

INCLUDES 14 TIPS FOR FINDING THE INNER ADULT IN YOUR TEEN

“If you are concerned about America’s young — and about America’s future — this is a must-read.”

Newt Gingrich

“A bold and serious challenge to widely held views ... rigorous and persuasive.”

Deepak Chopra

TEEN*2*

SAVING OUR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
FROM THE TORMENT OF ADOLESCENCE

*The Landmark Program
for Awakening the Inner
Adult in Every Teen*



ROBERT EPSTEIN, PH.D.

Praise for
Teen 2.0 and its first edition,
The Case Against Adolescence

Winner of the San Diego Book Award,
The Lysander Spooner Award for Advancing the Literature of Liberty, and
The National Indie Excellence Award

Cited by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case *Graham v. Florida* (2010)

“...one of the most revolutionary books I have ever read.”

—**Albert Ellis, Ph.D.**, The Albert Ellis Institute (from the Foreword)

“Adolescence was invented in the nineteenth century to enable middle-class families to keep their children out of sweatshops. But it has degenerated into a process of enforced boredom and age segregation that has produced one of the most destructive social arrangements in human history, consigning thirteen-year-old males to learning from fifteen-year-old males. It’s a social experiment that failed. Dr. Epstein’s book traces the history of the problem, demonstrates with unrelenting perseverance that much of the turmoil of our teens is a creation of our culture, and offers a specific and detailed proposal for getting our young people back on track. If you are concerned about America’s young—and about America’s future—this is a must-read.”

—**Newt Gingrich**, former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives and Founder of the Center for Health Transformation

“Perhaps it is time for a paradigm shift in how we understand the tumultuous time we call adolescence. Dr. Epstein’s landmark book may be just what we need to help enhance our understanding of and better serve those moving through this complex period of life.”

—**Drew Pinsky, M.D.**, Co-Host, “Loveline”; Medical Director, Department of Chemical Dependency Services, Las Encinas Hospital, Pasadena, California

“Epstein’s book presents a serious and bold challenge to widely held views about teenagers: that they are inherently irresponsible, that they must be shielded from adult challenges, that they are not capable of making sound decisions about matters of health. Epstein demonstrates in a rigorous and persuasive way that teens are in fact highly capable—in some respects even more capable than adults. By shielding and protecting young people from adulthood, we have isolated them from their elders, from their spiritual roots, and from their heritage, leaving many of them angry and confused in the spiritually empty world of teen culture. We need to reexamine our basic assumptions about young people, and Epstein shows us how.”

—**Deepak Chopra**, author of *Life After Death: The Burden of Proof*

“Many developmental scientists, psychotherapists and popular writers have tackled the problem of adolescence, but none with the objective clarity and perspicacity of Dr. Robert Epstein. He argues persuasively that adolescence is an unnecessary creation of modern culture and gives both parents and professionals new insights about worrisome aspects of the behavior we see so often during the teen years. Epstein’s arguments are well researched and empirically defensible, and he is a lucid writer. At times his prose is riveting.”

—**Lewis P. Lipsitt, Ph.D.**, Emeritus Professor of Psychology, Medical Sciences and Human Development, Brown University

“This is a profoundly important book. Dr. Epstein is raising issues about our young people that we need to think about and evaluate carefully. Generally, I think the institutions that serve our young are sound, but this book points to some obvious problems—most especially the fact that our young people are largely isolated from the adult world. If you care about America’s young, this is a must-read.”

—**Dr. Joyce Brothers**, author & columnist

“Dr. Epstein is correct in expressing skepticism about all the hype these days on the teen brain. There is no evidence that the problems of American teens are a result of immature brains. My own research suggests that what many adults call risky behavior in teens may actually be associated with brain maturity. Dr. Epstein writes with unusual clarity on the teen-brain issue. Given what’s at stake for our society, his views need to be taken seriously.”

