

## Chapter 4: Teaching Your Teenager to Act Responsibly

### Step 1

Here is the first thing I want you to do:

Make a list of all the things that your teenager does that bothers you. Take your time and be sure to be as thorough as you can.

This list will be the basis of what you do in this program and it will serve as a list of items that you expect to improve. Therefore you should be as thorough as possible.

Most parents have 8-10 major complaints. I am giving you a place to write ninety things. If you need more space, please feel free to take it. Please be thorough.

1.	2.
3.	4.
5.	6.
7.	8.
9.	10.
11.	12.
13.	14.
15.	16.
17.	18.
19.	20.
21.	22.
23.	24.
25.	26.
27.	28.
29.	30.
31.	32.
33.	34.
35.	36.
37.	38.
39.	40.

In case you are having trouble thinking of things I am going to include here a list of eighty common complaints parents have about their teens.

Some of these things are more of a nuisance and some of them are quite serious.

Here is the list:

- Stays up late
- Stays out late
- Sneaks out of the house at night
- Stays away from home for days
- Doesn't care about school
- Doesn't do school work
- Won't go to school
- Failing in school
- Dropped out of school
- Getting expelled from school
- Lies
- Does not clean up after himself
- Leaves the bathroom mess
- Leaves dirty dishes around the house
- Leaves the kitchen a mess
- Uses my clothing without asking
- Gives away my things away to friends
- Dresses like a bum
- Wears too much make up
- Leaves his things outside where they can be stolen or ruined
- Leaves my things outside where they can be stolen or ruined
- Talks on the phone for hours
- Runs up a large long distance phone bill
- Watches too much TV
- Spends all day playing video games
- Spends all day online
- Has a bad attitude
- Is defiant
- Is argumentative
- Is moody
- Has bad friends
- Involved in a religious cult
- Brings friends over when I'm not home
- Steals from me
- Uses drugs
- Doesn't do anything productive
- Won't clean up his or her room
- Doesn't bath
- Won't do chores
- Has tantrums
- Threatens me
- Says she hates me

- Lies about me
- Tells others I mistreat her
- Uses bad language
- Disrespectful
- Defiant
- Constantly argues
- Refuses to obey rules
- Doesn't respect authority
- Doesn't accept responsibility
- Bad attitude
- Breaks things when angry
- Won't admit it when wrong
- Self centered
- Constant whining
- Apathetic
- Always blames others
- Manipulative
- Curses at me
- Rude to me
- Won't do things with the family
- Fights with siblings
- Smokes
- Uses alcohol
- Is sexually promiscuous
- Got pregnant or got girlfriend pregnant
- Had an abortion and is still promiscuous
- Gets angry a lot
- Yells
- Breaks things when angry
- Shoplifts
- Threatens suicide
- Tried to commit suicide
- Drives irresponsibly
- Stole someone's car
- Wrecked the car
- Drives drunk
- In trouble with the law
- Destroying my marriage



Here is an example of what the list might look like:

<b>Your Teen's Column</b>	<b>Your Column</b>	<b>Third Column</b>
Doesn't wash	Does not clean up after himself	<b>Uses drugs</b>
Dressed like a bum	Gives away my things away to friends	<b>Doesn't do anything productive</b>
	Leaves the kitchen a mess	<b>Watches too much TV</b>
	Leaves the bathroom a mess	<b>Smokes cigarettes</b>
	Leaves dirty dishes around the house	<b>Leaves things outside where they can be stolen or ruined</b>
	Is rude and disrespectful	

What you are going to have to do with the third column is to break down the behavior into parts. Those parts that affect you go into your column. Those parts that do not affect you belong in your child's column.

Your goal by the end of this part of the exercise is to have only two lists of items; those things that your child does that affect you and those things that do not affect you.

