

## **PARENTS GUIDE TO THE TEENAGE WORLD**

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### **WHAT HAPPENED TO MY PERFECT CHILD?**

Your sweet young child turned into a sneering, ill tempered, foul mouthed, rebellious, impulsive and argumentative critic of everyone and everything. You may be a real hot shot at work and have two degrees from Harvard, but to your youngster equipped with the reasoning power of pure hormones you are a pitiful moron. You just happen to live in the same house and are the breadwinner.

### **THIS IS A ROUGH PERIOD FOR ALL PARENTS**

Parents generally react with worrying, allowing themselves to be dragged down by irrational arguments, anger and frustration. They think about sending the youngsters to Military School (look what it did for Donald Trump), or some other expensive alternatives. Most, get accustomed to dealing with their spitfire, and figure out a way to minimize the damage. Stop and think about how you were when you were that age. There is no way to skip over this stage of development, all you can do is remain calm and be more rational than your young one. It takes about 18 months and then they get their brain back - if all goes well. Learn to reduce your stress level, read the section on Stress Management.

### **FREEDOM**

A big part of the problem is the definition of freedom. Take some time to read my article on Teenagers' Guide to Adulthood.

### **THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THEY ARE GOING THROUGH THIS STAGE BEFORE THEY LEAVE HOME**

No matter how unpleasant, you want to help them to navigate through this stage. If they go through it after they leave home, at college or in the service, they might self-destruct and you won't be around to see the signs.

### **IS THIS STAGE REALLY NECESSARY?**

Yes, it is. Small children adore and look up to their parents. When they start school this adoration and wanting to please turns to teachers. Later, they switch to their peer group as being the persons they most want to please. Their peer group will eventually grow up and be their friendship and work force base. Unfortunately, they do not have well-developed diplomatic skills or sources of income and they resent the control you have over them. So they try to get permission for all sorts of things they have no business doing.

### **HAS YOUR YOUNG PERSON TURNED INTO A LAWYER?**

The teen strategy is to continue to argue their point or points going from one topic to another until the parent gets a headache and says: "OK you can go!" The remedy for that, and to avoid this strategy in the future is to say, "It's not going to work, you're not going". No matter what the young person says, you say the same phrase. If you have a young person who persists for a long time, get some earplugs and put them in after you've used your magic phrase 5 times.

### **SNEAKING AROUND**

Your young person might decide that it's too much trouble to bully you into saying yes. Their friends will give them strategies on how to get around you. Here are some favorites.

- Going to school, but leaving the school grounds and going to a friend's house.
- Going to the movies on Friday night and allegedly going from movie to movie, while in reality heading to a party.
- Spending the night at a friend's house, while in reality, they all head to a party.
- Going to baby-sit, but it's an excuse to go to a party.

Now I'm not saying that all kids sneak around all the time. But you want to be aware of the strategies and check your young ones whereabouts.

Be especially careful if you work many hours and your young person is home by himself. Your house could become the favorite hangout. Talk to your neighbors and ask them to let you know if kids are congregating at your house when you are away. Come back early unannounced from time to time.

### **RULES AND EXPECTATIONS**

Make a list of rules that you want followed. Post the list on the refrigerator. Parents will have their own version of the 20 commandments.

Expectations are conditions under which, they get to keep and expand their freedom. It is like a roadmap to freedoms and privileges. Here is are some examples - and yes, expect protests that "all their friends" have been able to do these things since pre-school:

- Cleaning up their room before they leave the house on Saturdays.
- Getting a part time job - 15
- Staying out till 11 pm on weekend night - age 15
- Makeup - age 16
- Dating - age 16
- Driving privileges - 16
- If grade point average stays at 3.5 or whatever you know your youngster to be capable of. Make sure you yank the license and the car if they fall below your expectations. This is training to adult world where you have to produce to stay on top and employable.
- No drinking and driving, talk about the dangers of that before they even start drivers training.
- Going to worship services with the family.
- Attending family functions

## CONSEQUENCES

There should be consequences for disobedience and self-damaging behavior. The consequences have to be something that they care about. For example, you would not give a timeout to a child in his room, if he prefers to be by himself. That would not be punishment for that child. Your children will go through phases where their phone, computer, IPOD, bike, car is the most important thing in their life.