—**Gregory S. Berns, M.D., Ph.D.**, Distinguished Chair of Neuroeconomics and Director of the Center for Neuropolicy, Emory University

“I believe what Dr. Epstein is saying one hundred percent. Young people have the ability to do great things; they just never have the opportunity to do them. They’re also rarely placed in situations where they have to do them. We treat teens as if they’re just kids, assuming they can’t do very much, but when they’re put into tough situations, they tend to perform just as well or even better than adults. As a teen I successfully impersonated an airline pilot, a medical doctor, a lawyer, and a college instructor. Imagine what I could have done if I had actually been encouraged to develop my adult capabilities. And imagine what today’s teens might be able to do if they weren’t so completely cut off from the adult world.”

—**Frank W. Abagnale**, author of *Catch Me If You Can*; president, Abagnale & Associates

“Retired and in poor health, it is extremely rare for me to endorse any book these days. However, I feel powerfully called to write in support of Dr. Robert Epstein’s book *The Case Against Adolescence*. I heartily believe in the validity of what he is saying. Furthermore, I believe what he is saying to have vast consequence for our society. All of America should take note of it.”

—**M. Scott Peck, M.D.**, author of *The Road Less Traveled*

“The American education system, as we know it, was designed during a period of rapid industrialization. The mission of schools was to inculcate ‘industrial discipline’ as a means of preparing our young people, in factory-like fashion, to work in the new industrial world. That antiquated system no longer prepares our young for the real world they will be facing in the years to come, and, as Dr. Epstein shows, it also isolates young people from adults in ways that have unfortunate consequences. If you care about the future of our young people, *The Case Against Adolescence* is an essential read.”

—**Alvin Toffler**, author of *Future Shock* and *Revolutionary Wealth*

“Here are America’s youth, regarded keenly, knowingly—with many popular assumptions and notions set aside in favor of an accurate and thoughtful portrayal of our young fellow citizens, and too, many of the rest of us, who may fail them by overlooking their achievements and possibilities.”

—**Robert Coles, M.D.**, professor of psychiatry, Harvard University

“Robert Epstein’s critique of our conventional view of adolescence is timely. Of all its wide implications, perhaps the most significant is the one for education. Treating young people as adults and giving them the opportunity to embrace responsibility are strategies that the empirical research and analysis of Epstein’s work justify. This is a vital book for parents and policy makers on the state and federal levels. It is a long overdue contribution.”

—**Leon Botstein**, president, Bard College; author of *Jefferson’s Children: Education and the Promise of American Culture*

“Dr. Epstein has written a very provocative essay about adolescence. His arguments deserve serious consideration and open debate.”

—**Ellen Langer, Ph.D.**, author of *Mindfulness*; Professor of Psychology, Harvard University

“Epstein’s book on adolescence is a fresh and timely look at what makes teens miserable, and how their condition can be helped. It is a very original approach, sure to ignite discussion and controversy. A great deal of what he says is right on the money, and few people have written on this subject with his combination of expert knowledge and clear prose.”

—**Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**, author of *Flow*; Professor of Management, Claremont Graduate Center

“While human evolution has for hundreds of millennia trusted teens to be fully competent adults and parents, our present culture has somehow found it convenient to view them as children. Robert Epstein makes a powerful case for correcting this costly error.”

—**Jean Liedloff**, author of *The Continuum Concept*

“Parents puzzled about the reasons for changes in child-rearing since they were children may find some answers in Robert Epstein’s argument about what he calls ‘the artificial extension of childhood.’”

—**George F. Will**, columnist

“Teenagers are not children. Dr. Epstein convincingly demonstrates the harm caused by treating them that way. With an intellectual honesty not often seen, this book cuts through the mountain of prejudice and negative stereotypes and shows teens as they once were, and some day will be again. This is an important book, and one that strikes the next nail in the coffin of the bigoted “storm and stress” view of adolescence. This book should be required reading for all youth workers, all parents trying to better understand their kids, all politicians setting youth policy, and most especially for teens who instinctively recognize the injustice and harm of our system. This book is a powerful tool for articulating that injustice.”

