

Sarah Newton Productions

Parenting Teens - Tips, Tools and Techniques

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Parenting Teens –tip one

What to do when your child swears at you

Firstly I believe every household should have clear ground rules about what is and what is not negotiable in your house and I believe that swearing is absolutely one of those non-negotiable baselines. By letting your child swear at you and get away with minor infringements you are giving them a pass to do more disrespectful things. When I was in the police I saw huge crime back spots turned around by focusing on the minor infringements and I believe the same applies to your home. Zero tolerance on the minor will prevent the major.

So here is an easy process that you can use in your home when you child swears.

Step One

Let them know they are swearing. "Do you realise you are swearing at me?"

If they continue to swear

Step Two

Let them know they are swearing and tell them it is not acceptable and ask them to stop.

If the swearing continues

Step Three

"You are still swearing at me, it is not acceptable for you to swear at me, please stop."

If the swearing continues

Step Four

Let them know what will happen if they continue

"You are still swearing at me it is not OK to do that I have asked you to stop if you continue then I will have to....."

In most instances of swearing you will either walk away or stop listening

Step Five

Carry out what you have said you would do

"I have continually asked you to stop swearing at me and you are continuing to do so. I am now walking away."

You must carry out these steps in a very calm, neutral voice. No shouting, even though you may feel like it

This process may seem a bit complicated and clunky the first few times you use it but believe me, you must continue to do it consistently. Consistency is the key and remember, zero tolerance on the minor will prevent the major.

Finally, be honest with yourself, do you swear at them? If you do then you are standing on very shaky ground here. Don't try to justify what you do by saying that you are an adult, they are a child. Sorry, I just don't buy it! Yes, you are the adult and as the adult you should know better and you should first and foremost understand that you are the role model for them.

Parenting Teens Resources

[PARENTING ON THE RUN: How to Help Teens Stop Swearing](#)

[Cuss control academy](#)

[Swearing and Bad Language](#)

[Experts help parents get a grip on teen lip](#)

[Your Teen's Bad Language-What Can You Do?](#)

Parenting Teens –tip two

What to do when it's your entire fault, but it actually isn't.

How many times, when you're parenting your teen, do you feel like you are blamed for something that is not your fault....my guess is a lot, right? Well you really do not have to put up with it.

Let's say for example that you have told your teenager that washing day is Tuesday and everything that needs washing has to put in the wash basket by Monday evening. On Thursday they come down to you with a shirt that they want to wear tomorrow which has not been washed. You refuse to do it and they start screaming and shouting....this is a typical situation and what I find in most instances is that the parent gives in and washes the shirt. The teen learns nothing about responsibility and consequences and the parent feels like a slave. Here is a system you can use in this and similar situations. They may not like it however if you stick to it consistently they will get the message.

I call this technique the Choice and State technique.
So let's go back to the shirt-washing scenario

State and Choice

Step One – State the behaviour and tell them what they are doing

"Do you realise that you are shouting at me for something that is not my fault? I want to help you but I cannot until you stop shouting. When you stop shouting, we can discuss this."

Step Two - Show understanding

"I appreciate how important this is you and that you want the shirt now."

Step Three – Explain the situation

"The reason the shirt is not washed is because you did not bring it to me when I asked, this is a result of your choice."

Step Four – State what you will and will to do

"I can see how important this is to you but I am not prepared to wash the shirt for you, however I will show you how to use the washing machine."

I love this system; it is so simple and when used consistently is very powerful. Remember to say this in a very neutral voice and stick to your word. If your child keeps shouting, just go through the process again, letting them know you have told them what you are prepared to do and you will not change your mind. The choice is theirs.

Apply this to your own situations and let me know how it goes.

Parenting Teens Resources

[How do I Handle my Daughters Attitude?](#)

[Typical Teenage Behaviours and Attitudes](#)

[Parentpedia- Bad Attitudes](#)

Parenting Teens –tip three

What to do when your child asks for money and they have already had their allowance

OK, this is a biggie, and for parents who are struggling with setting clear guidelines with their teens, you may want to look at my Money for Chores systems, which is one of the most effective ways I have found to help teenagers understand the responsibility of money.

