

One of our girls turns eighteen next month! As adults, we realize how much we did not know at this age. But we also remember the frustration of being teenagers and feeling like we were being treated like a child. This is normal. It's also normal to try to protect our teenagers and help them through this difficult period. However, the more we protect and guide, the more the teenager thinks we are treating him or her like a child. It is a difficult time. The teenager's mission in life is to move into adulthood, while the parents, many times for nostalgic reasons, try to slow the process.

This parent-teen tension between a teenager and a Collins Home houseparent is even more difficult. Most group homes are structured with rules to provide order for children who have suffered through terrible abuse and neglect. That structure is meant to provide security for the children by organizing everyone and getting them going in the same direction.

A wise parent will vary the structure as the children get older and give more responsibility to the aging teen. However, since our youngest child is 6 and our oldest is seventeen, the structure is geared for a variety of ages. This can be stifling for a seventeen-year-old. I am grateful for our houseparents, Jamie & Crystal and Tyler & Bridgette, who understand this and work to find ways to give our older teens more responsibility and freedom.

There is an additional pressure teenagers at Collins Home face if they decide not to stay with us until they are twenty-one. In the back of their minds, they know when they leave Collins Home, we make room for other hurting children. When our children leave, they know they can come back to visit and talk with staff. But they also know they will not be able to come back to live as a young adult if anything goes wrong. The room they lived in for years will be filled with other children who have brought new pictures and placed new memorabilia on the walls. This is why it is critical we help the children keep and build their relationships with their family and the community. At seventeen, we want Collins Home children to have many friends in the community as well as relatives who will serve as their support group as they move into adulthood.

Every young adult needs a safety net as they enter the high-wire balancing act of finding a home and financial security. The safety net of relatives and friends provides an advisory resource to the young adult facing life's many challenges. Please consider volunteering your time to get to know our children. I think you will find the relationships you build will be both rewarding and fulfilling. Some of them will last a lifetime!