—**Alex Koroknay-Palicz**, president & executive director, National Youth Rights Association

“*The Case Against Adolescence* constructs a powerful argument against trivializing a significant fraction of the population in the interests of an illusion. Whether you’re a parent, a teacher, a policy maker, or a recovering victim of enforced childishness, you need to read this book.”

—**John Taylor Gatto**, author of *Dumbing Us Down* and *The Underground History of American Education*; former New York City and New York State Teacher of the Year

“Dr. Epstein offers a compelling mixture of historical evidence and modern insight into the present problem of infantilization of youth. If we trust our youth with the inevitable responsibilities of modern life sooner rather than later, we can reinvigorate our society. Dr. Epstein’s ideas provide an academic framework for a number of issues—like allowing teens to vote in municipal elections at age 16—that are close to my heart and crucial for the future of American society. In this iconoclastic work, Dr. Epstein shows not only how much we lose by belittling teens, but also how much we stand to gain by empowering them.”

—**Gale A. Brewer**, Member, New York City Council

“We are all individual and desire to be treated as such. Dr. Epstein makes a good case for adolescents to be treated not as a group with a formula, but as individual unique people.”

—**Suzanne Somers**, actress and author

“Because of my family’s troubled history and because I’m the mother of two teens, I have a deep interest in the mental health of young people. This book has opened my eyes, and it will open yours too. We’ve completely isolated teens from the people they’re about to become, and we’ve trapped them in a meaningless world controlled by peers and media. We’ve forgotten how capable young people are, and they know it and are frustrated. We need to completely reexamine how we treat America’s teens.”

—**Mariel Hemingway**, actress

“This is an amazing book, long overdue. I’ve been saying for decades that the way to bring out the best in young people is to give them meaningful responsibility and authority, and the Guardian Angels have shown in countries around the world how powerful this model is. The surest way to make teens miserable is to treat them like kids, and the best way to make them strong is to let them grow up. Dr. Epstein lays out these issues like no one ever has before.”

—**Curtis Sliwa**, Founder & President, Guardian Angels; host,
‘The Curtis Sliwa Show,’ WABC Radio, New York

“Dr. Epstein’s ideas about teens are revolutionary. Many of our teens today have serious problems, and if Dr. Epstein is right, those problems are largely of our own making. This book will bring our ideas about teens down to earth.”

—**Buzz Aldrin**, Ph.D. (Col., USAF, ret.), Apollo 11 Astronaut

What the Reviewers Are Saying...

“Anyone who cares about adolescents, has been impressed by their abilities, or has sympathized with the mixed messages and confusing pressures they face in society will be encouraged by this book and will want to share it with others.”

—**Kathleen Leonard**, *The Free Library*

“Time to abolish adolescence—so argues Epstein in this extensive, groundbreaking book.... Epstein’s credentials and research are extensive; his arguments, persuasive. He is an astute observer of the world around him, especially its do-nothing adolescents.”

—**Linda Beck**, *Library Journal* (Starred Review)

“Among the many good titles on the invention theory of adolescence, Epstein’s is the most comprehensive and authoritative.”

—**Julianne J. Smith**, *Library Journal*

“... [Research] largely confirms the general picture Epstein presents. Teenagers should be deemed to be adults, albeit young ones, and treated as such by those around them and by social institutions at all levels. There is no need for a special category of ‘adolescents’ and no need for the corresponding concept of ‘adolescence’ except as a reminder of the pathological phenomena observed in teenagers when we treat them as children.”

—**David Moshman**, *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*

“I couldn’t agree more with Epstein’s arguments regarding infantilization. This book has the potential to be an important conversation starter about social policy and as such should have a broad audience. His book is replete with examples of young people who have not been allowed to live up to their true potential and with other examples of how today’s adolescents are actually quite capable of mature behavior... This book has an important core message—infantilization is harmful, and adolescents can be competent.”