So what do you do when your child has had their allowance and they ask for money?

Well, firstly you have a choice. You need to know that you can say yes or no. However, know that when you say yes you may not be teaching them to be responsible around money.

When you set an allowance with a child, be clear that they know what is and is not included, i.e. what they are expected and pay for and what they are not. Most of the problems come because this is not clear from the outset. Do you pay for your daughters make up? Your son's game subscriptions? Get very clear.

Then when they ask for something outside of that, here is what I suggest you do.

Step One – remind them of their responsibilities

"Each week I give you your allowance and you are responsible for ensuring that you use that to cover the things we agreed and anything else you may need."

Step Two – let them know what you are going to do

Either...

"I am not willing to give you extra to do that."

Or...

"I am willing to give you that money because..." I suggest that you make it very clear here why, if you are going to give it, so that they don't expect it every time.

Step Three -Offer support

"What other ways could you earn this money?"

"How can I help you to manage your budget more?"

Using this system will ensure that your teenager starts to learn valuable lessons about money and responsibilities.

Resources for Parents of Teenager

[Stuart Fleming Wealth Expert for Teens](#)

[Ten of the best ... money tips for teenagers](#)

[Teaching Teens To Manage Money](#)

[How Teens Could Make Money?](#)

[Teenagers and Money](#)

Parenting Teens –tip four

How to set boundaries that work.

I prefer to use the work boundary instead of rule. To me they are both very different. A rule is, in my mind, a fear-based action that is set to control the teenage behaviour. It promotes authority and regulation and will send a teenager, or adult for that matter, into rebellion. It is natural behaviour for us to want to break the rules that someone else has set for us. Never was a truer word said than the title of the famous book by Curt Coffman, "The first rule is to break all the rules". No one likes rules. Think of your own experience of rules that have been imposed on you. How did you react to them?

A boundary is much more flexible and is an indication of the furthest limit to the behaviour that a person is prepared to go. It gives a teenager a limit to their behaviour rather than a limit to stick to.

Boundaries are not set; they are negotiated and agreed, unlike rules which are just set and adhered too. Some boundaries are implied rather than spoken – such as your knowledge that a partner will not accept you cheating on them. However for teenagers and children, we must not assume this implied knowledge, due to so many brain changes.

If you want co-operation from your teenager, then work with boundaries. It is also good to start from offering a boundary that is not your final limit and we will discuss this in class.

Parents often don't know where to start with boundaries and often start with the most challenging area. I suggest that you make a list here of the top five things in your house that there is conflict about.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now look at the list; which one fills you with most dread? Write this below.

OK, so this is where we will not start. Which one seems the easiest for you to deal with at the moment?

We will start there; better to have small successes than a big struggle.

If you are still at a loss of where to start, I suggest you take these five areas

1. Eating
2. Sleeping
3. Responsibilities
4. Money
5. Behaviour

And under each one write one thing that you would like to work on.

Eating

Sleeping

Responsibilities

Money

Behaviour

Remember, you are not setting rules here, you are finding a starting point for a discussion.

Resources for Parenting Teens and Setting Boundaries

[Parenting Teens: Setting The Boundaries and Giving Independence](#)

[Setting Boundaries with Teenagers](#)

[Parenting Teens - Rules & Boundaries](#)

[How to Deal With Teenagers and Boundaries in Relationships](#)

Parenting Teens –tip five

Instilling a sense of respect in your home.

Respect is one of those loaded words ... parents often come to me saying that their teenagers do not respect them and quite often, the parent is showing no respect for their teenager, so are you surprised? Teenagers do not automatically know how to show respect, they need to learn it, be shown it and realise how it feels so in turn, they can give it. So how can you instil respect in your home?

The best way is to start saying it to your teen. You may find this difficult at first, but how many times do you say you are proud of your child? Well, I want you to stop saying that and substitute it with the word respect. When you tell someone you respect them, you are telling them you hold them in high esteem. When you tell them that you are proud you are really saying that you are pleased for yourself – how many of us as adults are still trying to make our parents proud? I rest my case!!!!

Let me give you an example; the teen does really well in exams.

