



FAMILY *Matters*

Michael D. Zito, Ph.D.



How to Handle 4 Common Problematic Teen Behaviors

This article is in response to several reader inquiries requesting guidance on these four specific situations with their teens. My previous articles, “Everybody’s doing it” (December 2015 issue) and “My teen is driving me crazy” (April 2016 issue) may be helpful as well.

Why does my teen seem to want to make me angry? Parent-teen conflict is not uncommon which leaves a teenager with many unheard emotions. When a teen appears to be provoking emotion in you, it is often because they want you to understand, indirectly, how they are feeling because they believe you do not understand how they are currently feeling. For example, if a teen is experiencing a significant amount of hurt, they may make hurtful comments to a parent to show the parent how they are feeling. They are often not aware of this dynamic until it is uncovered in therapy. So if the teen regularly provokes a certain feeling in you, use that to understand a feeling they may be struggling with and perhaps consider addressing it.

Why is my teen never ready to go out the door on time? This is a common complaint I hear from parents

when going to an appointment and/or going to school. What often happens is that a teen has determined in their own mind the appropriate time to leave, based on the idea that they never need to go anyplace early because to do so takes away from their enjoyable activities and is boring. Teens rarely plan for the unknowns (traffic, accidents) that most parents are well aware of. This behavior reflects the narcissism of the teenage years and their biological desire to seek pleasurable activities that they deem important. If this behavior is chronic, a parent might manage this behavior by connecting being on time for appointments and/or school with access to privileges at home. For example, if the teen wants full access to electronic devices after school, they need to have left the home by a specified time for school or specific appointments. They may still argue about it, but simply hold them accountable to the contingency arrangement.

What does “in a minute” really mean to a teen? When teens have a history of noncompliance with parental requests (i.e., chores) this and statements like “I’ll do it later,” generally mean “I hope you forget you

asked because I really don’t want to do it.” Therefore teens who often resist will require monitoring and be held accountable for completing basic chores. Simply connect completion of basic chores with the ability to do things they like to do such as video or electronic games. Specifically, they can have access to these enjoyable activities after the basic chores are done.

How do I know if my teen is addicted to video games? Video games need to be used in moderation because teen brain biology may promote hyper focus on this pleasurable activity. Parents should intervene especially when video games may be interfering with academic performance and/or social relationships. If you are concerned that your child may be addicted to video games, both parents should decide the allowable time limit for access to the games, then monitor and enforce this limitation. Consider turning off the phone and internet access after certain hours. If the teen becomes extremely upset and resistant to this limit setting, this may suggest they are addicted to video games and may require professional assistance.

Michael D. Zito, Ph.D. is a licensed psychologist with offices in Watchung and Morristown. He practices clinical and sport psychology with children through adults and can be reached at 908-753-8696 or at MichaelZitoPhD@yahoo.com. Dr. Zito welcomes your questions and ideas for future articles. The information provided in this article is for informational purposes and is not intended to treat any person or condition. Seek professional services if treatment is needed.