

Parent Guide

Teenage

Problem

Behaviour



Parenting strategies for common
teenage problem behaviours

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Problem Teenage Behaviour: Parent Guide by Chris Hudson

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Introduction

Welcome to the Understanding Teenagers Parents Guide for Problem Teenage Behaviour.

This guide is a collection of responses to the most common behavior questions I receive from parents of teenagers.

It provides simple strategies any parent can implement to help manage and reduce the occurrence of common teenage behaviour problems.

Each chapter focuses on a specific behaviour. The chapters are broken up into 3 sections outlined below:

What is Going On?

On the basis that understanding is empowering, each chapter tries to provide insight into teenage behavior and what is motivating teens to behave the way they do.

What Can Parents Do?

The second half of each chapter outlines some strategies parents can employ to help manage teenage behavior.

Summary

At the end of each chapter is a simple summary to use as a quick reference guide.

The final chapter in the book provides some other important tips that are essential if you want to achieve lasting change in your teenager's behaviour.

I hope you find it helpful.

Chapter 1

Endless Arguments

What is Going On?

It is a well-established fact that conflict within households increases during the teenage years, particularly in the early teenage years. While each situation is different and every family has its own unique dynamics, there are a few common processes of adolescence that contribute to an increase in conflict.

Desiring Independence

As teens get older they naturally want to expand their boundaries. Arguments occur when parents and teens often disagree about the nature and timing of these boundary expansions.

It is a good sign that when teenagers are pushing for more independence. What is not so good is their inability to work out what they can and can't handle, combined with their need to fight about every single issue along the way.

Emotional Autonomy

It sounds fancy, but it just means teens are seeking to disengage from the emotional dependence on their parents that marked their childhood. In this process parents can become de-idolised in the eyes of the teenagers.

This process can be quite painful for both teen and parent, so it is no surprise that tempers can flare. The trick for parents is not allowing your teen's need to move on from childhood to make your life one long argument.

Learning To Think

As teenagers move through puberty they also develop increased ability to think logically and critically. As with most new skills,

they are keen to practice and show off their improving arguing abilities. Unfortunately, parents are the prime testing ground.

Demonstration of Power

All of the above culminate into one key reason why many teenagers want to argue with parents all the time – POWER.

Along with independence teenagers are searching for significance. Getting into an argument, especially with a parent, gives teens a real sense of being significant.

It doesn't even really matter deep down to a teenager if they win the argument or not. They get satisfaction merely in engaging a parent in the argument in the first place. When a teen gets a response from a parent it is a demonstration of their ability, or power, to affect a situation and a person who they see as already having power.

Entering into an argument with an adult is a way teenagers make themselves feel just as powerful as an adult. During an argument a teen becomes an adult's equal in terms of having power.

What Can Parents Do?

When it comes to teens who are always arguing, the less is more principle is key. Parents just need to choose not to argue with their teen and a big part of the problem goes away.

It is not as hard as it sounds, really!

Don't Argue With Teenagers!

If I was to have a list of cardinal rules about living and working with teenagers this would be on it – Don't argue with teenagers.

And before you say “what choice do I have?” remember it takes two to have an argument.

All adults are free not to argue with teenagers. As a bare minimum just say nothing – argument avoided.

For some reason many parents seem compelled to ignore this simple truth and enter headlong into arguments with their teens.

If this is you, then STOP. Today. Right now.

Say to yourself repeatedly, “I will not argue with my teenager!”

Here is the simple truth, as soon as you start to argue with your teenager you have put yourself into a power struggle. And the mere fact that you the parent have chosen to enter into such a struggle with your teen means that you have already lost, no matter what the outcome.

By getting you into an argument your teenager has demonstrated they have power to influence and manipulate your behavior. Your authority is diminished in their eyes, irrespective of the outcome.

Say to yourself repeatedly, “I will not argue with my teenager.”

What to do Instead of Arguing

State upfront you are not going to argue with them. As soon as you see them start posturing in preparedness for an argument, say

“This is not up for debate, and I am not arguing with you.”

If, as is commonly the case, the impending dispute is about a decision you have made then instead of arguing give your teenager a choice:

“You can either do (action A) and (explain consequence) or you can do (action b) and (explain consequence of action b). That is your choice, it is up to you”

Then walk away.

Make sure to follow up with your teen later to check if they had something they wanted to “discuss” in a calm and rational manner.

Reduce Reasons For Arguments

Prevention is better than cure they say. The best way to prevent arguments is to proactively deal with common situations that cause arguments before they arise.

This means you need to have clear agreements and boundaries established with your teen that outline what is required and what the consequences are if the required actions aren't carried out.

If arguments occur about chores not being done or access to phones and computers then establish clear agreements and guidelines with your teen about these issues in advance. You and your teen need to agree on what is reasonable, what they are responsible to do, and agree on what the consequences will be if your teen breaches the agreement or boundary.

This way there is no argument to have at the time, you simply say to your teen “you know the deal. We agreed this is what is to happen.”

As with anytime you use consequences as a parent make sure you follow through on them.

Summary Endless Arguments

What is Going On?

- ➔ Desiring Independence
- ➔ More Emotionally Autonomous
- ➔ Learning To Think
- ➔ Demonstration of Power

What Can Parents Do?

- ➔ Don't Argue With Teenagers!
- ➔ What to do Instead of Arguing
- ➔ Reduce Reasons For Arguments

Chapter 2

Persistent Lying

What is Going On?

Lying is not unique to teenagers, but there can be a significant increase in the deceptive behavior and dishonesty during the teen years.

Parents need to understand a teen's increased need for privacy, but this should not excuse lying.

Avoiding Getting in Trouble

This one is not surprising, we have all done it; told a lie to avoid punishment. One of the most common reasons teenagers lie is to avoid getting into trouble.

