

Mothering My Teenage Daughter

Jill A. Kuhn, Ph.D.

My oldest daughter, who will be 15 when this comes out, wrote this poem several years ago. She gave me her permission to share it here.

Things to Know and Always Remember

By Hannah (age 12)

Just know that
You're not always right
No matter what you think.
I may thank you someday
But not today and maybe not at all.

Just know that
Sometimes I am pretending
But I am not really fine
And your advice
Doesn't work for this time.
I love you!

Just know
I do appreciate it.
I just don't feel like saying, "thank-you."
And I do care about you
I just don't always know how to help.

Just know
That it can be hard to say, "I love you."
But I do!
And even though I said, "I hate you."
I don't.
I love you!

Just know
That what I say is in the moment
Not tomorrow, like your advice.
That's why I don't listen.
But someday I'll come
Crying for help.

Just know that
When I grumble about chores
It is not meant as an insult
And my room is fine the way it is.
And no matter how many times you say
"You can tell me anything!"

I can't, so get over it! I don't want to.
I love you!

Always remember
No matter when, where, why or what
I really will always love you!

I feel privileged that my daughter shared her poem with me and trusted me to accept her thoughts and feelings. I saw a tenderhearted girl who in spite of her yearnings and striving for autonomy, and not always seeing eye-to-eye with me, also wanted me to know that these things did not negate her love for me. More and more she was becoming her own strong, independent person. I valued that she felt she had a voice and was using it. As a feminist I have endeavored to help my girls have a voice and to believe they can use their voice with anyone at anytime. Sometimes their voice is directed at me! And sometimes the words sting me. I have done a lot of my own soul searching, read books on parenting a teenager and talked to fellow parents. More importantly, I am learning (or at least I continue to try really, really hard) to listen to my daughter with my heart, which she asked of me after a long, tearful (both of us) and difficult discussion. I have spent a lot of time examining how I might be contributing to the times we have had negative interactions. I have spent even more hours trying to find the best ways to reach her, to know her, to parent her, all while letting her know that I loved her unconditionally! Even though I haven't always liked the ways she has talked to me, looked at me or behaved, I have tried to dig deep and find out what she was going through, what she needed, and what she was trying to say. I eventually learned to leave my ego in the other room. That doesn't mean that I haven't set limits on some of her behaviors, but I have also tried to find her truth that was sometimes buried under a lot of bluster and subterfuge. I can see that the work we are both putting into our relationship is paying off. During one exasperating interaction, that seemed to be going in circles, we were able to find the humor. I said to my daughter, "I don't recall buying a ticket to this rollercoaster ride." Without missing a beat she said, "mom, you bought a ticket when you had me." Indeed I did! I'm not sure who has grown more over the years, but we are growing up and together!

* The photo is a selfie Hannah took of us. It was a touching surprise when I discovered she had posted it to her Instagram account, wishing me a happy birthday.