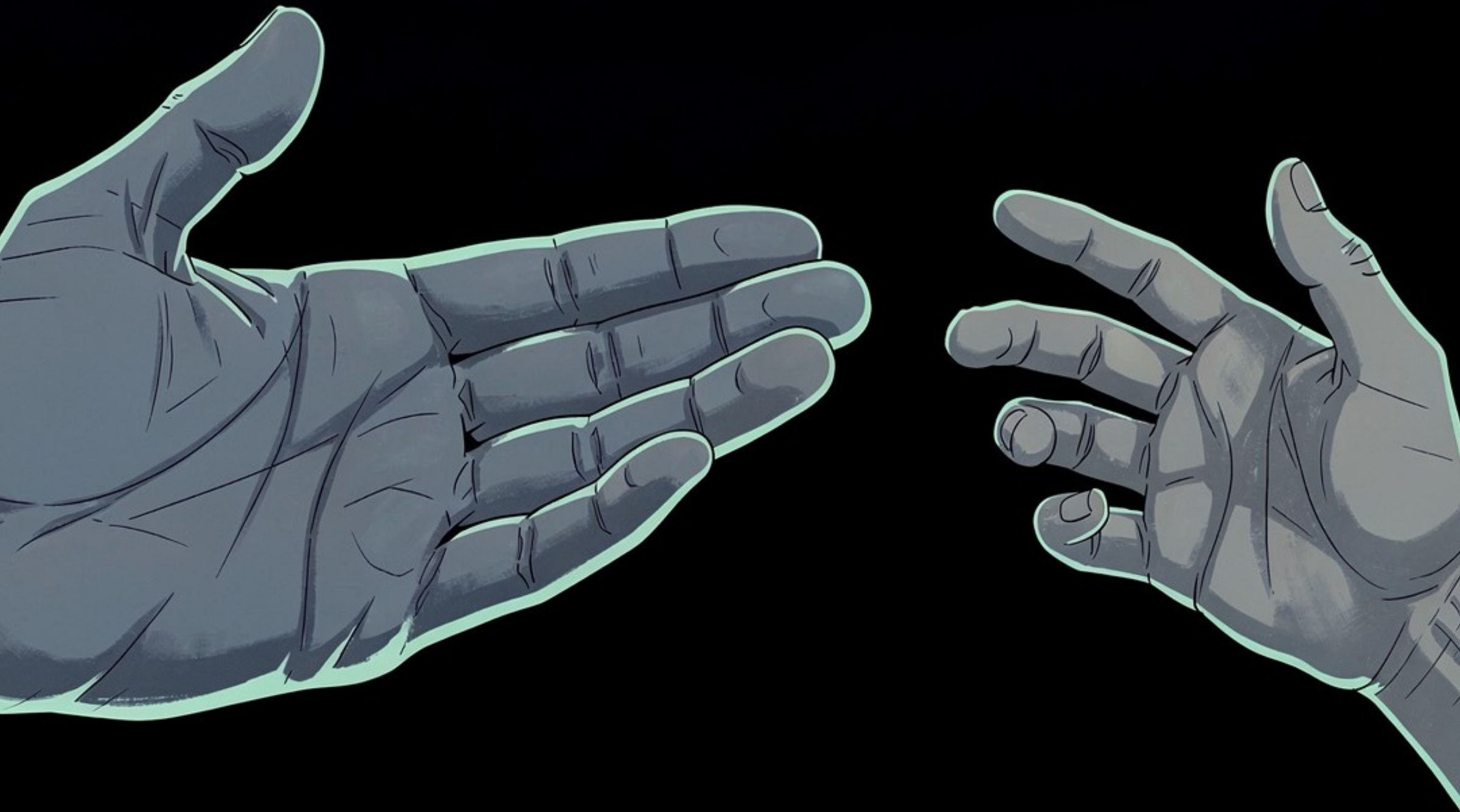


ÉCOUTE MOI GRANDIR
Teenagers grow. Adults do too.

