



**Lorraine and Richard Platt** ✦ Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist

## Minimizing Teen Anxiety During Divorce

Blended families are common these days since the divorce rate in the U.S. is 50%. Many couples who get divorced already have children and then remarry. This creates a situation where teens are moving between two households, often with new siblings, where the rules in each home are different. This causes confusion for teens and their parents, so here are some helpful guidelines to keep things easy.

**Be Clear and Consistent.** If things are similar between households and they know what to expect, it can reduce your child's anxiety tremendously. Change causes stress, so try to keep routines the same. Consistency creates predictability which allows them to feel more secure so they can focus on school and other priorities. Pick your battles and come to an agreement with your former spouse about what's most important for your child's wellbeing since you won't agree on everything.

**Keep Your Teen Out of the Middle.** Be mindful when you mention the other parent – criticism is like poison and causes internal conflict for kids. They love both of you and have a natural loyalty to each parent. Don't make them take sides. Unless there's a safety issue, let your child have their own relationship with the other parent. Seek counseling for your child if they're having difficulty with your separation. There's a lot they may not be telling you which makes it hard to help them.

**Have Family Meetings.** It takes a lot to harmoniously blend 2 families. Everyone will have complaints and adjustments. Find out what those are for your teen and work them out with the new family. Communication is essential, but it will take time. It's normal for your teen to resist a new stepparent. If this causes undue stress, family counseling can work wonders.

**Get Support.** Find a place where you can speak freely about the divorce and your former spouse – uncensored! This ensures that your teen will not end up being your therapist. Support groups are a good option since others are going through the same experience and it makes it easier not to feel alone.



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**Be Open-Minded.** If you come from a divorced family yourself, make sure you're not projecting your own experience onto your teen. Learn from your own experience but don't assume your child's experience is the same. Be open and curious about how they feel. Be there for them and listen. If you're available and non-judgmental, they will trust you and open up.

Divorce has an impact on children even if the process between you and your former spouse is amicable. Children tend to take the separation personally and believe it's their fault. Be clear that they are not the problem and that your main objective is to support them through this difficult time. This will go a long way and your teen will see that, no matter what happens, you are there for them.

Lorraine Platt is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist in Mill Valley, CA. She mentors teen girls and coaches parents live or via Skype. Go to [www.teensolutionstherapy.com](http://www.teensolutionstherapy.com) for more information.

## Your Daughter's Future

Recently there was a screening of the Turkish film Mustang at the Mill Valley Film Festival in Marin, CA. marriage, and it shows how their lives are not their own, and probably never will be.

In the U.S., there's often a wealth of options and possibilities for young girls – sometimes too many. This can lead to overwhelm and pressure. All they know is that they're supposed to do something great because they have everything. This amorphous sense of expansion can cause a girl to freeze! Here's how to help your daughter sort things out for her future:

**Narrow Things Down** – Telling her she can do anything may inspire her but she needs help figuring out what that "anything" is. Is she good in math? Is she a great artist? What are career possibilities in those subjects? Get the wheels turning by having a conversation with her about her skills and interests. This will stimulate her curiosity and awareness. Too much emphasis is placed on what others are doing in order to compete with them. Get her to focus on herself and what's important to her.

**Determine Her Strengths** – I work with a lot of bright, sensitive and introverted girls (just like me!) who may not thrive managing a Fortune 500 company, for example.

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What is your daughter naturally good at? What would make her happy? Get feedback from others who know her like teachers and tutors, but don't take over. Lead her to resources and get her thinking and let her determine what she does with it.

**Discover Her Passion** – and it needs to have a purpose. If she's doing well for the sake of succeeding or for the sake of other's expectations, her accomplishments will have little meaning to her. In order to be satisfying and sustainable, it's got to light her up. She can discover her passion by exploring different interests and experimenting. Encourage her to take a class or try a summer camp. It doesn't have to last a lifetime, she just needs to start with what she cares about now and pursue it.

**Set Her Up for Success** - ok, here's the BIG one –does she want to go to college? For many parents, not going to college is not an option. Yes, education is important, but maybe your daughter needs a year to explore the world before making this commitment. It's essential to ask the question so she has room to find her way. Today's teens are under extreme stress so her quality of life must be considered for the long-term. Acting out occurs when someone is under excessive pressure for an extended period of time.

Now you get to trust your daughter and see what she does with it! Remember, you've done the best you could to raise a happy, successful girl with many opportunities. Take off the training wheels and watch her ride off into the sunset. Of course, as always, you will be there when she scrapes her knee.

