

## **Top 10 List: Things I wish I had known when I was a Teenager**

By Jenny, New York

I was fortunate enough to have recently met the founder of this site. I decided to check it out for myself and once I had, I knew how badly I wanted to contribute. I realized that I was in a great position to offer some insight to those pesky teenage years. I am not exactly what you would all be expecting...I am not a teacher, or guidance counselor or anyone else that you'd be expecting to get advice (or let's face it – a lecture) from. I'm a 26-year-old single girl, living and working in New York City for one of the hottest fashion companies in today's scene. I was born and raised in Westchester, so my life in a really nice suburb was more than similar to all of yours. I was a decent student through my high school years, was an athlete, a cheerleader, member of student government as well as the leadership council, and just a couple of years ago graduated from one of the greatest school's around, the University of Florida (for your sports fans, that's Gators – not Seminoles!) I'm not giving you this info so you'll be up to speed on my life, I just thought you'd be interested to know that I have been in your shoes and I get it...and I hope that what I've got to say can in some way inspire or motivate you, or at the very least, let you know that you're not the only one who has ever felt the way you feel or wondered the things you wonder.

Here is my Top 10 List:

### **10. “Everybody is Doing It.”**

I wish I had known as a teenager that this is the single most overused and untrue statement that your peers will make to you. I say that because the only time anyone ever uses this phrase is to try and convince someone else to do something they have already done and kind of wish they hadn't (i.e. drinking, drugs, etc.) If you stop and think about it, things that literally “everyone does” like breathing, blinking or even just eating breakfast never get talked about. If everyone were doing it, it wouldn't be all that interesting to talk about, would it? The term “everybody is doing it” should be a sign to you of exactly the opposite: not everyone has done it – so you should be thinking seriously about whatever it is they are referring to before proceeding.

### **9. Friend or Foe?**

I wish I had known as a teenager that those people I consider my “friends” should only ever act as such. I was unfortunate enough to have peers in my life during high school who sometimes did things that made me think “gee, if they were my friend, why did they just go and do/say that to me or about me?” Friends are meant to ONLY help us learn, enhance and enrich our lives, and make our lives better. If you have peers in your lives who don't or who fall into that gray area – consider reprioritizing your friend list to those who you've never had to question. FYI – you will not keep in touch with those gray-area folks when you go away to college, I promise.

### **8. Preparation is Key.**

I wish I had known as a teenager that when my parents hounded me about doing homework, or a teacher would lecture on and on about doing the reading before the test, that it would actually help. This rule will apply to your entire life, not just school, so it's best to keep it in mind. Whether it's an upcoming exam, college essay/application, a job interview, anything...if you are prepared for it you have that much better of a chance at being a success.

## **7. Unlike gum in your hair, your word is the best thing to stick to.**

I wish I had known as a teenager that living up to your word gets you a long, long way in life. It lets people around you know that not only are you responsible but you care enough about them to have followed through on whatever it was you said you'd do. Believe it or not, it really is the little things in life that get you the farthest, so when you say you'll be somewhere at a certain time – be early. When you say you'll do something – do it the best you can the first time. Being someone that others can trust and depend on makes you a more valued person to others, which should make you feel more valuable to yourself.

## **6. Don't go against your grain.**

I wish I had known as a teenager that my gut would play such a major role in my life. I don't mean that you will grow to do a thousand sit ups every day, I mean when you are faced with decisions or situations and you have a "gut" reaction – 9 times out of 10 you should go with it. If someone is trying to get you to do something you're not ready to do, and you know in your "gut" that you're not ready – don't do it. If you are in a situation that those around you are comfortable with yet you are not – remove yourself from the situation. Don't go against the grain that is your gut reaction, your core. You know what's good for you – don't compromise that.

## **5. Give respect and learn to earn it.**

I wish I had known as a teenager how important this point was. As you may have already experienced with certain friends, parents, or teachers, liking someone isn't always the only important point of reference. It is important to surround yourself not only with those you like, but also those you like what they stand for. The kid with the coolest clothes or who throws the best parties, may have very little to offer beyond that. Be sure that the relationships you form are formed for genuine reasons and that you honestly conduct yourself in a way that others feel the same about you.

## **4. "For your own good."**

I wish I had known as a teenager that (yep, like it or not) when your parents use this phrase, it's true. You have all heard it; I can assume you're sitting there nodding along. No two people in the world will ever feel about you the way your parents feel. If you have someone at home who has used this line on you...go home and throw your arms around them, as you are so lucky! This top ten list is not only something that I could come up with – but believe it or not – your parents could too. They were young once (even though you don't recognize them in their pictures from years ago) they were and yes, they know what it's like. When they ask about where you're going, what you're doing, who's going to be there, and so forth – YES – it is actually for your own good. Parents have a way of knowing things that you really wouldn't believe and keeping you safe, healthy and happy is something they will stop at nothing to do. Be thankful everyday for this fact. And once in a while try to show them that you appreciate them for it.

## **3. Family THEN friends**

I wish I had known as a teenager to never put my friends before my family. This is a carryover of the last point, but it really is meaningful. We are only given one family. It should be respected, appreciated and treated with care each and every day. Never choose to go out with friends instead of celebrating your dad's promotion at work with the rest of the family, don't belittle your sibling to look hot in front of friends. God has a reason for giving each of us the families that we are so fortunate to have – so don't look a gift horse in the mouth. No one will support you the way your family will. You don't normally see friends you had in the first grade sitting in the crowd at your long, boring junior high graduation –

nope – but your family was there. Families do things for each other that friends can never imagine. There has to be a reason, don't you think?

**2. Believe it – whatever “it” may be.**

I wish I had known as a teenager that my belief in my religion, next to the breath in my body, was the single greatest gift my parents and God could have given me. Nor did I know how much it would define me as a person. If you already have them, whatever your beliefs are, hold them in your heart the way you hold nothing else. Never force them on others. Remember that your beliefs should be most important to you, but will not be to others. That is every individual's right only worry about you. If you have not yet discovered exactly what your beliefs are, seek them out. Learn what you are and what you believe, you owe yourself that knowledge.

**1. The “pond” is forever changing – be a strong swimmer.**

I wish I had known as a teenager that the silly saying of “there are more fish in the sea” or “you're just a little fish in a big pond” all really boil down to one thing. We go through so many different phases in life. If you're in high school now, soon enough you're going to be in college trust me, totally different pond. If you're in college, soon you'll go into the working world, yet again, major differences. The point is this – knowing yourself, being proud of who you are and where you come from, being a good person with something to offer the world will enable you to swim from pond to pond – and while you may not always be the biggest fish – if you're simply a strong swimmer not only survival but success will be easily attainable.