—**Susan L. O’Donnell**, *PsysCRITIQUES*

“Epstein estimates that young Americans are now ten times more restricted than adults, and twice as restricted as convicted criminals. He says teenagers are infantilised and deprived of human rights.... It is a strong argument: that by increasing restrictions upon children, and denying them civil freedoms and responsibilities, neurotic parents are in fact facilitating the very thing which they seek to prevent—they are driving their offspring even deeper into the toxic world of online teenage culture.”

—**Melanie Reed**, *The Times* (London)

“Teens are highly capable—in some ways more than adults—and this landmark discussion offers paths for reaching and enhancing the competence in America’s youth.”

—**Independent Publisher**

“...enormously valuable as a provocation and well worth reading...a knock on the side of the head.”

—**Bruce Bearistro**, *Education Canada*

“Epstein provides a cogent and coherent account of the data about the capacities of young people.... The book should be required reading for anybody concerned with young people—but especially those making policy. Things can be done differently. Epstein’s book leaves us in no doubt that they should.”

—**Howard Sercome**, *Scottish Youth Issues Journal*

“Epstein presents a persuasive, marketable plan to rescue youth programs from their endless, futile mandate to suppress adolescent precocity, and American social policy from the perpetual ineptitude of blaming teens for social problems caused by adults.”

—**Mike Males**, *Youth Today*

“Epstein shows that differences in the teen brain are the result of social influences, rather than the cause of teen turmoil. He concludes that a careful review of the research shows the teen brain we read about in the headlines—the immature brain that is supposedly the cause of teen problems—is nothing less than a myth.”

—**Michael Smith**, *The Washington Times*

“Epstein looks in depth at the history of adolescence and finds that most cultures throughout human history don’t even have a word for it—it is a recent artificially created time of life. I hope it changes. It would be great to see those in power stop looking at our young as a sub-human species that needs to be totally controlled, but instead provide enough adult interaction that will develop a mature competence in them.”

—**Ron Flickinger**, *News-Sentinel*, Fort Wayne, Indiana

“In his provocative new book, professor and author Robert Epstein argues that, just as our society has underestimated the abilities of women, people of color and the elderly, we treat adolescents with much less respect than they deserve and much less freedom than they have experienced in the past.... Alexander the Great founded his first colony at age 16 and suppressed a revolt that same year. Did he shower, keep his room clean, and take out the carnage? If not, was he grounded?”

—**Michael Jaffe**, *New Jersey Psychologist*

What the Bloggers Are Saying...

"More than any other single book I have read in the past decade, this book has rocked my thinking about youth and youth ministry. Epstein's contention—extremely well documented—that we 'infantilize' teenagers, keeping them in a protracted form of childhood, resonated with me.... If I've ever said another book was a must-read for parents and youth workers, ignore that, until you have read this book."

—**Mark Oestreicher**

"Epstein's book is a timely work that should be heeded by anyone who has any sort of contact with those whom we currently call 'adolescents.' Having worked with high schoolers for the better part of three years, his proposed method of viewing teenagers as adults has proved extraordinarily successful.... Epstein's book is thorough and well-researched. It is a must for any parent, educator, youth worker, or anyone else who works with teens or is interested in American culture."

—**Matthew Lee**

"As Dr. Robert Epstein has shown in his convincing book, the result of infantilization [on teens] has been almost wholly negative."

—**Classically Liberal**

"*Teen 2.0* is very accessible and, quite frankly, a must-read for any parent, youth worker, or person who cares about the development of young people. I highly recommend it, but be warned: it will rock your world."

—**Jeff Goins, Pilgrimage of the Heart**

"In the last year I read and was deeply disturbed by the book, *Teen 2.0*. If you are going to read a book in 2011, make it that one. It shook me."

—**Adam McLane, Youth Unlimited Daily**

"Really powerful.... Epstein is saying that we can do better, and I agree."

—**Chitch.at**

"Dr. Robert Epstein is someone who 'gets it.'"

