

This 15 page package is excerpted from the  
Leader's Guide and Program Manual for  
*Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* parent discussion groups.

In it we've provided the complete Introduction  
which provides useful information for your evaluative  
purposes. In addition, we provide the complete  
Chapter 3 from this Leader's Guide, which should  
be viewed in conjunction with Chapter 3 from  
*Please Stop the Rollercoaster!*

Viewing these excerpts together will provide what you need  
to view and evaluate this parent discussion group program.

## **A note from Sue Blaney**

One of the greatest gifts we can give parents of teenagers is the knowledge that they are not alone. Parents of young children talk regularly and provide important support for one another. But parents of teenagers too often become isolated and deprive themselves of this simple and effective strategy. There are many reasons for this, including time pressures and lack of opportunity, but more often it is driven by the desire to not expose personal family issues, impose on their teen's privacy, or risk looking like failures. The tragedy in this is parents miss the fact that what they are facing is perfectly "normal," that other parents can provide valuable and insightful support, and the challenges faced in most households with teenagers are remarkably similar. Parents feel tremendous relief when they realize their challenges aren't unique, and they are not alone.

The *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* parent discussion program provides the framework for enlightening, informative and supportive discussions for parents. The concept is simple and effective, and parents spend time discussing issues in a safe and healthy environment while having no expectation that they share private information.

I originally wrote *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* as a self-directed program that runs like a book group. This is a viable and effective way to run the program for many people. But after the book/program was on the market, I received requests for leader training. I've since observed that some parents of teens don't have the network, skills, or desire to participate in a self-directed group, but are extremely interested in participating in a group with a formal leader. This *Leader's Guide and Program Manual* provides everything a leader needs to promote and run this unique program, and makes it accessible for a wide majority of parents of teens.

I believe most parents of teenagers have what it takes to be effective and loving parents. I know most parents of teens truly have the best of intentions and care deeply about their teenagers. My approach helps people build on what they already know, respects their unique beliefs and values, and guides them to examine the range of issues they are likely to face. And they spend less time reading alone, and more time talking with peers.

My mission, simply put, is to facilitate communication. This program strengthens communities as it builds bridges, expands networks and improves communication among parents, between parents and schools, and between parents and their teenagers.

I'd love to hear how it works for you.

*Sue Blaney*

## Program Overview

Parenting teenagers today is a challenge! Parents must manage new issues, knowledge and choices, as well as new stresses, dangers and fears. There is a lot that parents need to consider and learn.

Welcome to ***Please Stop the Rollercoaster! How Parents of Teenagers Can Smooth Out the Ride.*** This program not only teaches parents about adolescence, it helps parents develop and grow. We'll show you how to create and run discussion groups that can profoundly and positively impact parents' confidence in their important, and evolving, role.

We're not going to tell parents how to parent. This program respects their beliefs and values, and we believe that most parents are well equipped for the job. We base this program on the premise that parents need to be engaged in their teenager's life—now more than ever. We'll help parents navigate their way through the many changes that occur during adolescence so they can provide the support teens need.

This is a **learning and discussion** program that encourages parents to discuss issues while they learn together. It asks parents to be respectful of differing views, and to offer support to one another. This is not a therapy group. Parents are not required or expected to share private information about their teens. However, in case sensitive or confidential topics are addressed, we want you to define and agree upon your rules for confidentiality.

- Program Objectives:**
- Participants will:
- Examine the most important issues they will face as they raise their teenagers.
  - Discuss differing points of view and learn from the experiences of other parents.
  - Explore specific ways to improve communication.
  - Learn from the experts about adolescent development—what's normal and why.
  - Understand the important influence parents have on their teen's engagement in risky behaviors.
  - Learn about character type and temperament and apply it to improve communication and understanding.
  - Identify ways in which they can be appropriately helpful in their teenager's school life.
  - Create a specific plan of action that enables them to apply what they learn to improve their family's dynamics.

## **Program Benefits**

This program helps parents:

- Build their confidence in this tricky business of parenting teens.
- Gain clarity on their positions as they create their own "rule book."
- Develop a support network of peers and strengthen their sense of community.
- Expand their viewpoints as they learn from others.
- Examine their own role and influences on their teen so they can be more intentional in their words and actions.
- Become more knowledgeable about current research and information about raising teenagers today.
- Enhance their relationship with their teens as they improve their communication and understanding.

