Sixteen-year-old Ellie, who lives with her parents, Louise, 38, and Peter, 43, has written a book to tell us what parents of teenagers are doing wrong.

All adults think teenagers are a nightmare. According to them, we're moody, argumentative, rude and disruptive. But have any adults ever stopped to think that perhaps they are responsible for the unpredictable and confusing way we behave?

Take me, for instance. I may be a teenage nightmare, but this is all to do with my parents, not me. With my mother, I stamp my feet, storm out of shops in the middle of arguments and moan until I get my own way. Just last week, for example, I persuaded mum to buy me a pair of shoes that she had said I couldn't have. But my father, on the other hand, turns me into a shining example of teenage perfection. I do as he asks, I don't answer back and I happily accept that no means no.

My parents have very different parenting styles. While my dad brings out the best in me, by being calm and reasonable and treating me like an adult, my mum, like so many other parents of teenagers, inadvertently makes me want to rebel by being combative and speaking to me as though I'm still a child. Last summer, after yet another row in a shop with my mother, I decided to start writing down the way I felt about things.

A few more rows later and I'd written more than 10,000 words of advice for parents.

In December, having contacted various publishers, I signed a book deal. My parenting book, *How Teenagers Think*, is going to be published next year, the first of its type actually written by a teenager. Much of my book is based on my own experiences, but I've also interviewed my friends about their parents. Surprisingly, we all share similar views on what our parents are doing wrong. And it usually comes down to the fact that our parents care too much about us and don't want to let us grow up. For example, mum drove me crazy a few weeks ago when she kept worrying I'd broken my neck after I fell off my bike. Yes, my neck hurt, but I'd been to the doctor and he'd told me I was fine, so why did she want to take me to hospital?

Instead of fussing around their teenagers like we're small children, parents could be using our desire to feel grown-up to their advantage. If we're behaving badly, why not tell us straight out that we don't deserve to be treated like an adult? Then we'll try to earn your respect. And why not reward us when we do behave maturely? Recently, I wanted to take a train to Portsmouth to see a friend – a journey I'd done with mum before. Dad was fine with the idea of me going alone,

but it took weeks of arguments before mum agreed. Why was it such a big deal?

Parents need to learn to trust teenagers. And when parents are worried about us, there is no point becoming angry – that just makes things worse. A few months ago, mum lost her temper when I told my parents I'd been receiving e-mails from a stranger I'd met in a chatroom. She instantly banned me from using the Internet and we ended up having a huge row. But I'm not stupid. Most teenagers know talking to strangers online is not a good idea, so I'd told them what was happening – I don't want to get abducted, just as much as they don't want me to. So why be angry with me, mum? It makes me not want to confide in you. Surely it's better for me to feel you won't be angry, so I can talk to you?

Many of my friends feel the same way. They end up not telling their parents what they're up to because they'll be cross. Everyone I interviewed for my book loved the idea of being really close to their parents. Despite the way we behave, we all want close relationships with our parents. We also all know deep down that our parents usually do know best. But part of being a teenager is feeling free to take steps down new paths and learning from our own mistakes. Our parents have to unwrap the cotton wool they place around us and let us get on with what is just a natural phase of life.

1. What happened when Ellie wanted a new pair of shoes?
   A. She asked her father nicely and he said yes.
   B. Her mum said no, then changed her mind.
   C. Ellie just went out and bought them.
   D. Her mum said she couldn't buy them so she didn't.

2. Why does Ellie always obey her father?
   A. Because he sets a good example of how to behave.
   B. Because he always gives her what she wants.
   C. Because he is very strict.
   D. Because he doesn't get cross and talks in a reasonable way.

3. Ellie's ideas about parenting _____
   A. are shared by many people of her own age.
   B. are unusual for a teenager.
   C. come from a book called *How Teenagers Think*.
   D. have surprised many of her friends.

4. Teenagers would respect parents more if _____
   A. parents didn't argue with them.
   B. parents told them more often that they didn't deserve to be treated like adults.

C. parents rewarded them more often.
D. they didn't treat them like little children.

5. How does Ellie react to her mum's lack of trust?
A. It makes her feel stupid.
B. It makes her tell her mum exactly what is happening in her life.
C. It makes her not want to talk about herself to her mum.
D. It makes her think her mum is stupid.