The parent can either say,

“I am so proud of you, well done!” or

“I know how much work and effort you put in; I really respect the commitment you made in passing these exams.”

Can you see the difference? By telling them you respect something about them rather than being proud of something they did, you are really giving your child's self esteem a massive boost. It is totally awesome and you will almost see them walk taller.

Here are some ways other than just telling them that my clients have created respectful homes.

1. Respect board – a word chalk or a white board with all family names written on. Each day or whenever the mood takes you, write next to a name something your respect, admire or love about them.
2. Respect photo – blow up a large photo of your family and put in a prominent place. Have some post-it notes and pens nearby and use the same principle as above, but with post-it notes - this is my favourite.
3. Leaving respect post-it notes around the house for people to find.
4. Having an appreciation time at meal time where everyone gets to say what they respect, love and admire about each other.

What you use in your house will obviously depend on where you are starting from....if communication is poor then you may need to start from a more general place but believe me, this technique has the power to make a huge difference.

Parenting Teens Resources

[Terence Blacker: Show a little more respect to teenagers](#)

[Do good teenagers get the respect they deserve in your opinion?](#)

[How to Show Respect to Your Teenagers](#)

Parenting Teens –tip six

What to do when your teen says, “It’s not fair!”

Doesn’t this one just drive you mad! I can tell you what though; a “life isn’t fair” answer will certainly not tame these outbursts. What you have to do here is call their bluff.

Generally their claims of, “It’s not fair” really means, “you are not giving me what I want! I am not getting what I want and I am angry and cross about it. I think you are not listening to me or understanding my point of view. That frustrates me and makes me think you are not being fair.”

So now you know what they really mean, you can do something about it.

The first option is to get it before it even raises its ugly head.

Here is the common situation as I see it so often. Teenager asks for something like, “Mum, can I go out tonight?” Without a second thought the parents says no and the teenager storms out with a torrent of, “it’s not fair!” Really, I mean they could have a point, have you really listened to them? I heard someone say recently that if you look at the word listen, the last three letters say ten and we should be listening ten times more than we are talking. So there is a lesson for you in itself.

So, the first thing to do is to listen, not to trigger the behaviour. If they ask you if they can go out or have friends over, just take a moment to think about the answer. If you want to say no why do you want to say no? Is it because you are tired? You want to spend some time with them tonight? You have no food in the cupboards? They don’t do what they say when their friends are over? They keep you up all night? – What is it?

When you have got clear here, you can then move on. Instead of saying no you are going to say yes, but that does not mean that they get things their own way. Here is how it works.

“I would love to have your friends over, however I am really tired at the moment and when they are here you keep us awake all night. Let’s look at doing it another night and see how this can work for everyone.” Do you see how we have taken the resistance away, so a “not fair” is unlikely to come out. We have stated what we wanted and offered a solution. Notice too how I did not use the word “but”. I want you to take it out your vocabulary when talking to your teenager. Use “and” or “however”; these words will move the situation forward more.

If you use this method the “it’s not fair” is unlikely to surface. You just need to carry on listening and attempting to find solutions that work for both of you.

However, if this does not work or you don't take this route, you can always challenge what they are saying. If they say, "it's not fair", ask them what they think is unfair about the situation. Tell them that you are trying to understand their point of view and would really appreciate them sharing. You can even challenge them, asking if it was really what they wanted to say, or were they just frustrated at not getting their own way? The key, as I stated before with this one, is not to react, but call their bluff. They will soon realise that their "it's not fair" is not getting them what they want and will eventually give it up as a bad job.

Parenting Teens Resources

[It's not fair: Brains may compel teens to tantrum](#)

[Rules of Life for Teenagers](#)

[Knowing Your Rights and Responsibilities](#)

[Teen Rights \(and Responsibilities\)](#)

Parenting Teens –tip seven

What to do when your child won't get out of bed

Oh how annoying, in bed all day! OK, before you decide that they are just a lazy good-for-nothing, take heed to this advice.

