



How to Discipline Your Teenager



THE CHALLENGE

The family rule is cell phones off by 9:00 p.m., but twice this week you caught your daughter texting past midnight. Your son's curfew is 10:00 p.m., but last night—once again—he came home after 11:00.

Your teenager *can* do better. But first you need to know why he or she seems to be flouting your rules. The good news? What appears to be outright defiance may be something far less serious.



WHY IT HAPPENS

Unclear boundaries. Some teenagers ignore rules in order to see what they can get away with. For example, if a parent has said that a certain misdeed would result in a particular consequence, a teenager might test the boundaries to see if the parent will follow through. Are such teenagers becoming hardened rebels? Not necessarily. The fact is, teens are more likely to be lax about obeying rules when parents have not been consistent in enforcing consequences or when the boundaries have not been clearly defined.

Rigidity. Some parents try to control their teenager with an endless list of rules. When the teen disobeys, the parent gets angry and imposes even *more* rules. Often, however, that only makes matters worse. “The more you try to gain control, the more your teenager resists,” explains the book *Parent/Teen Breakthrough*, adding: “The control approach feels like trying to spread cold butter on soft bread: it just tears the bread apart, and the solution isn’t to spread harder.”

Proper discipline can help. Different from “punishment”—which means to make someone suffer—“discipline” basically means to teach. So how can you teach your teenager to comply with your rules?



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Be clear. Teenagers need to know precisely what is expected of them and what the consequences of disobedience will be.—*Bible principle: Galatians 6:7.*

Suggestion: Write a list of your house rules. Then ask yourself: ‘Have I set too many? Have I set too few? Are some no longer needed? Should I make adjustments in accord with the level of responsibility that my teenager has demonstrated?’

Be consistent. Teenagers might become confused if they were let off the hook last week but then face consequences this week for a similar infraction.—*Bible principle: Matthew 5:37.*

Suggestion: Try to make the consequence more relevant to the “crime.” For example, if your teenager breaks a curfew, imposing an *earlier* curfew would be a related consequence.

Be reasonable. Show yourself to be a flexible parent by according your teenager more freedom as it is earned.—*Bible principle: Philippians 4:5.*

Suggestion: Sit down and discuss rules with your teenager. You might even have him or her weigh in on what consequences should be meted out for certain infractions. Teenagers are far more likely to comply with rules that they have had a hand in formulating.

Build character. Your goal is not just to get your teenager to obey orders but to help him develop a healthy conscience—an internal sense of right and wrong. (See the box “Build Positive Traits.”)—*Bible principle: 1 Peter 3:16.*

Suggestion: Look to the Bible for help. It is the best source of “discipline that gives insight,” and its wisdom can “give to the inexperienced ones shrewdness, to a young man [or woman] knowledge and thinking ability.”—Proverbs 1:1-4. ■

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Whatever a man is sowing, this he will also reap.”
—Galatians 6:7.

“Let your word Yes mean Yes, your No, No.”—Matthew 5:37.

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

“Hold a good conscience.”
—1 Peter 3:16.

BUILD POSITIVE TRAITS

Help your child think about the character traits for which he or she would like to be known. When faced with a challenge, young people can learn to make good decisions by asking themselves the following questions:

- What kind of person do I want to be?—Colossians 3:10.
- What would a person with a Christlike personality do when faced with this challenge?—Proverbs 10:1.

The Bible contains many true-life examples of men and women whose actions defined them as being either good or bad. (1 Corinthians 10:11; James 5:10, 11) Use these examples to help your son or daughter build positive character traits.

(See *Awake!* of October 2012)