

## **Even Good Parents Can Be Surprised**

*By Jody Russell*

It's been a little quiet recently with my friends.

Sometimes, when it's quiet, I realize I've been too busy with my own life to keep in touch, and I've temporarily neglected my friendships. But recently, it's been something a little different. It's sometimes hard to talk when things are rough. And it's been rough, for me and my friends. So we've been quiet.

Surprise can do that to you. Especially surprise from teenagers.

We are the good parents. Really. We are.

We are single parents, married parents, moms and dads. Some of us read the parenting books, some of us go by sheer instinct, some of us emulate our folks' good parenting techniques, and some of us went to early childhood classes with our children. Some of us work, some of us don't. Some work downtown, some work at home. We drive our children, we pick them up, we watch their soccer and football games, we let them have sleepovers, we cook them pancakes in the morning, and we eat dinner together.

We are the good parents. Really. We are.

We read books to our children when they were little, we talk current events with them now. We talk about values and faith. We love them deeply. We love them dearly. We work hard to have balanced lives. We watch them grow up, allow them to grow up, letting go slowly, seeing them change, and knowing that's the way it will be.

We listen to our children. We are available emotionally for our children. We are good parents. I know it.

And then something not-so-good happens. Not just to me, but to my friends' kids. Our teenagers have made choices that we don't care for. No, that sounds so benign. Our teenagers have made some terrible choices. It can be about anything, it is about everything. Talk to my friends. Talk to me. Talk to the good parents. There are kids who are smoking, trying drugs, exploring sex, kids who harm themselves, lose sense of their body image and endlessly diet, and kids who are depressed. They are our kids. They are our good kids. They are. I know it. Because it happens to us. The good parents.

My friends and I were surprised. Didn't see it coming. Because we were there, because we are there, because we listen and love.

And therein await the lessons. During our child's journey, we will be good parents. We will do the right things. We will love and read and learn and teach and provide our children with all the best. But it is their journey. And some choices will be tough to parent through, tough to watch, tough to find a way through.

The surprise will take away your breath, cause you to doubt every decision you've made. You will doubt your parenting. You will even doubt your job change, your house change, your decision to stay with a marriage, your decision to end one, your decision to take a vacation without the kids, and your decision to take a night class.

But it's important to remember -- you are a good parent. You are listening and loving. Breathe.

And don't forget to call. Your friends will probably have a story of their own. I know.