

## Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

**My family is boring. All they do is come home from work and watch TV. They don't even care what's on! We even eat on snack tables in front of the TV! I keep trying to get them to do things with me, but they say they're tired, or aren't interested in the things that interest me. I'm fifteen, and don't have a driver's license yet, so after school I'm captive at home. I want to learn to speak fluent Spanish (I take classes in school, but would like to learn more). I've asked my parents to teach me to play bridge – they used to play a lot – but they can never seem to do it at night when we are all together. My dad used to play golf and I've asked him to play with me, but he's always busy watching golf or sports on TV. Do you have any suggestions to help me?**

**-- Amanda**

Dear Amanda,

I have a question for you. Are you sure these couch potatoes are your real parental units? Perhaps you were separated at birth from parents who are jazzed about the idea of learning new things, spending time with the people they love, and living life to the fullest.

The role reversal here is amazing. Usually I get letters from parents who crave time with their teenagers, but it is the teenagers who can't make time for them. And this lack of connection has reached critical mass. Did you know that only 34% of American families eat dinner together on any regular basis? This is a decline by a third over the last fifty years. And dinner together doesn't consist of everyone in different rooms, watching different t.v. shows! It means having conversations, learning about what each person did that day, and drawing closer through these intimacies. It seems like the days of families playing Scrabble or cards or making music together (and you don't have to be the Osmonds to get something out of this) have disappeared into the distant past.

I understand that your parents are tired after work. Most people are, and an occasional evening vegging in front of the TV should be allowed. But, if this activity becomes the norm, your parents are in grave danger of sleep-walking through their lives.

Amanda, talk with your parents and read them the question you wrote to me. Remind them that teens who spend quality time with their families – especially their parents – have higher levels of self-esteem, moral behavior, and school achievement. Tell them how much you want to spend this kind of quality time with them. If they are willing, make some plans. For example, do they also want to learn to speak Spanish? Would it be possible for all three of you to take some classes together? Or even listen to Spanish language CDs when you're in the car together. What about a bowling league for families? Can you find a fourth for bridge? Volunteer. Get involved in your community. Watching a video or DVD together followed by conversation (there's a concept) can be a time for connecting and not feeling separate and apart. Regardless of what you all agree on doing, get your calendars out and set a schedule, a plan for family time.

It's my hope that your parents will really hear what you are asking, and act on it. But if they are unwilling to change, then you might have to follow your own path. Are there after-school activities, clubs, or sports that appeal to you? Do you have a native Spanish speaking friend who could coach or mentor you? Find some friends who also want to learn to play bridge or golf.

If your parents are reading this, I hope they will reconsider their priorities. In another few years, you will be heading off to college or to a job. The days remaining to pull together as a family – at least while you are living at home – are numbered. And Dad – you might want to consider that watching golf on TV is not exactly the same thing as being out there on the links. You have a special opportunity to make memories with your interested daughter. Show her the finer points of a long, straight drive to the green, or how to putt with confidence. Mom – your daughter needs a deep and meaningful relationship with you. She's asking important questions. I hope you're listening.

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com) or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2005 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com).