

## The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

### Some Tips For Surviving Your Child's Teenage Years

from the American Counseling Association

The teenage years are never easy -- for either the teen or the parents. It's a time of little communication beyond eye rolls, sullen silence and that infamous "whatever." It's a time when you wonder if either of you will survive this period.

It's often very frustrating, but can be easier if you recognize what jobs each of you now have and how best to approach them.

Your job is to raise a compassionate and competent adult who can handle the challenges of life and who has a sense of what it's like from the other guy's perspective. Your job is not to be a genie who makes all your child's dreams come true, or to be a servant doing things your teen is perfectly capable of doing on his or her own. You can't always rescue your child from failure or life's inevitable pains.

Your teen's job, on the other hand, is to separate from you and test the waters of life. When your child drives you up the wall by pushing limits, that's what's supposed to happen. It's all part of the developmental process, of becoming an adult. You have an absolutely normal child.

But that doesn't mean you should just smile and accept it all. You are expected to show the appropriate feelings, set limits and impose reasonable consequences for unacceptable behavior.

How do you do this when you're so angry you could explode? Start by calming down. Don't confront your child when all you can think about is how angry you are. Take a walk, a hot bath or whatever it takes to relax.

Tell your child that you plan to discuss the situation later. That gives you enough time to prepare your response thoughtfully, not emotionally.

Sit down with your child at the appointed time. Don't yell, scream or engage in any physical acting out. You have to be a model of responsible behavior if you expect the same from your teen.

Share your feelings using "I statements," like "I was very scared about what you did without my permission." Discuss appropriate consequences. Don't threaten things that you won't or can't carry out.

And when handing out punishments, it's also important to affirm that you love the child but dislike the behavior. Make it clear that what happened disappointed you.

With patience, love and a sense of humor, you will survive the teenage years.

*Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.*

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