6. Which sentence best summarises the main idea?
A. Fathers are much better at dealing with teenagers than mothers because they understand them better.
B. If parents trusted teenagers more and were less controlling, then they would get on much better with them.
C. It's best not to tell your parents what you are doing because they will either get angry or worried.
D. Adults have a poor opinion of teenagers, but they often behave badly themselves and set a bad example for their children.

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ORGANIC FOOD: WHY?

A recent NOP* poll found that 82 per cent of UK consumers want a return to traditional farming, even if it means paying more for food. Today, many sins are laid of the feet of conventional farming. BSE, foot-and-mouth, pollution, obesity and the disappearance of sparrows have all been blamed on modern agriculture. And governments across Europe are keen to show they care. They are increasingly keen to be seen as promoting not conventional farming methods, but the new-age version: organic. Europe is now the biggest market for organic food in the world, expanding by 25 per cent a year over the past 10 years. The German agriculture minister wants to make 20 per cent of German agriculture organic by 2010, and Denmark's agriculture minister is herself an organic farmer.

Organic farming is often claimed to be safer than conventional farming – for the environment, for our children and for us. Yet after lengthy and ongoing research worldwide, science continues to reject this claim. The UK's cross-party House of Commons committee on agriculture announced that, despite exhaustive investigation, it had failed to find any scientific evidence to prove "that any of the many claims made for organic farming are always and invariably true".

The notion that organic food is safer than "normal" food is contradicted by the fact that many of our most common foods are full of natural toxins. Yet educated Europeans are more scared of eating traces of a few, strictly regulated, man-made chemicals than they are of eating the ones that nature created directly. Why? For most of human history the more artificial and elaborate your diet, the better; when dominating nature was a constant battle, it was a sign of cultured living. The ancient Romans distinguished between foods not as proteins versus carbohydrates, or even meat versus vegetables, but as cultivated versus wild. Farmed animals were a more civilised food than game. Wine and bread, because they were created by man, were symbols of cultured living – only barbarians ate wild plants. Today, Europeans, surrounded by plentiful food, fear not nature, but science. Our obsession with the ethics and safety of what we eat with antibiotics in animals, additives, GM foods, and so on – are symptomatic of a highly technological society that has lost faith in its ability to put technology to a positive end. In this context, the less touched by human hand something is, the more virtue we see in it.

A dominant contemporary fear is that we are wrecking nature. This is the real significance of the NOP poll. It is not a vote of positive support for "traditional" or organic farming – about which most of us are blissfully ignorant – but rather a vote against human intervention in the countryside.

*NOP - National Opinion Polls; a leading market research organisation.

1. According to paragraph one _____
   A. European governments support organic farming.
   B. the reason why British consumers turn organic is obesity.
   C. modern agriculture is responsible for environmental degradation.
   D. the British believe traditional farming could be cheaper.

2. What information does paragraph two provide?
   A. Organic farming is safer for the environment than for people.
   B. No proof has been found that conventional farming is worse than organic.
   C. The committee on agriculture raised objections to organic farming.
   D. The research on organic food was not entirely reliable.

3. What does the author say about the ancient Romans?
   A. They didn't appreciate the meat of wild animals.
   B. They preferred meat to bread and vegetables.
   C. Their diet was healthier than that of modern Europeans.
   D. They introduced the distinction between proteins and carbohydrates.

4. Which of the following is closest to the author's opinion?
   A. Organic food is favoured by those who support modern technology.
   B. In ancient times people couldn't afford organic food.
   C. The British are more organic-oriented than other nations.
   D. Many people don't know much about organic farming.

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132 THE MAN WHO IS PAID TO BE AN ALIEN

Roo Reynolds has a job at IBM which many people would envy: to spend as much time as possible playing online games like Second Life and Entropia Universe, in which players move and act within a three-dimensional digital world. "I'm bringing the idea of virtual worlds to IBM," said Mr Reynolds, "helping IBM to understand virtual worlds and how we might use them."