## **How the Program Works**

- The program consists of 8 meetings, which correspond to the chapters in *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!*
- Meetings are generally 2 hours in length, but can be adjusted according to your group's needs.
- Participants read one chapter in preparation for their meeting, answering the reflective exercises.
- We recommend that you meet about every 2 weeks. (Monthly meetings are not recommended because groups tend to lose valuable momentum.)
- Try to organize groups with similar ages of teenagers. Teens in 7<sup>th</sup> grade are very different than teens in 10<sup>th</sup>.
- The ideal size for a group is 6 to 12 people.
- Be flexible. The curriculum is designed for flexibility. If a community emergency arises, for instance, take the time to address it. However, don't allow meetings to become so loose they are simply chat, or gossip, sessions.
- The facilitator will lead the discussions, but should play a decreasing role as the program progresses. The more the participants get involved in the program and discussions, they more they benefit.
- A copy of *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* is required for each participant. Books are available from any book store, and from ChangeWorks Publishing & Consulting.
- Our associated web site offers support information for groups, articles of interest and an e-newsletter for parents of teenagers and those who work with them.

## What Group Leaders Need to Know

Begin by reading *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* The introduction will familiarize you with the program objectives and approach. Review each chapter so that you gain a sense of the flow of the program, and the content.

This *Leader's Guide and Program Manual* provides all the instruction you will need to organize and run this parenting discussion group program. Materials are provided in the back of this manual that you may reprint and/or customize. These tools will enable you to run facilitated, self-directed, or hybrid groups. We provide tools for

- planning your program,
- promoting it,
- helping parents to sign up,
- establishing ground rules and setting expectations,
- a confidentiality agreement.

You will need this *Leader's Guide and Program Manual* for facilitated programs. As described in the meeting instructions, each meeting is likely to have its own dynamic depending on the topic and group comfort levels. You'll see we define the objectives for each meeting, and outline the materials you will need. Be sure to review each session completely before you go to the meeting; often there is something for which you must prepare.

We've left lots of room for your notes and encourage you to customize this program. Encourage group participants to also share magazine articles and other information with one another.

As a facilitator, know that you are walking on delicate and emotional ground. Parents of teenagers are often a mixture of strength and weakness, vulnerability and sensitivity. They view parenting in a highly emotional context because their love, hopes, and worries about their child run deep. Being mindful of this will enable you to provide the necessary support, and to keep the conversations in the right tone.

It is important that parents maintain their teenager's trust. They need to be sensitive throughout this program not to reveal private information about their teenagers that their teens would not want revealed. Although teenagers may be suspicious of their parents participation in this program at the beginning, we've found that once they are reassured that their parents are not talking about them inappropriately at the meetings, they often become big supporters. What teens see is their parents investing time and energy in their relationship and improving their parenting skills – and this can yield very positive results.

Note that the program progresses from fairly benign topics to ones that are more personal in nature. This way, as trust develops in the group, participants are more likely to feel comfortable sharing with one another.

**Important notes:**

- The eight meetings have been designed with the expectation that participants will have received their copy of *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* and read the Introduction and Chapter One prior to the first group meeting. A helpful “Overview Handout” is downloadable from the “Tools” section of our website which outlines these expectations for group participants and addresses parents’ concerns about confidentiality.
- The order of topics is intentional. In the first and second chapters we cover adolescent development and parenting roles and strategies. This is a good, safe start as participants learn to know one another.
- Communication (Chapter 3) is always a key area of concern for parents of teens. This chapter contains skill building exercises.
- Chapter 4, on risky behavior, can be a highly sensitive area for parents. It is by design that parents don’t focus on risky behavior until they have met as group four times, and have established some trust.
- Chapter 5 is one of the most popular because it covers character type and temperament by using a short instrument. This gives participants concrete information that they can have some fun with and apply in their family. It requires a little extra preparation time, and it includes the participation of family members - which is often a very positive thing!
- Chapter 6 covers supporting teenagers in school. This is sometimes an area in which parents are confused, and perhaps even intimidated. Facilitators need to be careful to understand possible insecurities that parents may have in this area, and appreciate and support them.
- Chapter 7, *The Myth of Perfection*, is where we ask participants to focus on themselves. This can be the most insight-producing segments of the program, but it is intensely personal work. The trust that has developed in the group will impact the degree to which participants will share openly.
- Chapter 8 provides an overview, and the opportunity to focus on what parents have learned in this process.

