

Tips for Parents with Difficult Teens

If you, or someone you know is experiencing difficulty with a teen, take a few moments and answer the following questionnaire. This can serve as a point of reference for you in understanding the severity of the problems your teen is currently facing. Some times the problems are so severe that they can only be properly addressed by getting professional help in a controlled environment, such as a residential center, treatment program or specialty school. Other times problems can be resolved right in the home by setting better limits and tightening up the basic family rules and structure. After completing the questionnaire refer to the scoring guide which will offer suggestions, and recommendations based on the results of your own responses.

Answer Yes or No to each question.

- 1.Does your teen struggle with basic family rules and expectations?
- 2.Has your teen ever been suspended, expelled, truant, or had a drop in school grades?
- 3.Does your teen associate with a bad peer group?
- 4.Is your teen verbally abusive?
- 5.Has your teen lost interest in former productive activities, hobbies or sports?
- 6.Do you have difficulty getting your teen to do simple household chores or homework?
- 7.Has your teen been involved with problems with the law?
- 8.Do you find yourself picking your words carefully when speaking to your teen, so as not to elicit a verbal attack or rage from them?
- 9.Are you worried that your teen may not finish high school?
- 10.Does your teen seem depressed/withdrawn?
- 11.Has your teen's appearance and/or personal hygiene changed?
- 12.Does your teen ever display violent behavior and/or are you ever afraid of your teen?
- 13.Is your teen manipulative and/or deceitful?
- 14.Does your teen seem to demonstrate a lack of motivation?
- 15.Do you suspect that your teen sometimes lies or is dishonest with you.
- 16.Are you concerned that your teen may be sexually promiscuous?
- 17.Has your teen ever displayed any evidence of suicide ideation?
- 18.Have you wondered if you have money missing from your wallet, or other valuables from your home?
- 19.Does your teen's behavior concern you for their safety?
- 20.Is your teen angry or display temper outbursts?
- 21.Is lack of self-esteem and self worth creating problems for your teen?
- 22.Do you have a lack of trust with your teen?
- 23.Does your teen have problems with authority?
- 24.Does your teen engage in activities you don't approve of?
- 25.Do you think your teen is possibly using or experimenting with drugs/alcohol?
- 26.Are you concerned about your child's well being and their future?
- 27.Does your teen seem to constantly be in opposition to your family values?
- 28.No matter what rules and consequences are established, do you feel that your teen will defy them?
- 29.Are you exhausted and worn out from your teen's defiant and/or destructive behavior and choices?
- 30.Do you feel like you are being 'held hostage' by your teen?

Tally your yes responses. Based on the number of your 'yes' responses, our recommendations would be as follows:

- 18+: High risk. Get help! A residential center, treatment program or specialty school is strongly recommended.
- 9-17: Borderline risk. It is possible that the problems can be resolved by tightening up the family rules and structure. However, it may be that a residential center, treatment program or specialty school needs to be considered.
- Up to 8: Moderate risk. Tighten up family rules/understandings, and be consistent with your monitoring and follow through.

If outside help is indicated, Teen Crisis Foundation can refer you to an information line (1-435-628-2587) where you can receive some recommendations on cost effective options that have a successful track history with difficult teens. For Information on Residential centers, Treatment programs or Specialty schools. 1-435-628-2587 We offer the following suggestions for families that need to tighten up their family rules and structure.

SETTING BETTER LIMITS

Limits and rules are necessary to create order and productivity, the lack of which create chaos and confusion. Rules provide the basis of understanding of what is expected, whether in the workplace, classroom, community or family. If a classroom had no rules, very little learning would occur. If a community operated without rules it would cease to be a safe place to live. Likewise, if order is to be maintained within the family, there must be a proper set of family rules, understandings or expectations that are based on your family values. If your teen is generally responsible you probably will only need a few rules. However, if you are dealing with a difficult or defiant teen you are already familiar with the need for more defined structure.

When setting rules you want to create several layers of safeguards to assist your teen. For example: If you want to protect your teen from substance abuse you must set some very clear rules with your teen as to who they may associate with, what types of activities they are allowed to attend and/or participate where they are allowed to go, and when they may! go, as well as expected to return. It would be foolish to think your teen could consistently party with friends that use drugs and expect your teen to stay drug free.

If you want to avoid your teen receiving poor grades you may need to have some clear rules in areas such as school attendance, completing daily homework, and obtaining weekly progress reports. The key is that you set rules and create a structure that will help your teen succeed along the way, rather than waiting until the end of the semester to see if they got good grades.