Most parents find the sleeping habits of teenagers bizarre. They appear to become nocturnal in their activities. In Barbara Strauch's book, "Why are they so Weird?" she explains in great detail the reason for such strange behaviour, from the change in melatonin levels to the fact that in the past adolescents, as the most agile, had to stay up and be alert to defend the pack. She believes that these in-built environmental qualities have lingered on and our teenagers find it difficult to go to sleep in the evenings because of this biological factor. She also stresses that research has shown that teenagers need nine hours sleep; hence, they have an inability to go to sleep and an inability to get up, which is bound to lead to problems. Some schools in America have taken note of this and have started school days later, but in Britain I think we have a long way to go yet! So maybe our teenagers are not lazy, just biologically impaired!

So sometimes, leaving them in bed can be the best option, letting them catch up with their sleep can actually be a good thing. Teenagers need three hours of sleep more per night than we do and if they are not sleeping well throughout the week then this accumulates. So if you can bare it, leave them in bed. What you need to figure out yourself, as a parent, is what is acceptable to you and what the guidelines are around them staying in bed. Do you mind at all? Do you not mind as long as they get up at a certain time? Do you not mind as long as they spend some time with you or do you not mind as long as you don't have to force them out of bed on school days? Get very clear with yourself what the guidelines are and share them with your teenager. Say something like, "I know you need a lot of sleep and I want you to catch up on it. That is OK with us and we will leave you in bed. All I ask is....." Be clear what you want and will accept as a family. You might also want to look at ways you can coax them from their cave. Cooking food they love or doing something they find exciting may be other ways that you can also beat this one. Shouting at them, telling them they are lazy and forcing them out of bed is just not going to cut it. If you do agree with a cut off time with them, then here is a reminder on how to wake your little darling up without a slanging match.

Here are my suggestions for getting them up.

- Go in at least an hour before they have to get up and open their curtains - natural light is a gentle way to bring someone around from a deep slumber.
- Get a very loud alarm clock in their room and set it for thirty minutes before they have to get up. Put it somewhere where they have to get up to switch it off.
- Then, if they are not up, go in five minutes before they are about to get up and in a stern authoritative voice, tell them it is time to get up.

- Do this two more times and then leave them to it.

On the last occasion tell them that you will not be coming in anymore.

A side note here is that making them go to bed early to get up early may not be a solution. Melatonin levels (which induce sleep) kick in much later with adolescents and sometimes will not peak until one or two in the morning. So even though they may go to bed, their pleas of, "I can't get to sleep!" may actually be true. They are just not wired the same as we are when it comes to sleep, so this invasion truly is one that they are not in control of.

Resources for Parents of Teenagers

[Late Nights and Laziness](#)

[Teenagers and Sleep](#)

[How much sleep do teenagers need?](#)

[Mobile phones disrupt teenagers' sleep](#)

[Sleep Problems](#)

[Helping Teens Make Peace with Sleep](#)

Parenting Teens –tip eight

What to do when you think you are about to lose it

OK, I thought I would leave this one until near the end, even though I think it is the most important one by far. Being a great parent is all about managing yourself and your own anger and frustrations. When you have this managed everything else takes care of itself really well. However saying that, it's the hardest things to do too.

Here are two tips that I use myself and with my clients that support them in taking on the hardest part of parenting themselves.

Find your boiling points; let's face it, we all have one, a point where we totally lose it, run around shouting like a mad women and foaming at that mouth...surely it is not just me!

To temper yourself you first need to figure out not where your boiling point is, but where simmer is, so you can turn it down. So think of a current situation where you behaved like a screaming banshee and ask yourself these questions.

1. If me losing myself were at a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10, at what point did I still have control of myself?
2. At this point what did I notice – what was happening in my mind, body and emotions or how was I feeling, what was my body doing and what was I telling myself?
3. What happened directly before that point?
4. What could I do at that point to turn the heat down and ensure that my simmer does not become a boil?

Just to show you that I am human, here is what happens to me

When I lose it, which I sometimes do, what I find is at about 6 my jaw starts to tense, my fists clench, I begin telling myself everyone is taking me for granted and I feel very angry....at 4 I begin to get frustrated by really small things that do not often bother me. At 4, what I have found is that if I can go away and think about a logical solution, I will calm down. If not, there is no stopping me...

Here is what I do to come up with a logical solution.

