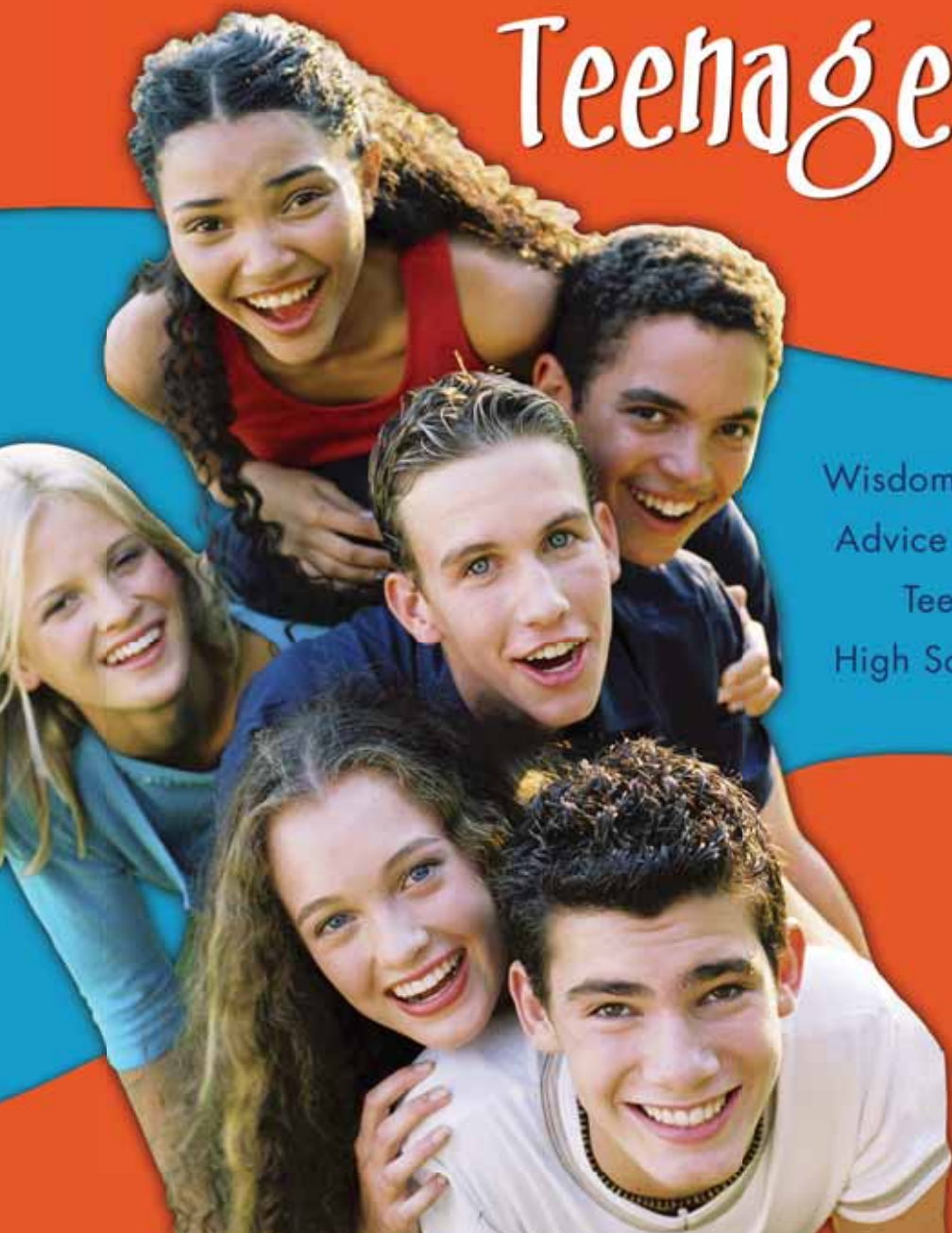


What I Wish
I Had Known

saint mary's press

About Becoming a

Teenager



Wisdom and
Advice from
Teens in
High School



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Preface

Whether you are excited or apprehensive about the teenage years, there is something in this book is for you. It is a collection of writings by high school students from across the United States. The writers explore lots of topics relevant to teenage life today: discovering who you are, being smart about technology, making friends, living your faith, staying out of harm's way, relating to parents and siblings, dealing with peer pressure, putting media messages in perspective, and being successful at school. The teens tell stories about their experiences, share insights about what they have learned, and offer great advice for younger teens and preteens.