<b>Your Teen's Column</b>	<b>Your Column</b>
Doesn't wash	Does not clean up after himself
Dressed like a bum	Gives away my things away to friends
	Leaves the kitchen a mess
	Leaves the bathroom a mess
	Leaves dirty dishes around the house
	Is rude and disrespectful
<b>Uses drugs</b>	<b>Keeps illegal drugs in my house</b>
<b>Doesn't do anything productive</b>	<b>Is freeloading</b>
<b>Watches too much TV</b>	<b>Has the TV on loud all day long</b>
<b>Smokes cigarettes</b>	<b>Has Cigarette smoke and ashes all over the house</b>
<b>Leaves his things outside where they can be stolen or ruined</b>	<b>Leaves my things outside where they can be stolen or ruined</b>

If you are having trouble deciding in which list an item belongs, here are a few guidelines:

First, how would you feel if it was the neighbor's kid doing this and not your teen.

For example, most parents wouldn't care if the neighbor's kid didn't wash. Therefore if your child also doesn't wash it is really his problem and not yours. Not bathing belongs in your teen's column.

However, if your neighbor's child was stealing from you, this would upset you. So if your child is stealing from you this belongs in your column.

Another guideline to help you decide where a certain behavior belongs is to ask yourself if you can do anything about it.

For example, if your teenager drives your car recklessly, you can stop him by not allowing him to use the car. Driving your car recklessly belongs in your column. However, if your teen is smoking cigarettes or smoking other things and he is doing this when he is out of the house, you really have no control over the situation. Smoking out of the house belongs in your child's column.

Smoking is an example of something that you might want to divide up. If your child smokes in the house and this bothers you, smoking in the house belongs in your column because it does affect you. But as I said before smoking out of the house has nothing to do with you, nor can you do anything about it, so it belongs in your child's column. So smoking out of the house belongs in your teen's column.

So on the next page please write down the list of behaviors that disturb you and place them in the appropriate column. Again, please be thorough. This list is going to be what you work on during this program. Any behavior that is not on this list will not be addressed and will still present at the end of the program.





## Step 3

Now that you have divided all of those things that your child does that bother you, we are ready to proceed.

With your list in hand, we are now going to give over the responsibility for your teenager's column to your teen. By the end of this procedure, you will no longer have primary responsibility for those things on your teen's list. Rather they will be up to your teenager to manage these items.

This is how it works:

What you need to do now is to take your child's list and item by item you are going to give over the responsibility to your teen.

Here are the two steps:

1- First, you must trust that your child will make the right decisions for himself or herself in these matters.

2- You must communicate to your child that he or she is now responsible for this item and you trust him to do the correct thing.

I will give you an example how you can do this.

Let's say that you don't like how much makeup your daughter is wearing. As we discussed earlier, this is an item that really has nothing to do with you. You also might choose something like this because if your daughter makes what you feel is the wrong choice, no permanent harm will come of it. Eventually, she will grow out of this phase and the makeup will come off.

However, there might still be some parts of this behavior that does affect you directly.

First, she may be using your makeup, which can be expensive after a while. Also, you might be embarrassed to be seen with her in public. You should address both of these concerns.

Here is a typical statement that you can make:

“Jennifer, I have been very bothered by how much makeup you are wearing. But I have been thinking about it and I realize now it silly for me to try to control the way you dress.

First of all, I can't control how you decide to dress, and besides, how you dress really has nothing to do with me. For now on I am going to stay out of this and I

will trust your judgment to dress anyway you wish. I will offer my opinion if you ask, but basically it is your show from now on.”

Notice that the main thrust of this message is what "I" am thinking and what "I" have decided to do about it. You are saying nothing about how your daughter should behave or how she should feel.

Also, you are not asking questions or asking her to explain her behavior. There are no questions and there are no accusations. You are just informing your daughter of your decision.

The next part of the statement is going to address your reservations with this decision. You are going to discuss the things that directly affect you.

Here goes:

“However, Jennifer, makeup is expensive. I would request that you not use my makeup for now on. Also, since I am embarrassed when you dress up with too much makeup. I would like it if when you wish to go out in public with me that you would dress in a more conservative fashion so that I am not embarrassed.”

