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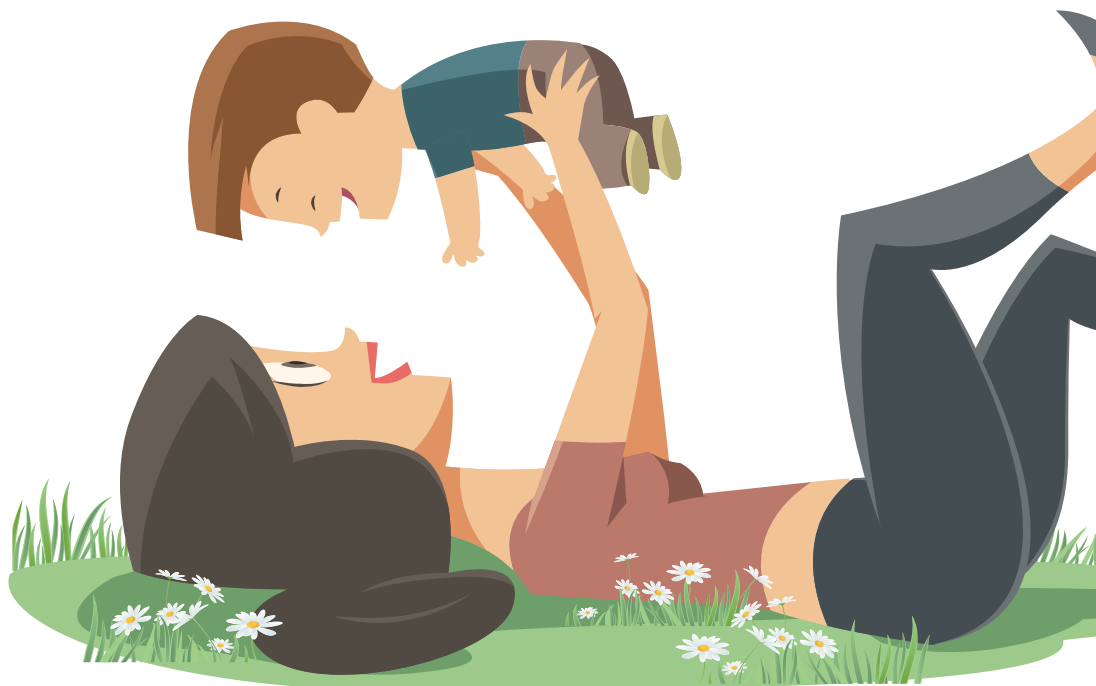
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Best Buds

By Lisa Beach



We used to be best buds, my son and me.

My little shadow would follow me everywhere, running outside to get the mail, helping me water the flowers, watching me fold a load of laundry. Like two ice cubes frozen together, you couldn't pry us apart.

We used to do this little trick whenever I was about to gather up the laundry, where I would lie down on my back, knees parallel to the floor, and he would sprawl on top of my legs, facing me. We'd hold hands, and he'd start laughing, knowing what was about to happen.

"Do you want to help me with the laundry?" I would croon quietly to him.

"Yes!" he'd declare with a huge grin. And then I'd swing my legs up and down, giving him a ride on my shins, propelling him from horizontal to vertical and back again. He'd giggle uncontrollably, and when the laughter died down, I'd do it all over again.

But that was back in the days of giggles. Now, we live in the days of mumbles. And scowls. As my son slowly grew up, transitioning from a polite toddler to a moody teen, we grew apart.

My son, now 15, tolerates me.

As much as I try to become a part of his world, he keeps me at a distance with one-word answers, if he answers at all.

Because I pick him up from high school every day, we've got about 15 minutes of one-on-one time in the car as we drive home. Each day, I try desperately to connect with him, often falling flat within the first few minutes.

Knowing that a simple question like, "How was your day?" usually evokes nothing more than "fine," I ask him open-ended questions to peek inside his teenage world.

"Tell me something funny that happened at school today," I asked on our recent drive home.

