The Fear of Teenagers in Sold by Patricia McCormick And The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis

What do people fear most in life? For some it is heights, for others it is spiders. However, one thing that everyone has in common is that everyone is afraid of something. For a lot of teenagers, fear is prominent in their lives and it consumes them. They have many fears that affect their daily lives. Though, teens' worst fear is failure. They fear failing their loved ones, themselves, and social expectations. Firstly, failing loved ones is greatly dreaded by adolescents. This the idea that teenagers fear failure. Very commonly teens do not want to let down the people they care about most. They do whatever they can to make sure they are content. For example, in the novel Sold by Patricia McCormick, the protagonist Lakshmi belongs to a poor family and is afraid of letting her parents down. After her mother informs her that she has been sold and needs to work as a maid in the city, Lakshmi responds, "This is good news Ama. There will be one less mouth to feed here, and I will send my wages home" (McCormick 18). She accepts a job in a major city unknowing of the consequences that await at her arrival. She sacrifices everything in order to send money to her family so they would be happier. Lakshmi will do anything for her family, and it is evident when she is sold into prostitution. Even though she was unaware that she was entering the human trafficking business, she knew she was being sent far away for a job and was ready to do so. This further solidifies the idea that she does not want to disappoint her parents. Though Lakshmi is just one example of this, many are afraid of the same thing. Similar to Lakshmi, the Blue Man, Joseph Corvelszchik, from the novel The Five People You Meet in Heaven by Mitch Albom, also feels he needs to please his parents. After moving from Poland while he was still young, Joseph had to work in a sweatshop to aid his family financially. Both Lakshmi and Joseph accepted jobs in order to fulfill the needs of their families and to make them happy, completely dismissing the possible negative impacts. Their actions proved that neither character wanted to disappoint their parents. Moreover, teenagers not wanting to fail their loved ones justifies that failure is a teens' biggest fear. Additionally, adolescents do not want to fail themselves, adding on to the belief that teens do not want to fail. In the article "It Seems That we can Only be Interested if we are Smoking, Snorting, or Stabbing," written by Dominique Mitchell and Dein Harry, teens talk about how they have shaped themselves into good people despite societies' misconceptions. Many of them also spoke about how they did not want to miss the goals they set for themselves, one of which was Joshua Adejokun. He stated, "I wanted to make changes for young people in Newham." This statement shows that he set goals for himself and he wants to accomplish them. He does not fall into the trap of being the stereotypical teenager who is troublesome and wild. He dreads falling short of his own expectations and not fulfilling his aspirations. Similar to Joshua, many teens in today's world share this feeling as well.

In the novel The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis, Parvana, the protagonist, also possesses the mindset of wanting to prosper. Parvana sets out with the goal of becoming the source of income for her poor family who is living in a war-ridden country. Many obstacles challenge her during her journey, yet not once does she give up. She fights until she is able to accomplish her goal. Similar to Joshua, Parvana also does not want to let herself down and has a burning desire to succeed. Therefore, teenagers fear failing themselves, hence why failure is a teens' biggest fear. Lastly, teens fear falling short of social expectations, contributing to the concept that teens dread failing. In the novel Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson, the protagonist's close friend,

Heather, a new girl in the neighborhood, makes the decision to change herself to meet the social standards set at their school. Melinda, the protagonist, states, “ She has a plan...she isn’t finished with her survey of Mayweather’s social scheme” (Anderson 22-3). This statement shows how determined Heather is to fit in at the school. One example of her endeavors to do so includes when she joins the Marthas, a group of girls dedicated to making decorations and charity work, in an effort to find a sense of belonging at the school. Heather believes that she had finally found a group of friends who accepted her; however, that was not the case. The group starts to change her, she becomes more worried about her social status, than losing her true self. Even when they make fun of Heather’s friend, Melinda, she does not do anything about it, and eventually, she starts to shun her out as well thinking Melinda will tarnish her reputation. The Marthas start to take advantage of Heather as well, they use her to do all the work as the rest of the group take the credit for it. Her tenacious desire to meet the expectations set at her school completely ruins her, she becomes a whole new person and fails to realize it. Heather was ready to drop anything and everything if it meant she was able to be seen as “popular”. The feeling of acceptance was more important to her than being true to herself. Heather did not want to fail in the eyes of society, she did not want to fall short of their expectations. Furthermore, teenagers fear of failing social expectations proves that adolescents’ greatest fear is failure. Teens are always worrying about failing their loved ones, themselves, and social expectations. In their lives’, failure is the thing they fear most. Fear is a natural instinct that has been embedded in people. It is a powerful emotion able to manipulate one's actions simply based on what fuels it. Fear scares some into weakness, yet allows others to show strength while overcoming it.