really makes me sad that Dad and Mom don't love each other any more. I don't understand why they are going to split up. I don't know what I did wrong, or what I could do to make it better. It really sucks that I have to live in two different houses and I can't still live with both of them. I don't want to only see Dad on the weekends. What's going to happen during the holidays, and during spring break, and during the summer? Are they both going to still come and watch me during my gymnastic meets? I just wish I knew what was going to happen.*

5. Turning Poor Grades into Excelling in School

> ***"Remember – people learn differently. How do* you *learn best?"***

If you're like most parents, what you want for your children is that they become lifelong learners responsible for their own education. No excuses, no *I can't learn this because I'm just not good at it,* no *My teacher's boring so I can't learn this* – the list goes on.

It starts with attitude – an I CAN mindset. Henry Ford said it best: "If you think you can, you can. If you think you can't, you can't." Lots of kids don't do well in school because they don't think they can!

STRATEGIES

Develop an I CAN attitude

Help your child turn I CAN'T into HOW CAN I? into I CAN! and I WILL!

Using visible communication to acknowledge your teen will help build an I CAN attitude. Being specific is what makes the difference. Instead of just *Great job,* say something like *I noticed you putting in a lot of time on studying for your history class the last few weeks. It made me think you are giving it your best effort and care about getting a good grade. I feel very proud of you.*

An important link with an I CAN attitude is an I WILL approach. Help your teen to recognize the value of a commitment to giving his or her best effort in everything.

Discover your LEARNING STYLE

A fast way to I CAN and I WILL, is when students discover how they learn best. One of the biggest AHA! moments for them is knowing that people take in and process information in different ways. If they are excelling, it could be that the subject, the teaching method, the way they are studying matches their learning style. When they are struggling, the opposite is true. When students are putting in effort and still struggling and they see others excelling, most think they are the problem – *I'm stupid* or *I'll never be able to do this* – when all they may need to do is apply different strategies that match how they learn best.

To discover how your teen learns best, have him or her take a learning styles assessment to discover their dominant style. Have the entire family do the exercise and compare notes on how everyone learns.

EXERCISE

As a family, take the ***Learning Styles Profile*** and have a discussion about how each of you learns best.

Then review the strategies below that work best for each style. Your teen might also want to discuss his/her learning style with his/her teachers.

Visual learner:
- Take notes on the things you learn and use pictures and symbols in your notes.
- Write out step-by-step actions to accomplish homework and projects.
- Ask for feedback and constructive criticism in writing.

Auditory learner:
- Talk with others about what you're learning.
- Ask questions – hearing the answers makes it easier to learn the material.
- Read your lecture notes out loud.

Kinesthetic learner:
- Connect body motions to your learning by asking, *What does this feel like?* or *How can I lock this in my memory by associating the content to a body motion?*
- Be sure you are physically comfortable while maintaining a proper learning state.
- Walk and talk when you review material you're learning.

Learning to Learn

Most students are not taught how to learn effectively**.** Knowing and applying specific learning skills that fit students' styles, supports them in excelling in school. The Quantum Upgrade Series of books is written especially for students and helps them take charge of how they feel, think and learn so they can focus their energy on getting what they want in school and in life.

Quantum Learner: Focus Your Energy, Get What You Want
Quantum Reader: Read Fast, Comprehend More, Move On
Quantum Writer: Write Easily, Less Stress, Better Results
Quantum Memorizer: Remember Anything, Anytime
Quantum Thinker: Think Bigger, Make Things Happen
Quantum Note-Taker: Study Smarter, Learn in the Moment

Teens who (a) have an I CAN attitude and give their best effort, (b) know their learning styles and use that knowledge to learn "better", and (c) learn how to learn effectively, will see exceptional results in school.

Here are some quick tips for excelling in school –
- Let go of limiting beliefs: instead of saying "I can't" say "I can!"
- Take breaks when studying: every hour take a ten-minute break to let your brain recharge.
- Stay focused: look and listen to help keep your mind on the class or study topic.

6. Turning Lack of Focus into Organized Study Strategies

"Adjust your physiology!"

Physiology affects learning. Our mind, body and emotions are all connected – change one, you change them all. Change your body posture and it changes your mind and focus as well as your emotions and how you feel about yourself.

Try this exercise:

- Ask your teen to slouch down in a chair – way down.
- Then tell your teen to try to feel confident and ready to take on the world in this position. It's not possible.
- Now have your teen sit up straight and tall, looking forward, and tell him to try to feel bored in this position. Again, it's not possible.

Our physiology has a huge impact on our confidence and ability to concentrate and focus.