Thanks

Almost six hundred teenagers responded to Saint Mary's Press's invitation to submit writings for consideration in this book. We are thankful for each and every one and regret that only a fraction could be included. Thanks also to all the high school teachers and parish leaders who encouraged their students and teenage parishioners to reflect on their experiences and put their wisdom and advice in writing for the sake of other young people.

Maura Thompson Hagarty, editor

Being a Teen

The best advice that I can give about the transition from childhood to adolescence is not to worry. Preteens shouldn't stress over the significant physical, intellectual, and emotional changes that will come as they become teenagers. Remember that each and every adolescent is going through these same changes, no matter how bizarre they may seem. The transition from childhood to adolescence is often a rocky one. Expect to make mistakes from time to time. Don't worry about making errors. Mistakes are a person's greatest teacher. Enjoy becoming a teenager, because it only happens once.

Michael J. Sanders

A Whole New World

Although the teenage years are often presented as angst-ridden and overly emotional by the media, the reality is that these years are some of the best in our lives. As teenagers, we have a difficult but rewarding balance between freedom and responsibility. We can see, feel, and do new things. Our relationships with others have the ability to grow deeper and more mature. A whole new world is opened before us.

Dane Davis

Managing Time

The biggest challenge teenagers face is trying to balance everything that is going on in their lives. It gets so complicated to play sports, hang out with friends, keep a boyfriend or girlfriend, cram for that huge history exam, find a ride to get to work on time, and find time to eat “healthy” (how often does that happen?). Then we have to talk about our day with our parents, after checking out colleges online. It gets so frustrating and overwhelming that you just want to dig a hole and hide in it forever. The thing most teenagers, including myself, need to work on is time management. Once there’s a set schedule, it will take that enormous boulder that’s weighing you down off your shoulders, and you will even have time to watch television, or even hit up the mall. There will be more than one stressful week in your teenage years, do not get me wrong, but there are ways to deal with this.

The worst thing anyone can do is bottle everything up and have no one to cry and scream with. If the people you want to tell aren’t listening to you fully, guidance counselors are an amazing help. Don’t be shy when you need to talk about a problem. Hiding it makes every situation worse. There is somebody, somewhere that has that same problem. People will understand; there is no need for you to be against the world.

So my young friends, time management will save you, but not as much as a good listener will. It’s better to have one true friend that will help you through anything, and put you before the world, than if you had one hundred acquaintances just to party with and sit with at the lunch table. Being a teenager can be the best part of your life one week and then the next week, the worst part of your life. But it’s you who can control the ups and downs.

Mary Beth Hoagland

Five Things to Remember When Beginning the Teen Years

1. The relationships that you have before your teen years will change. Everyone's do.
2. Your outlook on life, religion, politics, and many other aspects of society will change, and they must. You need to allow yourself to become the person that God has chosen you to be.
3. Be lenient with those around your age. They are also changing and learning. Don't put them down. Be supportive and allow them to grow.
4. Understand that your friends do not always know what is right for you, no matter how smart they seem or how good their idea sounds.
5. In your teenage years you hear the phrase "be yourself" quite often, but you don't know who you are yet. The better way to say it is, "Be who you want to be." That doesn't mean choose who you want to be every day . . . minute . . . second; it means find out what kind of person you want to be and be that.

Bri Boher

I am so happy in my life right now. What happens can be ten times better than what you read in a book, see on a movie screen, or even dream.

