

Solutions

FOR PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE

SURVIVING ADOLESCENCE – TOGETHER!”

By Gary Alger, M.Div., LADC, CEAP

The following suggestions incorporate a few basic, key concepts aimed at widening the perspectives of both teenagers and their parents, toward a better understanding of life in one another's shoes. Hopefully, applying these few samples of simple wisdom to both sides of the parent / adolescent equation might just help ease the frequent conflicts and tension at home.

Practice “Mutual Empathy”. Simply consider the perspectives and pressures that influence the thoughts, words and actions behind what you see and hear. For parents that may mean recalling one's own adolescence, and/or actively listening to learn what her/his life is really like. For teens it may mean becoming willing to ‘walk a mile in the moccasins’ of Mom and Dad, at least emotionally, to gain a certain level of respect for the delicate balancing act they practice daily, still guiding and protecting, while increasingly letting go.

Accept the idea that parents’ and teens’ “Job Descriptions” naturally conflict. Is it any wonder that in dutifully following our natural instincts we find ourselves frequently at odds with one another? If only we could remember that so many of the things that annoy us about one another are neither personal, intentional, malicious nor calculated – rather, they are just teens and parents thinking, acting and reacting as they tend to do.

Identify and communicate those expectations (rules) that are “non-negotiable”. (My three brothers and I learned quite early that ‘talking back’ was something one simply did not want to do!) Such declarations, accompanied by honest explanations, and appropriate consequences for failure to follow through, set clear boundaries that are firm and easily understood. Once established, the precious energy that is so often wasted re-hashing the same few arguments over and over again can be better utilized discussing all the other less rigid expectations, or “negotiables”.

Practice (even 1 or 2) Positive Principles. (This is an exercise for both parents and teens!)

1. Refuse to lie. Period. No excuses.
2. Admit when you're wrong. (It's good for both of you!)
3. Paraphrase what you think you hear him/her say, to check your understanding, before reacting or responding to what was said.
4. Say good morning, and good night – every day, even (especially!) if you just had an argument or you're really angry. And mean it.
5. Commit a monthly, random act of kindness or senseless, loving care.
 - Cook breakfast.
 - Wash his/her car.
 - Invite your teen out for lunch
 - Offer to help Mom or Dad with dinner, or yard work, or taking a younger sibling for ice cream.
6. Ask (sincerely) how her/his day went (and then listen...!)
7. Ask 1 clarifying questions about something s/he shares about herself / himself.
8. When you hear something that upsets you, or that you disagree with, try saying (either):
“*Hmm...OK, I hear you. Let me think about it some, and then let's talk more...*”
-or-
“*Hmm... that's interesting. Could you say some more about that?*”
9. Give a gentle, connecting touch on the shoulder, just to say hi, as you walk by.
10. Don't be afraid, or too proud, or too stubborn, to apologize when you've made a mistake. (Deep integrity fosters trust and respect, and is often rather contagious!)

Call Solutions at 1-800-526-3485 for assistance with family concerns or any of life's challenges.