

GETTING THROUGH TO TEENS

HOW TO DECREASE CONFLICT, SHARE
YOUR VALUES AND NOT LOSE YOUR MIND IN
THE PROCESS
SCHOOL-BASED YOUTH SERVICES,
HUNTERDON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

DECREASING CONFLICT/SHARING VALUES

When it comes to influencing kids, a relationship-based approach is much more powerful than an over-reliance on rules and consequences.

~ The truth about consequences is that they don't work very well; they may change behavior in the moment, but they don't create the emotional scaffolding necessary to support positive self-image and decision-making.



“NOT LOSING YOUR MIND”

“Parenting is not about kids ~ it’s about parents.”

It’s about our own emotional maturity, our belief systems, our families of origin; therefore, the best parenting tool is a mirror. As our kids evolve, we, too, must evolve, to make room for the young adults who will soon be living with us.



DECREASE CONFLICT BY:

Giving some trust and freedom ~ Teens are designed to crave freedom and knee-jerk restrictions only create unnecessary friction; unless there has been a huge mistake recently, the default answer should be “yes”. (If there has been a huge mistake recently, allow the teen to make reparations, then another opportunity to do the right thing).

Avoiding capricious punishments ~ Punishments lead kids to feel disinclined to work with you, and they don't teach kids anything, except to be angry with parents. Make no mistake: it may feel good for the moment, but every time you capriciously punish, you throw some of your real influence with your kid out the window.

Getting your priorities straight: A clean room is not as important as good grades, and good grades are not as important as staying away from drugs. Attempts to spit-shine the fine points will bite both of you.

DECREASE CONFLICT BY:

Focusing less on what kids do and more on who they are: It's easy to get caught up in "How was the history exam?" and "How was practice?" But we need to ask simply "How are you?" much more often. Kids often feel like they are being evaluated by parents; this takes a toll almost every time.

Respecting kids: This is pure gold, and will pay you back ten times over. Good behavior from kids almost always stems from respect for parents, not consequences. We respect kids by allowing them some privacy, listening well, and validating their viewpoints. And PS – angry teens deserve respect too; a parent who is able to show respect to an angry teenager just bought rent inside that kid's head.

DECREASE CONFLICT BY:

Learning to listen: Also pure gold. Listening is not waiting your turn to speak; it's a genuine presence that does not interrupt, judge, criticize, flip or offer unwanted advice. "Don't just do something ~ stand there." Try to set aside two things when you listen to your teen: your fears and your agenda; in your efforts to pay attention to these, you will not hear your kid.

Expecting mistakes: One of the most powerful and healing things a parent can say to a child is, "Oops ~ try again." The tendency is to hash and rehash with kids the mistakes they make – just to be sure they "get it". Guess what: most of the time, they already got it; and the rehashing is just another thing that pushes them away from us.

DECREASE CONFLICT BY:

Attributing to kids the best possible motive consistent with the facts: Unless there is evidence to the contrary, assume an innocent explanation. Kids will move towards what they see reflected in your eyes; treating your teen like a good kid who just made an error in judgment helps to create that good kid.



SHARING VALUES/INFLUENCING TEENS

We need to spend less time telling kids what we believe, and more time helping them to be curious about why they believe what they do. *

~Paradoxically, this puts our voice into their head; questions like “What factors played a role in your decision?” and “Is this issue a 100% thing for you, or are you split 60/40%?” help to create the kind of dialogue in which our influence can be heard by kids.

~Rather than teach them to comply ~ teach them to think.

*B. Sachs



SHARING VALUES/INFLUENCING TEENS

Influence by acknowledging your lack of it.

- ~ “If I catch you smoking, you’ll be in big trouble!” essentially dares your kid.
- ~ “I get scared when I realize that I can’t control you anymore; it makes me really upset to think about you smoking.” buys you rent inside your kid’s head.

Influence by saying, “I don’t understand.”

- “No, I don’t get it – help me understand why this is so important to you.” is a highly effective way to improve communication.

SHARING VALUES/INFLUENCING TEENS

Influence by leaving your spin out of it. As soon as our warnings slide into agenda, teens stop listening. The key to influence is this: you can tell teens what you believe as long as you don't tell them what they must believe. *

~ Don't lose so much sleep – 9 times out of 10, they come around to reflect your values anyway; so in forcing and arguing, you are fighting a battle you have probably already won and don't know it yet. *Kirschenbaum



SHARING VALUES/INFLUENCING TEENS

Influence by asking permission: By asking permission to offer your opinion, you will be allowed in on many more issues than would ever be the case if you forced them to listen to you.

~ “I’m not going to try to be the boss at all, but could I get your permission to just weigh in on this?”

But fair play means no badgering: state your opinion and leave it at that.



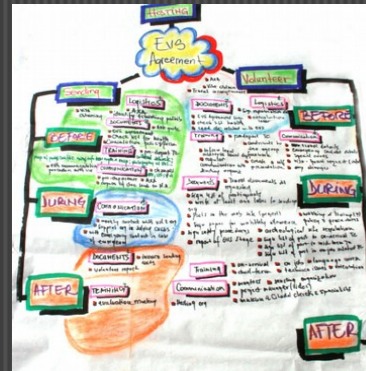
HOW NOT TO LOSE YOUR MIND

Remember that the impact you have as a parent is not about what your kids do; it's about what YOU do."

~ It's about our beliefs on punishment, retribution, score-keeping, power....so whether he takes out the trash or she is a little fresh is not as important as how you handle that.

Learn to view teen behavior as "map-making"*: Rather than hand teens your map – help them create their own.

* Kirschenbaum and Foster



SHARING VALUES/INFLUENCING TEENS

Recognize the need for the evolution of the family. *

“Having a teenager in the family is like having a canary in the mineshaft.” *

~The goal of teen behavior is not to break apart the family, it's to rebuild it – to make room for the young adults who will soon live there.

~ Relationships must unlock & shift, as parents and teens find new ways of connecting, and boundaries must be re-negotiated.

~ So when everything suddenly feels like a funhouse – floors and mirrors changing – take heart: your family is evolving.

You don't have to feel as afraid as you do ~ there is a function to teen behaviors.

**B Sachs*



FINAL THOUGHT

If your teenager keeps his room messy, likes loud music, gets mediocre grades and gives attitude.....

If he does these things, he's like other teenagers.

*~ And if he's like other teenagers when he's a teenager,
he'll be like other adults when he's an adult.*



REFERENCES

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