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A Temporary Pause

Step 6

Although I said there were only five steps, there is a sixth step. I didn't want to speak about this earlier for three reasons:

1. Step 6 is really just a global extension of Step 5.
2. Almost no one ever has to use it.
3. It is a very hard step for parents to take. I wanted you to hear everything else that comes earlier before worrying about ever getting to this point.

Step 6 is a hard step for parents to take no matter how bad the situation is. To do this successfully, you are going to need to focus on your long term goals with your teenager. That is, you want to have a good long term relationship with your child. Keep that in mind always.

Although you can execute this step on your own, I would recommend you consult some type of counseling professional before you do this, just to make sure that you have not overlooked another solution. Step 6 is drastic.

If your teenager has not responded to anything you have done up until now, then your only choice at this point is to put a temporary limit on your interaction. You are going to make a separation between you and your child. This is extremely hard for parents to do.

The first thing you must decide is how much of a separation you are willing to bring about. Here are some options.

You could:

- **Arrange for your child to move in with a relative.**
- **Send your child to a boarding school.** Keep in mind your child has to want this option. Boarding schools are very hesitant to accept students that don't want to be there.
- **Enroll your child in a troubled teen program.** This is a variation on the boarding school. There are numerous programs popping up all over the country that will help your teen. Some may not require your child to want to be there.
- **Have your teenager board by another family.** Your child may know of other families that will agree to let him stay there for a modest cost. The great advantage of this option is that your child knows that this family will never tolerate the kind of behavior that he has been showing you. If he doesn't behave himself, then the family is going to kick him out. This is a big incentive to change his behavior and is an excellent chance for growth.

- **Provide financial support but allow your teenager to make his own living arrangements.** You allow your child to find his own place to live, but you provide the money for room and board.
- **Declare to juvenile court that your child is out of your control and make him a ward of the court.** The court will place your child in a juvenile facility and you will have to pay for it.
- **Just send your child away from home.** Please note that unless your child is eighteen or considered an adult because he or she is married or has a child, this is against the law. Many parents do this anyway.

You have to choose how much of a break in the relationship you are willing to tolerate. Again, I stress that you do not do this on your own. You should seek professional counseling before you make such a drastic move.

Informing Your Child

Once you decide which path you are willing to choose, the next step is to inform your child.

You will make a two part statement. In the first part you will again state what you want. In the second part you state what you are going to do if you don't get what you want and by when you want it.

“George, I am extremely unhappy with our relationship. You have dropped out of school and do nothing to help out around here. I don't want a freeloader in my house. I am giving you two weeks to either return to school or get a job. If I don't see one of these things happen in the next two weeks, I am afraid you are going to have to find another place to live.”

“Betty, I simply will not tolerate your rude behavior and your coarse language anymore. If I don't see a change in the next few days, you are going to have to leave the house. I have already spoken with Uncle Ted, and he is willing to have you stay there if you so choose. But unless I see a real effort on your part to treat me better, you are not going to be allowed to live here.”

Waiting It Out

Now what you must do is wait. You must wait until the end of the time you have set to see if your child has made enough improvement to satisfy you. If so, then all you must do now is to continue to stand up for yourself to maintain these improvements.

If your child has not made the improvements you expect, then you must carry out what you said you would do after the stated amount of time. You must do this definitively and without guilt or hesitation. Know that this is what is best for your child.

Once your child is out of your house, you are not finished. You will probably feel a lot of guilt and remorse following the separation. This is normal, but painful.

What will also happen is that you may start receiving calls from friends, neighbors or relatives who are calling to intercede on your child's behalf. These people have invariably just heard your child's side of the story and based upon that try to convince you to give in. Keep in mind that you didn't ask your child to leave your home for some trivial misdemeanor. You have worked through the entire process of this program and after weeks or months of trying to reach out to your child and make a change, you were unsuccessful. Having your child move out was your last step. You had no choice. You should not let others pressure you into going back or feeling guilty.

What will also almost certainly happen is that your child will get in touch with you again. At that point you may see that your child is quite happy being out of the house and feels he is doing well. If so, then keep focused on your long term goals, to have a warm and loving relationship with your adult child. Be friendly and supportive. Your child is ready to be independent now. Apparently he or she was ready to leave home and needed your push to make the break. This frequently happens if your child is older.

What often happens is that your child is not so satisfied with the new living situation and wants to move back home. At this point you must decide if you feel that your child is committed to changing his behavior. If you feel your teenager is ready to comply, then state clearly what you expect from him. If he or she agrees then you may allow your child back in the house on a trial basis. However, if you feel that there is no real commitment to change, then you must say no.