

Five Strategies For Encouraging Teens

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How do you communicate with your teen? Is the majority of communication spent reminding, coaxing or yelling? It's easy to get into habits that actually discourage teens. Pampering is one of those habits. Pampering is one of the most common forms of disrespect. I once heard a quote by Rudolf Dreikurs and Vicki Soltz, "do nothing regularly for people that they can do for themselves." Pampering actually handicaps teens because it teaches them that they can't handle the tasks or situations in front of them. They can come to see themselves as incapable, needing help in most areas, keeping them in a state of dependency. Once pampered, teens may expect this behavior from other people in their lives. Some of the ways parents pamper their children are:

- Monitoring homework assignments, deadlines, and checking homework
- Waking teens even when they have alarm clocks
- Reminding teens of what time it is, and whether they have an appointment or not
- Giving money whenever needed
- Allowing rules to be disregarded
- Speaking for teens when others are addressing them
- Taking responsibility for the picking up and laundering of clothes

Most of the above tasks are done with good intentions. Those intentions, however, block the ability of the teen to experience responsibility. Another discouraging outcome is that teens generally do not love and respect their parents for these actions. Instead, a teen will learn to expect more pampering, and disrespect the parents in the process.

If you find yourself in this situation, and you want to practice some strategies for change, I would suggest the following:

1. All behavior starts with a thought or belief. If you are thinking "I will lose my child's love if I don't agree with them on most issues", it would be beneficial to change the thought to "I will gain my child's respect if I equip them for the real world, and they will learn how valuable their contribution is."
2. Expect resistance. Old habits die hard.
3. Give responsibility. The giving of responsibility is a gift - it says that they are able to respond in a trustworthy fashion.
4. Focus on the effort that they are putting forth (not the grumbling, attitude, or words they use). Teens will eventually respond to their own sense of being acknowledged for the improvement they are making and effort going forth. Appreciation goes a long way.

5. Have positive expectations. If you expect the worst, you will probably get it. Avoid the temptation of demanding perfection.

Our words, expectations and attitudes are powerful. We have the power to bless our teenagers and the power to influence them in ways that encourage them for life. Maybe you had someone like that in your life. Remember how they blessed you, and pass on that blessing!! Good things are on their way!

For more information on parenting techniques, please refer to: Parenting Teenagers: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting of Teens by Don Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay (1990)

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