

LIFE WITH A TEENAGER: THE ART OF NEGOTIATION



for
Women

The teenage years can be a challenging time for both of you. Parents must adapt and gradually change expectations as young people experiment with adult-like activities from the safety of a solid home base. Parents will guide teens through some dramatic changes, providing a solid and reassuring presence against which to rebel and test limits in a safe way.

Parenting a teen ...what is the same?

- you still need to be a parent even though your child is older
- you still nurture and support your child to grow up in a safe way
- you still love and are concerned for your child
- the “Everyday Essentials” for parenting still apply (see page 32)
- there are still some “givens” that are non-negotiable rules in your family (see page 38)

What is different?

- *how* you express your love and concern (e.g., less physical and fewer expressions in public)
- your teenager may not realize parents are still needed or desirable
- you have less control over a teen’s behaviour and cannot physically enforce limits (e.g., if an adolescent decides to go out, he or she will)
- it may be more challenging to keep emotion out of it: you may work harder to avoid losing your temper
- the “givens” or non-negotiable rules are fewer and take the form of things that could be harmful (e.g., drinking and driving; unprotected sex)
- how you parent changes, as your child matures and moves toward independence
- the limits and rules, except for the “givens,” must be **NEGOTIATED**

Negotiation

Negotiation is an important skill when you have teenagers. It is the basis for problem solving and setting rules or limits with teens. Negotiation:

- requires give and take: both parties must listen, show respect, talk, and be willing to compromise
- requires everyone to be clear on what is **NOT** negotiable (e.g., no drinking and driving)
- helps your child learn and practise this essential relationship skill
- is a skill most parents and adolescents need to improve and continually practise

When you don’t negotiate, it...

- increases the frequency and intensity of adolescent/parent power struggles
- increases the likelihood of extreme, “all or nothing” outcomes (e.g., running away, physical altercations, moving out at a young age)
- deprives young people of chances to learn and use this essential life skill
- decreases the likelihood your child will transfer this necessary skill into other relationships (e.g., dating, friends, teachers, employers and co-workers)
- diminishes the opportunities for gradually and safely shifting power from parent to teen

Steps for parent-teen negotiation

1. Parent or teen says what she wants to happen.
2. Other person shares her reaction without saying yes or no to the request or suggestion
3. Each person then says any problems with the other's suggestions
4. Both teen and parent think of solutions to the problems raised
5. If agreement, negotiation is over. If no agreement, try to find alternate compromise
6. If no compromise apparent, then state differing positions as objectively and respectfully as possible
7. Decide on a time to try again

An example of negotiation over curfew is given on page 63.

What you can do

- decide what rules are “givens” and what are negotiable (see page 38)
- write them down and make sure everyone knows them (and buys in)
- seek support from other adults whose ability to parent you respect

Getting teens to cooperate requires parents to show respect, define “givens” but negotiate other limits, choose limits that are appropriate for teens, and have fewer rules than when the child was younger

When your teen breaks a rule or does something wrong...

- keep your voice in a normal tone and your emotions under control – when you yell, order, or threaten, it shifts focus from the youth's behaviour to your behaviour
- try to understand what happened and what your teen was thinking and feeling
- if you are emotional or upset, set a future time to discuss consequences (e.g., next day after school)
- model respect, reasonableness and flexibility

If your adolescent threatens you...

- stay calm
- don't threaten back
- deflect - calmly say you will discuss the matter later and say when (e.g., after dinner)
- don't change your position on an issue because of a threat
- when forced to respond immediately
 1. *briefly say what you hope will happen*
 2. *say that because you love him or her you cannot change your position*
 3. *say you are doing what you believe is best for him or her*

Daughter: *“If you don't let my boyfriend sleep over in my room, I'm moving out and you'll be sorry.”*

Mother: *“I hope you don't leave home. I love you and I would miss you. As a parent, I have to do what I believe is best for you.”*