When you create several layers of safeguards, not only does it provide your teen with the greatest amount of protection, but it also allows you to resolve problems early before they become overwhelming.

Conflict is inevitable with difficult or defiant teens. Consistently addressing and resolving conflicts over small issues such as homework, dress, grooming and curfew, is your best preventative measure to avoid the large, devastating issues such as teen pregnancy, substance abuse and failing grades. "Take care of the small things, and the big things will take care of themselves" really applies when it comes to administrating rules.

COMPLIANCE

Once you have an established set of rules, compliance with those rules depends on four things:

- 1.The rules are clearly understood.
- 2.The rules are monitored.
- 3.The rules are consistently enforced.
- 4.The consequences used are effective as deterrents.

If any of these four things are not in place it will drastically affect the compliance with the rules. With this in mind, let us address each area.

Clearly Understanding the Rules

If your rules are not clearly understood, it leaves a lot of room for misunderstandings, conflicts and even manipulations. Many times parents assume that their teen understands the rules the same way they are intended. For example, if you tell your teen to be home early, their interpretation of 'early', and yours, may be drastically different. If you tell your teen to clean their room, their idea of a "clean room" and yours may be miles apart. For these reasons, rules need to be very specific. To avoid misunderstanding, it is a good policy to have your teen write down or repeat back their understanding of any rule or expectation.

Monitoring

Monitoring is essential in the administration of any rules. Imagine for instance, if our highways were not monitored by law enforcement? What if a business did not monitor production and quality? As parents, we must provide a safety net for our children by monitoring their behavior. How much we have to monitor depends on how much monitoring is needed. Some teens require very little monitoring; difficult teens require intensive monitoring. Let your teen know that you will be monitoring their behavior. This will do a couple of things: First, they will not be offended if, or when, they discover you are monitoring, and second, if they know they are going to be monitored, it tends to give them added incentive to follow the rules.

Monitoring may occur in many ways. For instance, in regard to academics, most schools will assist you in providing daily or weekly reports, or you may choose to occasionally drop into your child's classroom and talk to their teacher. Random drug tests can assure compliance with sobriety. Use of a vehicle may be monitored through odometer checks. As a means of 'cross-checking' such things as activities or curfews you could communicate with the parents of your teen's friends, or even drive by to assure they are where they said they were going to be.

Consistency

The hardest, yet most important thing a parent can do is to be consistent. A rule, or understanding, that is not enforced can be the same as having no rule at all, and can undermine the well being of a family. In order for our teens

to feel safe, they need to know they can count on us to be consistent and dependable. If a violation occurs, we need to consistently enforce the previously established consequence. A difficult teen will test the boundaries to see what their limits will truly be. That is why consistency is so critical. Letting small things slide until they become large things will create chaos, confusion and resentment. While most of us do this from time to time, it is a very ineffective approach. Consistency is the key. Follow through on what you said you would do. Sporadic enforcement does not work. Only those parents who consistently enforce their rules will have their rules consistently followed.

Consequences

Consequences will vary dependent on the violation as well as the teen's response to the consequence. Some teens may respond to the loss of the privilege of going out on Friday night, while others may not be bothered by it at all. The key is: (1) to use consequences that have significant meaning and/or deterrent value to your teen, and (2) the severity of the consequences should match the severity of the violation.

Research has shown that immediate consequences are the most effective. However, some behaviors are so severe that an immediate consequence would not be strong enough by itself. That is why a combination of immediate consequences with some follow-up consequences is often needed. Immediate consequences might include such things as writing essays, time-out, room restriction, or a work project. Immediate consequences refer to those consequences done immediately and on the spot, before the teen can resume any of their normal activities. Follow-up consequences are those applied over a period of time such as loss of driving privileges, book reports, a major work project, being grounded, additional household chores, or loss of a planned upcoming activity. Again, follow-up consequences are sometimes needed to provide an additional deterrent.

Using Consequences that are effective deterrents

The consequences you use must be strong enough to be deterrents. Otherwise, not only will consequences be ineffective, they will most likely be ignored. Some teens will not respond, no matter what consequences are used. Other teens defiantly refuse to complete their consequences. In either of these situations, parents are forced to look at getting outside help, such as a residential center, treatment program, or specialty school. We can refer you to an information line (1-435-628-2587) where you can receive some recommendations on cost effective options that have a successful track history with difficult teens.

For More Information Call.. 1-435-628-2587

This free booklet is offered as a Public Service, for families struggling with teen challenges.

Reply to: tipsinfo@mailcity.com

For contact information:

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