

Let them navigate:
Why teenagers need space
to make their own choices

Teenagers need guidance, but they also need room to make choices, test ideas and learn from small failures

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Every parent has heard it: “I have other commitments.” The commitment might be a group call, a game with friends or simply time spent doing something that adults may not consider particularly important. But these moments matter. They are part of how teenagers build friendships, practise independence and learn to navigate life without someone evaluating every decision.

Parents have always worried about how much freedom to give their children. Yet growing up requires more than academic success. Teenagers also need opportunities to make choices, handle disagreements, manage their time and understand the consequences of their decisions.



THE FAMILY BUSINESS OF EXPECTATIONS

Between the first school performance and the repeated question, “What do you want to be?”, parents can gradually develop a set of expectations for their children. These expectations often come from love and a desire to see their children secure and successful. Sometimes, however, parents may also project their own experiences or unfinished ambitions onto the next generation. Having hopes for children is natural. The challenge begins when a hope becomes a fixed destination, with little room for a different interest or career path. When every decision is made for them, teenagers may become good at meeting expectations without necessarily learning how to make decisions independently. A student who performs well academically but is afraid to ask questions, explore unfamiliar subjects or make mistakes may be missing an important part of education. Learning is not only about getting the correct answer. It is also about asking questions, testing ideas and understanding why something did not work.



LANTERNS, NOT ROCKETS

A sky lantern does not rise by fighting every movement of the wind. It adjusts to the conditions and continues upwards, sometimes moving sideways before finding its direction.

Teenagers can need something similar: guidance without complete control. When a parent says, “I want you to become a doctor,” the statement may be about more than a particular profession. It may reflect hopes for financial security, stability and respect. Understanding that underlying concern can open a more productive conversation.

A teenager might respond by asking, “I understand that you want me to have a secure future. Can we talk about what that means and explore different ways of getting there?” That shifts the discussion from disagreement to negotiation.

Parents can also begin with curiosity. Asking, “Why do you want to try this?” creates an opportunity to understand a child’s thinking before saying no. Curiosity can help build trust and make difficult conversations less confrontational.



A SMALL TOOLKIT FOR NAVIGATING CHOICES

- Start with a shared goal: “We both want me to do well” can create a better starting point than “You never listen.”
 - Suggest a trial: Trying something for a term or a few months can be less intimidating than making a permanent decision.
 - Bring a plan: Interest becomes more convincing when accompanied by a practical plan for managing time, studies and responsibilities.
 - Allow small failures: A manageable mistake during the teenage years can become an opportunity to develop resilience, reflect and try again.
- Let the lantern wobble. A change in direction does not necessarily mean that a teenager is losing their way. Sometimes, it is part of learning how to navigate.

FOR PARENTS, IN THE MARGINS

A parent’s “just a suggestion” can sometimes sound much stronger to a teenager than intended. The way advice is delivered matters.

If a child’s ambition sounds smaller than a parent’s expectations, it is worth asking whether it is genuinely less ambitious or simply unfamiliar. Different interests do not automatically mean lower aspirations.

Parents can provide boundaries while still allowing teenagers to participate in decisions that affect their education and future. The objective is not to remove every obstacle or prevent every mistake. It is to help young people develop the judgement and confidence to handle challenges when parents are no longer there to make every decision for them. Education, after all, is not only preparation for examinations or careers. It is also preparation for making choices, responding to setbacks and finding a direction of one’s own.

(The author is a Talent Strategy leader at KniTT, and Co-Founder of edutech startup)

IISc’s FSID strengthens focus on research, innovation

The Foundation for Science, Innovation and Development (FSID) at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) has announced a new leadership structure aimed at strengthening its work in research, innovation and technology-based entrepreneurship. Omprakash Subbarao has been appointed as the organisation’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Under the new model, Subbarao will oversee FSID’s operations and external engagements, while Prof Suryasarthy Bose, Professor-in-Charge, will provide institutional oversight and serve as the link between FSID and IISc.

An IISc alumnus, Subbarao has worked across technology, industry, public digital infrastructure and innovation. Before becoming CEO, he served as CEO of CORE Labs at FSID, where he worked on research and innovation collaborations connecting scientific expertise with industry requirements.FSID’s activities are centred on two areas—

innovation and incubation. Through these initiatives, the organisation seeks to support the translation of scientific research into practical applications and provide an environment for developing technology-focused startups.

The organisation has also been expanding opportunities for collaboration between researchers, companies and startups through its Innovation Hub (iHUB). The facility provides research and development laboratories for industry partners and infrastructure for incubated startups. BEML, Toyo Ink and Schaeffler are among the companies that have established research facilities or workspaces at iHUB.

For students, researchers and aspiring entrepreneurs, such initiatives can provide opportunities to engage with applied research, technology development and innovation beyond the academic laboratory. Industry-linked projects can also expose researchers to practical challenges and the process of developing technologies for wider use.

IIT Kharagpur students design and fly aircraft in international competition

The Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur (IIT Kharagpur) made its debut at the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) Design/Build/Fly Competition in Wichita, Kansas, securing the 39th position globally and fifth in Asia. The institute also recorded the highest total score among participating Indian teams.

The competition brought together university teams from 12 countries, with 98 teams submitting design reports and participating in the fly-off. IIT Kharagpur was represented by a 21-member student team that designed, built, tested and flew an aircraft within four months.

The competition provided students with practical experience across multiple areas of aerospace engineering, including aerodynamics, aircraft structures, propulsion, avionics, computer-aided design, manufacturing and flight testing. The project required students to



work through design and engineering challenges within a defined timeline and prepare their aircraft for competition flights.

The team received support from the Department of Aerospace Engineering and the Aerial Robotics Kharagpur (ARK) Lab, along with mentorship from Prof Arnab Roy, Anup Ghosh, Naba Kumar Peyada, Prof Sandeep Saha and Prof Somesh Kumar.

The 2026 edition marked the 30th year of the AIAA Design/Build/Fly Competition. Of the 175 proposals submitted and

evaluated, 102 teams were invited to submit design reports. A total of 98 teams submitted reports, while 89 teams attended the fly-off, including 17 international teams. More than 1,200 students, faculty members and guests attended the event, and 83 of the participating teams completed the technical inspection. The competition recorded 197 official flight attempts, of which 143 resulted in successful scores. Seventy-three teams achieved at least one successful flight score, while 17 teams completed all four missions,

Today is National Swap Ideas Day
How sharing thoughts can lead to change

Ideas often begin as simple thoughts—something that could make a classroom better, solve a small problem at home, or improve the way people work together. But an idea becomes more useful when it is shared, discussed and developed. Talking about ideas with friends or family can help us look at familiar problems from a different point of view.

An easy way to start is to set aside some time to “swap ideas”. Pick a topic that interests everyone and let each person suggest a change they would like to see. It could be something small, such as organising a study space, reducing food waste or planning a family activity. It could also be a larger idea, such as making a school more environmentally friendly or finding ways to help people in the community.

The important part is to listen as well as speak. Someone may suggest an approach that you had not considered, while another person may identify a

challenge that needs to be addressed. Instead of immediately deciding whether an idea is good or bad, ask questions: What problem does it solve? Who could benefit? What would be needed to make it work? Can it be tried on a small scale first? For students, swapping ideas can also support learning beyond textbooks. Group discussions encourage communication, listening, creativity and problem-solving. They can help students understand that there may be several possible answers to a problem and that improving an idea often takes more than one attempt.

Not every idea will become a major project, and that is perfectly fine. Even an unsuccessful suggestion can lead to another thought or help someone understand what does not work.