

## **Why Teens Misinterpret Parent's Emotional State as Anger**

***Parenting Teens Just Got Easier***  
Is a free monthly eZine  
For parents of pre-teens and teens  
From Saso Seminars by  
Patt and Steve Saso

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**March 2006 Issue**

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### **This month's parenting tip:**

How parents can avoid the conflict that can arise when teens misinterpret a parent's emotional state as anger.

### **Announcements:**

Upcoming parenting seminars open to the public  
Free monthly TeleSeminar  
Summer High School Prep Courses (HSPT)

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## **Why Teens Misinterpret Parent's Emotional State as Anger** ***By Patt and Steve Saso***

Yesterday, Tricia asked her teenage son to help her make some changes on her business web site. Mark is quite tech savvy and his mother often hires him to do work. His response caught her off guard.

"Why are you always so angry when you ask me to do something?" he said in a snotty tone.

Tricia didn't initially feel angry, but found his remark and attitude disrespectful. Now she was upset. So she shot back, "You think I'm the irritable one! Hold the mirror up, buddy!"

You can probably guess what happened next.

The conversation went in a downward spiral and Tricia never did get the help she needed. They didn't speak for the rest of the day.

### **Could This Argument Have Been Avoided?**

Dr. John Gottman, a professor of psychology at the University of Washington, acclaimed researcher,

psychologist and author, says approximately eighty percent of parent-teen conflict is initiated by the parent.

If the mom, Tricia, had known what we are going to tell you now, maybe this escalation could have been avoided.

Those of you who attended our free Teleseminar last month on *The Teen Brain: Why They Do What They Do* will already know what we are going to share with you. It is important.

<http://www.sasoseminars.com/tele.html>

Neurobiologists are connecting the familiar patterns of adolescents' seemingly senseless behavior to new findings about the evolving brain. They discovered that the prefrontal cortex of the brain goes through a wild growth spurt during the teen years.

The prefrontal cortex is important for a wide range of processes involving planning, setting priorities, suppressing impulses, weighing the consequences of one's actions, and the regulation of emotions.

Until the brain is finished developing, teenagers are not fully capable of making good judgments or exercising adult impulse control. Emotional control, impulse restraint, and rational decision-making are all functions of a fully developed prefrontal cortex.

### **The Prefrontal Cortex and Adolescent Behavior**

We now know that the adolescent brain deciphers emotional expressions differently than an adult brain. This discovery was made by Dr. Yurgelun-Todd at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts.

Brain scans reveal that when adults were asked to interpret facial expressions, they used their prefrontal cortex to read emotions and to distinguish subtle differences. Adults were able to correctly identify different emotional states in pictures, but the results were different with teens. Adolescents often mistook fear or surprise for anger.

Teens and adults use different parts of their brain when they read emotions in others. While adults rely on the prefrontal cortex, teens rely on the amygdala. The amygdala is the seat of fear and anger.

This helps explain why teens often see anger in the faces of people when anger is not there.

It is believed that the amygdala is the source of two behavioral outcomes in adolescents:

1. the tendency to react explosively to situations rather than with more controlled responses, and
2. the tendency to misread facial expressions of others as a sign of anger.

### **Did a Light Bulb go off?**

So when you calmly ask your son to finish his chore, and he responds, "You don't have to yell at me," it is because his teen brain is misinterpreting your emotional state as being angry.

### **How Can This Information Help You?**

1. It can significantly **reduce unnecessary conflict**. By understanding your teen's immature perspective, you can choose to respond differently.
2. It can help you **grow in your parenting** by becoming more compassionate. A compassionate response calls forth love and understanding. When teens feel loved and understood they are more cooperative.
3. The new research on brain development can help you be more patient in your parenting and **model clear communication**.
4. You can **improve communication** by helping your teen understand the correct interpretation of what you are saying. For example, a parent might calmly state, "I am not mad, however I do feel a little frustrated that you are neglecting your chore."
5. **Share knowledge**. Let your teen know about the difference between the adult and adolescent brain. When they understand that the adolescent brain often misinterprets other people's emotions, they can **learn to check out assumptions rather than reacting from their gut**.

As children grow into their late teens and early twenties, the developing brain allows for more mature perceptions and behaviors. This is because young adults are shifting from using the amygdala to using the prefrontal cortex in interpreting emotions.

For more information on the teen brain and parenting strategies order our new book *Parenting Your Teen with TLC*.

<http://www.sasoseminars.com/tools.html>

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## **Announcements**

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An Invitation to the following Parenting Seminars:

Parents know how frustrating and complex raising teens can be. They can be sullen and moody leaving us feeling angry or worried. In the following seminars we will show you how to worry less and stay cool during these critical years.

BAY AREA PARENT MAGAZINE

*Parenting Teens: The TLC Method*

March 23, 2006

7:30-9:00 pm

Bellarmino College Prep, Liccardo Center

850 Elm Street, San Jose, CA

Cost: \$5 advance \$10/door

For tickets: Leah Hadfield, 408.399.4842 ext. 24

[www.bayareaparent.com](http://www.bayareaparent.com)

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LA CONGRESS: Anaheim Convention Center

*Raising Courageous and Confident Daughters*

*Maintaining Your Sanity while Parenting a Teenager*

March 30 – April 2, 2006

<http://www.recongress.org/2006/speakers.htm>

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## **FREE Monthly TeleSeminar: March 28**

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### ***How to Help Your Teen Succeed in School***

1 p.m. Pacific Time

Approximately 45 minutes

<http://www.sasoseminars.com/tele.html>

From a listener:

I just finished listening to your teleconference on the developing teenage brain. As the wife of a physician and the stay at home mother of 4 children (three teens), I thoroughly enjoyed listening to your candid advice and practical suggestions regarding raising

teens. I have received your newsletter for years and have passed it on to many friends. Unfortunately, I have not had a chance to hear you speak, so this teleconference was a real treat! Please do this again!! - Carla Byrne

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## **Summer High School Prep Course (HSPT)**

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ATTENTION Seventh Graders in the Bay Area

***Improve Your Grades and Increase your Chances of Getting into the Catholic High School of Your Choice***

### **Mr. Steve Saso's High School Placement Test (HSPT\*)**

Preparation Course is a proven program designed to:

- Improve proficiency skills in math
- Expand knowledge in English,
- Strengthen test-taking skills with practice HSPT exams,
- Develop competent study skills habits,
- Master time management strategies, and
- Motivate and build self-confidence

Classes begin June 19 and run five weeks. Limited class sizes.

<http://www.sasoseminars.com/hspt.html>

\*The HSPT is used for high school admissions, grade placement, and scholarship awards predominately by Catholic high schools.

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All the best,

Patt & Steve Saso  
Saso Seminars  
Helping make parenting easier

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