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How to Respond to a Controlling, Rebellious Teenager

Nicholas Pollak / April 19, 2010 /

OP-ED (<http://www.thefrontpageonline.com/category/op-ed>)

A client recently introduced me to her 17-year-old daughter who had nervous habits that made her uncomfortable.

The daughter said she didn't like the habits, but she could not help herself. They were embarrassing. She tried to only do them in private. Her psychologist said hypnosis may help temporarily, but unless she understood the root of her insecurities and other problems, the bad habits would return.

The daughter was willing to try the hypnosis, but it was clear to me she was not willing to allow hypnosis to occur. She resisted strongly. She wanted to be in control, not only of the session but of her family, too. She wanted (as all teenagers do) to be free of her family, doing what she wanted, without discipline or control.

Up to now, her mom handled all cooking, cleaning, rides and cash needs as well as buying clothes and paying for all sorts of entertainment.

Time to Surrender?

The mother cancelled the next two appointments because her daughter thought the whole thing was hokey and she didn't think want to come back. When the mother told her she must, the daughter responded with profanity. Eventually, the mother relented and the 17-year-old got her way.

This poor woman has given up the parenting of her child.

To allow any child to dictate terms within a family is a recipe for disaster. It is awful to think that a parent must tiptoe around on eggshells.

I know of another family who used to have similar issues, but earlier than age 17,.

Strong parenting had a profound effect on their children, now college graduates with promising careers.

The children learned what it was like to be raised in a motivating home where chores were divided and expected to be accomplished. A reward system encouraged the swift handling of all chores. Tasks were rotated monthly.

Confronting the Downside

Failure was answered with a pre-determined series of punishments. Earning points and losing points became of great importance.

Wrapped up in this was the theory that each of us must work to accomplish what we want. The children found when they completed the assigned tasks, their points mounted quickly.

Rewards included allowing a friend to stay over, to go to a friend to stay over, use of their cell phone for a week, use of the computer, and the television. All privileges had to be earned. Slowly, the children's attitude turned around. The less they complained, the

How hard they worked at chores and schoolwork, the more points they earned and the more rewards they gained.

This all came about when the mother realized her children were spoiled, demanding, self-centered, argumentative and unappreciative of all they had been given, plus disrespectful and rude.

She was determined to change the situation.

While her children were at school one day, she removed everything from their rooms, leaving each with a bed, mattress, bed cover and one change of clothes.

She set about creating a list of what her children were to accomplish, which would gain them a pillow, sheets, and blanket for the night.

She then created a list of items that they could earn and reminded them that as long as their total points remained over a pre determined limit that they would remain entitled to the rewards at that point level. She also ensured that they understood that they could just as easily have points deducted for infractions, and that if they were not careful, could lose the points and privileges accrued at any point level.

There was considerable resistance at first. But this was a determined woman. She remained rock solid. Shortly, her children understood. They began to succeed not only in realizing their rewards but academically as well. They learned that the work they put into their lives created the rewards.

We try. But in the end, we cannot give a child the depth of our life experience. Just as we did at their age, they want to experience for themselves. Hearing is not the same as doing..

These children gained trust from their parents. They learned that by doing what they had to, their rewards would come. And they do. They learned the only way to succeed was to make the effort themselves. Through hard work, they achieved their goals. They understood that by focusing on and by doing, they gained obtained they wanted.

This simple lesson is one we may all learn from. By visualizing what we want, recognizing what must be done to achieve the goal, by breaking down the tasks that need to be done to attain the goal and by visualizing success the goals are reached and your success,

Happy parenting and happy living.

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