The key factors that influence teens lying to avoid getting into trouble are the quality of relationship that exists with their parents, and the type of discipline parents hand out. If you have a healthy relationship with your teen and respond to misbehavior with fairness and reasonableness, your teen will be more willing to come through with the truth when they stuff up.

Preventing Disappointment

Somewhat surprisingly the other common reasons teenagers lie is because they are scared of disappointing their parents. Worried that the truth will either cause a parent to worry or result in a parent's disapproval, teenagers will choose to say what they think parents want to hear rather than the truth.

Not wanting to let parents down can be a bigger motivation to lie than avoiding punishment. Let's face it, punishment is over once you have done your time, but losing your parent's respect or trust can take a lot longer to get back.

Social Standing

It is hard to overstate the importance of peer groups to a teenager. Their social standing amongst peers is the most valuable and treasured asset they possess.

The value of maintaining, or not risking, standing amongst peers will sometimes be considered higher than telling the truth to parents. The pull from friends to maintain appearances or participate in shared experiences can be greater than the pull of having integrity with parents.

Most teenagers understand the risks associated with lying to parents, but they make the choice to do so because the risk posed to their peer relationships by not lying is greater.

Social media has also made lying to parents a means of gaining peer approval. Teens think of a clever or outrageous lie, convince their parents of it, then brag to their followers on social media how smart and cunning they are by getting their parents to believe the lie.

Poor Communication

Teenagers will lie when they don't believe parents will give them a fair hearing or respect their point of view.

If teenagers go and do something they know will be displeasing to their parents, they do so not to cause offense but because they believe there is no point discussing it as they will be ignored.

The reason they then lie about doing it is the same reason they did it in the first place; they think what they did was reasonable and believe their parents won't listen to them.

This cause is the quality of parent teen relationship and the fairness of parental discipline.

Exercise Control

Lies help teenagers create a social space that is entirely theirs. It is a space where they are completely in control. Having a sense of control is important for teenagers developing a sense of autonomy.

Teens need to feel they are able to handle life by themselves. Telling parents or other adults about the issues they deal with is an admission they are unable to manage life by themselves.

Some of the lies, or failures to disclose the truth to parents, include; amount of schoolwork/homework, schoolyard activity your teen will commonly witness, cheating, bullying, vandalism, name-calling etc., the state of their love life, financial problems, and other types of personal issues.

What Can Parents Do?

The best way to deal with teenage lying is to create an environment where your teen is encouraged to be honest, or at least not dishonest.

This can be easier said than done, but here are some places to start.

Stay Connected

Your teen's degree of honesty may reflect on your ability to communicate openly with your teen.

Honest conversations between parents and teenagers aren't

always easy, and will sometimes cover ground that can make parents uncomfortable. It sounds great to have real open and honest communication with your teenager, but this can actually create some sticky issues at times.

Most solutions below assume you have a relationship with your teen where you can communicate and talk to them calmly when required. If your relationship is not like this at present then your first step is to reconnect with your teen and start rebuilding the relationship.

Be Fair & Reasonable

Teens will be more likely to lie if they are used to experiencing overly harsh or unfair punishments from parents.

Many parents believe they are doing their kids a favour by being overly strict and dishing out severe punishments to their teens. Unfortunately, this is far from the truth, just as lax parenting can harm kids, harsh over zealous parenting will also harm teens and drive a wedge in their relationship with their parents that can last a lifetime.

A good test of your reasonableness is how will you deal with the lying. There should be consequences for lying, especially repeated lying, but moderation and proportionality are also important to encourage truthfulness.

Pay Attention To What Teens Lie About

Quite often, the key to understanding why your teenager is lying can be found in the lie itself. If your teen is generally honest in other areas of life but constantly lies about a particular issue, then it suggests something is going on in a particular area of life that is troubling them. The way forward is to calmly and gently raise your concerns

with your teen about the lying but then ask if there is anything wrong they would like to talk about. They will be unlikely to divulge much at first, so you will need to persist (but do so calmly).

Assure your teen you can get past the lying, and would really like to help with whatever the issue really is. Of course, this only works if you stay calm and do not have a history of over reacting when your kids disclose something unpleasant.

Negotiate, Negotiate, Negotiate

If a teen believes that you as a parent will never compromise, meet them half way, or even listen to what they have to say, they will give up trying, feeling like there is no point.

Similarly, be willing to give your teen more trust and responsibility when they ask or have earned it. When your teenager sees you are willing to give more freedom they are unlikely to feel the need to lie to you as much.

Avoid Angry Interrogations

Getting angry is an inescapable part of parenting. How you choose to express and manage your anger is entirely your decision.

When it comes to getting the truth out of your teenager, anger-ridden interrogation is rarely the most effective method.

It is perfectly normal to get angry when you realize your teenager is lying to you. By all means be angry, but don't use your teenager as a means of getting your anger out. The results will be yelling, door slamming and an increased likelihood your teen will become more stubborn, more secretive and more prone to deception.

Summary

Persistent Lying

What is Going On?

- ➔ Avoiding Getting in Trouble
- ➔ Preventing Disappointment
- ➔ Social Standing
- ➔ Poor Communication
- ➔ Exercise Control

What Can Parents Do?

- ➔ Stay Connected
- ➔ Be Fair & Reasonable
- ➔ Pay Attention To What Teens Lie About
- ➔ Negotiate, Negotiate, Negotiate
- ➔ Avoid Angry Interrogations

Chapter 3

Blatant Defiance

What is Going On?

Defiant teenagers cause some of the biggest upheavals to families. Parents are left feeling disrespected and helpless, while the teenager becomes increasingly non-responsive and belligerent.