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## **From Frozen to Freedom – One Girl's Story**

Megan had always been a good student. School was naturally easy for her until she hit High School when she had a hard time keeping up. In the past, she got A's with little effort, but the homework in High School was piled on every day so she really had to focus, but she couldn't. She played on her phone with her friends, surfed the internet, watched movies – anything but actually studying. After receiving her first report card, which showed B's and C's and even a D in chemistry, her parents panicked, and so did Megan. Her parents were baffled since she was smart and spent so much time in her

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room “studying”. The panic for Megan led to the big freeze (she lost faith in her abilities) and her parents went into overdrive trying to make sure she got back on track. Sound familiar?

At this point, the parents knew they needed tips from someone who deals with this challenge all the time. So here’s what we did:

I coached them on what not to say to their daughter like: “Have you done your homework yet?” “Why not?” “Your grades aren’t good enough.” “You have to do better if you ever want to go to college.” “Do you know how much we pay your tutor?” etc.

Instead, I encouraged them to make their connection with their daughter the top priority. Acknowledge that starting high school is a big adjustment. Remind her that she’s smart and they believe in her. They told her they would give her the support she needs to succeed even if that meant keeping her phone while she did her homework. They made themselves available if she needed anything and they periodically checked in to see how she was doing. Megan could feel that her parents cared and that she was not alone in her struggles. They also held a firm boundary so she could meet her goals.

Teen girls often tell me that the pressure of school and competing with their peers is too much so they lose their motivation. Remind them that who they are is enough, they are not their grades but need to do their best and that this too shall pass – meaning high school!

Here's a recent scenario from a parent that you might relate to: You pick up your teen's phone and see explicit sexting messages between your son and his new girlfriend. What to do?

**Don't panic.** It's not an emergency. Before you do anything, make sure you have a plan. Talk to your partner, if you have one, to decide what to say. Make sure you're not reactive or fearful when you go to your son. Take time to get grounded.

**Take your cues from your teen.** If your son is doing great in school, isn't smoking pot or drinking, has healthy relationships, and is developing into a functional adult, he can probably handle more privacy than another teen can.

**Realize things are different.** Teens are



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experimenting with sex earlier than when we were kids. They have more exposure through their peers and the Internet. So help them through it. Be curious and non-judgmental. Use it as an opportunity to get to know your son and what he's dealing with.

## **TODAY'S TEEN**

### **The Good, the Bad and Not So Pretty**

I have so much to say about teenagers, I don't know where to begin! First of all, I think they're amazing and today's teens are ahead of their time, changing the world – volunteering, advocating for the environment, influencing technology, and raising current academic standards.

But there are drawbacks to such rapid growth and they need our direction so they don't get lost in the fast-paced culture. Here are some guidelines to keep your teens on track:

### **Sexting Scandal**

The small Colorado town of Cañon City was rocked Friday with revelations that at least 100 kids had been trading naked pictures of themselves in a "sexting" ring that was said to even include some kids as young as 8th graders in the local middle school.

Unfortunately, this is becoming common. Often parents bring their daughters to me when they discover sexting material on their phones or computers. This dangerous trend is alarming and parents are rightfully concerned. How do you know if your child is at risk of engaging in this behavior that's becoming more common?

Bottom line, it's an inside job. You can't control the culture or the environment as much as you'd like, but you can set your teen up for safety and success. Interested? View our blog on Sexting.

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Check out the current Pacific Sun (November 11-17) article Waste Not – Millennials Take on Ending Food Waste and Feeding the Hungry by Ari Levaux. Millennial Ron Clark fills 60-80 truckloads a week with food he recovers from farmers and packer, bringing 125 million pounds of produce to food banks! (link to Pacific Sun article)

Ok, here's the Not So Pretty- front page of last week's Mill Valley Herald (November 4-10) Headline – Program Addresses Teen Cough Syrup Use - "Almost as if on cue, five students were hospitalized for overdosing on cough syrup right before the annual meeting of a grassroots group aimed at reducing harm from prescription drugs." (link to Mill Valley Herald article).

What's driving this destructive, out-of-control behavior? Growing up too fast - being exposed to media they aren't mature enough to handle and trying to keep up with overwhelming expectations. But some teens avoid the pitfalls. What distinguishes them from their peers? Find the answers in our next issue of Today's Teen. Sign up for our Newsletter. (link to Home Page)

## **TODAY'S TEEN – December 10<sup>th</sup> Issue PHOTO OF US**

Can you believe finals are next week already? If you have a teen, you are in the thick of it with the stress level. Here are suggestions for calming things down, or at least taking the edge off:

Parents and teens and homework don't mix well. Get your teen a tutor if they need help. It's well worth the investment to keep harmony in the house.

Help your teen pace themselves – if they're watching tv and you know they need to study, calmly turn off the television and tell them it's time to study – no nagging or criticism, just a solid clear boundary.