TEN PERSPECTIVES

*On What Unfolds in the Relationship Between a Teenager
and Those Who Love Them*



Benjamin Mortagne

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Introduction

Over the years I have spent alongside teenagers and the adults who support them, one conviction has gradually taken shape within me, almost without my realizing it. Most parents, teachers, and educators do not lack love or goodwill. They search, try, sometimes get things wrong, and often begin again. What they occasionally need is not a better method, but a different way of looking at what they are going through.

We believe we understand adolescence because we once lived through it ourselves. Yet having experienced our own adolescence is not enough to understand someone else's. Every teenager finds their own way of growing, with their impulses, contradictions, and silences, often in a language that adults no longer speak quite as fluently.

This book grew out of my encounters with those trying to remain present in teenagers' lives: exhausted, disoriented, and sometimes wounded parents who no longer fully recognize the child they thought they knew; teachers wondering how to reach a student who has withdrawn into silence or become indifferent to what once seemed to inspire them; and educators feeling their way towards that difficult position—close enough that the teenager does not feel alone, yet far enough away to allow them to become their own person.

Alongside them, I came to understand that the question was almost never simply, "How can I get this teenager to change?" It was also, and perhaps above all, "How can I change the way I see what is happening between us?" This shift does not make the difficulty disappear immediately, but it can help us move beyond confrontation, anxiety, or helplessness and recover a more grounded way of relating to one another.

This book therefore offers no formulas, because a human relationship cannot be reduced to a set of instructions. Instead, it offers ten perspectives: ten opportunities to pause, breathe, and look differently at what may be unfolding when a teenager pulls away, pushes back, falls silent, lies, searches for who they are, takes risks, or begins to fall in love.

Understanding does not solve everything, nor does it mean accepting everything. But understanding already changes something in the way we hold ourselves, speak, set a boundary, wait, and remain present. Sometimes, that is precisely what a teenager needs: not an adult who has every answer, but one who does not give up trying to understand.

Teenagers grow. Adults do too.

How to Use This Book

Some of you will open this book because a particular situation is weighing on you right now: a teenager who has withdrawn, tension that has settled into the relationship, or a distance that has grown without anyone fully understanding why. Others will read it out of curiosity or a desire to understand more clearly what unfolds during the strange and intense years of adolescence.

You may read this book in order, but you do not have to. Each of the ten perspectives stands on its own, so you can begin with the one that most closely reflects what you are experiencing today. You can then continue reading or return to the other perspectives as new questions arise.

Each perspective follows the same progression. It begins with a concrete, recognizable situation before turning towards what that situation may awaken in the adults involved: their emotions, their concerns, and the thoughts that sometimes arise before they have had time to step back. It then invites a shift in perspective to explore what may be unfolding within the teenager. The explanations offered are never presented as certainties, but as possibilities that may help us understand the situation differently.

Understanding does not mean that everything should be accepted. Each perspective therefore returns to the adult's role, the boundaries that may still be necessary, and what the situation may touch within the adult's own history. A metaphor then offers another way to absorb what has been explored, before opening a space devoted to how adults can care for themselves without withdrawing from the relationship.

Finally, the closing pages of each perspective bring together what the adults I have met over the years have taught me and offer a summary to hold on to when answers are not immediately available.

This book does not seek to tell you what you should do. Instead, it invites you to slow down, observe what is happening within you and within the relationship, and recover a way of being present that respects the teenager's needs, your responsibilities as an adult, and your own limits.

Sometimes, changing our perspective does not resolve the situation immediately, but it can already change the way we inhabit it.



Teenagers grow.

And sometimes, growing up can look like pulling away.

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First Perspective

My Teenager Is Pulling Away from Me

When Emotions Overflow Instead of Being Expressed

My Teenager Is Pulling Away from Me

They come home from school, put down their bag, and head straight to their room. The door closes, sometimes without a word, sometimes with a look that seems to say, "Don't ask me anything."

A few years ago, they told you about their day, their friends, and their small victories. Now the answers are brief: "I'm fine." "Nothing much." "I don't know." You see them every day, yet sometimes feel as though you no longer know how to reach them.

I often encounter this particular kind of pain in parents: the feeling that they are losing someone who is still there, only a few metres away. They understand that their teenager is growing up, but that does not make the growing distance any less painful.

