

Getting Along with

TEENAGERS

Many parents feel they are at their wit's end and cannot cope with the conflicts and worries that can come with living with teenagers. Problems range from feelings of alienation, frustration over perennial crises, anger with vague threats and ultimatums, to fears of violence. Some families are so preoccupied with their problems that the parents ignore the positive traits of their teenagers, and the teens lose sight of the love and concern behind the distraught or angry faces of their parents.

Predicaments Include

- **Alienation / Feeling Ignored** - Many parents feel at a loss as to how to get through to their teens. Family trips are offered, however they want to be with their friends. Conversations are initiated, but the teen leaves right after dinner to sit down at the TV/computer/or communicate with friends.
- **Fears / Worries** - Teenagers live in an age where they can get into more adult types of trouble: crime, drugs, relationships, and sex. It is hard to let someone you love experience the consequences of mistakes that can have lifelong damaging effects.
- **Conflict / Anger** - Every family has conflict. It is normal. Not all conflict needs to be resolved. But how do things get so far? Simple requests escalate into threats. Simple refusals escalate into running away.
- **Lack of Fun** - Parents and teenagers are simply not enjoying each other. Many report they have nothing in common and do nothing together. It is as though the only alternative to conflict and crisis is boredom or estrangement.



Philosophies to Help Sort Through Teenage Crises

- **Know Yourself** Look at yourself and see how you may be contributing to the problem. What is bothering you and how are you reacting in the situation? Review your values, wants, limits, and ultimate goals and those you have for your child.
- **Adopt a Policy of Honesty** Tell your teenager that in fairness you will assume that everything they tell you is honest and you will act accordingly. Some parents will see this as impossible because of all the past lies and lack of trust. Trust starts with trust, and to build trust you need a starting point.
- **Place Responsibility on the Teenagers for Their Actions & Decisions** This philosophy empowers teenagers to make decisions for themselves instead of rebelling against parents. There may be a period where the teenager does not want this responsibility and will try to persuade you to take it over. Strive not to do this. The fact that you are no longer responsible does not mean that you stop loving, caring, guiding, and being there for your teenager.
- **Be Fair & Consistent** Fairness applies to all parties when establishing ground rules. Consistency means always following through with the consequences, always being fair, and placing responsibility where it belongs. This is hard, especially at first, if inconsistency has been part of your children's lives. It is vital to stay consistent throughout so as not to reinforce their negative behaviors.

Some Suggestions for Change

First of all, **relax**. It is so easy for parents to get stuck and feel knotted up with tension. Set aside a half hour of uninterrupted time to read this newsletter and simply consider some possibilities. You do not need to make big resolutions or prepare for big confrontations. Set aside any thoughts of guilt. Parents are prone to feel guilty even when all is well. The best parents in the world still have struggles with their teens.

Here are some questions you might find useful in exploring the possibilities for getting out of the rut-

- **Who owns the problem?**

The room is a mess, the report card grades are low, or the haircut is bizarre. Certainly you may be feeling the most pain, but is it your problem? It is helpful sometimes to actually write out the issues that cause conflict and to sort out whose problem is whose. You can only do something about the problems that are yours.

- **What is within my control and what is outside of my control?**

The actual consumption of drugs for example, is out of your control unless you are using them. You can educate yourself and your teen well and be a good supportive parent. Your positive example is certainly influential, and it will reduce the risk of drug abuse. Ultimately however, the decision to use drugs is up to the individual. An example of something within your control is how you respond to the news of your teens' or their friends' drug use or questionable behaviors.

- **What are some things that are going well with your teen that you really like and admire?**

Sometimes parents are seen as people who do nothing but dictate shoulds. A good way to get out of a rut is to give up nagging (easier said than done) and to put more energy into praise. Praise is more successful than punishment in changing behaviour and attitude.

Rapport Building

Even though there is conflict, there can still be understanding, caring, trust, and loyalty. It is a shame to watch people learn to hate the ones they love. This can happen when too much energy is spent trying to change each other. It is possible to accept and love the person while not accepting their behaviour. Parents and teens may disagree about the wisdom of dropping out of school, hanging out with undesirables, or smoking. Differences in lifestyles may reach a point where they cannot live under the same roof together, yet love can still be there.

Keep Talking

As a rule of thumb non-communication between parent and teen presents more trouble than open conflict. In fact, non-communication actually communicates defeat and resignation. It signifies that you have either given up hope, do not care, or both. It is good to set aside time to talk about the things that matter, and your teenagers do matter regardless of their behaviour. Meal times may not be the best times to get into issues as conflict may disrupt the meal.

Keep talking with friends and relatives. Just as your teen is likely to be comparing notes with friends about how to handle parents, it is good for you to talk with other parents. It will help in getting a sense of what is normal. An uncle or aunt may have some suggestions to facilitate communication.



The business of raising teenagers is complex. Be comforted in the knowledge that you are not alone. If you need some help keeping the lines of communication open, do not hesitate to contact your EFAP.

YOUR LOGO HERE

For confidential assistance
Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055
www.browncrawshaw.com