

Chapter 13: The Final Touches

Step 4

At this point your child has still not given in to your reasonable requests.

If your child has persisted this far, it is clear that he feels that it is only a matter of time until you break down. He knows what it takes to set you off and that when you get set off your reaction is very predictable. Your teenager is just trying to get you to that point so that your reaction will be something that he is familiar with.

Evidently, your teenager feels, either consciously or unconsciously, that if he just pushes you a bit further, you will break down and back off. Most likely in the past you have behaved this way. Your job in step four is to begin to change this pattern.

What you are going to do now is to establish the idea in your teenager's mind that whatever you say you are going to do. You will stick to whatever you decide regardless of the level of resistance your teen puts up.

In the past you have always or at least often enough backed down just to get a bit of peace and quiet. Your child could rely on this. You were predictable.

What you are going to do to prepare for step four is to become unpredictable.

Changing Your Teen's Image of You

The first part of step four is to change the way your teenager looks at you. If you do this right you are going to have a lot of fun with this step.

Up until now you have been very predictable. Now you are going to establish yourself as someone who is not so predictable. You are going to do this with a series of dramatic and fun demonstrations that will say to your teenager:

1. You mean what you say, and
2. There is no telling what you will do next.

Here is the plan:

First, pick some minor irritation that bothers you and that happens on a fairly frequent basis. It doesn't have to be something specifically that your child does, though it could be. The main thing is that it is a small thing and it happens often.

For example, let's say it bothers you when you go to the bathroom and there is no toilet paper there. Whoever finished the last roll of toilet paper didn't replace it. He expects you to do it and may even think of it as part of your job.

Now even if this type of thing might bother you, which it very well might, it certainly is not something that is destroying your life. So this is a good thing to use to show how surprising and unpredictable you can be.

Next, I am going to ask you to think of something you can do when this happens again that will meet the following six criteria:

1. You will enjoy doing it.
2. It will not be aimed at anyone specifically.
3. It would be something that is startling or unexpected, and maybe even funny.
4. It is related to what happened, but does not target any family member specifically
5. It does not give negative attention to anyone.
6. It is something that you can do yourself

Using the toilet paper example, you might do something like this:

Take a roll of masking tape and tape the toilet seat down. Then write on the tape in bright red crayon, will the person who finishes the roll of toilet paper please remember to replace it.

Next, you are going to give a two part warning.

The first statement is about what you expect and what you feel is fair.

For example, announce to the family at large at a time when everyone can hear,

“For now on I expect the person who uses up the toilet paper to replace the roll.”

Then wait until the incident happens again. I can guarantee that it will.

Now you are going to make your polite request one more time, but this time you are going to add what you are going to do if it happens again.

“I really expect the person who uses up the toilet paper to replace the roll. If that doesn’t happen I am going to tape the toilet seat down and write you a message in crayon to help you to remember.”

Now, no one is going to take you seriously, at least the first time you do this. That is what makes this so much fun.

Next, wait for the incident to happen again and then do exactly what you said you were going to do.

So in our example, the next time you go into a bathroom and the toilet paper has run out, get out the masking tape. Tape the toilet seat closed and write on the tape in red crayon,

“Please remember to replace the roll when you finish the toilet paper.”

Choosing Your Action

What should you choose to do?

Choose something that you will enjoy doing and that will make you feel good when you do it. Your actions should not be something that teaches a lesson nor should it make you feel like you are getting even. It should be something that is pure fun for you. It should also be something that you can do yourself and then be able to walk away and forget it.

It is also important that whatever you choose to do is not directed at anyone. Your goal is to get to a level of surprise and astonishment, not to start a confrontation. Your other goal is to show that you are ready to do an unpredictable physical action in order to stand up for what you want and rightfully expect.

Whatever you decide to do, you should do it as a one time only action. You want to have fun with this as well as make your point. You don't want to create another battle front for yourself or create a new job.

You should be prepared to target a number of minor irritations and address them in a similar fashion. You should do this until you are internally comfortable with this type of response. Your goal is not only to convince your teenager that you are unpredictable, but to become comfortable yourself with being unpredictable.