Malinda Frevert

Being a teenager is such a complex experience that sometimes it's hard to explain. There are so many wonderful things that occur and so many challenges that come to pass. One of the best things about being a teenager is the friendships that develop during these years. I have such wonderful friends, and as you get older, your friendships become stronger because interests and worldviews change. Friends become your family, and they help you through the joys and challenges that life can bring to you. Friends help you to become who you truly are. Another great thing about being a teenager is the development of opinions and ideas. As you age, the way you see and understand the world changes, and being a teenager in high school allows discussion of such ideas and opinions. Life isn't comprised of television shows and toys anymore. The conversations that make up teenage life truly make it great.

Johi Koneval

It is so great to become a teenager. I personally think you will love it. Becoming a teenager is one of the best things that will ever happen to you.

Lenny Ragaglia

The thing that has surprised me the most about my teenage years is the utter realization of reality. In my preteens, I lived a “Candyland” life with sugarcoated truths and unrealistic intentions. I felt that having the title *teenager* would thrust me into adulthood and privy me to the late-night curfews, romantic nights, and most importantly, boys that were as tall as me. I looked toward those awkward teenage years as a time to reinvent myself.

Waking up on July 3, 2001, I half expected to have long blonde hair and a boy waiting at my breakfast table. Instead I got cheesy cards about growing up and thirteen punches from a friend. Although I had been expecting more, I didn’t let my disappointment get the best of me.

I never found true love during my transitional years, nor the late-night endeavors, nor a non-height-deprived boy, but I started my journey into reality. Reality, with all its twists and surprises, is something I have learned to embrace and learn from. It’s the things you don’t expect that make you who you are and shape you. Surprises throughout my teens are what have helped me to continue to be the energetic and unpredictable person that I am.

Shama Lee Miranda

The Yellow Brick Road

I wish I had known becoming a teenager was like walking in Dorothy's ruby slippers down the Yellow Brick Road to see the wizard. You grow up in a nice house with your parents and a little dog like Toto. Everything seems to be perfect. Then one day a tornado hits: adolescence. Be careful what you wish for. You're not little anymore. You feel like you are all alone, dealing with your menstrual cycle, and your body is changing and developing. You used to see the world in black and white. All of a sudden, you feel as though you land in Oz, a world full of color. Everything is different. The munchkins are like all the boys you never noticed before, and you realize they now notice you. You just want to go back to Kansas, the security you once knew.

Glenda, your guardian angel, introduces herself and explains that adolescence will be like a long walk down the Yellow Brick Road. She gives you the ruby slippers and wishes you luck; it's a little scary, but exciting at the same time. Along the way, you meet your first guide, dressed as a scarecrow. He reminds you how lucky you are to have a brain, to always use your best judgment, to realize how intelligent you are, and to always choose the right road. Your second guide, the Tin Man, reminds you that your heart keeps you alive, to keep it healthy, and that you do survive a broken heart. Your third guide, the Lion, teaches you to muster up the courage to say no. He explains to you that fear is God's way of letting you know you're alive.

At every guide meeting, there is a visit from the Wicked Witch of the West, the devil, trying to spoil everything for you. She represents all the negativity, temptations, and emotions you have to deal with, including drugs, smoking, sex, alcohol, going along with the crowd, skipping school, and bullies. But Glenda always helps you and keeps you safe.

When you finally reach the Wizard, you know there is nothing in his bag for you. This becomes almost like an encounter with God. He acknowledges how proud of you he is and reminds you that you have traveled the road to maturity well, keeping your faith and achieving your goals. Glenda returns to explain how you had to take this journey to become who you are and to tell you that you always had the power and you always will. You say goodbye and thank all for their help and guidance.

Eventually you wake up and realize everything your parents said and warned you about growing up was right. But you'll never admit it.

Embrace and enjoy the journey. You'll have wonderful memories.

Erin Monahan

The best thing about the teenage years is receiving more independence. With this independence comes responsibility. During these years, it is important to choose your friends carefully. You do not want the kind of friends that are always looking for trouble.

