



How to Set Rules for Your Teenager



THE CHALLENGE

Your teenager says you are too strict. Your instincts tell you otherwise. 'If I relax the rules,' you say to yourself, 'he will just get into trouble!'

You can set reasonable rules for your teenager. First, though, you need to understand what might be causing him to chafe against the rules in the first place.

Although in this article we refer to the teenager as a male, the principles discussed apply to both genders.



WHY IT HAPPENS

Myth: All teenagers rebel against rules; it's an unavoidable part of adolescence.

Fact: A teenager is less likely to rebel when parents set reasonable rules and discuss them with him.

Although a number of factors may be involved in rebellion, parents may unwittingly encourage it if their rules are inflexible or no longer age appropriate. Consider the following:

Inflexible. When parents lay down the law and there is no room for discussion, rules become more like a strait-jacket that stifles the teen rather than a seat belt that protects him. As a result, he may secretly engage in the very acts that his parents forbid.

No longer age appropriate. "Because I said so" may be enough explanation for a young child, but adolescents need more—they need reasons. After all, in the near future, your teenager may be living on his own and making weighty decisions. It's far better that he learn to reason well and make good decisions now, while he's still under your supervision.

But what can you do if your teenager constantly seems to be irritated by your rules?



WHAT YOU CAN DO

First, realize that teenagers need—and deep down even *want*—boundaries. So **set rules, and make sure your teenager understands them.** “When adolescents are given clear boundaries and expect a reasonable amount of parental supervision, they are less likely to engage in worrisome behaviors,” says the book *Letting Go With Love and Confidence*. In contrast, uninvolved parents who grant their teenagers too much freedom give the impression that they do not care. And that is a recipe for rebellion.—*Bible principle: Proverbs 29:15.*

How, then, can you show balance? **Let your teenager express himself** about family rules. For example, if he asks for an adjustment to his curfew, **listen** to him as he presents his case. A teenager who knows that he has been fully heard is more likely to respect and comply with the decision you make—even if he does not agree with it.—*Bible principle: James 1:19.*

Before making a decision, though, remember this: While teenagers tend to ask for more freedom than they should have, parents may tend to grant less freedom than they could. So **give serious consideration to your teenager’s request.** Has he demonstrated that he is responsible? Do the circumstances warrant a concession? Be willing to bend when appropriate.—*Bible principle: Genesis 19:17-22.*

Besides listening to your teenager’s feelings, make sure that you **let your teenager know your concerns** as well. By doing so, you may teach him to consider not only his wishes but also the feelings of others.—*Bible principle: 1 Corinthians 10:24.*

Finally, **make a decision and explain your reasons for it.** Even if he is not thrilled with the decision, likely he is glad to have parents who will hear him out. Remember, an adolescent is an adult in training. By setting reasonable rules and discussing them with your teenager, you will help him grow to become a responsible adult.—*Bible principle: Proverbs 22:6.* ■

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Let your reasonableness become known.”
—Philippians 4:5.

“Do not be exasperating your children, so that they do not become downhearted.”
—Colossians 3:21.

FOR TEENAGERS

“Imagine a man who owes money to a bank. If he makes his payments regularly, he’ll earn the bank’s trust and the bank may even extend more credit to him in the future. It’s similar at home. You owe your parents your obedience. If you prove trustworthy—even in small things—your parents are likely to trust you more in the future. Of course, if you continually let your parents down, don’t be surprised if they reduce or even close your ‘line of credit.’”
—From *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, Volume 2, published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.