Early adolescence can be a challenging time for parents and young teens alike. Many parents are unprepared for the changes and challenges that often occur at this age, and they often seek advice from “expert” sources – friends and family members, their child’s pediatrician, or a family counselor. Others seek low-cost and practical advice by turning to self-help parenting books. There are hundreds of parenting “how-to” books available in bookstores and libraries. These books offer a dizzying array of choices, each offering advice, encouragement, and hope for frazzled parents.

Parents who wish to borrow or purchase a book to get helpful advice or answers for parenting problems may wonder how to choose the “best” such book to meet their needs. Here are a few simple tips to keep in mind when trying to find a parenting book that best will meet your needs.

- Don’t judge a book by its cover. A clever title or the inclusion of testimonials from celebrities on the cover is no guarantee that a book will be helpful to you or your teen.

- Examine the author’s credentials. What is their expertise? Is the author a parent of teens, a psychologist, family counselor, or youth worker? What education or training have they had to prepare them to work with parents, teens, and families? An academic degree does not mean that the author is an expert on adolescent development unless they have also had specialized training to work with young people and their families.

- Choose books that promote positive rather than punitive approaches to parenting. If the problems that your young teen is presenting require strict behavioral management, then the guidance of a counselor or family therapist may be necessary to successfully resolve them.

- Avoid books that promise quick fixes to problems that may be long-standing (“easy as 1-2-3!”). Human behavior is complex and often arises from many diverse sources and motivations. Parenting books that advocate simple solutions are rarely on the mark and you may feel frustrated when your dutiful efforts to comply with the author’s advice meet with failure.

- Remember that the book you select is simply that – it is a book, not a counselor or therapist who can provide timely personal assistance matched to the particular challenge or problem that is confronting your relationship with your teen.

- If the author’s advice resonates with your own sense of “what works,” and matches well with your personal views of good parenting and positive teen behavior, then this may be the best parenting book for you.