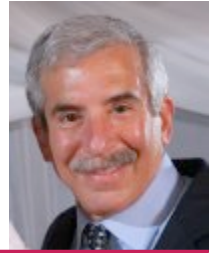


The Battle of Parents & Teens

By Dr. Michael Tobin

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First of all the title is misleading. It doesn't have to be a battle. In fact the good news is that it's possible to live in peace with your teen.

You may wonder how I know that. Here are my credentials:

1. I was the father of four teenagers - three girls and a boy
2. Once upon a time I was a teenager
3. As a psychologist who specializes in parent teen relations I have 36 years of experience listening to parents and teens complain, cry, scream and moan about their "impossible" adolescent/parents, and then helping them work out their conflicts.

Here is my laundry list of thoughts, ideas and practical suggestions on how to relate to a teenager. At the end of this list you can add your own suggestions. Here goes:

- Cultivate a sense of humor. Learn to laugh at the small stuff (most of it's small stuff). Teenagers can be enormously entertaining.
- You were once a teenager. Try to remember those crazy, wild, and confusing years when your parents seemed at best irrelevant and at worst the embodiment of evil.
- Learn to listen. When you feel compelled to lecture, eat an apple. Only through listening can you develop a connection to your son or daughter.
- Be patient. The nose ring will eventually come out.
- Pick and choose your battles. A messy room is the wrong fight. Learn to stand firm on issues that may be harmful to your child like drugs, alcohol, teen sex, and cigarettes.
- Be informed about the above issues. Be an intelligent and responsible parent. Talk, read and surf to find the information that you need in order to succeed at parenting a teen.

- Learn to talk to your son or daughter. Don't judge or preach. Let your conversations with your teen be an act of discovery. You may be surprised at what you'll find out.
- Don't be afraid to discuss the "taboo" subjects. The worst that will happen is that you'll find out what you already "knew". If so, you might be able to deal with it.
- Don't expect to be complimented on doing a great job. When your teen is no longer a teen, you'll get your kudos retroactively.
- Better that your teenager be "rebellious" now than later. It's what they're supposed to do. A rebellious thirty year old is an impulsive and irresponsible adult.
- Love your child unconditionally. Don't give or withhold love based on your child's behavior.
- Don't unconditionally accept or approve everything that your teen does. If it's for the right reason, saying "NO" to your teen is an act of love.
- Have fun with your kids. Let them bring out the kid in you.
- Spend one on one time with your teen.
- The best parenting is parenting by example. Work on yourself, especially your anger.
- It's okay to lose it; just don't forget to apologize. That's called parenting by example.
- The only one who expects you to be perfect is you. Perfect people are a bore. They also make terrible parents.
- Be kind to yourself. There's no more difficult job than being a parent of a teenager, especially in the year 2010. Drugs, sex and violence are far more serious today than 25 plus years ago when most of us were teens.
- If all else fails, don't say, "Because I'm your mother (father)." It's better to walk away, count to ten, and reassess.
- If you are connected to a responsible co-parent, two is better than one. Good cop, bad cop can sometimes work as long as the roles are interchanged and the strategy is agreed upon in advance.
- When it comes to issues of values both parents should stand shoulder to shoulder.
- Your teen needs reasonable limit setting. Never be afraid to set appropriate expectations.
- A parent who always says yes is a neglectful parent and your kid will think you don't care.
- A parent who always says no is a scared and controlling parent who your kid will hate.
- Never be embarrassed by anything your teen does in public. You can always walk away and pretend you don't know her.
- Forget about the outside. Get to know the inside.

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