



What to Do When Your Child is Out of Control by Dr. Fran Walfish

Many good kids go out of control and when this happens, parents can be at a loss. But before we tackle the solution, here are a few signs that there is a problem. Your child:

- has academic grades that suddenly go south
- begins skipping school
- starts taking drugs, drinking, stealing, and/or lying
- does not come home on time for curfew

Your Goals as a Parent

To correct the behavior, and the problem, you as a parent should have four goals in mind:

1. Develop an honest, straight-talk connection with your child that includes regular warm and positive “together” time. Find something you like to do together.
2. With your child, develop and implement strict boundaries of behavior. By including your child in this process you will together come to a fair policy and begin to develop mutual trust.
3. Declare firmly what the consequences will be if the boundaries are broken.
4. Follow through on the consequences.

How to Make it Happen

If you feel you have done your absolute best in parenting your child and there still are significant problems, here are some ideas that will help:

- Choose a warm, but firm therapist. Teenagers generally are more open and comfortable with a therapist who is the same sex.
- Have daily, uninterrupted quality time with your child. Even fifteen minutes together without the distraction of a TV, cell phone or iPod will help.
- Declare that your child must achieve passing grades.
- If your out-of-control child or teen has friends who are a bad influence, reserve the right to limit or terminate the relationship.
- Consequences can include losing the use of a car, phone, iPod, or computer for a short period of time, or losing the privilege of time with friends or going on an outing.
- If you say a consequence is coming, you must make that happen. Stand firm!

When Other Loved Ones Go Off Track

You may also have other loved ones who go off track: a sibling, parent, spouse or friend. Some of the above techniques will also work with them, however, there are some major differences:

1. You cannot ever divorce your child, but you can “divorce” yourself from any adult relationship.

2. You are not the parent of any person other than your child, and in that relationship, you, the parent hold the power.
3. A minor child does not have the same legal standing as an adult, so you have more influence while your child is still under eighteen.

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