"Well, there's this kid who runs down the hall after second period every day," my son revealed. "I call him Speed Racer because he is literally darting between all the kids in the hall trying to get to his next class. He does this every day, Mom."

Okay, not an earth-shattering revelation, but, at least, it's a conversation. I tried a different angle.

"What happened today that made you feel good?" I asked, hoping for a tiny teenage epiphany.

"Nothing," he replied, somewhat

annoyed, as I see the wall between us start to build again, one frown at a time.

"Nothing made you smile today? Maybe you got a good grade on a test, or someone helped you with a project, or a girl smiled at you or something?" I asked, grasping for a hint of what makes my son tick at 15.

His brows furrow, and I see that I've awakened the irritable beast lurking inside, sending him into an angry tail-spin. My innocently probing questions pushed him over the brink.

"Stop suffocating me! Why are you always so involved in my life, asking a million questions?" he lashed out at me.

"I'm just wondering how your day went, trying to get you to focus on the good stuff, that's all," I explained, feeling both defensive and defeated at the same time.

His body tensed as he turned toward the passenger-side window, staring vacantly at the passing cars. In the window's reflection, I could see the anger in his face. If he glanced over at me, he would have seen me biting my lower lip in frustration. He didn't bother to look, of course, and instead put his earbuds in for the rest of the drive home, literally tuning me out.



And so it goes, my son and me. We repeat this dance often—me leading the way with my unflinching love, my never-give-up attitude, and him resisting, every step of the dance.

I wonder if he even recalls our shadow-days together when he was a pint-sized extension of me? Does he remember the hours I spent decorating his fire engine cake for his fourth birthday, the games of flashlight tag we played at night in the house, the hours we spent walking through the neighborhood, or the countless trips to the library or the park? How about the back scratches, the tuck-me-in snuggles, the piggyback rides, or the butterfly kisses?

My heart aches for our days of giggles, as I struggle to find my footing in his sullen teenage

years. I realize this “don’t-poke-the-bear” phase is just a temporary detour, as my son becomes his own man, trying to escape the shadow of his younger self. But it hurts me to the core as he pushes me away in the process.


Some days, the dichotomy of our relationship then and now seems almost too stark a contrast. I wonder if our shadow-days will recede into a faded memory as we both tiptoe around a new strained normal between us. And I worry that we will never be best buds again.

But then, it happens like clockwork. Almost every night, no matter what’s transpired between us that day—arguments, snarky comments, silence, attitude, or frustration—my son asks me to tuck him in. My 15-year-old son still wants to

snuggle. He melts into his blankets, his attitude softens, and his heart opens. I prop myself up on his bed with one arm while I reach over and tickle his arm or scratch his back with the other. We relive something good that happened earlier in the day, and we exchange I-love-you's in the dark. And once in a while, before I leave his room, we even exchange butterfly kisses, just like when we were best buds, my son and me. ■

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Lisa Beach is a freelance writer, humorist, mother of two teenagers, and recovering homeschool mom who lived to write about it. Check out her writer’s website at www.LisaBeachWrites.com and visit her humor blog at www.TweeniorMoments.com.


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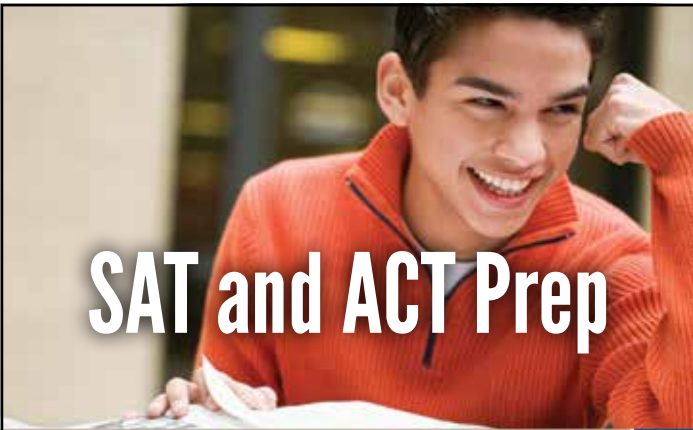
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