First I stick by the mantra that people do not fail, systems do

So the first question I ask myself is,

“What system failed to allow this to happen?”

“What do I need to put in place to ensure this does not happen again?”

I then look at different ways to put different options in place.

Another thing I often do and walk my clients through is an extremely easy exercise.

You get a piece of paper and split it into two. On one side write facts and on the other write feelings. Then look at the situation; what are the facts, the truth in the matter and then what are the thoughts and feelings that are going through your head?

Then look at the facts and see what you can do about them and what system you can put in place.

I love this because it allows you to feel like you are in charge. Most parents who come to me are so caught up in the feelings of the situational and while they are important, progress only occurs when you deal with the facts...deal with the facts first and change the situation and then the feelings will take care of themselves.....

Let's take an example; say your siblings fight every morning about who sits in the front seat of the car. Every morning is a stressful experience. The facts of the situating are simple...they had an argument about who sits in the front seat, the feelings are much more difficult; you feel like a bad parent because you have not taught them how to share, they do not love each other and furthermore they do not care about you and the effect it is having on you, or anyone else for that matter! So you can rush around in the dreadful feelings and feel like the worse parent in the world or you can deal with the fact. They argue every morning about who sits in the front. Easy - put a system in place. Monday to Thursday they share and on Friday, no one sits in the front seat. If they break this and continue to argue, then all deals are off and no one sits in the front seat. If you stick to what you have said here then bingo, the situation is solved and you feel like a powerful parent in control again.

So focus on the facts, they are far more powerful and will get you the results you want.

Parenting Teens –tip nine

Communicating with confidence, clarity and consistency

Are you being clear and consistent in your communication with your children? I had a conversation with an ex-client the other day and she told me that one thing that had helped her so much in the parenting years was something I had said to her ages ago, that is, the difference between Ask and Tell.

So I thought I would share this easy distinction with you.

An Ask is a request of your teenager, a question they have the right to answer yes or no to, or re-negotiate.

A Tell is an order or an instruction – you are telling your teen to do something and it needs doing now; there is no negotiation.

Most parents, unclear in their communication, ask when they should be telling and tell when they should be asking. With a teenager there is no doubt that we will be asking more than telling, but sometimes we will still tell, for example, “Come on, we are leaving now!”

So look at your parenting; where are you asking when you should be telling? Remember, if there is no negotiation at all then it is a tell. Where are you telling when you could be asking? Remember, if you could stretch a little and there is room for negotiation, then it is an ask.

Most teenagers negotiate with everything because parents are not clear with them, so they never know if it is an Ask or a Tell. They push their luck and negotiate everything, knowing they will win some and lose some, but it worth a try.

So get clear in your communication and give your teenagers clear messages about what they can and cannot do.

Resources for Parents of Teens

[Communication with your teen](#)

[Communicating with Your Teen](#)

[Communicating with Your Teen - Use an Action Plan](#)

[Communicating with Your Teen](#)

[Talk to Your Teen](#)

Parenting Teens –tip ten

When and how to negotiate with your teen

Agreements are the things that, without a shadow of a doubt, have transformed in big way many of my client's relationships with their children. They take the heat out of many situations and put you as the parent in control. This does not mean that you control your teenager, only that you can control your own self in the negotiation stage of agreements.

Agreements are the backbone to everyday life we make and break agreements daily. We agree to get our children to school on time, we agree to pay the mortgage and we agree to meet a friend for lunch. These are all things that, considering the options we have decided to agree on, we can at any time pull out of, if we so choose and although there will be consequences, some will be easier to break than others. Upsetting a friend over cancelled lunch arrangements may be easier than losing our house since we have not paid the mortgage, or losing our child's place at school because we got them their late.

Whether you like it or not, your life is a series of agreements, some not so great as others but nevertheless, all agreements. You were not forced into any of them, you weighed up the alternatives and decided to agree, knowing the consequences and the impact that the agreement has upon you.

This is why it is so important that we start to make agreements with our children as early as we can because as I have said, life is full of them.

Think of the agreements you make everyday now and how they came about -are any of them rules that we must stick to? Are any of them forced upon us? Even the law in a way is a set of acceptable behaviour agreements; we can choose not to agree with them and break the law, knowing the penalty. We have that choice.