This withdrawal does not necessarily mean that the bond is coming apart. More often, it suggests that a familiar relationship is changing form. From the other side of the closed door, however, that distinction is not always easy to see.



A Before and an After

The parents I meet often describe a moment when something changed—sometimes gradually, sometimes almost overnight. A child who was once close, talkative, or affectionate becomes more private. Conversations grow shorter, tensions appear, and certain silences seem to last longer than they once did.

Even when we know that adolescence involves a degree of separation, this transformation can still feel like a loss. Parents are not losing their teenager, but they are losing a particular way of relating to them: the easy closeness, the confidences offered without being requested, and the sense of naturally holding a central place in their life.

That loss deserves to be acknowledged, because it is real, even when it accompanies a necessary stage of development. The point is not to pretend that it does not hurt, but to understand that the relationship does not end here. It is searching for a new form.

WHAT WE FEEL

When Their Silence Becomes Our Worry

When a teenager begins to pull away, the adults who love them may experience several emotions at once. There is sadness at no longer being their confidant or first point of reference, but there is also worry: Are they all right? Is something happening that I cannot see? Should I step in?

Anger may arise as well, especially when we feel ignored or shut out after giving so much. It can become entangled with guilt and the fear that we missed an important moment or made a mistake we cannot identify.

Beneath these emotions often lies a fear that is harder to name: no longer knowing what purpose we serve in the life of someone we love deeply. Acknowledging this fear does not mean allowing it to govern the relationship. On the contrary, it helps prevent us from unintentionally turning it into pressure on the teenager.



The Stories Our Minds Tell Us

"They don't love me the way they used to."

"If this continues, we're going to lose our connection."

"I must have done something wrong."

"I don't recognize them anymore."

"They prefer their friends to their family."

"They're rejecting me."

These thoughts often arise when we are tired, hurt, or left without an explanation. They try to make sense of a situation we do not understand, but they do not necessarily describe what the teenager is experiencing.

When these thoughts take hold, they may lead us to ask question after question, seek reassurance that we are still loved, or interpret every silence as further proof of the distance between us. It can then be helpful to ask whether we are responding to what is actually happening or to the story our worry is telling us.

What If This Distance Were a Sign of Trust?

What if pulling away were not only a form of rejection, but also a step in becoming oneself?

During adolescence, a young person begins to distinguish themselves more clearly from the way adults see them. They search for their own answers, test their values, and discover a more personal way of moving through the world. To do this, they need a degree of privacy and new freedom in what they think, feel, and choose to share.

This movement towards greater distance does not look the same in every teenager. Some close their door more often, while others remain close but begin asserting their choices differently. Their growth should not be measured by how far away they move, but by recognizing their need to become gradually more distinct from us.

Changing our perspective means asking whether the teenager is truly withdrawing from the relationship or primarily trying to move closer to themselves. Sometimes, both movements are happening at once.



WHAT MAY BE UNFOLDING

Building a Space of Their Own

A teenager who guards their privacy more closely is not necessarily forgetting about you. They are learning to organize an inner world that is no longer entirely accessible to you.

Adolescence is a period of profound reorganization. Young people face questions about their identity, where they belong, what they value, and what their future might hold. They do not yet have all the answers and need room to experiment, hesitate, and contradict themselves without every movement being immediately commented on or corrected.

A closed bedroom door, short answers, and certain silences may help protect this still-fragile space. They may also mean something else, particularly when accompanied by significant distress, marked isolation, or a concerning change in behaviour. Understanding a teenager's need for privacy does not relieve us of the responsibility to remain attentive.