Many parents feel like they risk losing their relationship with their teen entirely if they push too hard or run out of energy caused by the constant fighting.

There is hope.

Teenagers Are Designed to Oppose You

The good news is it's not you. Although you are not perfect, it's unlikely you are the prince of darkness and engaged in a cosmic conspiracy to destroy your adolescent's life.

The truth is teenagers are designed to oppose their parents. It is their destiny. Your teenager hates because they need to in order to accomplish their ultimate plan – to be an adult.

Most teenagers who say they hate their parents don't really. At certain moments they feel intense dislike towards you, but this is because at that moment they perceive you as an obstacle or threat to them being who they want to be.

Adolescence is all about teenagers finding their own identity without the childhood dependence on parents. This process of discovery is not easy and involves teenagers pushing up against established boundaries. Their natural quest for autonomy (self rule) drives them to challenge existing sources of authority, namely parents.

An Overdeveloped Sense of Justice

Often teenagers will defy their parents as an act of revenge. The actions and words are designed to hurt you. If your teenager feels hurt, betrayed, or unfairly treated by you their natural instinct can be to lash out in an attempt to hurt you in retaliation.

Now a teenager's sense of what is right and just may be strong, but is not always accurate. Developmentally they are still learning how life works and often get things a little out of perspective. Teens will often feel you are the "most unfair" person in the world even when you are making an entirely rational and sensible decision.

Looking For a Response

All misbehavior has a goal, and in the case of defying a parent's directive, a teen's goal is often to get a response from the parent. A reaction from you, even if it is a negative one, is still a response. For some teens, any type of parental focus on them is valuable attention that they believe they need as it gives them a feeling of significance and importance.

What Can Parents Do?

Don't give up, that is the number one thing parents need to do in the face of defiance. This doesn't mean you fight with your teen, in fact you need to do the opposite, but you have to set a course and stick to it. It is the sticking to it that is hard; defiant teenagers have a way of draining a parent's will to go on.

But go on you must!

Remember What Is Happening

Perspective is a marvelous thing. One way of dealing with the defiance, tirades, and attitude is to see it for what it is. This is your teenager growing up and wanting to exert their independence. They need to challenge you, but you don't have to let it become a battle. Their emotions will fade and they will calm down. Learning how to negotiate, state what they want and find compromises are important skills for them to develop.

Yes, it can be very hurtful and worrying, but don't escalate the situation by responding in the moment based on hurt feelings. All this does is reinforce to your teen that such behavior is justified.

Choose To Stay Calm

It is bad enough if your teen is irrational and agitated, things will only get worse if parents start acting the same way. Teenagers are still learning to manage their emotions. Expecting them to stay calm or respond rationally is not really an effective strategy. Adults however are better equipped to manage emotions.

Be aware of how you are responding physically. If your breathing is getting shallow pause and take some deep breathes. If you hear your voice getting louder or you feel like yelling deliberately focus on speaking slowly and quietly. If you can feel your muscles tightening, relax your limbs and take a moment before you speak.

Offer Your Teen a Choice

Staying calm doesn't mean doing nothing. Your teenager needs to understand that you set limits for a reason and therefore there's a consequences if the boundaries are broken.

If your teen is determined to defy you, then you need to calmly point out to your teen they are making a choice and choices have consequences. So while remaining calm you say to your teen something like:

"I hear what you are saying, and I have made my decision. You can either (outline choice to follow your instruction) and (consequence of compliance) or you can (outline choice to defy you) and (consequence of defying you). I can't make you do either, the choice is yours."

Then walk away.

A specific example might go something like:

"I hear what you are saying, and I have made my decision; You can either arrange to be home by 10:30 tonight and continue to have access to my car, or you can choose to stay out later than 10:30 and lose access to the car for the next 2 weeks. The choice is yours."

Then walk away.

As with all consequences you have to follow through for it to be effective.

This doesn't work overnight. But if used repeatedly over weeks and months, and consequences are enforced, the defiance level in your teenager will reduce.

Hang in there; it will be worth the effort.

Follow Up Later

Your teenager needs to learn that being hurt or disappointed isn't an excuse to hurt others.

For this reason your teen needs to understand that talking to you like that and making such threats is not the way to deal with issues. Later, when everyone is calm, you will need to talk to your teen about the outburst, and let them know that you understand they were upset and disappointed but you were not okay with the way they chose to deal with things.

During these conversations, it is good to try and do 2 things: Discover what it was specifically that made your teen so upset or they considered to be so unfair, as this will give you greater insight into what is important to them.

Try to explore with them other ways they can deal with their hurt and disappointment in the future.

Own Up

If you have treated your teenager unfairly then own up to it and apologize. Don't do so in the heat of the moment, as that just rewards the behavior, but in a calmer moment discuss why your teen felt so hurt by you or your decision and if in the cool light of day you can see you may have been unfair. Then say sorry and commit to acting differently in the future.

Summary **Blatant Defiance**

What is Going On?

- ➔ Designed to Oppose
- ➔ Sense of Justice
- ➔ Looking for a Response

What Can Parents Do?

- ➔ Remember What is Happening
- ➔ Choose to Stay Calm
- ➔ Offer Your Teen a Choice
- ➔ Follow Up Later
- ➔ Own Up

Chapter 4

Squabbling Siblings

What is Going On?

Teenage siblings will fight about anything, especially if they are all in a bad mood at the same time. However, there are some issues that rate significantly higher on the list of causes of an inter sibling squabbles list.

Personal Space

Research has shown that the most common cause of fighting between teenage siblings is due to issues of personal space and privacy. Arguments are commonly about borrowing without permission, not respecting physical privacy, listening in or reading private communication, copying what the other does, and being followed around by another.

