



Kari and
Ella Kampakis

Can Mothers and Teenage Daughters Get Along?

By KARI KAMPAKIS

My oldest daughter, Ella, is a high school senior set to graduate this spring. She is ready—yet I am not. Honestly, it would be easier if I didn't like her, but as things stand, I know I'll miss her like crazy.

She is the oldest of four sisters, the leader of the pack, the guinea pig that her daddy and I learn on. With each new season she enters, we become typical first-time parents, making the common mistakes as we attempt to find our way.

One mistake that I initially made was buying into society's narrative about teenage girls. When my daughter was just a baby, I began to hear the warnings from well-meaning moms and strangers.

Enjoy her now while she's sweet and easy, because you're in for it when she's a teenager.

Girls are so dramatic—my son is a lot easier.

Teenage girls are nightmares. Just try to survive the season.

I like to feel prepared, yet these gloomy forecasts just made me scared. Again and again, I heard the same script, and it led me to dread the teenage years. It made me believe that my peak parenting experiences would occur in childhood—and it was all downhill from there.

Today, 18 years later, I'm in the foxhole of those warnings. I have

three teenage daughters and a fourth daughter not far behind. I know the stress, the struggles, and the secret battles in a mother's heart. I am knee-deep in adolescence, yet the biggest truth I see is how this next generation needs us. They need the love, support, and guidance of adults who have their back, and if our sole goal is to "survive" them, we will miss a major opportunity to connect.

More than ever, this connection matters because our daughters face a world that is harder and meaner than the world that shaped us. They're the first generation of teenagers to be more stressed than their parents (at least during the school year) according to the American Psychological Association. They may look worldly and self-sufficient, yet they still have emotional needs. They need the wisdom of those who have walked before them, but they'll quickly shut down in the presence of adults who only see the worst in them.

No relationship is perfect, and in any parent-teen dynamic, conflict is inevitable. While I used to believe all conflict was a sign of things gone

wrong, I now see it as a learning ground. After all, conflict is a part of life. Most pain in the heart of a teenage girl relates to conflict with peers and family. When girls never learn how to resolve conflict, it can set them up for problems in future relationships like marriage.

As psychologist John Gottman reveals in the article "America's Top Couples Therapist Says All Successful Marriages Share This Trait," the number-one predictor of success in marriage is how well two people can resolve conflict.

"In every good relationship," he writes, "couples have repairing skills, and they repair early."

When my daughter was a baby, I wish the moms ahead of me had emphasized the importance of listening, empathizing, picking my battles, and loving my daughter well even in times of conflict. I wish they had said: "You're likely to lock horns





Kampakis family from left: Marie Claire, Camille, Kari, Sophie, Ella. Not pictured but very significant: Harry Kampakis

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—KARI KAMPAKIS

at times, and that is normal. That is part of her growing up and trying to establish her independence apart from her family. Instead of letting your pride or anger create a gulf in your relationship, listen calmly. Teach her how to have respectful conversations and choose her words wisely. Apologize when you’re wrong, and forgive her when she’s wrong. Most importantly, circle back around once you’ve had time to think. Repair any damage that was done so that little resentments don’t become big resentments and create unhealthy habits and dynamics.”

In my rookie days with a teenage daughter, I only wanted to prove I was right. I blamed every fight on her and chalked it up to the narrative that teenage girls are difficult. It took some soul searching and self-reflection to realize how my reactions played a

major role too. By changing my approach, I could connect with my teenage daughter and still do my job as her mom.

I recently released a book to help mothers like me. It was inspired by my mistakes and also the things I’ve learned about preparing girls for the real world, helping them stand on their own two feet. Our daughters live at home for 18 years, yet our adult relationship with them may last 30 or 40 years. What happens in adolescence sets the stage for what’s to come. Rather than “survive” them, we can aim to finish strong. We can be wise with the time that is left while our daughters are under our roof.

As I look at my soon-to-be graduate, I realize the brevity of the teenage years. They pass by incredibly fast, and looking back, I don’t regret one sacrifice I made, one apology issued, or one

minute I spent with my daughter. I thought I loved her as a baby, but what I feel now is exponentially stronger. I’m so proud and thankful to be her mom.

I wish I could hold on to my daughter forever, but since that’s not an option, I’ll support her as her biggest fan. I’ll enjoy her senior year even as every “last” event makes me teary. Though it’s tempting to dwell on the past and get lost in childhood memories, I’m reminding myself to stay present. I’m soaking up the gift of today, because where we are now—on the brink of a new journey—is an exciting, hopeful, and remarkable place to be. **P**

Kari Kampakis is a Birmingham mom of four girls and author of Love Her Well: 10 Ways to Find Joy and Connection with Your Teenage Daughter, available on Amazon and other fine booksellers. Her books for teen and tween girls, Liked and 10 Ultimate Truths Girls Should Know, have been used widely across the U.S. for small-group studies. Find Kari on Facebook and Instagram or visit her blog at karikampakis.com.

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