

# Gifts for Adolescents

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What to get a teenager? Below, please find some suggestions for adolescent gift giving based on adolescent development.

Teenagers are trying on alternative futures for themselves, considering not only various career paths, but asking fundamental questions such as who am I, how do I become a man or a woman, and what will the world be like when I am an adult? Adolescents are simultaneously breaking away from the family while at the same time longing for the stability that family brings. Their bodies are becoming adult like, while their emotions are somewhere in between child and adult. They are forming their moral selves, determining their code for life. They are also relentlessly pursued by a sophisticated, market-targeted, billion dollar merchandising empire that wants your money and your teen's, and may steal her soul if you are not vigilant against it.

So, what to give an adolescent? Here are some ideas:

## Events with you.

I recommend this as the number one priority for your gift giving consideration. All kinds of opportunities present themselves depending on your budget and inclination, but your teenager really needs an adventure with you: The grander and perhaps risky or scary, or at least challenging, the better. He needs to watch you in a challenging situation to learn how to handle

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it. This would be a great time to take a road trip of mutual choice or a backpacking trip or a trip to Europe together or to go sailing or cross country skiing or river rafting together or climb a mountain together. You could also build something together, something either big or very intricate and precise. Give it a great deal of thought and commit your time and heart to this gift to

your teenager. Your child needs it and so do you. Your time together is running short and so many life lessons still need to be learned before she leaves you, such as accurately estimating consequences, learning resilience and setting long-term goals as well as how to believe in yourself. She can also learn from you that that life can

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be exhilarating and beautiful yet often challenging, but is very do-able and great fun. Show your adolescent that being happy and competent is normal.

## Family Rituals.

Your teenager is also painfully aware that time at home is running out. He may outwardly scoff at family rituals, but he needs them more than ever. Bring him into them even more. If it's holiday time, then this is the year that he can make the turkey and bake the pie, so teach him how. Perhaps get your teenager a very special ornament with great meaning attached that goes on the tree every year that she can take with her when she starts her own home. Play board games or cards or some other non-electrical activity that gives you time face-to-face, rather than parallel activities such as watching television. If you don't have a family tradition, together come up with one. Your child can hold in his heart these tokens of his family life with you as he moves into his own life.

## Self-expression and physical release.

Adolescents need creative, safe, yet exciting outlets for their emotions and they need to expend all that physical energy in positive ways. Such gifts could include a rope climbing course or a camera, watercolors or a blank journal book, clay, a bow and arrow or a new basketball and hoop or a speed bicycle, even roller blades and ice skates. Show her how to use these tools and go outside and put the hoop up together, and then shoot a few.

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### **Dreaming, investigating and considering.**

The whole world is possible for your emerging adult and there are so many choices. She needs a place to dream, plan and reflect as well as thought-provoking sources of inspiration for how to make her dreams come true. You can offer tools to experience this. Instead of something electronic, give him a really excellent and very cool desk lamp, a soft blanket for his room or a comfortable chair to dream in. A great biography is always a good idea, especially if it talks about heroes making choices and prevailing. This is also the time to introduce your emerging adult to a philosophy of life, so give your teen something really big to read, like Shakespeare, Aristotle or Ayn Rand. An excellent art or photography book can also inspire. Don't forget a classic piece of literature, *Ivanhoe* or some Jack London, Louisa May Alcott or even Ian Fleming. A telescope, a microscope or an updated, very excellent world atlas gives her a glimpse into other worlds. How about a sophisticated aquarium?

### **Experiencing excellence.**

Does your teen know how to order in a fine restaurant? If not, then now is the time to get all dressed up and go out to dinner as a family and teach him. Has your adolescent been exposed to the best in arts and sports? Take him to the ballet, symphony, opera, theater or the art museum and to a professional sport or amateur sporting event that spotlights individual talent, like fencing, archery or ice-skating. Splurge on the close-in seats so your teen can see and feel the excellence

personally. Teaching your adolescent how to go to these events and to appreciate them as well as how to conduct himself there, will give him so much confidence now as well as later when you won't be there to model it for him. Letting her watch and experience excellence helps her with the choices she will need to make on her own in the not too distant future.

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What you give as gifts should reflect your values, as well as your personal knowledge about your child rather than what the merchandisers say your adolescent should own. You can inspire your adolescent to choose and embrace his life rather than to hide from it. (Teens often hide from their life by disappearing into video games, chat rooms, gossip or risky behavior such as sex, drugs and alcohol or worse.) Your teenager will remember and cherish a perceptive gift from you long after the latest trendy thing is discarded and forgotten.

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*fostering the authentic life of children and their families in the American culture*