**Necessary materials:**

- All participants will need their own copy of *Please Stop the Rollercoaster! How Parents of Teenagers Can Smooth Out the Ride*.
- Facilitators will need their own copy of the Leaders Guide as well as a copy of *Please Stop the Rollercoaster!*
- Additional supplementary materials, available for free download from our website. Visit [www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com](http://www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com)

## **Alternative Format Options**

*If an 8-meeting program is just too long...*

While this program is best delivered in its entire 8-meeting format, our busy culture makes this time commitment a challenge for many parents. It is possible, while not recommended, to provide shorter alternatives.

### **Shorter format suggestions:**

- You could offer the program in 6 meetings, rather than 8 meetings. While participants would still be expected to read and do the exercises in all eight chapters, you could eliminate the discussion for chapter 5 as that work and discussion can be done with family members. Additionally, you could combine the discussion for chapters 7 and 8 in one meeting.
- Condensing the program into 4 two-hour sessions is also possible. For the greatest benefit, consider the following chapter combinations:
  - Meeting 1: Chapters 1 and 2
  - Meeting 2: Chapters 3 and 6
  - Meeting 3: Chapters 4 and 5 (or skip the chapter 5 discussion)
  - Meeting 4: Chapters 7 and 8
- Rather than 2 hour meetings, you could use a 90 minute format.

### **Additional recommendations:**

- Taking the 5 minutes at the close of each meeting for participants to articulate and write down their take-aways is a key element of this program. Even if you shorten the meetings, continue to take this important time to reflect and write. Applying this discipline helps participants to get the most actionable learning and outcomes.
- Encourage participants to be diligent to complete the reading and the exercises; they will have to do more of the work on their own.
- Encourage participants to meet outside of class for discussion.

### **Risks/disadvantages of a shortened program:**

This program embodies a growth process; so you do run the risk of diminishing participants' value and experience in a shorter program. Participants will have less time to develop an atmosphere of friendship and trust with one another. This may not only impact the relationships in the group, but the experience of participants. Trust is essential in participants' willingness to suspend judgment, develop their openness to new ideas, and experience the areas they have in common with their peers. However, a skilled facilitator who is aware of this up front can work to enhance the group dynamic. And it's better to run a shortened program than no program at all!

**Many groups actually continue beyond 8 meetings** and some ask for guidance in continuing their discussions. One simple way to continue is to go through the discussion questions again, spending time on those that were not discussed. Also, please visit [www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com](http://www.PleaseStoptheRollercoaster.com) for new material and topics to discuss.

## **About the Author:**

**Sue Blaney** is the author of *Please Stop the Rollercoaster! How Parents of Teenagers Can Smooth Out the Ride!*, and *Practical Tips for Parents of Young Teens*. A Certified Professional Behavior Analyst, she is a graduate of Northwestern University with a degree in communications. She specializes in improving team performance and managing the human side of change, and has spent over 25 years in training and development, marketing and sales.

Sue observes that many parents of teenagers are bombarded with conflicting messages and feel unsure about their changing role. As the parent of two teenagers, she uses her personal and professional experience to provide tools that connect parents of teens while helping them prepare for the range of issues they are likely to face. She's a communications expert and speaks frequently to parents, educators and other professionals about parenting issues, improving communication, increasing parent involvement, and creating parent discussion groups.

Sue Blaney and her family reside in the greater Boston area.

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## **Chapter 3 – PREPARATION**

### **Improving Communication**

**Time: 2 Hours**

#### **What to Expect:**

Improved communication is what just about every parent of a teenager wishes for and this chapter provides hands-on learning opportunities. In order to get the most out of the chapter, it will require that parents be very honest in their own self-evaluation.

#### **Objectives:** Participants will:

- Take a brief look at what good communication looks like in a family setting.
- Learn about communication by highlighting obstacles and examining elements that are inherent in good communication.
- Study several different strategies to enhance communication with their adolescent.
- Examine the recommendations of two experts with regard to setting limits and consequences.

#### **Materials:**

- Please Stop the Rollercoaster!* (PSR)
- Leader's Guide

#### **Preparation:**




- Read PSR, Chapter 3, and complete the exercises; familiarize yourself with the Group Discussion Questions on page 97.
- Read Leader's Guide, Chapter 3.
- Communication is a very important topic, and parents know it. Try and help parents improve their skills by being specific and concrete as you lead the discussions.




## **Chapter 3 – PREPARATION, cont.**




### **Preparation, cont.**

- Try to develop a role play to demonstrate active listening.
- Think of a personal story or experience that provides humor or poignancy that you can share to open the meeting.

