

Handling a teenager's outburst

How would you respond to this parenting challenge – a teenager's outburst?

You are a parent of a 15 year old boy and you don't want to him to go to a Saturday night party. He puffs out his chest, curls his lip and barks: "You're kidding. You can't make me stay home tonight. No way!"

So how would you go? Here are some tips, that seem logical in the calm light of day, but hard to implement in the heat of the moment.

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Remaining calm is the key

Act like the confident parent, even though you may be quivering inside.

Don't rise to their bait

It sounds simple but with practice you can learn to avoid rising to the bait and entering a full-on fight with a teenager. Deflect it by saying something like, "Let's talk about this tomorrow. I'm not going to discuss this now."

Remember, teens battle their physiology

It's important to understand that teenagers have outgrown their brains and they have faulty judgement. With their hormones raging and physical changes they battle to be in charge of their bodies as well as their brains. Understanding this makes them less scary and their behaviour less hurtful.

Keep words to a minimum

It's easy to talk too much when teenagers challenge you, which usually leads to arguments. In fact, knowing when to be silent takes judgement but it can be your best ally when confronting an argumentative young person.

Give them a reason to cooperate

When things have calmed down give them a good reason to cooperate. Suggest that they may consider preparing their own meals or washing their own clothes if they want to operate outside your guidelines. It helps to remind young people that cooperation is a two way street.

Take a problem-solving approach

Another way of dealing with challenging teenagers is taking a problem-solving approach. That is, you state a rule and put the onus on your teenager to work within your guidelines. You can say, "I need you home safely by eleven o'clock. Let's come up with some ways to make this happen." Working with your young person to make sure both your needs are met takes some patience but the results can be extremely worthwhile.

Build your relationship

Getting cooperation from young people is easier when your relationship is strong. Relationships give parents leverage but building goodwill takes time and effort. Joint shopping trips, watching sport, or just hanging out together at home can help parents build bridges with young people.

The pay-off is huge in terms of your ability to influence your young person and help them make better choices.

When a teenager challenges you:

1. Refuse to respond to their verbal taunts or challenges
2. Stay calm, even aloof. Stand your ground and act as if this behaviour is not new to you

3. Be prepared to move away from a teenager who is out of control
4. After an outburst sit down with them and remind them that cooperation has two sides