



Genuine compliments for things they've done well, or even just authentically attempted, add to the adult we are working to build. Help when things aren't going well, asking how you can help – these things will also be welcome by a young teen and then an older teen.

Who wouldn't like to know that their family, the people they live with and who love them more than anything, are going to pick them up when they fall, hug them when they need it, hold on to them when they are sad, tired, or hurt? And also let go so the young, loved person can pick themselves up one day, but always assure them that we will be there when they need to return to us. It might be a pep talk or maybe a shoulder to cry on, but we can be a support to our adolescents. Sometimes it's sought after advice, or maybe being silent so they can talk to us as they work out a problem. Maybe we ask a question they haven't considered and let them ruminate over that for a bit. Or perhaps we ask open ended questions that shows we respect their opinions.

### *My children are amazing.*

Who doesn't feel that way about their kids? I hope we all can say that because we love them. And with that love for them, we want them to be the best people they can be. We get to assist with that. What an amazing opportunity, what a daunting task! But it's worth it. We get to be part of the ultimate project. For my husband and me it was quite the ride and we are grateful for every minute of it. Even the mistakes – theirs and ours. It's made us all who we are today.



## Open Lines

ERIN M. PHILLIPS

### *First of all, let me begin with a warning:*

nothing I am about to say is likely to earn your kid any cool points. If you told any of my high school classmates I was writing an article with my mom about how important it is for kids to talk to their parents, the most common reaction after, "Who?" would be the understanding smile and closed-eyed nod of total non-surprise. Let me issue a second warning: keeping open lines of communication with my parents left me with such positive attitudes toward military life that I ended up marrying a soldier. So, if you want to raise a cool teen with no future military affiliations, read no further. But if you're interested in raising a reasonably well-adjusted adult who is open to caring for you in your old age, then I may be able to help.

I didn't realize it at the time, but I think the thing I found most helpful growing up in a military family was that we were kept well-informed in an age-appropriate way. I see it now in military spouses, and I think the same thing holds true for military kids; the family members who best understand the nature of their service member's work tend to be the happiest family members. We usually knew our dad's unit, his job, the broad strokes of what that meant in the grand scheme of the way the Army works, and where we as his children fit in. Specifically, when we were stationed in Europe, my brother and I were made to understand that we were acting not only as ambassadors for our family, but for our country. It was a big responsibility, but it showed trust and confidence in us, and so I think my brother and I were happy to comply.

### *...the thing I found most helpful growing up in a military family was that we were kept well-informed in an age-appropriate way.*

That same trust and confidence displayed by our parents in other facets of life meant that while we were given quite a bit of latitude as we got older, we knew we could come to our parents with our questions, concerns, and feelings. To me, it seemed almost counterintuitive to keep important things from my parents, since my anxieties, questions, and opinions were always taken seriously and addressed. You wouldn't keep really serious symptoms from your doctor, would you?

Parents don't need to be their kids' best friends. Frankly, my kids are still pretty small, so I can't fathom why any parent would want to be their kids' best friend. Our priorities are just too different, and probably will be for at least the next fifteen years or so. But you can treat your kids like people, and give their feelings and opinions the same respect and consideration you would give those of an adult. That doesn't mean treating them like adults, or burdening them with your own concerns, obviously, but a kid who feels listened to on a daily basis will be more likely to come to you to talk.