Fairness

The other most common reason teens will fight with their brothers and sisters is over issues of fairness, or more specifically issues of inequality. Fights frequently erupt over who determines what television shows to watch, time spent in the bathroom, doing a fair share of household chores, being granted small privileges more often than others, and not waiting or taking turns in general.

Sibling Rivalry

If teenagers feel that one sibling receives more attention from parents, they might act up in order to get noticed. Competing with each other for parental attention can lead to all types of arguments.

Another common source of sibling rivalry is jealousy. When one grows to resent or envy another sibling's talents, possessions, friends, or even perceived status with parents they are inclined to lash out in angry or spiteful bursts.

Cabin Fever

Just spending too much time in the same place with nothing constructive to do will often produce some sort of spontaneous spat. The temptation to stir or provoke a sibling can be hard for some teens to resist at the best of times. It is virtually impossible when they are bored. And I don't know anyone who doesn't get edgy after sitting next to someone in close quarters for long periods.

What Can Parents Do?

The art to managing fighting siblings is to do so without being seen to intervene. The more teenagers learn to solve their own issues, the better result in the long run.

Your focus as a parent is to work on what not to do as much as it needs to be on what to put in place.

Do Not Intervene

Don't intervene unless you really have to!

Learning how to resolve issues amongst siblings assists in the development of important relational skills. Learning how to resolve conflict, negotiate, compromise, and express an opinion are all skills teens learn from family squabbles.

If parents always intervene, not only do teens miss out on developing their relationship skills, they also learn that fighting is a way of getting attention.

There are times when you will need to intervene such as if things look like becoming physically or emotionally violent, or things are escalating beyond the point of no return. In most instances, it is better to limit the intervention to separating the warring parties for a set period and let them resume the "discussion" later – if still required.

Do Not Ask, "Who Started It?"

Nothing good can come from asking this question. Has any child or teenager responded to that question with "It was me, I started it"?

If by some chance a sibling does own up, where does that leave the parent who asked? Conflicts can be caused by perfectly innocent acts or they can arise from planned acts of aggression; instigation doesn't equal guilt.

The only thing achieved by asking, "Who started it?" is a chorus of accusation and counter accusation.

Do Not Take Sides

It is important that parents stay neutral in inter sibling arguments. Even if you agree with one party more than you agree with the other, try to remain unbiased in how you deal with each sibling. If you are perceived to be favoring one over another, you risk further escalation of the conflict.

Do Not Compare Siblings

Making comments comparing one sibling to another will only increase levels of animosity and jealousy. Many parents do it with out meaning to; "Why can't you be more like your brother?" or "Your sister never does that" can easily slip out. Make every effort to treat each sibling as an individual and accept his or her differences.

Set The Ground Rules

Each house should have clear rules about what is never okay during an argument. How you phrase it is up to you, but the minimum rules should be along the lines of:

- No physical violence of any sort –ever!
- Threats of harm or damage are not allowed

- No name calling or personal insults

Share the Consequences

If the fighting breaks the ground rules, or is just constant and excessive, warn all involved of possible consequences, i.e. loss of privileges or extra chores, if the fighting continues.

When the fighting does continue make sure all involved suffer some consequence. This way each of the teens involved will have an interest next time in walking away from a potential fight.

Separate Corners

When you do need to intervene and talk to your teenagers, do so with each of them individually in private. Give each of them the opportunity to speak to you without interruption from others.

When you talk to each of your teens don't try to solve their differences for them, focus instead on encouraging them to sort out their own differences. For younger teens this might mean giving very specific suggestions about what they could say or do.

Provide Space

Try to have places in the home that each teen can consider their own space. Ideally this is their own bedroom, but if that is not possible, allow them to have a part of the house for a period free from interruption or distraction. Just keeping them out of each other's hair will go a long way to keeping the peace.

Spend Time Together With All Your Kids

Research has found that when parents spend time with their teenagers together the relationship between siblings has less conflict. Teens benefit from having time with each other in the company of their parents.

This is not an immediate solution to a current conflict, but it works towards a more harmonious climate within the family. Giving each of your teens equal amounts of attention and affection will reduce rivalry and the need to seek your attention.

Summary

Squabbling Siblings

What is Going On?

- ➔ Personal Space
- ➔ Fairness
- ➔ Sibling Rivalry
- ➔ Cabin Fever

What Can Parents Do?

- ➔ Do Not Ask Who Started It
- ➔ Do Not Intervene
- ➔ Do Not Take Sides
- ➔ Do Not Compare Siblings
- ➔ Set the Ground Rules
- ➔ Share the Consequences
- ➔ Separate Corners
- ➔ Provide Space
- ➔ Spend Time Together With Your Kids

Chapter 5

Angry Outbursts

What is Going On?

Adolescence was once characterized as a time of “storm & stress”. These days there is a more holistic understanding, but there can still be plenty of storms in the form of teenage temper tantrums, which cause stress for plenty of parents.

Different personalities deal with anger differently. In this chapter we are only focused on teenagers who express their anger in a loud and aggressive manner.

The Teenage Brain

Even though they can look and sound like adults, the teenage brain is far from fully mature.

The teenage brain undergoes a massive reorganization throughout adolescence. One of the consequences of this is the part of the brain responsible for emotion develops at a different rate to other parts of the brain that are responsible for thought that is more rational.

Teens feel things strongly, and it can take some time for them to learn how to manage these strong emotions.

In short, teens are hard wired to respond emotionally to the world around them, and that includes being angry.

Frustrated About Life

As teenagers get older, their social worlds become more complex, more confusing, and far more important than ever before. As their awareness of other people grows so does the fear of being accepted. Being conscious of personal differences becomes a real issue for most teens.

