

DEALING WITH NORMAL ADOLESCENT REBELLION

Adolescent rebellion usually starts at 12 to 14 years of age. Under the best circumstances, it continues for about two years; it is not uncommon for this stage to last four to six years. The following guidelines may help you and your teenager through this difficult period. Emotions usually run high, and mood swings are common.

When parenting a teen, your goal should be mutual respect, support, and having fun together. Strive for relaxed, casual conversations during shared activities such as bicycling, hiking, shopping, playing catch, driving, cooking, working, and especially, mealtimes. Friendship with your teenager doesn't mean bending your own behavior or values in an attempt to be popular with them, however. Use praise and trust to help build self-esteem. Recognize and validate feelings by listening carefully and making nonjudgmental comments. Remember that listening doesn't mean you have to solve your teen's problems.

Avoid criticism about 'no-win' topics. Most bad parent-adolescent relationships develop because the parents criticize their teenager too much. A great deal of the teen's bad behavior merely reflects their desire to conform to the current tastes of their peer group of friends. Dressing, talking, and acting different from adults help your teenager to feel independent of you. So just back off, as your teenager would say.

Try to avoid criticizing clothing, hairstyles, makeup, music, friends, recreational interests, room decorations, speech, posture, or philosophy. Allowing your teen to rebel in these areas often prevents testing in other areas, such as drugs, truancy, or shoplifting. Intervene only if your teenager's behavior is harmful, illegal, or infringes on your rights.

Your teenager must learn from trial and error. Parents should speak up only if the adolescent is going to do something dangerous or illegal. Otherwise, teens must rely on their own self-discipline, pressure from their peers to behave responsibly, and the lessons learned from the consequences of their actions (the school of hard knocks).

City curfew laws will help control late hours. A school's requirement for punctual attendance will influence when your teen goes to bed at night. School grades will usually hold them accountable for homework and other aspects of school performance. Teenagers need plenty of opportunities to learn from their mistakes before they leave home and have to solve problems without an ever-present parent.

Clarify the house rules and consequences of breaking them. You have the right and the responsibility to make rules regarding your house and other possessions. Written ones cut down on misunderstandings. A teenager's preferences can be tolerated within their own room, but they need not be imposed on the rest of the house. You can forbid loud music or incoming telephone calls after 10 p.m. that interfere with other people's concentration or sleep. You should make your teen's friends feel welcome in your home, but clarify the ground rules about parties or where snacks can be eaten. Your teen can be placed in charge of cleaning their room and washing and ironing their clothes. You can insist upon clean clothes and enough showers to prevent body odor.

Reasonable consequences for breaking house rules include loss of computer, TV, stereo, and car privileges. Working for the money to repair or replace damaged articles is also appropriate. Rarely, you may need to ground your child for a day or a weekend.

Give space to a teenager who is in a bad mood. When your teenager is in a bad mood, they generally won't want to talk about it with you. This is a poor time to talk to them about any topic, pleasant or otherwise. If teens want to discuss a problem with anybody, it is usually a close friend.

Some talking back is normal. We want our teenagers to express their anger through talking and to challenge our opinion in a logical way. We need to listen. Let the small stuff go; it's only words. But don't accept disrespectful remarks, such as calling you a "jerk." Unlike a negative attitude, these mean remarks should not be ignored. You can respond with a comment like, "It really hurts me when you put me down or don't answer my question." Make your statement in as non-angry a way as possible, even though you may be legitimately angry. If your adolescent continues to make hostile, unpleasant remarks, you should leave the room. Don't get into a shouting match with them because this type of behavior is unacceptable. What you are trying to teach is that everyone has the right to disagree and even to express anger but that screaming and rude conversation are not allowed in your house. You can prevent some rude behavior by being a role model of politeness, constructive disagreement, and the ability to apologize. **GOOD LUCK!**