

CHAPTER 11

RULES FOR DEALING WITH THE BEHAVIOURS

Our Vulnerable Emotional Touch-Points

Just as babies arrive designed to cry at just the right pitch to make a parent leap into action (oh – who can ignore that very special brand of noise?), teenagers are equipped with thrilling accoutrements of their own, which are closely allied to the Big Red Hot Button. Yes! They can...

- ❖ Repeatedly not do their homework and then slope off somewhere
- ❖ Show horrifying rudeness at a family event in front of everyone
- ❖ Show an amazing level of contempt when you've just spent your last money and all of your energy on something for them

These are indeed sophisticated pieces of (faulty) emotional equipment. Unfortunately, these talents do have impacts on their adult family members – and not exactly of the helpful variety. Here are some of the words that parents have used to describe the impacts that they feel:

- ❖ Mad. Mad as anything....
- ❖ Stupid. What am I supposed to do?
- ❖ Confused. Do I let it go, or come down on the behaviour hard?
- ❖ Like they are in control, not me
- ❖ Like my life's not my own any more
- ❖ Like I don't have a say in my own house
- ❖ Like they just don't care about me at all
- ❖ Is it worth it?
- ❖ I feel totally ineffective
- ❖ We are demoralised

I think that parents feel disturbed when they think they are doing badly and they don't have answers. But actually, this is only a cultural overlay. Imagine instead that we feel the exact opposite – that is, that we know what this is all about, and how to deal with it.

Here is what might happen in a forest-dwelling tribe from another planet. They view knotty teenaged behaviours through a lens of sympathetic amusement, logically concluding that they are merely the result of teenagers being people who are not fully developed yet.

Alien Dad: 'I fixed up that canoe for him specially but he didn't come and use it – for about the fourth time.'

Dad's Auntie: 'Ah, yes, that's funny dear! That's Immaturity number 17.'

Dad: 'Aha. Pass the cookies. I know what to do with number 17.'

Sounds peaceful. However, *you also* may be able to unhook yourself from the teenagers' emotional effects if:

1. You can detach yourself from the damage that you feel has been done to your relationship with your child.
2. Put yourself into emotional neutral for a couple of weeks, take stock of which developmental supports you feel that your child needs in their life – then start putting into action helpful techniques for responding to challenging behaviours. The chances are that you will end up feeling a whole lot more positive about your child and the way things can work in your house.

Island living, anyone?

Using the following will be very important. This comprises:

PARENTAL LEADERSHIP

- ❖ Cool and confident parenting
- ❖ Thinking very carefully before we respond
- ❖ Modelling respectful speech

- ❖ Modelling respectful and confident conflict management
- ❖ Modelling mutual support between the adults - with no-one being taken for granted
- ❖ Setting firm and consistent boundaries
- ❖ Keeping our word
- ❖ Listening
- ❖ Making a strong family culture
- ❖ Relating honestly

Teenagers have their own acute Truth Radar. If you try and insist on them behaving in ways that you yourself can't manage, your credibility with them will be zero.

The list above might look like a big To Do list. But if you use the principles described below you are likely to feel rather more confident, and as if it could actually work for you.

BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT PRINCIPLES

- ❖ With teenagers, you don't have to respond right at that moment – in fact, it is often better not to (just as in your own adult relationships)
- ❖ Give yourself time to calm right down
- ❖ Wait until the 'right' moment and be inspired to have the 'right' (i.e., emotionally true) response
- ❖ You do not have to be entirely predictable in your responses, but you must be fair
- ❖ Do not escalate
- ❖ Do not yell. Do not use insults, comparisons, or put-downs
- ❖ Do not make empty threats (this makes your word worth nothing). In fact – do not make any threats
- ❖ Instead, use real-world consequences (trying to shield them from these only perpetuates immaturity)
- ❖ Sometimes, humour is the best remedy!

When can you use humour?

Only once you have begun to establish your new responses, and your teen has got used to them (that's only fair). Do NOT use humour if there is someone else present, or if there is a behaviour happening which is directed at another person (that is likely to be disrespectful to someone

else). But you can use it (sometimes) if you and your teenager are alone, and if the behaviour is at a low-level.

For example:

Teenager: '(Mumble, mumble...) ...you can't *make* me, you know. Your rules are dumb.' (Begins to leave).

Mum: 'I heard that. Poor effort. That's only a 2 out of 10 for rudeness, Joshua!'

Teenager: 'Whaa?'' (Later heard laughing sheepishly).

Since he has registered your point and you are both in good humour, nothing further is needed. Save your carefully targeted responses for the behaviours which merit it.

REMINDERS

- ❖ Remember to recover - by putting yourself into *emotional neutral* and taking stock of which developmental supports your child needs.
- ❖ Show Parental Leadership (p.148)
- ❖ And use the Behaviour Support Principles (p.150)