For many teens, working through the relational maze of adolescence can be overwhelming. Teenagers allow all the confusion and lack of control associated with the relational angst build up but they don't dare let it show in public. This means home can be the only place where it all comes out

It is not just social and relational issues teens can feel frustrated about. The nagging desire to be more independent and to have more freedom can also cause significant internal frustration for teenagers; frustration that they only know how to express as anger.

Disappointed With Parents

As discussed earlier (Teenager Hates You) part of growing up is the need for teenagers to separate themselves from their parents emotionally.

This emotional autonomy can trigger a degree of disappointment and animosity towards parents as teenagers realise that their parents aren't perfect or an ideal to be aspired to.

This dynamic is exacerbated if parents treat their teens harshly, try to be overly controlling, or are perceived to be unfair or dismissive of their teenager.

Annoyed About Not Getting What They Want

There is a theory that anger is rarely the real emotion, but rather is the tip of emotional iceberg. That is, anger is the first feeling felt and expressed, but underneath there is usually a more profound emotional response such as sadness, fear, loss etc.

While I don't think the theory always holds true, there are definitely times when teenage anger is really an expression of

disappointment and frustration at missing out on something important to them.

Underneath the angry outburst, usually focused on the parent, are other feelings related to not being in control, fear of missing out or social loss, and sometimes it could be the loss of a coveted possession or experience.

This doesn't make them right and you wrong, nor is their cause necessarily just. But rather it explains how anger can distract and confuse teenagers and parents from the real issue at hand.

Righteous Anger

Sometimes teenagers get angry because they see genuine injustice or experience genuine hurt. Anger is a normal human emotion, in fact it is a sign of emotional health for someone to experience anger.

As with all emotion, anger is not the problem, it is how your teenager acts when angry that can be the problem. In this case teens need help to understand how to manage their emotions.

What Can Parents Do?

The key to dealing with teenage anger is not to feed it or be part of allowing it to escalate. Your main role as a parent is to help your teen calm down and stay calm. Sometimes that means you need to not be around.

Stay Calm

The worst thing to do when your teen has an angry outburst is to have one right back at them. This will only result in what might have been a minor conflict becoming something larger and increasing the chance of some real damage being done.

It also sends a message to your teen that loud aggressive expressions of anger are okay.

Of course, this is easier to say than to do, but you need to do what ever you have to avoid mirroring your teenager's behavior.

Walking away is a perfectly acceptable means of doing this. Be honest with your teen and say you will continue the conversation later when you are both feeling calmer.

Don't Get Physical

As a follow on of the above point, at no point should you respond to teenage anger and aggression by getting physical with your teen. It models to them that physical force is how you get what you want, but more immediately it presents a very real risk of the situation escalating quickly and people getting hurt.

If you are feeling like getting physical with your teen, walk away.

Highlight the Impact of Their Anger

Let your teen know that you find it hard to communicate with them when they are shouting and being aggressive. Phrases like "I can't talk to you when you are yelling at me" or "Screaming and threatening me doesn't make me inclined to want to help you."

At this point you give your teen a choice if they are unable to calm down you will walk away and the conversation will continue later, or if they can reign in their aggression and calm down you are willing to listen to what they have to say.

Don't Try To Reason With An Angry Teenager

Further to the point above, there is no point trying to reason or

win an argument with an angry teen. Remember – Never Argue with Teenagers!

Pointing out flaws in their point of view, or disagreeing with the basis for their indignation will do nothing except inflame their anger even further.

This might mean letting your teen have the last word sometimes. That is okay. Let them have the last word in that conversation. Your opportunity to have the final say in the matter can come later when everyone has calmed down.

Teach Teens How to Manage their Anger

In calmer moments, when you and your teen are feeling less agitated and the issues relating to the anger aren't simmering, take time to talk to your teen about how they can manage their anger.

First key message to get across to your teenager is that there is nothing wrong with feeling angry. In fact, anger is a sign your teenager actually cares about what is happening around them.

Help your teen to understand what their triggers are. Get your teen to think through what are the issues, topics, or situations that cause them to feel so angry. If your teen can do this, you are halfway there. Next step is working with your teen on how you can work together to avoid those situations or avoid using language your teen finds unhelpful.

Teach teens to recognize the signs in their body that they are getting angry. Talk to your teen about what they are aware of feeling just before they start yelling or carrying on. What parts of their body are they aware of that might be feeling different i.e. they get tightness in their jaw, their fists start to clench, they feel their face getting warm etc.

If your teen can identify these signs you can work with them on developing strategies to implement when they become aware of the feelings in their body.

This approach gives teenagers a choice about how they deal with strong feelings. Such skills will stand them in good stead well beyond their teenage years.

Summary
Angry Outbursts

What is Going On?

- ➔ The Teenage Brain
- ➔ Frustrated About Life
- ➔ Disappointed With Parents
- ➔ Not Getting What They Want
- ➔ Righteous Anger

What Can Parents Do?

- ➔ Stay Calm
- ➔ Do Not Get Physical
- ➔ Highlight Impact of Their Anger
- ➔ Do Not Try To Reason With Them
- ➔ Teach How To Manage Their Anger

Chapter 6
No Motivation

What is Going On?

Very few teenagers completely lack motivation. What many teenagers lack is the motivation to do stuff that doesn't matter, doesn't seem important, or is about satisfying an agenda that doesn't relate to them.

Trying to understand what is happening in an unresponsive teenager is the key to dealing with their behavior.

Nothing In It For Them

Teenagers long to feel significant. They want to demonstrate to themselves and the world that they matter and are capable of making a difference. Many of the problems teens encounter today are because their desire to be significant is ignored or diminished.

If your teenager does not perceive any value in a particular task, or cannot see how following through on a certain endeavor contributes to their sense of significance or satisfaction with who they are, then they will have very little internal motivation.

