



As you listen to what is going on in your child's inner life, be encouraged by what we heard from nearly all the kids we talked with: they want your influence and involvement in their lives—not just now, but in the years to come as well.



*a fresh new year:*  
*a new understanding of your kids*

SHAUNTI FELDHAHN

A new year means new beginnings.

So instead of simply being stumped by your kids' words and actions on the **outside**, make this the year that you resolve to understand them on the **inside**.

Youth speaker, Lisa Rice, and I spent nearly two years doing focus groups, interviews with teenagers, and a nationally-representative survey of teens. We gleaned six eye-opening truths about what is going on inside our kids and put them in our book, *For Parents Only: Getting Inside the Head of Your Kid*. Here's a sample of just two of those points.

### Freedom-fighters

Why did Jimmy hop in his buddy's car even though he knew he had alcohol? And why does he overreact to you taking away his cell phone for a few days after learning of the incident from another parent?

Simply put: the addictive influence of *freedom*. It's intoxicating to kids to experience their first taste of freedom. They can't get enough, and the thought of losing it terrifies them. We heard kid after kid tell us things like, "Once I got my own cell phone and was connected to the world on my own, *I felt like a real person* for the first time" (emphasis mine). Under the influence of freedom, even good kids may sometimes do dumb things—and hide them to avoid being caught and losing that freedom.

But teens also told us that even though they craved more freedom and fought restrictions, they wanted and needed parents to *enforce* boundaries. They felt more secure with set expectations, so they knew when their freedoms would be safe, and when they could be lost.

For smaller infractions, children may learn the same lesson if you choose a form of discipline that gets across the consequences without triggering a knee-jerk fear of losing their freedom. For example, having your chatty daughter work for months to pay off the enormous phone bill she ran up instead of taking the phone away.

### Identity-seekers

Does your daughter always say you don't understand her? Chances are she is in the throes of an unsettling childhood developmental stage that is equally scary for you: figuring out who she is.

Somewhere around the age of 12, a child stops looking solely to Mom and Dad for clues about who she is as a person and starts urgently asking, "Who on earth am I?" Instead of, "What does Mom value?," she feels like she has to get some distance in order to figure out, "What do I value?" She accuses you of not understanding her because she doesn't understand herself!

The teenagers we talked to said they *wanted* to be able to talk through their questions with Mom and Dad, but that it depended on how their parents handled it. So if your child protests going to church because, "I don't know if I believe like you do," don't panic. Calmly discussing how *she* would prefer to get the fellowship and teaching God says is important, and allowing her to raise all her questions, will help her feel safe in approaching you again. But if you "freak out," that emphasizes even more that going to church is a part of *your* identity, not hers. Thankfully, eight out of 10 kids said that if they could go through this questioning process, they would very likely come back around to the beliefs that were important to their parents.

### They want you to walk this road with them

An ancient Hebrew proverb says, "Happy the generation where the great listen to the small; for it follows that in such a generation, the small will listen to the great." As you listen to what is going on in your child's *inner* life, be encouraged by what we heard from nearly all the kids we talked with: they *want* your influence and involvement in their lives—not just now, but in the years to come as well. ✨



**Shaunti Feldhahn** was a Wall Street analyst who now applies her investigative skills to helping people understand each other. Her latest book is, *For Parents Only: Getting Inside the Head of Your Kid*.