—**Puerile Psyche**

"This is big. This is very big. There is a new book out there that seeks to reveal all the harmful ways we harm our adolescents.... Someone understands!"

—**The Ranting Teacher**

"I think Dr. Epstein is right, and I think a lot of genuine cruelty is perpetrated under the guise of 'protecting the children.'"

—**Classical Values**

"...fascinating and persuasive book."

—**Laissez Faire Books**

"This new book...is a must for everybody who has anything to do with teenagers!"

—**HappyWomen**

“I agree with Epstein that infantilization is making teens angry and depressed. When your body screams you are an adult and adults keep insisting you are a child, it has to be frustrating.”

—**Dr. Helen**

“Dr. Epstein is no survivalist crackpot driven by conspiracy theories. The former editor-in-chief of *Psychology Today* who earned a Ph.D. from Harvard says that we inflict great harm on our states and nation by stretching childhood out for decades.”

—**State Policy Blog**

“Everyone should read Epstein’s book, which argues that adolescence is a destructive concept and that many teens are much more capable than given credit for.”

—**The Misanthropic Economist**

“It’s fantastic.... the research and statistics are wonderful, very useful and eye-opening.”

—**Just Another Blog** (written by a young person)

Teen 2.0

Saving Our Children and Families
from the Torment of Adolescence

Robert Epstein, Ph.D.



Fresno, California

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To Jordan and Jenelle,
may you grow up in a world that judges
you based on your abilities,
not on your age.

Are the disturbances which vex our adolescents due to the nature of adolescence itself or to the civilisation? Under different conditions does adolescence present a different picture?

—Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, 1928

The task of youth is not only its own salvation but the salvation of those against whom it rebels.

—Jane Addams, *The Second Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 1930

The psychological events of adolescence in our society are not a necessary counterpart of the physical changes of puberty, but a cultural invention—not a deliberate one, of course, but a product of an increased delay in the assumption of adult responsibilities.

—L. Joseph Stone and Joseph Church, *Childhood and Adolescence*, 1957

Constitutional rights do not mature and come into being magically only when one attains the state-defined age of majority. Minors, as well as adults, are protected by the Constitution and possess constitutional rights.

—United States Supreme Court, *Planned Parenthood of Missouri v. Danforth*, 1976

We are suffering heavy casualties during the years of growth and development, and these casualties not only are tragic for the individuals but also bear heavy costs for American society.

—David A. Hamburg, *Today's Children*, 1992

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Foreword

Teen 2.0 is one of the most revolutionary books I have ever read. It presents many challenging and little-known facts about young people, some of them quite breathtaking. It suggests that our contemporary disregard for the civil rights of young people is abysmal and that their parents, teachers and society are doing much harm and little good by over-restricting them. Epstein shows that although conditions have improved in some ways for adolescents over the past century, in many ways teens are far worse off than ever before. Incredibly, we still often discriminate against teenagers when it comes to education, sex, censorship and many other areas.

Epstein's final chapters contain his program for social change—quite the chapters! He proposes that young people be “extended full adult rights and responsibilities in each of a number of different areas as soon as they can demonstrate appropriate competence in each area.” Good! To give adolescents more responsibilities when they are set to handle them is an excellent pragmatic goal.

The form of psychotherapy I originated in 1955—Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy—tries to teach people to retain their goals and preferences but stubbornly refuse to make them *dire necessities*. People thereby take responsibility for their own disturbances and gain the power to prevent and change them. Does this include adolescents? By all means. They, too, can largely control their emotional destiny if they think, feel and act as if they can. This won't make them all miracle workers, but it can help tremendously to keep them less disturbed.

Chapter Thirteen of Epstein's book describes twenty-nine rights that he believes society had better give to adolescents. Some of them, such as the right to marry without parental or court consent, may seem extreme and impractical (as Epstein admits), but I would still tend to endorse them, at least experimentally. If we give adolescents all the rights that Epstein asks us to grant them, many may fail. *Maybe*. Let us experiment and discover!