Developmentally many teens don't do well at connecting future outcomes with current choices. Their ability to connect the performance of a mundane task now, with a more enjoyable or satisfying outcome later, can be lacking.

Power

When your teenager refuses to go to school, do homework, or loses interest in sporting or cultural activities, it can be an exercise of power and control on their part.

Behavior nearly always has a goal, and that goal generates motivation. When teens appear to lack motivation, what they are really doing is being motivated to demonstrate their ability to control what they will or won't do.

Adolescence is about the search for autonomy and the development of a self-concept that is independent of external authority. Teenagers, who choose to do nothing, are in fact doing something, exercising control over their lives.

Teenagers are proving to their parents and themselves that ultimately they are in control of what they will or won't do. And while it may appear to be very passive behavior, it can in fact take a huge amount of emotional energy for a teen to consistently resist the pressure to comply with expectations.

Confidence

For some teens, a change in motivation can be linked to a drop in personal confidence and associated sense of self.

Teenagers are still working out who they are, what they are good at and where they fit in. If a teen struggles or experiences a set back in a pursuit that is important to them then their confidence can be damaged. A dip in self-confidence can be very demotivating to a teen.

A dent in confidence in one area of life can easily spill over into other areas and cause a subsequent loss of motivation across seemingly unrelated pursuits in life. Just as success in one domain can breed confidence across the board, so too failure in one aspect of life can negatively impact a teen's self-belief across many areas.

Unfortunately, too often teens feel like they are failing, not because they are doing poorly, but because the expectation placed upon them is unrealistically high. Setting the bar high for your teen without a realistic regard for their talent or ability will not result in them improving but will instead produce a demoralized and discouraged teenager.

For other teens, it could be that they are yet to find "their thing" that helps answer the question about who they are and what makes

them significant. Especially for teens that find the modern school system alienating and mainstream extra curricula activities not interesting, discovering that certain thing in life that gives them a sense of self belief and satisfaction can be difficult.

Overwhelmed

Sometimes the size of the task will demotivate teenagers. It isn't that they don't want to do it, but rather it all looks too big or too hard to cope with.

Teenagers not wanting to go school (more so than the normal school day protests) are often facing a situation at school that they have run out of ways to cope with. They are dealing with the issue by avoiding the source of the problem. It could be social, it could be academic, or it could be a mix of all the multiple factors.

Whatever the root cause, the teenage brain is not great at processing and managing emotion. When a teen gets flooded with negative emotions such as fear, hopelessness, or worthlessness, they struggle to manage the emotion and consequently view situations as controllable and manageable. It all gets too big, so they curl up and hide; most of us have days like that, for some teens everyday can feel like that.

What Can Parents Do?

It can take some time to turn a reluctant teen into a co-operative and willing young adult, but there are some basic things any parent can implement that will definitely challenge the status quo.

Don't Carry On

Jumping up and down or yelling and threatening will never motivate a teenager. If their unresponsiveness is about power, aggressive parenting just heightens the stakes and a teen will dig in more. If the issue for the teen is feeling overwhelmed or lacking

confidence, threats will only add to their sense of inadequacy and lack of self-confidence.

It is not that you shouldn't feel frustrated. A passive, unmotivated teenager can be extremely frustrating. However venting your frustration to you teenager will usually make matters worse.

You need to respond, but your response needs to be calm and matter of fact. Yelling, begging and pleading, or getting visibly upset will result in the teen becoming even less compliant and motivated.

Don't Reward Unresponsiveness

Make sure you do not reward the behavior you are trying to prevent.

If your teen won't study, don't allow them to have access to their computer or phone so they can spend time on Facebook socializing. Or if your teen refuses to go to school, don't allow them to sleep in then spend the day watching TV or playing computer games.

If your teen sees a reward for their unwillingness to respond, then they will have even less motivation to comply with what you wanted them to do.

There Needs to be Consequences

When your teenager doesn't comply, for whatever reason, there must be a negative consequence connected to it.

Allowing a teenager to opt out is made worse when there is little or no negative consequence for them. Often when teenagers choose not to comply, they actually experience a reward i.e. a teen refuse to go school is allowed to stay home and watch TV or stream videos online all day.

Ideally with a consequence, it should be connected to the behavior

concerned, i.e. if your teenager refuses to use their computer to do home work, they lose access to the computer for other activities.

Sometimes this isn't possible or effective. When this occurs you need to find something important to your teenager that involves some sort of privilege or effort from you, and withdraw your teen's access to it for a period.

Most teens will pretend like they don't care when a consequence is first enforced. However, after a little while, if the consequence is the right one, your teen will start to find motivation to find relief from the inconvenience.

Let Them Fail

Associated with the need for consequences, is allowing teens to deal with failure when they don't cooperate or respond. When parents constantly step in and rescue their teens from failing, they undermine their teenager's ability to grow up.

What gives a task significance is the consequences or what is at stake if it doesn't get done. When parents prevent teens from experiencing the consequences of failure they rob a task of its significance, and hence their teenager's motivation to do better next time.

If your teen is responsible for taking the rubbish out every week and they don't get it done, then they become responsible for managing the mess and overflowing bins for the following week. They will learn more from this than by a parent repeatedly nagging them at 11pm the night before, or doing it for them.

Similarly, if your teen chooses not to study for an exam and fails they are more likely to be motivated next time. Parents can maximize these opportunities by asking questions rather than giving lectures. Discuss with your teen how they feel about the outcome, what they might do different next time, and ask if there

is anything they need from you to help them.

Incentivize

The flip side to the previous is to try and help your teen see that doing something they don't want to do, can provide a means of doing something they do want to do. Creating a positive incentive for your teen can be a way of them seeing there is "something in it for them".