So what is common in our agreements?

1. We are generally involved in the process
2. We have the information we need to make a choice
3. We know the consequences of breaking them
4. We choose to accept them or not accept them.

So if this is how we operate in life, then why do we so often give our children a set of rules to adhere to? Not involve them in the process, expect them to abide by them without giving them the proper information and we certainly do not make it clear what will happen if they are broken...oh and then we scold them for not making a choice.

Does that seem right?

No it doesn't! No wonder we can never get them to do anything.
OK, so what I want to do today is give you a system that you can use

Here are two definitions from the dictionary about the word agreement.
The act of agreeing or of coming to a mutual arrangement.
An arrangement that is accepted by all parties to a transaction.

This is not a clever way for you to instil rules or get your teenager to do something, it is a way of you all agreeing what is acceptable, since you all share the same house, bathroom, wallet 😊

Think for a moment, how you get your children involved, how the house runs and how you ensure it runs smoothly - how are they involved in this? What do you have in place at the moment?

There are three main steps in making an agreement and they are listed below - we will go through these more in class.

Step one - Get clear

Before making any agreement, be clear what it is you want. Most parents skip this step and it is crucial, do you want her to do the washing up or do you want her to take more responsibility around the house? Having a conversation that starts, "Let's talk about you taking more responsibility around the house," is very different than, "I want you to do the washing up". Whatever it is you think you want, ask what it is you really want, what is the bigger why?

Step two - Make the request

You are making a request of your teenagers, you are not telling them - they have the right to say yes, no or re-negotiate and you need to be ready for this. Ask for what you want and ask for a discussion around this. What you are doing here is opening the conversation up for negotiation.

Step three - Seal the deal

After negotiation, you must both be clear what has to be and when it has to be done. Some wishy-washy, "...yes I will do the washing up..." is not good enough.

Here is also where you need to have a discussion with your teenager about what will happen if the agreement is broken and although you may not know the exact consequences yet, there needs to be some discussion here about the possibility so that your teenager can agree, knowing exactly what they are getting into.

One important note to remember here are that you must come to an agreement with love. If you are making an agreement from fear it will not work.

OK so what do we do when an agreement is broken?

First we do not panic, you stay calm and let your child know that the agreement has been broken. You need to think about it and come up with a solution. Ask them to do the same.

Now there is not one-size-fits-all here and it will depend on the agreement, how it was broken and the reasons for the breach, so to speak.

Give yourself at least 24 hours and only after a discussion with your teenager come to a conclusion.

The first thing to do is look at the broken agreement and the circumstances and ask yourself if there is a remedy you could put in place to ensure that this does not happen again. A remedy is something you will put in place to ensure the agreement is not broken again. For example, if they just forgot about the agreement what could remind them?

Go into the agreements again with the remedy in place and see if that works.

If the agreement is broken again and it is obvious that another remedy is not the answer or the breaking of the agreement in the first place was so severe or no remedy could be found, then move into a penalty.

Now, I did think long and hard before using the word penalty, so in its broadest sense it does mean punishment. However, one of its definitions is loss or other unfortunate result of one action and for me, that definition did fit. If your child breaks an agreement, just like if you did, there will be some kind of loss or unfortunate event. If we don't turn up for work we may get fired - loss of job. If we fail to meet a friend for lunch they may not be happy with us - an unfortunate result. Often, someone else, i.e. the school, may enforce a penalty. However there will be times when you as the parent need to step in. If this is the case, then discuss options with your teenager first and come to a solution that you are both happy with.

So there is the system for making agreements. We will talk through it in greater length on the call.

Before next week I just want you to think about agreements in the context of your own home. What do you do already? Where could an agreement support you more? What has and has not worked so far?

As everything the key to this is consistency without consistency this will never work.

Resources for Parenting Teenagers

[Working It Out: Learning to Negotiate with Your Teenager](#)

[Negotiating with your teen](#)

[Logical & Natural Consequences](#)

[Natural Consequences](#)

[Natural and Logical Consequences](#)

[Natural Consequences](#)