

Parenting *ideas* INSIGHTS

Building parent-school partnerships

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Maintain a strong relationship with your teen

How do you maintain a good relationship with a teenager? Here are two simple strategies to help parents hit the right parenting mark through this sometimes-challenging stage.

One of the biggest challenges parents of teenagers face is how to maintain a good relationship with a young person while managing also their sometimes tricky and anti-social behaviour. The balance between good guy and bad guy is precarious indeed.

There are two simple strategies, when used in tandem, can really help parents straddle this great divide. They are - following through and following up.

When used wisely and consistently they can help parents manage teenagers even during their more difficult stages while maintaining a respectful relationship.

Following through to teach responsibility

'Following through' means doing what you say you'll do. If you say "You're grounded" yet then let a young person off the hook when they came home from an outing later than agreed, you are merely issuing a meaningless threat. Most young people know a meaningless threat when they hear one.

'Following through' is about taking parent action and the most appropriate action is the use of behavioural consequences. When young people behave poorly, irresponsibly, transgress family rules or someone's

individual rights, then the experience of a negative consequence teaches them that there is a link between their behaviour and outcomes. If this sounds high-handed then relax. It's how a civil society operates. Drive too fast and you'll receive a fine. Harm someone and hopefully you'll be issued with a suitable punishment that matches the offence. 'Cross a line and something happens' is the accepted wisdom in our community, in school and in family-life.

It's important that the consequence issued matches the misdemeanour. When we go too far - "you're grounded for the term" - then we generally get resentment. Not strong enough - "you should apologise" and they become ineffective. It also helps when consequences are related to the misdemeanour. Taking away a teenager's regular pocket money to remind him to come home on time defies teenage logic and will generally lead to resentment. Be mindful that a rational, logical approach is a parent's best defence against teen emotion.

The key to the successful use of consequences rests with how you implement them. If you issue them in anger (even though that's how you feel) then you are inviting a young person to challenge you. Implement consequences dispassionately

and calmly and you'll increase the likelihood of them being mad at themselves rather than mad at you. Nonchalance is a parent's best friend when it comes to managing the behaviour of highly-charged teens.

Following up to reconnect

It's easy to lock a young person out emotionally following a behaviour meltdown or disagreement, particularly when they've said or done hurtful things. Once the dust has settled after discipline or a dispute then it's time to follow-up with a kind word, an enjoyable activity or even just a sincere smile. It generally takes the adult in the relationship - parents or teachers - to make the first move to put the relationship back on an even keel. It's smart to choose a time when you are both more relaxed to reconnect rather than rush to make up before either person is ready, which can make matters worse.

Following through and following up are a dynamic discipline duo when they are used together as they help parents straddle the good guy, bad guy line that seems to appear on almost a daily basis. Use one without the other and you'll come across as either too soft or too harsh. Use them in tandem and you're more than likely hit the right parenting mark.

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