Providing an additional incentive can help generate motivation where otherwise there would be none. By offering rewards for effort, improvement, or participation, you reinforce in your teenager the values of trying and perseverance, rather than rewarding the act of giving up or resigning.

Does your teen respond well to encouraging words, gifts, quality time, physical affection or some other form of affirmation? Knowing what type of incentive your teen will respond best to will increase their motivation and responsiveness.

Find What They Love

If your teenager's lack of motivation stems from a lack of self-belief or confidence, you need to help them find "their thing."

What is it your teen shows a natural inclination for? What type of activity do they get distracted by? What is their peculiar interest or passion?

Many teenagers have something they enjoy or a good at, but they gain little confidence from it because it is not validated or popular.

It might not even be a particular interest, but more the way they operate. Are they creative? Do they thrive on details? Are they

abnormally organized and neat? Whatever their strengths try to think of ways to harness and promote their natural talents and strengths.

Summary

No Motivation

What is Going On?

- ➔ Nothing In It For Them
- ➔ Power
- ➔ Confidence
- ➔ Overwhelmed

What Can Parents Do?

- ➔ Do Not Carry On
- ➔ Do Not Reward Unresponsiveness
- ➔ There Needs to be Consequences
- ➔ Incentivize
- ➔ Find What They Love

Chapter 7 Technology Addict

What is Going On?

It is a particularly 21st Century problem: teenagers who can't pull themselves away from a screen. Be it Social Media, Computer Games, or just watching ridiculous amounts of cat videos on YouTube, more and more teenagers are spending increasing amounts of their available time in front of a screen.

When teens are in front of a screen they are not engaging with the rest of the family, doing homework, or participating in any sort of aerobic activity. For all of these reasons and more, parents are rightly concerned when their teen cannot leave their screen.

It Is How They Socialize

In the age of mobile phones, mobile social networking, texting, photo sharing, and status updates, any big news in a teenager's world is known almost instantly. This nearly constant connectedness to each other is beyond what teenagers of previous generations could have dreamt of. Peer groups have always been important, now they are important and always present. This means the pressure that goes with belonging to a peer group is always present also, and the risk of being left out or missing out is increased.

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) is real for many teens (& adults). For many teens who are constantly connected, there is a real underlying anxiety related to missing out on what is happening in their social circles. This anxiety results in a need to respond to messages, update statuses, and comment on other's updates as soon as possible for fear of suffering some sought of negative social consequence otherwise.

It Is a Safe Place to Escape

While for many teens online is just an extension of physical relationships, for kids who find the face to face life in the

schoolyard difficult and awkward, the online space provides an important additional element; control. For socially challenged or marginalized teens, the control they can have over how their present and who can contact them in the online space is very compelling.

It's Where They Explore Their Identity

Whether it is a skater, a goth, a rock chick, a gamer, or little monsters, teenagers have in the past, and will continue in the future, seek to find a place, a tribe, a group to identify with and belong to.

The Internet and mobile technology affords young people the ability to explore their still forming identities with greater efficiency and on a greater scale than ever before. Once teens might only have been limited to knowing a few other kids who embraced a niche look or hobby they were interested in. These days, young people can discover and connect with hundreds of other like-minded teens from all around the world.

For teens who are bit different from the majority in the playground, online offers a place to fit in with those who are like minded or project an image of themselves they believe is noteworthy and acceptable.

It's Where They Play

A survey of tweens aged 8-11 found that 91% of boys and 93% of girls play games online. Another similar survey found that 73% of teenagers who are online play games on the Internet. Screens aren't just things to be watched, they offer the chance to play. And playing rarely has to be alone; there will always be someone online who is happy to play with them.

Such is the complexity, realism, and networked nature of modern gaming; it offers for many teenagers an extreme level of escapism

from the rest of life. Teens are able to immerse themselves in online worlds to such a degree that they become oblivious to the “real” world around them. For teens whom find the real world to be hard, then gaming can be a much better place to be.

It's Where They Learn

With information so accessible, learning has fundamentally changed for future generations. Learning is not about gaining information. Learning is now about arranging, remaking, mashing-up, reinterpreting, and making sense of the information. This requires new types of learning and different skills sets to what we were taught at school. Make no mistake; technology has changed what learning means for today's teens.

What Can Parents Do?

Depending on the exact reason your teen is absorbed in front of a screen is the first important plank in a strategy to help them find a more balanced lifestyle. Below are some general principles any parent can apply followed by ideas for more specific situations.

Modeling Moderation

In today's families it isn't just teens who have an issue with high levels of screen time. If you and/or your partner are constantly glued to your phone, tablet, TV, or laptop (or many at the same time) then trying to change your teen's behavior is going to be difficult. If this is the case then consider having the whole family go through some type of “technology detox” where you all share in the adventure of learning to disconnect from technology and reconnect with one another and the outside world.

Set Clear Boundaries

Ideally talking to teens about technology use and time limits starts before they are teens and is embedded into the normal family rules

and boundaries.

However if that horse is already through the gate and long since bolted, you will need to rein it back in. This goes better when done gradually, and will likely cause some degree of discontent in the short term.

As with any boundary you need be clear about what it is (i.e. time, technology involved), what is not permitted, and what the consequences are if the boundary is broken. This should be done via negotiation with you teen. Some simple ideas to get started:

No technology to be used in their rooms after a certain hour at night. If they are found to violate the boundary one of the consequences is all technology is removed from their room, or has to be handed in at a certain time.

Certain times of the day need to be spent without any digital device available. Start at 30mins if you have to and gradually increase. Maybe apply this to getting homework done, and/or the family meal.

Stricter limit on credit or data spend so your teen has to be more selective about what and when they use their allowed data. All devices your teen has access to is done on the condition you will have the right to access it randomly and review how and when it has been used.

