

Need Help Parenting a Teen?

Some parents of teens confuse their parenting role with that of friend. In so doing, they abdicate their parental authority and minimize their ability to provide direction, guidance, limits and structure.

In such cases parents may feel their teenaged son or daughter must like them. The parent may be looking to their son or daughter for approval when it should be the other way around. When teenagers are, in a sense, in charge of the parent's emotional needs, this power is beyond their ability to handle responsibly. This is when their son or daughter has the parents most held hostage.

The teenager, with their parent's emotional needs in their hands, may work against the parent and extort unreasonable privileges. These teens may look to drink underage; have parties; surf the Internet for pornography. Some teenagers will demonstrate little self-control. If the parent objects, the teen winds up admonishing the parent ("You don't trust me!"; "You are snooping into my privacy!," etc.) and then the parent caves in, not wanting to lose their teen's approval. Some situations escalate to the point where teens find themselves in trouble with the law. Here too parents may cover for their misdeeds, pay off their teens debts; even paying off bookies and drug dealers.

Parents who seek their teen's approval must come to realize, they cannot rely on their son or daughter's to meet their own emotional needs. Parenting is a verb, an action word. It implies parents do something with regard to their children. The *it* that parents do is provide direction, guidance, limits and structure.

The idea that teens may not like this is not unusual. Teens are struggling towards independence. Parents are monitoring and modulating their independence in accordance with the teen's actual ability to handle independence responsibly. If the tasks of adolescence are not handled responsibly, e.g. school, part-time job, chores, etc., then the parent must step in correctively. In so doing, parents must resist seeking only their son or daughter's approval and hold firm with expectations of school attendance, reasonable behavior and restrictions on alcohol or drug use and eating in a dangerous manner and the like.

It is generally not realistic to be a friend and a parent at the same time. This doesn't mean parents are not friendly in carrying out their role as parents, but the objective is not to be a friend to their son or daughter. The objective is to have a clear parental boundary and provide the direction, guidance, limits and structure necessary to keep teens on track. The goal is to raise teens into healthy, law abiding, capable and contributing adults with good morals.

While some parents argue that peers have more influence over teens than parents, this is usually only the case where parents have abdicated their authority and tried to be their son or daughter's friend, versus parent.

If you as a parent or someone who talks with you about their teens, are having difficulty maintaining a parenting role or if you or others find yourself held hostage, needing your son or daughter's approval and cannot provide the direction, guidance, limits and structure necessary to keep teens on track, then tell them you know a family counselor and mediator who has 48 years experience with parenting and teens who they can talk with or even consider counseling. This counseling is not for the teens only, but for you as well. Give them my card or ask if you can have me call them.

Counseling and/or consultation with a family counselor will help the parent understand their own needs and to separate their needs from those of their teens such that they can regain appropriate parental authority and regain influence greater than their teen's peers.

Just to have your teen talk, alone, to a counselor will rarely have more influence than having the parent talk to their teen. It is best to help the parent(s) increase their influence and respect from their teen. If the parent prefer, I will see their teen along with them (the parents) although it is not very productive to attempt to be of greater influence to someone else's child. As parents take action, teens tend to respond more respectfully with time. Then a positive and appropriate parent-teen relationship is restored.

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