Albert Ellis, Ph.D.
Albert Ellis Institute
New York City

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I collaborated with Dr. Diane Dumas in developing the *Epstein-Dumas Test of Adulthood*. Diane also collected and analyzed competency, infantilization and psychopathology data from subjects in several states as part of her dissertation work. Bill Milburn, another graduate student, did some of the initial investigative work on Boys Town. Dr. Ann Sasaki of the San Diego Sheriff's Department provided assistance in the collection of inmate data. Dr. Michel Antoine, a professor at the Université de Marne-la-Vallée in France, assisted in the translation of French materials. Rabbi Sheldon Moss of Tucson, Arizona, checked my use of Hebrew. Translator Yasushi Ito of Osaka, Japan, helped with Japanese terminology. Dr. Hugh Cunningham, a history professor at the University of Kent in the United Kingdom, provided detailed comments on Chapter Two. Dr. Mike Males of the University of California Santa Cruz gave me many useful insights through extensive correspondence. And Dr. Eric H. Monkkenen of UCLA's history department shared some of his unpublished data on the history of adolescent crime. Dr. Helen Bond of Edinburgh University and Dr. David Elkins of Pepperdine University provided helpful comments on Chapter Twelve. And Dr. John Wixted of the University of California San Diego reviewed technical material in Chapter Seven. Drs. Herbert Kelman and David Hamburg were kind enough to help me track down references to their writings. James Kirchner of Detroit, Michigan, provided information about teens in Czechoslovakia. I offer special thanks to Dr. James Garbarino of Cornell University, Dr. Jerome Kagan of Harvard University, and Dr. Mark Phillips of San Francisco State University for critiquing an early version of the manuscript. Shannon Fox, Alex Koroknay-Palicz, Pierre Lehu, Kent Sorsky, and attorney Charles Thomas provided helpful feedback on The Young Person's Bill of Rights. I'm also grateful to my hardworking assistants for conducting library and Internet research and in other ways for helping me to assemble this manuscript: Nicholas Albrecht, Amy Barth, Joshua Blitt, Samantha Brooks, Angela Chen, Katie Codon, Shelley Converse-Rath, Meg Day, Cheryl Epstein, Jordan Epstein, Marin Fantino, Marnette Federis, Shannon Fox, Kristie Geist, Erin Hayes, Allison He, Tamara Hurst, Gwyneth Hyndman, Vanessa Johnston, Melissa Karnaze, Marie Kent, Kari Kientzy, Sachiko Kuwabara, Justin La, Christina Lee, Russell Leedy, Randy Lie, Avery Marvin, Elizabeth Morrison, Jessica Nager, Marina Nekhendzy, Jill Nelson, Lily Niu, Jennifer Ong, Aisha Prasad, Heather Rolfe,

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R.E.

Preface to the New Edition

This is an updated and retitled version of a book I originally published in 2007 entitled *The Case Against Adolescence: Rediscovering the Adult in Every Teen*. Books are sometimes revised and reissued under new titles, but perhaps not so soon after their original release. I was urged to take this step for four reasons: First, new data and recent events make the case even stronger; new information is included in this volume, including a comprehensive list of resources on teen rights (Appendix 6). Second, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families from the Torment of Adolescence* is a stronger title than the original, emphasizing the urgency and utility of the book's message. *Teen 2.0* is short for *Teen Version 2.0*; this book argues that our current version, who is often angry, depressed or frustrated, needs an upgrade. Third, some readers felt that the original book should have included practical parenting tips; the new one does (Appendix 7, "Finding the Inner Adult in Your Teen").

And finally, this book celebrates the first annual National Youth Rights Day, held on April 14, 2010. April 14 is the birth date of John Holt, a pioneer in both the home schooling and youth rights movements. I co-founded this day with a tireless worker for youth rights, Alex Koroknay-Palicz, director of the National Youth Rights Association (YouthRights.org). At this writing, a dozen other organizations have signed on as founding sponsors, and thousands of young people have signed on as supporters. To honor this day, I have also created The Young Person's Bill of Rights (Appendix 8), a document that I hope will serve as a blueprint for things to come.

Prominent people of widely different backgrounds and political persuasions—Albert Ellis, Newt Gingrich, M. Scott Peck, George Will, Leon Botstein, Robert Coles, Buzz Aldrin, Joyce Brothers, Deepak Chopra, Alvin Toffler, Drew Pinsky, and others—have praised this book because the perspective developed herein is critically important for the well-being of our teens, families and society. As you will see in the coming pages, the serious problems faced by America's teens—high rates of depression, drug abuse, drinking, pregnancy, gambling, sexually transmitted diseases and conflict with parents—problems that reverberate harshly through our families and our society—are largely unnecessary. In more than a hundred cultures around the world, teen turmoil is entirely absent; such cultures typically don't even have a word for adolescence. There is simply no

question that the problems that plague our young are creations of our culture—of laws and systems set in motion a century ago which cause us to isolate teens from adults and to treat all young people as if they are equally and inherently irresponsible and incompetent. Those laws and systems no longer serve their original purposes and in many respects now do great harm. They need to be abolished, or at least radically overhauled, in ways that serve the legitimate needs of today's world.

The price of our ignorance about these issues is so great that the message is worth repeating and, yes, retitling. If anything, we are moving swiftly in the wrong direction. Assisted by new technologies, we are rapidly increasing the number and type of restrictions we place on young people, extending childhood well into the mid and late 20s, and creating an even wider chasm between young and old. The result: more frustration and pain, more conflict with parents and other authorities, and more young people stranded for even longer periods in the frivolous world of youth culture—a tragic waste of precious human resources.

Consider this book an obstruction—large, weighty and fluorescent—placed on the tracks in front of a wayward train that's speeding toward a deep precipice.

Robert Epstein, Ph.D.
San Diego, California

A Note to the Reader

Teen 2.0 can be read on different levels. If you just want the gist, you might be satisfied with the detailed overviews at the beginning of each of the fourteen chapters. The overviews are free of jargon, and they capture essential arguments. To get answers to key questions on each of the chapter topics, skip to the end of each chapter, where I respond to the most common questions people have asked me about teens over the years. If you can't wait to get to the parenting tips, go straight to Appendix 7.

If you want to know how well you measure up as an adult, go to Appendix 1, where you can take an abridged version of the *Epstein-Dumas Test of Adulthood (EDTA)*. You'll be able to score the test yourself using a specially designed scoring sheet, and you'll end up with both an overall score and several subscale scores, which will tell you how competent you are in skill areas that are important for mature adulthood. Once you've taken the test, feel free to give it to some teens. They might surprise you. You can also take the unabridged test online at <http://HowAdultAreYou.com>. The online version generate scores automatically and provides a detailed report of your performance.

For more detail, read the main text in each chapter. The writing is informal and, I hope, friendly. I've also included technical material that's unusual for a mainstream book: I use graphs, tables and other scientific tools when I think they will strengthen my arguments, and sometimes I explore scientific issues in detail. If you're not interested in technical material, skim over it or skip it entirely. You'll still get the idea. The chapters also include magazine-style boxes that contain stories about young people, interesting tidbits, and literary material that's pertinent to the chapter. Most of the boxes are just for fun; I hope you enjoy them.

If you want to dig deeper, consult the material included toward the end of the book: notes, a list of relevant readings, and some statistical data.

All in all, even if you don't agree with every point, I hope this book will get you thinking in new ways about young people, and I hope it will give many capable young people new options and opportunities.

Introduction

By the time he was fourteen or fifteen, my son Justin was capable of living on his own. He did well in school without any prompting from me, did numerous chores around the house (also with minimal or no prompting), and kept a schedule and lists of things to do, just as I did. He demonstrated that he was ready to drive by stealing my pickup truck several times. I was angry about the deceit, but I had to admit—to myself, not to him—that he seemed to have been driving safely. He dealt with adversity with remarkable maturity and flexibility. He was and still is expert at what therapists call “reframing.” In other words, he knew how to put a positive spin on almost anything.