Remember access to technology is a “privilege” not a “right”. Privileges come with responsibility and need to be earned. When your teen has access to technology cut, he or she will most likely let you know how evil and awful you are in destroying their life. You need to ride this wave, don't argue, don't try to justify, just state what is happening and follow through. They will come around – eventually.

Try To Understand What is Happening

There could be a lot of reasons why any particular teen is overly consumed by technology. Depending on the reason, your response

needs to be different.

If you are the parent of teen who struggles socially, then the online world, be it gaming or chatting with distant friends, is an important part of your teens way of coping with life. In these cases consider:

- Trying to appreciate whatever digital space your teen inhabits. Don't go overboard, but show an interest, ask about what is happening, play dumb and ask if your teen will teach you how to do something related to the technology they are using.
- Working with your teen to find an "offline" interest or skill where they are able to express themselves and develop a degree of confidence. For this to happen, you may need to take up the pursuit with them, or at least be a keen supporter in the early days. Whatever it is, your teen needs a place and an activity that gives them a sense of purpose and confidence about who they are.
- Try to help your teen find people their own age who they feel more comfortable around. Sometimes this might be at a local club of some sort. Maybe encouraging some of their online relationships to meet in person is worth considering.
- Ask your teen if there is stuff happening in their real world life that is hard deal with. If they are being bullied or victimized, struggling at school, or feeling lots of dark emotions, then you need to step in and help your teen deal with the underlying issue rather than just focus on the technology.

Maybe the issue isn't social confidence, but rather technology is your teenagers "thing", it is what they are good at, or it enables them to do what they are passionate about. For non-athletic or artistic kids this is natural. For these teens, you don't want to discourage their talent or passion (kids who are good at tech could be your ticket to a comfortable retirement), but rather you need to teach them how to find a balance in life. Some simple ways forward:

- Affirm your teenager's skill or passion. Show a genuine interest and appreciation for what they can do. Actively try to encourage or assist them in developing their skills.
- Start to talk to them about finding a balance, and not restricting life to just one area of experience. Explore with them other areas of life they might be interested in.
- Help them set some boundaries for themselves that mean they will take a break every day and focus on something else unrelated.

Summary Technology Addict

What is Going On?

- ➔ How They Socialize
- ➔ Safe Place to Escape
- ➔ Exploring their Identity
- ➔ Where they Play
- ➔ Where they Learn

What Can Parents Do?

- ➔ Modeling Moderation
- ➔ Set Clear Boundaries
- ➔ Try To Understand What is Happening

Chapter 8

Final Word

What Parents MUST Do

Along with the specific strategies outlined in previous chapters, there are a couple of other vital ingredients you need to have if you are to really effect lasting change in your teenager's behaviour.

Consistency

Nothing else you have read will make any difference unless you are able to apply it consistently over an extended period of time.

I wish there was a quick fix I could offer you, but there is not. It has taken your teenager at least 13 years to develop the traits and behaviours you are dealing with, it will take more than a couple of days for them to be unlearned.

Behaviors are essentially habits, and I am sure you are aware from experience that good habits take time to form, just as bad habits take time to break.

You and your teenager need to learn new habits in order to effect change. But standing in the road of those new habits are the familiar yet unhelpful patterns you have both developed over time.

As the parent, you need to take the lead and start applying the principles and strategies outlined in this book. But be prepared, that your teen will not necessarily fall into line just because you choose to be different. In fact, many times they may react even worse.

It is vital that you do not lose your nerve or give up.

I repeat; DO NOT GIVE UP!

Once you begin, you need to keep applying the strategy repeatedly. Eventually your teen will see you are serious and realize that

whatever benefit they gained from their behaviour in the past is now diminished or overshadowed due to your new behaviour.

When I say eventually, I mean in weeks or months. You won't turn your teenager around in a couple of days. You might see some small signs of hope, but unless you stick to your guns for the next few months, your teenager will not change.

Decide now you are going to choose a course and stick to it. Yes, it will be hard and take effort and energy (which are probably in short supply due to dealing with problem behaviour), but if you follow through on your commitment both you and your teen will reap a genuine benefit.

Teach

One of the biggest misconceptions about dealing with bad behaviour is the idea that there needs to be punishment in order for people to learn their lesson.

This is 100% wrong.

Not only will punishment not make lasting positive change, in many cases it will create even more problem behaviours.

Punishment won't fix things, but discipline will.

Discipline is fundamentally about teaching. It is essentially another way of talking about training. As a parent of a teenager, you are training your child to become an adult. Or to put it another way, you are teaching them the disciplines of adulthood.

The reason I mention this is because to achieve behavioural change your teenager needs to learn how to act differently. And in order to learn something they will need to be taught.

Many of the strategies mentioned in the book rely on there being

consequences for certain types of behaviour. Good consequences are part of the learning process. Your teenager learns that by behaving in a certain way they will end up worse off than if they had chosen a more appropriate course of action; important lesson for life.

However, consequences alone won't change problem behaviour. There is only so much we can gain from trial and error, or consequential learning.

Teens need to be taught skills and strategies they can use to achieve their goals. Often they have been mistakenly trying to achieve these goals through problem behaviours, or their behaviours stem from not having the skills they need to be able to live the way they would like.

So, along with implementing the specific strategies outlined in previous chapters, you also need to be on the look out for teachable moments with your teen.

As you develop a better understanding of why your teen is behaving the way they do, consider what skill or attribute they might be lacking and what opportunities could you create for them to develop in these areas.

Further Help

If you want to learn more about teenagers and how to go about the challenging task of raising them, then head over to the Understanding Teenagers blog for lots more articles and parenting tips.

<http://www.understandingteenagers.com.au/blog>