Again, notice that the main thrust of this message is what "I" want. You are not telling your daughter how to dress. You are just making it clear to her your conditions for being seen with you in public. You are letting your daughter make the choice. If she wishes for you to go with her somewhere, then she has to meet certain conditions.

You are also making it clear that you are not willing to fund her choice. If she wishes to continue, she will need to allocate her own spending money. Again the message is short. You are not lecturing or demanding, just communicating a decision that you have made.

The basic format is:

1. I have been bothered by something.
2. I am letting you be in charge of it for now on.
3. I trust your judgment.
4. I am willing to offer my opinion if asked.
5. I would like you to respect my feelings when what your doing concerns me.

Be clear and be short.

You should practice what you are going to say until you are comfortable with it, before you approach you teen.

Now it's show time. Find an appropriate time, when things are calm and deliver the message the way you have practiced it.

## Which Items Should You Choose?

Over the next few days or weeks as you are ready, start to give over responsibility for more and more of the items in your teenager's column to your teen. Again try to choose the biggest item you can choose, without feeling stress or worry. You are looking for the maximum gain with the minimum amount of stress.

What you are going to find if you do this successfully is that you are going to be much more relaxed. You are no longer going to be worried about a lot of things that you have no control over anyway. You also might feel that there is a lot less tension with your teen.

Here is another example from our list from before:

### **Informing your teenager:**

“Brian, I have been very bothered by how much television you are watching. It bothers me to see you wasting your time like that. But I have been thinking about it and I realize now it silly for me to try to control what you do with your time.

I can't control what you do with your time and really what you do with your time has nothing to do with me. For now on I am going to stay out of this and I will trust your judgment to decide how much television you watch. I will offer my opinion if you ask, but basically it is your show from now on.”

### **Stating your reservation with this decision:**

“However, Brian, the television is on very loud. During the day it is not a problem since nobody else is home. But at night the rest of us need to sleep. Since our television has a headphone jack I would like you to use the headphones after 11 pm.”

Over the next few days or weeks as you are ready, start to give over responsibility for more and more of the items in your teenager's column to your teen. Again try to choose the biggest item you can choose, without feeling stress or worry. You are looking for the maximum gain with the minimum amount of stress.

What you are going to find if you do this successfully is that you are going to be much more relaxed. You are no longer going to be worried about a lot of things that you have no control over anyway. You also might feel that there is a lot less tension with your teen.

Initially giving over responsibility may be difficult for you. I suggest that you pick the largest item you can without feeling an undo amount of stress. Try to initially choose

something that has no real significant long term consequences. For example, choose to target not bathing regularly rather than drug abuse or reckless driving.

I feel it is best that you keep a complete record of what you do and your child's reactions. I am going to provide you with a place to do this in the workbook.

## Worksheet: Giving Over Responsibility

This worksheet is for items from your teenager's list. Please try to keep an accurate record of what happens. Make note of what things work best for you. This will make it much easier to apply this program as things come up in the future.

---

**Target Behavior 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

Starting Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Aspects of the Behavior that Affect You:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Prepared Statement:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Reservation Statement:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Date Statement Delivered** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Teenager's Initial Reaction:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Results Target Item 1:

Day	# Times/Day Target Item Happened	Did you react or intervene? (yes/no)	Level of tension in the home with regard to this behavior: (Better/same/worse)	Comments: write any difficulties or obstacles you may be having.
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				

You should wait until this behavior is going smoothly and you are satisfied with your results before targeting the next item.

### When to add the next item:

You will be ready to go on when:

- The # times/day the target item happens stabilizes. (Note: initially your child may try to do the behavior more often to test to see if you are serious about giving over responsibility for the item to him.)
- You do not react or intervene when the behavior occurs
- When the level of tension with regard to this item is better or the same. (Note: if it is worse, it is a sign that you really have not given over the responsibility to your child.)

