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GETTING ALONG WITH YOUR TEENAGER

- 1) **“PICK YOUR BATTLES”** – This is a common guideline for all parents but it is especially important for parents of teens. Every battle with your teen frays the relationship a little, so be sure each battle is worth it.
- 2) **“WHOSE PROBLEM IS IT?”** – Clarify for yourself whether you are struggling with something that is your issue (e.g. chores) or their issue (e.g. a disagreement with a friend). Logical consequences work well when it is your issue, but when it is their issue, back off and let them use you as a resource. If you try to tell them (or even worse, demand) how they handle personal issues, they will stop letting you know about these situations. If you stay calm and just listen, you may have opportunities to offer ideas and ask thought-provoking questions. And, if things don't work out, they might come back and talk with you about it, which would never happen if they felt they had to hide all their struggles from you.
- 3) **DON'T NAG! FIND ANOTHER WAY TO GET THEM TO FOLLOW-THROUGH.** – When you are about to tell a teen a second time to do something, stop for a moment and think about what you are doing. Check your own attitude. Do you need to calm down first? Is the issue worth hassling over? Should you be setting up some kind of reward or consequence for this behavior? Chances are, if you have reminded them once, and the job did not get done, a second reminder will fall on deaf ears. Think about finding another way to handle the situation.
- 4) **BE BRIEF. NO LECTURES.** – All kids tune out lectures. Teens do it even more easily.
- 5) **STAY CALM, POLITE AND RESPECTFUL.** – When you use a harsh tone or lose your temper, you are modeling disrespect. You are giving your child permission to respond to you in the same manner. A loving, kind approach will help preserve your relationship with your teen during these difficult years.

- 6) **BE PATIENT AND CALM WHEN THERE IS CONFLICT.** – Remember that you don't have to handle a situation immediately. Pull back. Cool off. Talk to your spouse or a friend. Think through your strategy. Decide if you even need to respond further to the situation.
- 7) **IF YOUR TEEN HAS GOTTEN OUT OF CONTROL, WORK ON ONE ISSUE AT A TIME.** – You can't change everything overnight. After there has been improvement on that first issue, work on another one. You may even want to involve your teen in choosing which issue to work on next.
- 8) **WHEN YOU REALIZE YOU NEED TO BE STRICTER WITH A RULE, BE SURE YOU GIVE YOUR TEEN FAIR WARNING.** – No child likes to be surprised by a new rule. Teens will be especially sensitive to the disrespect of changing the rules without warning.
- 9) **REQUEST HELP FROM YOUR TEEN. DON'T DEMAND IT.** – This is about respect. You'll get a better response if you make requests when you need help with something. You will get the help only if you have a fairly good relationship with your teen. If you have a conflictual relationship, there will not be enough good will for your teen to give you the help you want. But only make a request when your teen has a choice about doing what is requested. For example, don't request that a teen do one of their regular chores. If chores aren't being done willingly, then use rewards and consequences to get your teen to do them.
- 10) **ARRANGE FUN TIME TOGETHER.** – Every relationship needs fun time together to stay healthy and alive. If you are having a lot of conflict, you may have to search hard to find an activity that will provide a respite from arguing. One or both of you may feel too angry to want to spend time together, but things are unlikely to get better if you don't find a way to accomplish this.
- 11) **CONSIDER CLOSING THEIR BEDROOM DOOR RATHER THAN ARGUING OVER CLUTTER.** – A messy room for a teen does not mean they will be messy for the rest of their life. Sometimes messiness is a form of rebellion that you can overlook. Sometimes messiness indicates that other things are more important to them right now. Try having them keep their door closed so that you don't have to see the mess. Of course, a closed door does not mean that you have no access to their room. Maybe you want to let a particular privilege depend on them cleaning their room (not spotless cleaning) once a week. But pick your battles. How important is a clean room when you look at the whole picture.

- 12) REMEMBER THAT MOST TEENS GROW INTO MORE PLEASANT YOUNG ADULTS.** –Your teen’s sullenness and rebellion is a phase. Most teens will past through the phase and eventually become more cooperative and more enjoyable to be around. But this will happen in their timeframe, not yours. The more polite and respectful you are during these years, the better the likelihood that you will preserve the relationship with your teen and get to the other side.
- 13) ENCOURAGE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER POSITIVE ADULTS -**
...a relative, family friend, therapist, or parent of one of their friends. Teens are in the process of breaking away from their parents, so they have difficulty seeing you as a resource for guidance. They need other positive adults so that they won’t be depending on only their peers for guidance and support.
- 14) REMEMBER THAT RESEARCH SHOWS THAT THE HUMAN BRAIN DOES NOT FULLY DEVELOP UNTIL THE EARLY 20’S OR EVEN AGE 25.** – Don’t think that who your child is at 17 or 18 is how they will be for the rest of their lives. Their ability to problem-solve and handle their life continues to develop long after they turn 18.

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