STRATEGIES

Get in a focused "state" for learning

We spend most of our awake hours in what is called beta state, where we're thinking about dozens of things. To be efficient learners we need to focus on one thing. To focus on one thing, we get in alpha state, or what some call "being in flow state."

To get in alpha state:

- Sit up
- Take a deep breath
- Close your eyes
- Think of a peaceful place
- Roll your eyes up and down
- Open your eyes

Now ... look and listen.

Once you get into alpha state a few times, you can do it very quickly. Sometimes simply sitting up and pausing while taking a deep breath will work. Then look back at your work. The trick is to stop when you feel your mind wandering. Instead of saying to yourself *I should stop thinking of this ... or get back to task….or whatever*, just completely stop, pause for a moment, take a deep breath, and start again.

Try it yourself – get into alpha state before reading or working on something. You and your teen will be amazed at the difference it makes.

Remind your teen to ...

1. walk tall into every class – yes, even the most dreaded – it can have an amazing effect
2. sit tall at his or her desk – it wakes up the brain and starts it thinking, *what's next?*
3. look and listen – to focus attention.

Brain Wave States:

Beta:	alert and active, thinking of many things at once
Alpha:	relaxed and alert, absorbing information
Theta	almost asleep, dreaming to deep hypnosis
Delta:	deep sleep

7. Turning Low Motivation into Goal Achievement

> ***"What do you want to do?"***

How many people do you know who have reached their full potential? No one has. What we want is for our kids to reach ***for*** their potential.

What stops them?

Ask your teen ...

- Who are your heroes?
- What did they do that was so great?
- How did they get there?"

You and your teen will most likely find that the heroes mentioned were focused on something they wanted greatly, something they had a lot of passion about getting. This passion motivated them to take action.

STRATEGIES

Define Passions / Build Motivation

> We make a distinction between motivation and discipline: "Motivation is doing what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, when we want to do it. Discipline is doing what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, when we don't want to do it." – John LeTellier, Quantum Learning Facilitator

Both motivation and discipline are needed. It's easier and more fun to do things when we're motivated. Help your teens discover why they might want to do something.

When we need to achieve something we're not excited about, we're not motivated because we don't see the benefit to us. We need to ask, *what might I possibly get out of it?* and look for potential benefits by discovering *What's In It For Me* – or the WIIFM.

The best of all is to discover what we're passionate about. When we're passionate about something we are naturally motivated. Help your teens to discover what they are passionate about by asking them:

What would you do – today, tomorrow, or in the future – if you knew you couldn't fail?

Once they know what they want to do, it's time to set goals.

Set Goals

The first step to setting goals is to **be very clear about what you want**. Make your goals specific, measurable, and realistic. Next **define your action steps** and **make a declaration** about your goals to others – a commitment to give your best effort and do whatever it takes to achieve the goal. Telling others you're going to do something motivates you to follow through.

> Remember – Failure Leads To Success! Forgive yourself, learn from your "failure," recommit, and keep moving toward your goal!

EXAMPLES / EXERCISE

Remember to make your goals specific, measurable, and realistic. Here are some examples:

	Education	**Relationships Family/Friends**	**Personal/Health**	**Future/Career Accomplishments**
Goal	Earn a 3.8 GPA and make the honor roll all year.	Respect my parents by completing all of my chores.	Run a 5½-minute mile.	Get a full scholarship to Stanford University.
By when (date/time)	June	Every week	December	Fall 2009
Sub-goals (short, mid, long-term)	Earn 90% or better on all tests and quizzes during fall semester.	Clean room every day. Walk Buster after school.	Run a 7-minute mile by April. Run a 6-minute mile by September.	Score 2200 on SAT junior year. Average 3.8 GPA every semester. 50 hours of community service per semester.

Action plan (What's needed?)	Turn in all homework. Attend all classes. Participate.	Set 30 minutes aside every day to do house-work.	Run at the track twice a week (speed work). Get in 4-mile runs three times per week.	Excellent study habits. Go to volunteer group every Saturday morning.
Support Team	Mom/Dad Teachers Study buddy	Myself. Mom/Dad checking in with me.	Sister Coach	Janette (friend) Mom/Dad Beliefs on my mirror.
Declaration	I owe it to do my best. I am that important.	My parents work hard for me. I need to do my part for the family.	No one can stop me! All-county is mine to take!	I get one shot at this game called life. Live big!

Fill in **your** goals below ...

	Education	**Relationships Family/Friends**	**Personal/Health**	**Future/Career Accomplishments**
Goal				
By when (date/time)				
Sub-goals (short, mid, long-term)				
Action plan (What's needed?)				
Support Team				
Declaration				

Now – go for those goals!

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