From your teenager's list:

**Target Behavior 2:** \_\_\_\_\_

Starting Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Aspects of the Behavior that Affect You:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Prepared Statement:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Reservation Statement:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Date Statement Delivered** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Teenager's Initial Reaction:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Results Target Item 2:

Day	# Times/Day Target Item Happened	Did you react or intervene? (yes/no)	Level of tension in the home with regard to this behavior: (Better/same/worse)	Comments: write any difficulties or obstacles you may be having.
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				

You should wait until this behavior is going smoothly and you are satisfied with your results before targeting the next item.



From your teenager's list:

**Target Behavior 3:** \_\_\_\_\_

Starting Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Aspects of the Behavior that Affect You:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Prepared Statement:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Reservation Statement:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date Statement Delivered** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Teenager's Initial Reaction:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Results Target Item 3:

Day	# Times/Day Target Item Happened	Did you react or intervene? (yes/no)	Level of tension in the home with regard to this behavior: (Better/same/worse)	Comments: write any difficulties or obstacles you may be having.
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				

You should wait until this behavior is going smoothly and you are satisfied with your results before targeting the next item.

From your teenager's list:

**Target Behavior 4:** \_\_\_\_\_

Starting Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Aspects of the Behavior that Affect You:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Prepared Statement:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Reservation Statement:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date Statement Delivered** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Teenager's Initial Reaction:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Results Target Item 4:

Day	# Times/Day Target Item Happened	Did you react or intervene? (yes/no)	Level of tension in the home with regard to this behavior: (Better/same/worse)	Comments: write any difficulties or obstacles you may be having.
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				

You should wait until this behavior is going smoothly and you are satisfied with your results before targeting the next item.

From your teenager's list:

**Target Behavior 5:** \_\_\_\_\_

Starting Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Aspects of the Behavior that Affect You:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Prepared Statement:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Reservation Statement:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date Statement Delivered** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Teenager's Initial Reaction:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Results Target Item 5:

Day	# Times/Day Target Item Happened	Did you react or intervene? (yes/no)	Level of tension in the home with regard to this behavior: (Better/same/worse)	Comments: write any difficulties or obstacles you may be having.
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				

You should wait until this behavior is going smoothly and you are satisfied with your results before targeting the next item.

From your teenager's list:

**Target Behavior 6:** \_\_\_\_\_

Starting Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Aspects of the Behavior that Affect You:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Prepared Statement:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Reservation Statement:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date Statement Delivered** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Teenager's Initial Reaction:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Results Target Item 6:

Day	# Times/Day Target Item Happened	Did you react or intervene? (yes/no)	Level of tension in the home with regard to this behavior: (Better/same/worse)	Comments: write any difficulties or obstacles you may be having.
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				

You should wait until this behavior is going smoothly and you are satisfied with your results before targeting the next item.



From your teenager's list:

**Target Behavior 7:** \_\_\_\_\_

Starting Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Aspects of the Behavior that Affect You:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Prepared Statement:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Reservation Statement:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date Statement Delivered** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Teenager's Initial Reaction:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Results Target Item 7:

Day	# Times/Day Target Item Happened	Did you react or intervene? (yes/no)	Level of tension in the home with regard to this behavior: (Better/same/worse)	Comments: write any difficulties or obstacles you may be having.
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				

You should wait until this behavior is going smoothly and you are satisfied with your results before targeting the next item.

From your teenager's list:

**Target Behavior 8:** \_\_\_\_\_

Starting Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Aspects of the Behavior that Affect You:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Prepared Statement:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Reservation Statement:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date Statement Delivered** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Teenager's Initial Reaction:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Results Target Item 8:

Day	# Times/Day Target Item Happened	Did you react or intervene? (yes/no)	Level of tension in the home with regard to this behavior: (Better/same/worse)	Comments: write any difficulties or obstacles you may be having.
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				

You should wait until this behavior is going smoothly and you are satisfied with your results before targeting the next item.