Companies like IBM are being forced to take note of these 3D digital worlds which are populated by "avatars", on-screen representations of real people. This is simply because they are becoming so popular. Second Life, which was created by the Internet company Linden Lab, announced at the start of 2007 that it had two million users. The most impressive thing about this statistic is the fact that, only eight weeks earlier, the company had announced a figure of one million users. The speed of growth is astonishing.

And Second Life is not alone. Entropia Universe, created by a company called Mindark, is a virtual world based on the imaginary planet of Calypso. It recently passed the half-million milestone for its population. Many of these new members of the population are young. In addition, Second Life has a 50:50 split of men and women. For these two reasons, advertisers and marketing departments have a very real interest in the virtual populations of Second Life and Entropia Universe. In Second Life, sports manufacturers Adidas and Reebok sell virtual training shoes, Toyota and Nissan sell virtual cars while Starwood Hotels, owner of the Westin and Sheraton chains, test out new hotels without having to build them. Other companies are also taking note. The BBC holds music events on a virtual island. The

Reuters news agency now has a permanent reporter who lives in the virtual world of Second Life. Second Life allows people to do what they do in the real world without leaving their chair. People meet, chat, dance and socialise. Residents can also make and sell goods in exchange for the world's currency, the Linden Dollar. This has an exchange rate with the US dollar, so money that you make in Second Life can be transferred to the real world.

But why are virtual worlds suddenly becoming so popular? "I think it was the right time for Second Life," said Dr Jim Purbick, a senior software engineer, and the only full-time employee of Linden Lab. Dr Purbick believes that the increase in the number of broadband users and the ever faster speeds of personal computers are two of the main reasons behind the growth in popularity.

Roo Reynolds believes that the virtual worlds are here to stay, and will become a bigger and bigger part of life. "Nobody believes that experiencing something online is really the same as experiencing it in real life," he says. "However, not everyone can afford to go to major sporting events like the Olympics or the World Cup. Experiencing these events in a virtual world is the next best thing." So Mr Reynolds' job, which involves convincing people of the benefits of Second Life and similar online environments, may not last long. "My job will become unnecessary because everyone will be using it," he says.

1. Why does Roo Reynolds spend a lot of time in online 3D universes?
   A. Because his job is to provide his employer with information about them.
   B. Because he's a software engineer who creates virtual worlds.
   C. Because he's working on a joint project with IBM and Second Life.
   D. Because he's addicted to online games.

2. What is an avatar?
   A. It's a character in Second Life.
   B. It's a real person's equivalent in a digital world.
   C. It's a 3D digital world.
   D. It's an Internet company.

3. The planet Calypso is _____
   A. part of an online game called Mindark.
   B. a real planet scientists have recently discovered.
   C. a place invented by the company Mindark.
   D. a place you can only visit in Second Life.

4. Advertisers are particularly interested in Second Life because _____
   A. most of the users are young men.
   B. there are equal numbers of young men and women.
   C. the users spend a lot of money online.
   D. the creators have marketed it so well.

5. Reuters now have a full-time reporter who _____
   A. only reports on stories connected with Second Life.
   B. reports on music events in Second Life.
   C. tests out new hotels in Second Life.
   D. only exists in the virtual world of Second Life.

6. In Second Life you can _____
   A. try out new hotels.
   B. become a reporter for Reuters.
   C. order real goods from real companies.
   D. buy virtual goods from companies such as Reebok and Nissan.

7. The money that people make in Second Life _____
   A. can be converted into real dollars.
   B. can only be used for socialising.
   C. can only be exchanged for virtual goods and services.
   D. can be transferred to Entropia Universe.

8. According to Dr Purbick, why has there been a sudden growth in the popularity of online digital worlds?
   A. Because of an increase in the popularity of science fiction.
   B. Because of an improvement in the standard of software.
   C. Because of a reduction in the number of people in full-time work.
   D. Because of faster Internet connections and computers.

9. Roo Reynolds believes that he will eventually lose his job because _____
   A. other people will share their experiences online.
   B. people will realise that virtual worlds can never be the same as real experiences.
   C. everybody will already know about these virtual worlds.
   D. there are no long-term benefits to virtual worlds.

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