What Might Happen

You might start to notice that your teenager is beginning to look at you in a different light. He or she may begin to ask you what your plans are. Are you going to be home for dinner or are you planning on doing the laundry?

These are all signs that your teenager is seeing you as capable of doing what is unexpected.

When your teenager shows signs that he or she is looking at you a bit differently and you feel comfortable with yourself doing the unexpected, you have succeeded in laying the groundwork to start executing Step 4.

Laying the Groundwork Worksheet

Picking Your Target

Pick some minor irritations bother you and that happen frequently.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Choosing Your Action

Now for each irritation decide what small action that you can do that will meet the six criteria mentioned before.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

The Execution

Irritation 1:

Write Your Statement of What You Expect and Feel is Fair:

Date Delivered _____

Write Your Second Statement of What You Will Do:

Date Delivered _____

Date You Took Action _____

Write How Your Teen Responded:

Irritation 2:

Write Your Statement of What You Expect and Feel is Fair:

Date Delivered _____

Write Your Second Statement of What You Will Do:

Date Delivered _____

Date You Took Action _____

Write How Your Teen Responded:

Irritation 3:

Write Your Statement of What You Expect and Feel is Fair:

Date Delivered _____

Write Your Second Statement of What You Will Do:

Date Delivered _____

Date You Took Action _____

Write How Your Teen Responded:

Irritation 4:

Write Your Statement of What You Expect and Feel is Fair:

Date Delivered _____

Write Your Second Statement of What You Will Do:

Date Delivered _____

Date You Took Action _____

Write How Your Teen Responded:

Irritation 5:

Write Your Statement of What You Expect and Feel is Fair:

Date Delivered _____

Write Your Second Statement of What You Will Do:

Date Delivered _____

Date You Took Action _____

Write How Your Teen Responded:

Targeting Items in Your Column

Once you feel comfortable targeting minor irritations, it is now time to use step four to take care of some of those remaining things in your column.

The approach is basically the same. The only real difference is that the behavior you choose to target is something that is important to you. Also, the action you choose to use should have a bit more substance to it.

Before if you stated what you would do if you didn't get what you wanted your teenager would not have believed you. Now that you have carried out the other actions as you said you would, your child knows that you are dead serious and that you will do what you say.

For example:

“Bob, I am tired of taking care of the cat's litter box. I will not have this any more. If it happens that the litter box isn't cleaned on a daily basis, the cat is going to live somewhere else.”

Now if you had said this type of thing a few months ago, Bob would not believe you. Now that you have carried out the other actions as you said you would, Bob knows that you are dead serious. Bob realizes now that he has a choice. Either clean the litter box or say goodbye to the cat. You will do what you say.

I want to point out that you are still not directly punishing Bob for not taking care of the cat. Your action is not directed at him at all. You are merely giving him the choice, and saying to him,

“Either you handle the situation in a way that is acceptable to me, or I will do it my way.”

Worksheet

Write the Remaining Items in Your Column

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Choosing Your Action

Now for each item choose your action. The action:

- Must be related to what happened
- Should target the behavior and not be directed at your child
- Should not give negative attention
- Should be something that you can do yourself

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Item 1:

Write Your Statement of What You Expect and Feel is Fair:

Date Delivered _____

Write Your Second Statement of What You Will Do:

Date Delivered _____

Date You Took Action _____

Write How Your Teen Responded:

Item 2:

Write Your Statement of What You Expect and Feel is Fair:

Date Delivered _____

Write Your Second Statement of What You Will Do:

Date Delivered _____

Date You Took Action _____

Write How Your Teen Responded:

Item 3:

Write Your Statement of What You Expect and Feel is Fair:

Date Delivered _____

Write Your Second Statement of What You Will Do:

Date Delivered _____

Date You Took Action _____

Write How Your Teen Responded:

Item 4:

Write Your Statement of What You Expect and Feel is Fair:

Date Delivered _____

Write Your Second Statement of What You Will Do:

Date Delivered _____

Date You Took Action _____

Write How Your Teen Responded:

Item 5:

Write Your Statement of What You Expect and Feel is Fair:

Date Delivered _____

Write Your Second Statement of What You Will Do:

Date Delivered _____

Date You Took Action _____

Write How Your Teen Responded:
