



Spark & Stitch Institute

Ignite Courage and Connection with Kids



CATCH YOUR KID BEING GOOD.

**How to get out of negative ruts and see your
child or teen for who they really are.**

QUIZ - Are you stuck in a negative rut with your child or teen?

Don't worry, this is not a pass/fail test! This is just for you. All parents go through challenging phases with their kids. Sometimes we can get stuck there and negative interactions start taking over. The following statements will help you discover how stuck you may be with your child or teen.

I worry that my child/teen is turning into a _____ [something I don't like].

☐ None of the time ☐ Some of the time ☐ Most of the time

I find myself annoyed with my child or teen.

☐ None of the time ☐ Some of the time ☐ Most of the time

I have a difficult time seeing my child's strengths.

☐ None of the time ☐ Some of the time ☐ Most of the time

I feel like my child/teen reserves their worst behavior for me.

☐ None of the time ☐ Some of the time ☐ Most of the time

I correct or critique my child/teen either out loud or in my head.

☐ None of the time ☐ Some of the time ☐ Most of the time

I am able to find ways to have fun, joke, and enjoy my child/teen.

☐ None of the time ☐ Some of the time ☐ Most of the time

I am worried that other people will see my child/teen as _____ [something I don't like].

☐ None of the time ☐ Some of the time ☐ Most of the time

I find myself wishing my child/teen was different.

☐ None of the time ☐ Some of the time ☐ Most of the time

I do not like the stage my child/teen is in right now.

☐ None of the time ☐ Some of the time ☐ Most of the time

Insight

As parents, we want what is best for our kids. Part of our job is to notice and celebrate our child's strengths as well as help them work on and practice new skills and behaviors. This means that we have to be able to hold up an accurate mirror to our kids about who they are and how they show up in the world.

The challenge is that this mirror can easily get distorted by our perceptions. These distortions come from a range of places inside of us - from worry, fatigue, projection, protection, or adoration. It is as possible for us to ignore challenging behaviors as it is for us to dwell on them.

Human beings are susceptible to confirmation bias, meaning that once we have an idea or belief in our heads we look for evidence to support that belief. This can backfire in parenting because it can cause us to selectively notice only negative or only positive behaviors.

Exercise - Holding up an accurate mirror

Step 1. Look at yourself in the mirror first.

We are far more likely to get into a negative rut or a pattern of denial when we are tired, stressed, worried, or isolating ourselves/family systems. Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I need more sleep?
- Do I need additional support (therapist, parenting group, coach, mentor, elder, etc...) to help me understand my triggers, fears, and projections?
- Do I need more breathing room in my schedule? Do I need to ask for more help?
- Am I feeding any of my personal passions or interests outside of parenting?

Step 2. Get new perspectives.

Children and teens alike tend to fall apart where they feel most safe, which hopefully is with their caregivers. This means that as parent we often see the messiest and most challenging parts of our kids. To get a better sense of how your child or teen shows up in the world, seek outside eyes.

- Ask a family friend to tell you what they love about your child or teen.
- Ask your child's teacher what they see as your child's strengths.
- Pay attention to how your child's friends interact with them.
- Learn more about child development and/or about your child's unique wiring from a [trusted source](#). Often times challenging behaviors are right on time.
- ***Believe what you hear and take in what you learn.***

Step 3. Reframe challenging behaviors.

When we are stuck in ruts, it is tempting to make blanket personality statements. This can lead to missed opportunities to coach your child's behavior instead of judging them. Try changing the script in your head.

- Instead of "My child is so dramatic," Try, "My child is learning to manage their feelings."

Step 4. Name three of your child's strengths:

*If you are having a hard time coming up with specific strengths, write down three action steps you will take from Step 1 or Step 2 to be able to find a truly believe in them.



Catching Your Child or Teen Being Good



EXERCISE

It is easy to get caught in a negative loop with your teen if you are trying to manage challenging behaviors. To stop that cycle, you want to be sure that you are reinforcing positive behaviors without overdoing it. If we overdo it, it stops feeling sincere. Think of some ways to reinforce positive behaviors with just a short phrase or sentence. For example, "Thanks for including your brother" or, "Nice work on your chores today."

There are three simple steps to encouragement:

- ✦ Identify the *specific* positive behavior (avoid general statements like "they were nice")
- ✦ Label it as positive
- ✦ Reinforce it with appreciation or encouragement

Now, think specifically about your child or teen.

Think about their behavior over the last two days.

What helpful, kind, courageous, responsible, or thoughtful things have they done?

Did you catch it? _____ Did you reinforce it? _____

How?

From now on, I want to