### **Notes:**

<h2>Chapter 3</h2> <p>CONDUCTING THE LESSON</p>	<i>Est. Time</i>	<i>Reference</i>
<h3>Welcome</h3> <p><b>Welcome</b> participants back.</p>	--	
<h3>Review of Chapter 2</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Refer</b> participants to “take-aways” from Chapter 2 on page 68.</li> <li>• <b>Ask</b> them to share with the group how they were able to put into action what they learned at the last meeting.</li> </ul>	10 min.	PSR, p. 68
 <h3>Group Discussion</h3> <p><b>Explain</b> that we’ve listed several elements (in PSR on pages 76- 78) that make up good family communication: give and take, respect and honesty, trust, and humor. <b>Ask</b> the group what other elements they would add to this list.</p>	10 min.	PSR, pp, 76-78
 <h3>Group Discussion</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Review</b> the list of obstacles to communication found on page 79.</li> <li>• <b>Ask</b> participants to share which obstacles impact their communication.</li> <li>• <b>Discuss</b> why <b>praising</b> and <b>diagnosing</b> appear on the list of obstacles.</li> </ul>	10 min.	PSR, p. 79
 <h3>Group Discussion</h3> <p><b>Ask</b> participants to share which communication guidelines they identified in the exercise on page 75. [If they did not complete the exercise, ask them to re-examine the obstacles discussed on pages 79 – 81 and write their guidelines now.]</p>	15 min.	PSR, p. 75

Chapter 3, cont.	Est. Time	Reference
 <b>Group Discussion</b> <p><b>Discuss</b> the various techniques presented in PSR on pages 82 – 87. Ask for input as to how each approach can improve communication in a family. <b>Ask</b> participants to identify which approach holds the most promise for them.</p>	10 min.	PSR, pp. 82-87
<p>[Choose <u>one</u> of the following options.]</p>		
 <b>Option 1 - Role Play Exercise</b> <p>[In order to make this learning as concrete as possible, it is helpful to facilitate some role playing, or other hands-on application of the techniques described on pages 82 – 87. Depending on the group dynamic and your facilitation skills, a role play can be very helpful.]</p> <p>If you can, <b>model</b> a role play to demonstrate active listening skills. <b>Review</b> the techniques on page 84, and <b>ask</b> two members of the group to create a role play based on a realistic situation with their teenager. <b>Coach</b> them to improve their active listening skills; <b>ask</b> group participants to come up with additional open-ended questions.</p>	15 min.	PSR, pp. 82-87
 <b>Option 2 – Group Discussion</b> <p><b>Discuss</b> the quote on page 72 from A. Rae Simpson. Try and encourage parents to see how important it is that they take the “emotional high ground.”</p> <p>[To improve communication in their families, it is important for parents to see that they must be willing to change themselves.]</p>	15 min.	PSR, p. 72

Chapter 3, cont.	Est. Time	Reference
 <b>Group Discussion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Refer</b> participants to page 82 and read the teen quote aloud.</li> <li>• <b>Discuss:</b> How can parents approach serious topics without making a “Big Deal” about it?</li> <li>• <b>Develop</b> some strategies for this together.</li> </ul>	5 min.	PSR, p. 82
 <b>Group Discussion</b> <p><b>Discuss</b> the difference between natural consequences and punishment, using the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When might each be an appropriate response for parents?</li> <li>• Does this change depending on the age of the teenager?</li> <li>• Do you and your teen’s other parent agree on issues of discipline? If not, encourage them to engage in an open discussion about the topic <u>before</u> the next meeting.</li> </ul>	15 min.	
 <b>Group Discussion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Discuss</b> the two communication techniques shared on page 96.</li> <li>• <b>Brainstorm</b> as a group to come up with several other good ideas that you can share with one another to improve communication with your teenagers.</li> </ul>	15 min.	PSR, p. 96
<b>Take-aways:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Refer</b> participants to page 98.</li> <li>• <b>Ask</b> them to spend 5 minutes writing about their observations and what they learned based on the reading and discussion today <u>and</u> what they intend to do differently as a result.</li> <li>• <b>Ask</b> them to share their take-aways and plans with the group.</li> </ul>	10 min.	PSR, p. 98

<b>Chapter 3, cont.</b>	<b><i>Est. Time</i></b>	<b><i>Reference</i></b>
<p><b>Wrap Up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Announce</b> the time and place for the next meeting.</li> <li>• <b>Provide</b> a brief preview of Chapter 4</li> <li>• <b>Announce</b> their assignment: Read Chapter 4 and complete the reflective exercises in the chapter.</li> <li>• <b>Thank</b> participants, etc.</li> </ul>	5 min.	