

YOU MIGHT BE THE PARENT OF A TEENAGER IF...

Though I have only been living with teenagers for three years and am in no way an expert on adolescents, I have learned a thing or two about the metamorphosis from innocent tween to full-blown teen status. It can be a subtle shift, a change that sneaks up on you without advance notice. But there are some clear warning signs that signal you are now living with a teen. As a public service, I am offering the following easy assessment tool for any parent to use if for some reason you are not sure you have become the parent of a genuine, bona fide teenager.

You might be the parent of a teenager...

...If you spend more money every month on groceries, mainly consisting of pop-tarts, frozen pizza, ramen noodles, Doritos and chicken pot pies, than the Gross National Product of several third world countries;

...If you attempt to open the door to your child's room and your entry is blocked by a mountain of wet bath towels;

...If you have suddenly lost all ability to make sense, your IQ has dropped dramatically and at times your attempts at civil conversation are considered so lame that you deserve only an eye roll in response.

You might be the parent of a teenager if you have to fight for time on your own computer.

You might be the parent of a teenager if your makeup, hair brushes and hair spray regularly disappears. Even if you only have sons.

You might be the parent of a teenager if your car's gas tank is perpetually on empty, and can probably drive itself to the gym, the school and the pizza place on command.

If you have recently purchased any electronic item that starts with a lower case "i", had to ask someone to explain what the initials BRB, LOL and TTYL mean; bought 3 pairs of tennis shoes in 3 different sizes in one year for the same child; and you hear a "cha-ching" sound in your head and automatically reach for your wallet whenever they approach, you might be the parent of a teenager.

You might be the parent of a teenager if you can't get your kids to go to bed at night or get up in the morning; the decibel level for simple questions such as "Do we have any milk?" rivals that of the landing strip at O'Hare airport; and you have often chosen to completely discard an item of clothing that has resided in the dark, dingy corners of a gym bag for far too long rather than let it contaminate an entire load of wash.

This is not an all-inclusive list, of course. I have heard other descriptions that include things like body jewelry and tattoos. But, if you feel compelled to cut out this article and hang it on your refrigerator door, amidst Zits cartoons, orthodontist appointment cards and the outrageous car insurance bill, well, congratulations my friend. You truly are the parent of a teenager.

Mary Beth Weisenburger lives in Putnam County with her husband and two authentic, full-blown teenagers.