Even more significant, he had achieved enormous balance in his life. He worked hard, but he also played hard. He had lots of friends, and even though I knew he had experimented with drugs, he seemed highly resistant to peer pressure and ultimately to be reasonably cautious. He said no to his friends when he had homework or chores to do, even though he must have been under enormous pressure at times to run off. He learned to surf, jump bicycles, skateboard and so on, with his peers, and when I refused to drive him places, he found creative ways to reach remote destinations on his own. At times, I found myself envious of the delicate balance he had achieved between work and play, between the intellectual and physical, between the structured and the wild. It was obvious that he was going to go to college and then get on with his life, with or without me. And so, in fact, he did—mainly without me, which has made me feel quite proud of him.

Justin wasn’t a prodigy; he was just mature—that is, adult-like—more mature than his elder brother, and even more mature, in some respects, than I was. But what, I wondered, did we mean by *maturity*, and how did Justin get that way? And if Justin was so capable, why couldn’t he drive my truck legally, and why did he have to go to school every day, and why wasn’t he allowed to make even minor medical decisions on his own? In short, why was society—and, for that matter, why was I—continuing to treat him like a child?

Social psychologist Ellen Langer reminds us that many of our practices, both individual and societal, are quite mindless. We do them without analysis or thought, often simply because someone else once did them long ago. In her modern classic, *Mindfulness*, she tells a story about a woman who always cut a piece off her roast before putting it in the pan. She did this because her mother always had,

so one day she asked her mother to explain the practice. Her mom said only that her mother had always done the same, so the woman posed the same question to her grandmother, who said, “I only had one pan, and it was too small to hold the meat.”

Could it be, I wondered, that Justin had to be treated like a child because of principles and practices that were long out of date—because, in effect, decades or centuries ago someone’s pan had been too small?

I was dimly aware that teenagers hadn’t always been treated like children, but I didn’t grasp much of the picture. The Bar Mitzvah—the centuries-old Jewish coming-of-age ceremony—had always been a mystery to me: why did we say that this ancient ceremony indicated that a boy was now a man when we clearly didn’t mean it? Was the modern ceremony just a cruel joke, a kind of tease? “Sure,” says the rabbi, “Now you are a man (heh, heh).” Had the Bar Mitzvah ever meant that a boy had attained adult status? I also knew, vaguely, that in other times young people had had more responsibility and authority than they have today, but I had never thought to ask about what had happened to all that responsibility and authority. When—and why—did it disappear? My curiosity grew stronger as the years passed, and, over time, I filled file drawers and book shelves with relevant materials. Teens, I learned, had been treated like adults throughout most of human history. It’s only recently that they’ve been infantilized.

As a parent, citizen and occasional teacher of courses on developmental psychology, I was also aware that modern teens were a pretty scary, confused and angry group of people, and I began to wonder whether infantilization—or what one might call “the artificial extension of childhood”—could be the culprit. What I’ve learned has confused, surprised and, at times, shocked me. Over time, and based on my own research as well as findings from psychology, anthropology, history, biology, and other fields, I’ve discovered that Justin and millions of other teens have gotten a raw deal—that shortly after puberty, most of us have the potential to function fully as adults, emotionally, physically and mentally.

And that’s what this book is about. As you’ll see, I’m not the first person to have expressed concern about the artificial extension of childhood, and I’m sure I won’t be the last. But I hope that this volume will present a case so compelling, and perhaps so disturbing, that it will stimulate a long-overdue discussion about how we’re currently raising our teens, and perhaps set some changes in motion.

TEEN ^{2.0}

“A landmark book”
Dr. Drew Pinsky

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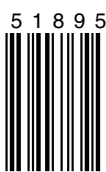
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