Keeping God in your life during these teenage years is very important. You should pray to God to help you with teenage challenges. He will always guide you in the right direction. I stay close to God through prayer and by volunteering as an altar server. I have made some great friends through altar serving at my parish.

Another great thing about the teenage years is learning how to drive. Even though this is a very exciting time, it is also a very serious responsibility. High school is another great thing about being a teenager. You have the opportunity to meet different kids from all different schools. This helps you make new friends. I have made some great friends by joining bowling, an extracurricular activity after school.

Remember during your teenage years to choose your friends wisely, be responsible, and have fun. Always keep God in your life and your teenage years will be great!

Trust in God

Exciting

Excellent

New experiences

Years to remember

Extracurricular activities

Awsome friends

Responsibility

Stay focused

Andrew Marotta

You have to be dedicated and focused in order to become a successful teenager, but you also have to have some fun. Try not to take life too seriously. Just think of worrying as a waste of your time!

Chris Sodano

New Responsibilities

Before becoming a teenager, I wish I knew that I was going to have so much more responsibility and that I could not take it lightly. I also wish I knew that I couldn't be so childish and immature. Before becoming a teenager, everything was basically spoon-fed to me. Once I started getting bombarded with privileges, responsibilities, and choices, I was completely overwhelmed. But I realized that this was my initiation into adulthood, and I was going to have to start organizing my priorities. Looking back, I was really inexperienced in taking care of my responsibilities, such as deadlines, appointments, and chores. However, there was nothing I could do to escape these responsibilities. This was life, and I was going to have to learn to sort it all out on my own. Now I consider myself to be very independent; that independence came gradually, and eventually I learned to take care of myself. Sometimes I slip when it comes to childhood behaviors, but even with all the responsibilities, there is always time for play. You never get too old to play.

Megan Dae Hutton

Moving On Up

Turning into a young adult
Can seem terrifying
Like the hardest thing to do
But if you think about it
You've been doing it for your
whole life
Adding the word **teen** to the
end of your age
Seems to fill us with anxiety
But with new times in your life
Comes new responsibility
New obstacles
Moving on up in your life
Being a young adult brings so
much excitement
Independence and the freedom
to make your own decisions
Nothing feels better than that
But in the shadows of the fun of
being a teen
Growing up ultimately and will
always
Bring new experiences to light
The first time you fall in love
The first time your heart gets
broken
The first group of friends you
realize are bad for you

The first time you turn them
down
The first time you succumb to
pressure
The first time you witness the
secret life of teens
Remember that everyone goes
through this
So talking about it isn't awk-
ward
Yes, even your parents have too
Step through the door into
adulthood
Without looking back
Look forward to all of your
"firsts"
And understand that facing
them
Requires fortitude
And the courage to decide
what is right
Moving on up like this
Is another chapter
That you can look back on in
your life
And say "I remember
when . . ."

Brianne M. Rogers

When I Was Young

When I was young, I thought I knew all there is to know about growing up.
What to expect and how to deal with it.
Whom I was going to hang out with and whom I wasn't.
I am a teenager now, and I'm still trying to figure it out.
When I was young, I thought I knew exactly where I stood.
I would say no to anything that could harm me.
I would say no to anything that might break me.
I am a teenager now, and I'm caught in the middle.
When I was young, I thought I knew where I was going and who I wanted to be.
I would be rich and famous.
Everything would always go my way, and I'd be happy.
I am a teenager now, and I know that I have a lot to learn.
When I was young, I had no idea exactly how hard things would really be.
My advice to you is to stay who you are and hold on to your faith and morals.
My advice to you is to not let the ride control you, but you control the ride.
I am a teenager now, so I'm still on the ride, but I'm in control of what I do and say,
so my final advice to you is to please do the same.

Emily Geise

Wake Up

"Wake up!" my mom yells down the stairs. I lurch forward, pulling my covers aside. It is the first day of seventh grade, and my adventure into junior high begins. I brush my teeth and comb my hair; I am ready to go. I have just spent the last seven years with the same friends and same teachers, and now I am being thrown into a school with double the students and only one friend from before. I open the door and head on in. I cannot seem to get rid of these butterflies in my stomach.

