

14

Direct Confrontation

Up to this point in the program, you have not had a direct confrontation with your teenager. In Step 4 you did introduce some actions, if your child at that point was completely ignoring your requests, but these actions were quite limited and restricted only to the particular situation. They also were directed at the situation, not your child. If this has not alleviated the major issues that are disturbing you, we will need to go on to Step 5. Unlike everything before in this program, Step 5 is taking an action that is directed at your child.

The Normal Parent Child Relationship

Throughout the program you have been maintaining the normal parent child relationship. That is, you are still living with your child and providing for his needs. This not only includes physical things like a home, food, clothing, medical care, but also the more intangible forms of parental care and support. You are doing what you can to maintain your side of the parent child relationship. However, it is only fair to expect that your child maintain his side of the relationship, also.

If your child is trying to rule your home like a dictator, is free loading, is flagrantly abusing your personal belongings or doing any of a number of things that shows a complete lack of responsibility and a disregard for you, then he is not doing what is expected of him to maintain his side of the relationship. If this describes your situation, then it is time to redefine what you are willing to do as a parent. Changing your parental role will benefit not only you, but also your teenager.

In a relationship between two people, each party gives something to the other and receives from the other. If your child is still violating your rights and behaving inappropriately on major issues, then he is not doing his part in the relationship. As it stands now, your child is not having a normal relationship with you. Therefore it is in everybody's best interest that you do something a bit more drastic to correct the situation.

Teaching Your Teenager How Relationships Work

In any other relationship that you have, if the other party treated you in an unfair way, you would withdraw from that relationship. This is a normal reaction and your child needs to understand that this is how relationships work.

Therefore, since your child is not treating you properly, you are going to react in the way you normally would in any other relationship. That is, you are going to make a gradual withdrawal from the relationship. This step might seem a bit drastic to you and it can be. Again, you should only take this step if major issues are still being ignored. If your child has made major improvements and only needs a bit of work on some smaller issues, it is better if you let them go and just wait for your teenager to grow up.

When Are You Ready for Step 5?

Step 5 really is appropriate only in the event that your child remains out of control after you have correctly tried to do everything else that we have discussed.

If you are ready for Step 5, then you are locked into a one way relationship with your teenager. That means you are giving to your teenager, but he is not reciprocating in any way. Your teenager may be running wild, acting irresponsibly and doing whatever he wants regardless of how you feel about it or how it affects you. This is an unacceptable situation. It is bad for you and more than for you it is very bad for your teenager. Your child needs to understand that relationships go two ways.

It is your job as a parent to educate your teen in this area. A child who grows up thinking that he can abuse the other member of a relationship is going to have a great deal of trouble maintaining a relationship with a spouse or with his own children. Step 5 may improve your relationship with your teenager or it may not. Either way it will get the message across that relationships go both ways and that unless your teen recognizes the rights of others he will forfeit the relationship.

Again, because this is actually a very severe step, you should only use Step 5 if you have made a serious attempt to apply the rest of this program and your child is still resistant to change on major issues. If things are going well and you see improvements but there just remain some issues that still need work, I would strongly discourage you from using Step 5. You don't want to jeopardize the gains you have made by entering into a direct conflict with your teenager if he has already made many concessions to you.

Another thing I would like to point out is that it could be that your teenager has not come around yet because he is physically or psychologically unable to do so. Teenagers who are addicted to drugs or have a serious psychiatric condition, such as Bipolar disorder or Schizophrenia, maybe unable to do as you request. If this is what is happening, you should have seen already some indication that your teenager is acting out, not by choice, but because there is something going on that is completely beyond his ability to control. Before you go further, make perfectly sure that your child is not suffering from some situation that really needs professional help. If your teenager really needs professional assistance and you do not help your child to get it, going further with this part of the program might be harmful for your child.

Executing Step 5

Now we begin:

The first thing to do is make a list of things that you do for your child to make his or her life better. These are things you do for your child that you would not necessarily do for someone else.

Please go to Chapter 14 in your workbook.

Here are some examples:

- Making meals.
- Buying groceries.
- Paying medical expenses.
- Teaching your teenager how to drive.
- Lending your teenager the car.
- Lending or buying clothing.
- Giving money.
- Doing laundry.
- Providing a room in your home.
- Emotional support.
- Being home at night.
- Driving him places.

Now given the current state of your relationship with your teenager, which of the things that you do for your child would you rather not do?

This is where you are going to start.

The first thing you must do is inform your teenager of your intention. You do this by simply saying to your teen that you are not going to do a certain favor for them unless you see a change in behavior. You should start by making this a one time refusal.

Here are some examples:

“Gloria, I am not going to do your laundry this week. I feel that I keep on giving to you and don’t get anything back in return. I feel really put out and I am not going to do that to myself any more.”

“Bob, I am not making you dinner tonight. I feel that I am always giving to you and I am not going to continue unless things get more fair around here.”

After you make your statement, you walk away. You are giving information, not opening up a discussion. If you see your teenager responds with some change in behavior such as doing his job or being nice to you, then you have the right to change your mind.

You can say something like:

“Bob, I’m glad you took out the trash today. I feel better about making you dinner now.”

“Gloria, I really appreciate it when you are pleasant. Now I feel like doing your laundry.”

If you do not see a change in behavior, then carry out what you said you would do. In our examples, that means that Bob doesn't get dinner and Gloria has to do her own laundry.

One of the obstacles of executing this part of Step 5 is that many times what you will do affects other members of your family. You should do your best to pick an area that will not affect others. However, if this is not possible, it is more important that you set your teenager straight than it is that you do whatever you need for the rest of your family. In this step, you are making the clearest announcement that you want and expect a change in your relationship with your child. If you have been executing the program properly, you have already shown yourself to be fair and respectful of your child's rights. In spite of all this, your child has not responded. Now you are employing Step 5 as a sort of preliminary shock treatment to get your teenager to treat you properly.

When you do this a few times most teens will begin to take your requests for change more seriously. Sometimes it takes a while, because teenagers are very preoccupied with themselves and what is going on in their lives. Quite often they will completely miss things that are blatantly obvious to everybody else. Don't be surprised if at some point your teen comes along and says:

“I didn't know that the mess I make bothers you so much.”

If Step 5 brings about the wanted changes, you should congratulate yourself. Step 5 is not so easy to execute. However, if after you have tried to apply Step 5 a number of times and you see no sign of improvement, then it might be necessary for you to move on to Step 6.