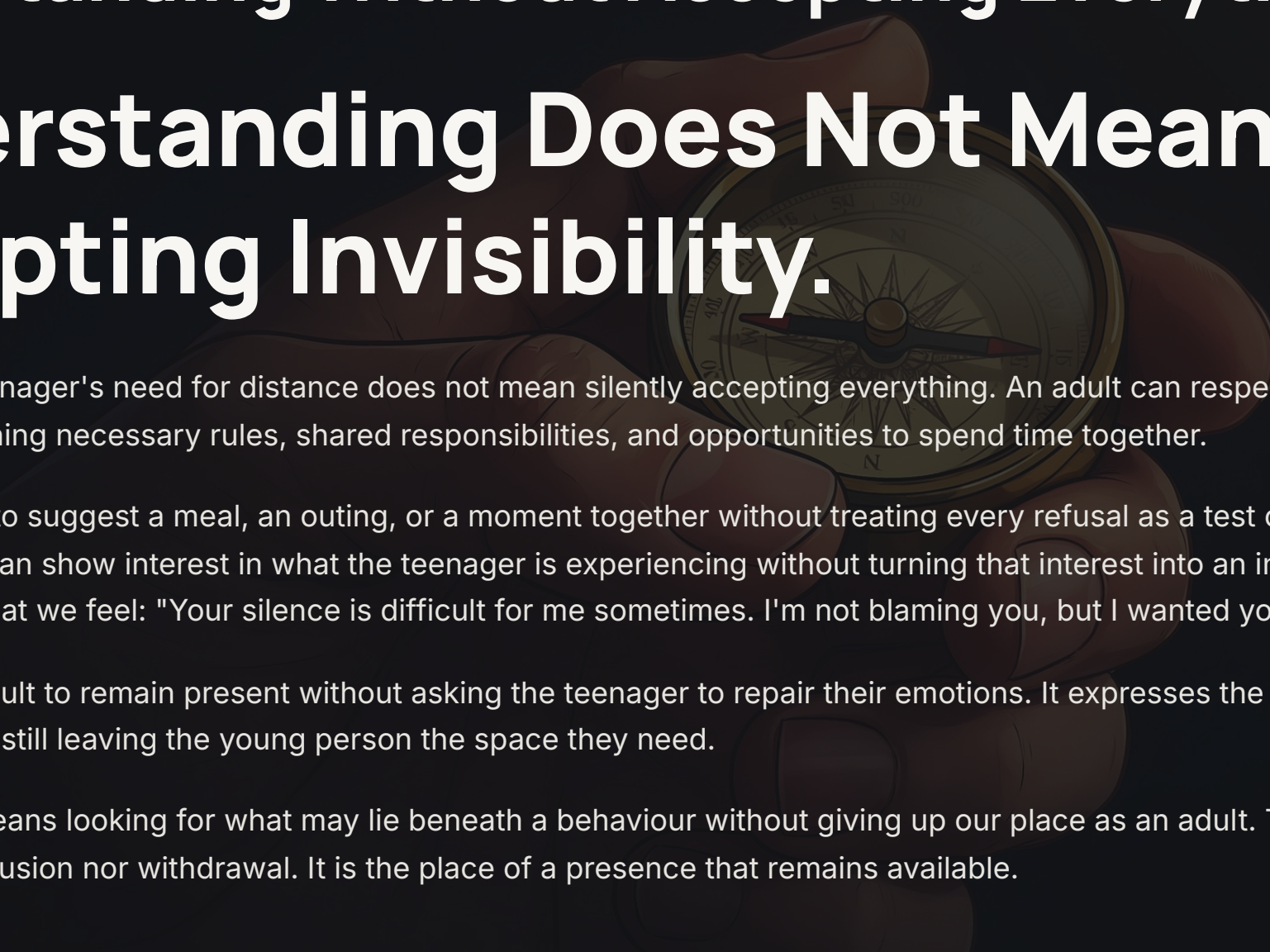
Teenagers still need adults, but in a different way. They need adults less to define the path for them and more to remain available—ready to listen and able to step in when the situation requires it.



Understanding Without Accepting Everything

Understanding Does Not Mean

Accepting Invisibility.

A faint, artistic illustration of a hand holding a compass rose is visible in the background. The hand is rendered in a dark, muted brown color, and the compass rose is a lighter, golden-brown hue. The compass rose shows cardinal and intercardinal directions, with a needle pointing towards the top. The overall style is subtle and evocative, complementing the text's theme of navigation and understanding.

Recognizing a teenager's need for distance does not mean silently accepting everything. An adult can respect their privacy while still maintaining necessary rules, shared responsibilities, and opportunities to spend time together.

We can continue to suggest a meal, an outing, or a moment together without treating every refusal as a test of the relationship. We can show interest in what the teenager is experiencing without turning that interest into an interrogation. We can also name what we feel: "Your silence is difficult for me sometimes. I'm not blaming you, but I wanted you to know."

This allows the adult to remain present without asking the teenager to repair their emotions. It expresses the reality of the relationship while still leaving the young person the space they need.

Understanding means looking for what may lie beneath a behaviour without giving up our place as an adult. That place is neither one of intrusion nor withdrawal. It is the place of a presence that remains available.

When Their Adolescence Meets Our Own History

A teenager's withdrawal may awaken older experiences within us. It may bring back a fear of abandonment, the memory of being ignored, or the feeling that we once failed to matter enough to someone. It may also unsettle a parental identity built around being needed.

Not every intense reaction necessarily comes from an old wound. Even so, it can be helpful to ask what in our emotional response belongs to the present situation and what may belong more closely to our own history.

When we respond to a teenager's need for independence from our fear of no longer mattering, we risk giving them a difficult message to carry: "Your need for space is hurting me." They may then feel faced with a choice that should never be theirs to make—the choice between growing up and protecting the adult they love.

Becoming aware of what is unfolding within us does not mean denying our emotions. It means avoiding the expectation that the teenager should become responsible for them.

A few questions may help us reflect:

- What does their withdrawal awaken in me?
- Was I allowed to create distance when I was their age?
- How can I remain present without allowing my presence to become pressure?



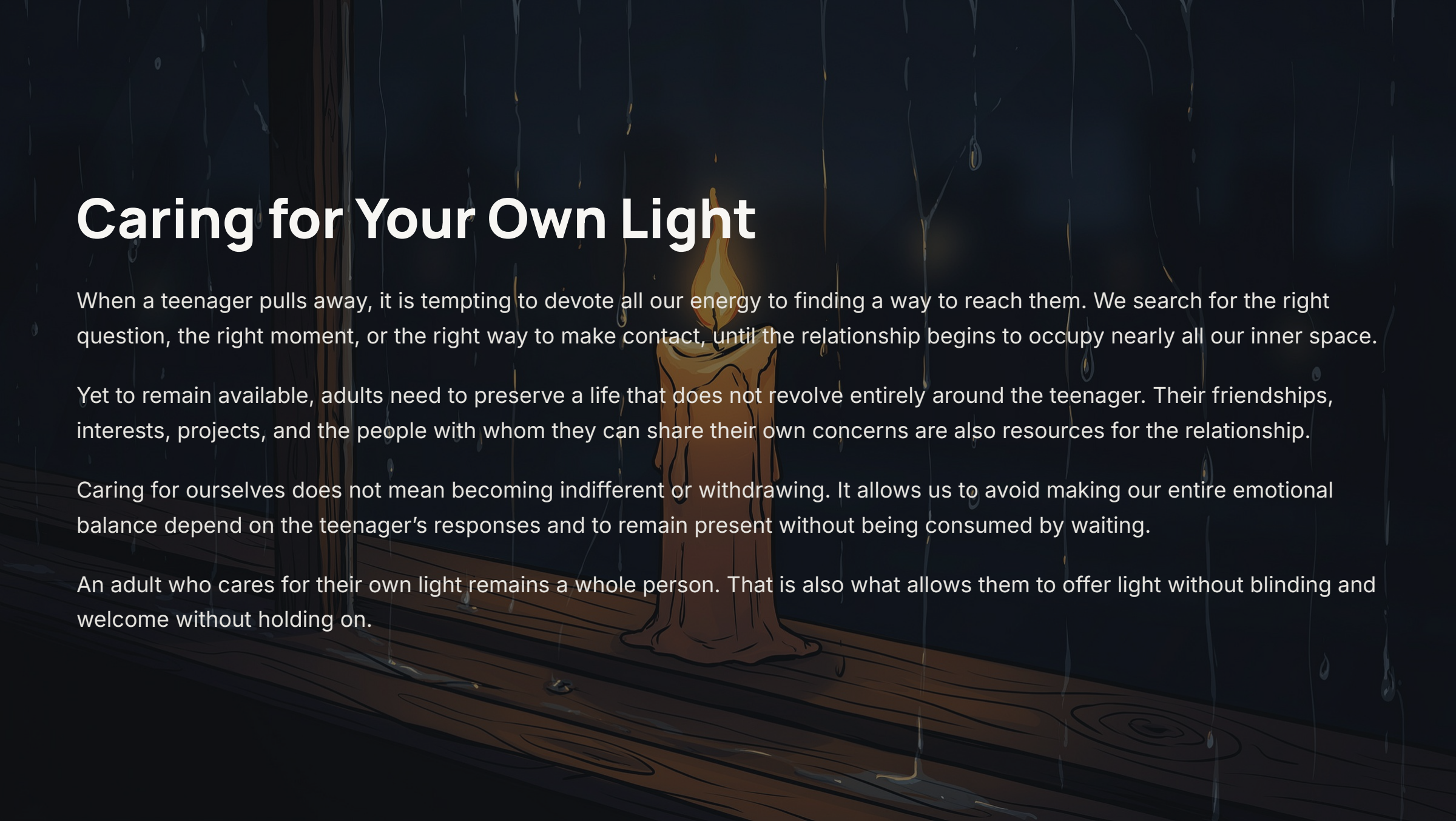
Be the Harbour, Not the Boat

The image of a harbour often comes to mind when I think about adolescence. A boat is made to leave, explore, and enter waters that the harbour cannot discover on its behalf. Holding it back would prevent it from doing what it was built to do.

The harbour does not need to follow the boat in order to continue to matter. It remains steady, recognizable, and lit. Even when the sea is rough or the distance has grown too great for either to remain in sight, the boat knows there is a place to which it can return.

Supporting a teenager may be something like this: not following them everywhere, not holding them back, but not disappearing either. It means remaining steady enough to be found again and trusting enough to accept that the journey does not belong to us.

Caring for Your Own Light

A lit candle sits on a dark wooden surface, its flame glowing warmly. Rain falls vertically in the background, creating a somber and reflective atmosphere. The candle's light illuminates the immediate area, contrasting with the dark, rainy environment.

When a teenager pulls away, it is tempting to devote all our energy to finding a way to reach them. We search for the right question, the right moment, or the right way to make contact, until the relationship begins to occupy nearly all our inner space.

Yet to remain available, adults need to preserve a life that does not revolve entirely around the teenager. Their friendships, interests, projects, and the people with whom they can share their own concerns are also resources for the relationship.

Caring for ourselves does not mean becoming indifferent or withdrawing. It allows us to avoid making our entire emotional balance depend on the teenager's responses and to remain present without being consumed by waiting.

An adult who cares for their own light remains a whole person. That is also what allows them to offer light without blinding and welcome without holding on.

What Adults Have Taught Me

A teenager's withdrawal is one of the most unsettling experiences in parenting, precisely because it can resemble a loss while actually accompanying a transformation.

I have met parents who moved through this period in silence, convinced they had failed because their teenager no longer confided in them. Years later, some discovered that their child had remembered an adult who never stopped being there, even when they no longer knew how to approach them.

These encounters have taught me that presence cannot be measured only by the conversations we manage to have or the time we spend together. It can also be found in consistency, in invitations that remain open, and in the ability not to punish a teenager for the distance they need.

This kind of presence is rarely dramatic and is not always recognized at the time. Yet over the years, it may become one of the most valuable points of reference an adult has offered.





Pulling Away Is Not Disappearing

Distance does not necessarily mean that affection is fading or that the bond is disappearing. It often reflects a search for the space from which a teenager can begin to discover themselves without having to give up the people they love.

The relationship then changes form. It may become less spontaneous, less visible, and more uncertain, but it can continue to grow if the adult accepts that they cannot hold back the journey while still remaining a place of return.

Supporting this movement means allowing the teenager to move forward without concluding too quickly that they are leaving us behind. Distance is not always a loss. It can also become the space in which trust learns to grow.

Teenagers grow. Adults do too.

TEN PERSPECTIVES

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This chapter is offered free of charge.

If it has spoken to you, you may wish to continue the journey.

The other nine perspectives await you in the complete book, Ten Perspectives.

Because there is often more than one way to see things...

and one perspective is not always enough.

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