



FAMILY *Matters*

My teen is driving me crazy!

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Raising teens can challenge the best of parents. While there are many teens who present minimal problems, I have had the opportunity to help parents manage difficult teens. The first thing to understand is the brain of a teen has not yet fully developed the resources to make good decisions and manage emotions. Much of problematic teens' behavior is due to this fact. This is why adolescents need parent(s) to bridge the gap between their developing brain regions and the need for good decisions etc. In essence, a parent needs to be to the teen what their brain development has not yet provided them.

Until essential brain regions develop, your teen may have poor impulse control, shaky judgment, excessive emotionality, hyper focus on pleasure and excitement, preference for low effort, and limited ability to stop and think through potential consequences. Essentially think of teens as a high powered sport car with poor brakes. Well-reasoned adults can see the danger in that, but many teens can't, which is why they need a parent(s) to guide them.

Many parents complain that adolescents do such irrational things, which is true from an adult point of view. However, in my experience, in therapy sessions, teens have a very clear idea of why they do and don't do things. They just don't

want to tell their parents for fear of criticism. Complicating matters is a strong sense of narcissist entitlement that teens have today. They might be best called "Generation **Why**" teens. **Why** can't I have expensive electronics now? **Why** do I have to do things I don't want to? The good news is teens can be managed more successfully when parents have an understanding of the limits of current teen brain biology and utilize developmental appropriate techniques. Also, realize that parent teen conflict is extremely normal and despite their aberrant teen behavior, most teens grow to be functional adults.

Here are some guiding principles for raising teens:

- Be mindful of the strong biological influences on their behavior and try not to take their behavior personally.
- Continue to influence them, even if they resist your influence because they actually do hear you.
- Allow natural consequences to fall upon them, which teaches them about cause and effect eventually helping them stop and think to foresee consequences.
- Realize adolescents will learn over time and will not change significantly with one conversation.
- Influence reasoning by sharing your own thought

processes and decision making in handling situations.

- Encourage delaying responses on important decisions which will help reduce impulsive judgements.
- Don't be afraid to disappoint your teen and set limits when appropriate. It means you are being a good parent!
- Know your teen's friend group and their parent(s).
- Limit time in unstructured group settings that don't have adult supervision since teen behavior is worse in group settings. Therefore you are correct to ask if the parents will be home!
- Monitor their social media communication.
- Validate your teen's feelings by saying "I can understand how you might feel but you still can't go to the party unless there is adult supervision."
- When possible, ask your teen to share their thoughts and how they approached decisions. They may resist but give it a try anyway.
- Don't tell them what to do rather guide them by asking questions that get them to think through situations effectively. For example, "what are some things you should consider before you decide what to do?"
- Seek professional help if chronic parent-teen problems occur.

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