

*When you don't agree with your adolescent's viewpoint, always clearly state your position and also, most essential, explain why you hold it.*

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# Parents and teenagers — three dozen suggestions for having an easier ride

**W**ith the majority of adults and young people:

- *Some minor conflict is not only bound to exist but needs to exist.*
- *Major conflict does not have to exist.*

There are ways of helping parents, other adults, and young people to cope with minor conflict and to reduce major conflict.

## 1. Sticking-points

Adults have all been through it and we think that we know what it is like.

As adults we conveniently forget the major areas of conflict that occurred with our own parents during this period.

We forget that the major way that humans learn is by experience.

Teenagers are having to find their own self-identity in an ever-more complex world with an attractive variety of experiences on the menu — drugs, sex, alcohol, tobacco are all more freely available at an earlier and earlier age. In other words, the 'menu' is greater now than when we were adolescents.

Areas of development (physical, mental, emotional) in young people are relatively independent of one another.

Adults have difficulty in accepting that young people may be inexperienced but they are not illogical, and therefore they want good information to inform their decisions — information that many adults do not have access to.

There is enormous variation in emotional intelligence in adults, and in their ability to empathise with young people's needs.

## 2. Signs of adolescent stress

1. Complaining of feeling tired all the time.
2. Losing their sense of humour.
3. Deterioration of their school work.
4. Rowing with friends.
5. Complaining of headaches and stomach pains with no obvious cause.
6. Loss of appetite, loss of weight, or compulsive eating.
7. Cutting themselves off from family and friends.
8. Being secretive.
9. Not taking part in activities in which they used to take part.
10. Being very self-critical and saying they are hopeless.
11. Getting increasingly disorganised.

## 3. Areas of conflict

The areas of potential conflict or difficulty between young people and adults are many!

- Moral values: whose, where, when?
- Relationships: his/hers, hers/his, his/his, hers/hers, and yours.
- Sex: who's doing what to whom, who wants to know, and whose problem is it?
- Whose money is it anyway?
- You call that a holiday?

*Negotiate, negotiate, negotiate*

- What to rave about?
- Being driven mad.
- Your friends, my friends, our friends.
- Jobs — if only.
- "When I was your age."
- "Just do it" — duties and responsibilities.
- Whose home is it?
- Culture and religion.
- Whose planet is it and what are you doing to it?
- Education.
- Sleeping hours — some people do have 'em.
- Blowing minds — illegal drugs.
- Alcohol, tobacco, legal drugs.
- Food, diet, exercise, clothes and music.
- Divorce and bereavement.

## 4. Tips for parents

1. Don't have children. But if you do have them (and all children grow into adolescence and out of it again), then:

2. Try and avoid face-off situations (e.g. "Yes you will" — "No I won't" — "Yes you will") because everyone loses face: negotiate, negotiate, negotiate.

3. Over routines like washing-up, helping with the housework, etc., negotiate ahead of time well away from any direct contact with the situation, and, if necessary, get a written agreement. For example:

- *Monday, Wednesday and Friday washing-up: Alice.*
- *Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday washing-up: Tom.*
- *Sunday: Dad and Mum.*

Detail is often helpful: table clearing *and* washing up *and* putting away!

4. Avoid ultimatums that almost inevitably mean that you, the parent, has finally to give in: e.g. "If you smoke in my car I will never let you borrow it again," because you will.

5. Trust and respect your adolescent's viewpoint, even if you don't agree with it.

6. When you don't agree with it, always clearly state your position and also, most essential, explain *why* you hold it. Young people may be inexperienced but they are not illogical. Don't expect your advice always to be followed (ad-

vice is advice, not an order), but do expect, and listen to, the reason given as to why it isn't being followed.

7. Try and remember what you were like at that age and how you regarded your parents' advice — is there any more reason why your offspring should listen to your advice than why you should have listened to your parents'?

8. Remember always to try and find something positive to praise first and then, and only then, see how it might have been done better!

9. Treat each of your adolescents as an individual, allow them increasing privacy as they get older, and try and be fair (adolescents have an extremely developed sense of fairness, which will not necessarily fit your own).

10. Say "sorry" when you are wrong, loud and clear.

11. Don't run your adolescents down in front of their friends and don't compare them unfavourably with their friends.

12. Remember, remember, young people may be inexperienced but they are not illogical.

13. You and your teenagers may share the same knowledge (drugs are harmful) but have different priorities — try and find out what their priorities are.

## 5. Tips for adolescents

1. Don't have parents — but in most cases you haven't got a choice, so learn to live with them and remember all they do for you, especially all those things that you assume will always be there — they may not be!

2. Parents are useful: they provide the roof over your head, the hot water (if you ever use it), the heating in the house, the telephone rental, the food on the table; occasionally saying "thank you" helps them to be nicer to you.

3. Remember that parents are grown-up adolescents with all the responsibilities for you and very little control over you — that is the way they feel.

4. Remember that parents get tired and like sleep. A non-tired parent is an infinitely nicer person to negotiate with. Also, parents have to work during the day to earn the money to pay your phone bills: 2 a.m. discussions about noise tend not to be welcome.

5. Ask your parents how they behaved with their parents at your age and try and look interested when they reply.

6. Get your friends to introduce themselves when they come into the house.

*Young people may be inexperienced, but they are not illogical*

*Parents have all the responsibilities and very little control*

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7. If you feel stressed with your parents, get out of the house and beat up something else — football/basketball/baseball/tennis ball, softball, etc.

8. Most protective, against parents stressing you out, is to have someone outside the family with whom you can share your intimate feelings of frustration, anger, happiness — friend, neighbour, grandparent, teacher, etc.

9. Say “sorry” when you are wrong, loud and clear — with practice you’ll be amazed how easy it is and what a wonderful effect it has on your parents and their happiness. Therefore, in the long run, on your happiness.