Make the punishment fit the misbehavior if it was a serious infraction of your rules. If it involved sneaking around with friends, make the punishment a disruption of communication with the friends, take away all communication devices and a place a strict curfew for 3 weeks to 3 months depending on the severity of the activity. Take the communication devices to work or your friend's house. If you find your child has acquired another one somehow, take the door of their bedroom off its hinges and take it to a friend's garage. Your child needs to know that you mean business.

If the misbehavior was horrendous and you feel really upset or really mad, give yourself a cooling off period. Do not mention the behavior even if it takes you a week to cool off. The child will sense that something is up and will worry. They will also know what they did wrong and will worry that you

found out. Let them worry. You take that time to strategize, on how you will handle the situation and what punishment is fitting. By then you will have gotten over the impulse to send them to a monastery in China, or to your grandparents' farm, or to a private school which you may not be able to afford.

### **NEVER GO BACK ON PUNISHMENT LENGTH OR SEVERITY**

Once you decide on a punishment stick to it. Do not change it because it is inconvenient to you, or the school or your other family members. That is why you want to think about punishments, you want them to be a lesson for your young ones. Not something that will create a friction for everyone else in the family.

### **WHY SO STRICT?**

You want your youngster to be able to wriggle out of future invitations from friends to sneak around and rebel by saying, "The price is too high." "My parents get kind of crazy, and overpunish". Give them that tool. It will save them a lot of heartache and it will save you the cost of private school or attorney fees when your youngster gets arrested.

### **DRUGS AND ALCOHOL**

Drugs are addictive, as are cigarettes. The easiest way to avoid getting addicted is to never do drugs and avoid smoking. Alcohol is very addictive to some people, if they come from families of severe alcoholism. Some people have reported becoming addicted after one drink.

Young people feel invincible, so they think that they won't get addicted or they won't get arrested. That is not our reality of today. Our jails and prisons are full of young people who thought so. Some of them are infected with AIDS and Hepatitis from sharing needles. Eighty five percent of incarcerated persons are in jail or prison for arrests related to drug or alcohol use. The arrests range from illegal activity to procure drugs to violent and non-violent acts committed under the influence. Using drugs is like driving a car without breaks you will crash.

Crystal meth is extremely addictive and it erodes the enamel on the teeth. So your angel with the braces might end up with rotten teeth which eventually fall out. Drugs and alcohol make people unable to function, while they think they are just great.

There is a whole culture of antisocial behavior that surrounds drug use. So if your young person is starting to sneak around and lie, it is just a matter of time before they start using drugs and alcohol - if they have not already. Then the real trouble starts as they self-destruct.

If you suspect drug use, contact Drug Treatment Centers. Get help. If it is happening at school, let the school know. Do not wait for it to go away. Drug dealers get people addicted by inviting them to parties and giving

them free drugs. For them, it is an investment in future business. They don't care if they are destroying an innocent life. They've already destroyed themselves. Now they need to get others into it so they can feel like they are OK after all.

The real danger of drugs and alcohol is that it makes the part of us that tells us what is OK to do and what is not - go to sleep. This means that your kids can be talked into doing all sorts of things that they would never do sober. This leads to a lot of shame and guilt. But of course they cannot come to you for comfort, because you didn't even know that they were out doing drugs or drinking.

### **MAKE IT OK FOR YOUR KIDS TO COME TO YOU WITH ANYTHING**

Tell them so repeatedly. Tell them that you might react with shock and anger initially, but basically you are on their side and will calm down and be able to discuss this with them soon. They need to be able to come to you when they feel threatened, ashamed or hurt.

Also make it clear, that if they break the law, you expect them to deal with the consequences. Avoid denial, and blaming others for your kid's failure to stick to the right path. Help your children to extricate themselves from the wrong path they have taken - not from consequences.