I take a deep breath. The butterflies still sit in the pit of my stomach like an anchor holding me down. I let the breath out. It is my eighth-grade graduation party. I walk into my first dance. I sit back against the wall; I am not really a dancer. If I do not ask someone to dance, my friend will do it for me. I give him the eye as I walk out to slow dance to what seems the longest song ever. As we move around in circles, I think to myself how sometimes peer pressure can pay off. As the song ends, I get a hug and walk off the dance floor. At least the butterflies are gone now. I blink.

I open my eyes as I walk up the bleachers. The upper classmen chant in unison, "Go home, freshmen!" I wish I were not a freshman. The other students are always so tough on us. The chants turn into cheers.

The crowd roars with cheers for our junior varsity football team. I am a sophomore now, and I have never played a sport as hard as I play football. There is nothing like getting rid of stress by hitting the person in front of you when it is for a friendly game. I get hit so hard that I land flat on my back.

I reach out to get up, but instead I grab the steering wheel of my brother's car. There is nothing more nerve-racking than driving for the first time. I think I showed that snowbank who is boss, though! After a few mistakes, practice makes perfect; I pull into my driveway with a sigh of relief and slide back into the seat.

I sit back up as they call my name. I walk slowly as everyone claps for me. I shake my principal's hand with my right hand as I take my diploma in my left hand. I turn toward my friends and family and hold my diploma over my head. I've finally done it, and it all seemed like a flash. What I wish I had known about becoming a teenager is how fast the years go by so that I could have lived and enjoyed it to the fullest.

Alexander Walker

A Beautiful World

High school is a passage of time
In which we find our world unwind.
Our hopes are crushed, our dreams trodden.
We mope around, but we've forgotten
We live in a beautiful world.

Gray matter is squashed, melted, and smushed
Due to tumultuous amounts of work.
Boyfriends. Girlfriends. They come, they go.
They make us happy. Then sad ever so.
We live in a beautiful world.

Home is a bust. We live in mistrust.
We want. We want. We want.
We whine. We shout. We yell. We complain.
"I hate you," we often proclaim.
We live in a beautiful world.

Although it's a drag, we still must go on
Living out life to its fullest.
Although there are bad times,
There are also good times.
Just remember,
We live in a beautiful world.

Melissa Jensen

Being a kid is great, but being a teenager is even better.

Christopher Iadicicco

Being a teenager is a hard but very cool job. It is hard because you are not an adult yet so you don't get all those privileges, but you are not a baby either. So you are just "stuck" for a couple years. But these "stuck" years have been the best of my life. I have made friends that will last a lifetime. These are the years that I hope I will look back on with no regrets and maybe a couple of laughs. Getting older means more stress and harder decisions. But the best thing about growing up is that you get to make those decisions. In the teenage years you are discovering who you are as a person and trying not to leave the child within you behind. The best thing about the teenage years, besides boys, driving, and going to college, is the mystery of it all. Know that you create your own destiny, and you alone control where the car of life takes you. So drive it well and don't forget to put on your seat belt.

Erin Davis

Everything Is Temporary

I had a little mantra when I started high school—a phrase that I kept in my back pocket and referred to often: "Everything is temporary." I repeated it quietly on nights when it seemed as though I could work forever and never finish all the things that needed doing. I wrote it in my journal when fights with friends seemed like the end of my social life as I knew it. My little mantra comforted me because I knew it was true—no matter how frustrated I was, I was sure to be fine in a week—two weeks at the most. It always worked out that way. A senior now, I realize that "Everything is temporary" applies to good things as well as bad. The friendships I have now are not the friendships I had, nor will they remain as they are. There's nothing anyone can do about it—everything, good and bad, ends or changes. Don't worry about the bad—it passes. Remember the good stuff before it's gone and you realize you missed it. Everything is temporary, and that's okay.

Sarah Lang