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Speaking of Boundaries – though they will insist they need their phone in order to do their homework, have them turn it over until they're done studying. Even the most disciplined adult has trouble resisting this temptation.

Bottom line – make it easy for them to succeed, let them know you're there (some teens and parents CAN survive homework together!) and keep a positive attitude with clear expectations that they follow through.

Help During the Holidays – Our current favorite non-profit is Ceres. Many of my clients have tried this one and found it both enjoyable and rewarding. Here's how it works – experienced cooks teach teens who volunteer for the Ceres Community Project how to make healthy meals that get delivered to those in need. This year, Ceres will provide around 95,000 organic, locally sourced meals to those with health challenges. Here's their mission, "we create health for people communities, and the planet through love, healing food and empowering the next generation." Pretty great, right? Go to [ceresproject.org](http://ceresproject.org) for more info. Read more –Oct.28-Nov. 3 Pacific Sun link

Our Favorite App – Sleep Pillow – Many of the teens I work with have sleep challenges. Sound familiar? This free app lets you "like" your favorite sounds with a slideshow of Instagram-inspired pictures. It's essentially a white noise machine on your phone. The company guarantees that you'll sleep tonight and claims to be the most effective & highest quality sleep app, with over 5,400,00 happy customers. Check it out. All the teens sleep with their phones anyways, even if you think they don't! SLEEP PILLOW ITUNES ICON HERE.

Our Favorite Child and Teen Referral Source – Kinstantly - Find providers & services, from child care to college essay coaches.

Visit them at [www.kinstantly.com](http://www.kinstantly.com) for more info on kids of all ages and guidance for parent

## **5 Ways to Support Your Introverted Daughter So She Can Shine**

I work with a lot of smart, creative, and sensitive girls, and many of them are introverts. In terms of academic achievement, this is a great asset. Introverts are often studious, focused and mature for their age. Because they're deep, reflective, and good

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listeners, they take in the world. While everyone else is talking, they're absorbing, analyzing and making sense of everything.

However, in high school, being an introvert can be socially challenging. We live an extroverted world that promotes constant contact, with everyone being in touch through social media. This is overwhelming to an introvert who recharges by spending time alone. How does any of this pertain to you and your teen daughter?

Some of the Mom's I work with are worried about their introverted daughters. "Will she make friends?" "Will she stand up for herself?" "Will she be okay?" or "Why won't she talk to me?" (though all the Moms ask me this question!). Parents believe if they push their daughter to be involved in group activities, they will get more comfortable. This often backfires and makes them withdraw because they don't feel accepted. Being an introvert is like being born with red hair – it's in your DNA. Recent brain research confirms this.

There's a great book called **The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World** that sings the praises of your unique daughter and how she will shine when she feels understood. It also explains how and why introverts are different and, of course, what's so great about them that most extroverts often miss. No need to worry about her future, just focus on the useful ways to support her genius.

These tips can get you started:

- 1) Let Her Be.** She needs space to recharge, especially after being at school all day. Her safe haven is her inner world. Give her time to digest the intensity before asking her questions or to do anything. A simple "Hi honey. It's good to see you", will do. This will reduce her anxiety and prevent overwhelm.
- 2) Buy The Introvert Advantage.** Read it together. Be open and curious about who she is. Point out her strengths and let her know the book helps you understand her experience. This will be incredibly validating to her since most introverts feel they should be more extroverted. Watch her relax.
- 3) Watch the Quiet Ted Talk Together.** I would recommend the book **Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking** by Susan Cain, but it's research based and rather dry – even for grownups. However, she



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will love the title since all introverts secretly wish everyone would stop talking so much!

- 4) Make Space for Her.** Introverts need to be drawn out. If everyone is talking over her at dinner, ask them to be quiet so you can hear her. Remember, she often feels invisible and thinks people don't want to hear what she has to say. If you show her you're interested without pursuing her too much, she will open up.
- 5) Celebrate How Amazing She Is.** Here are some great introvert qualities: insightful, aware, thoughtful, responsible, creative, independent and self-reflective. They also tend to establish stable long-term relationships, so be grateful for the reduction in teen drama and the deep connection she has to you, though she may not know how to express it.

Our Favorite Tutoring Agency – **Sage Educators**. William and Jamie have created a great environment for young people to learn. As I said in our last newsletter, parents, teens and homework don't mix, so here's their tag line: **Help from Adults They Can Relate to, Not Adults They are Related to!** Not only are they good at supporting your teen's excellence, they are across the street from Teen Solutions on Miller Avenue, just down the road from Tam High and Mill Valley Middle School. Check them out at [www.sageeducators.com](http://www.sageeducators.com) and tell them we sent you!