

9

Establishing Your Rights

There are three steps to standing up for your rights:

1. Deciding what your rights are.
2. Being prepared to defend them.
3. Being open with your teenager.

Deciding Upon Your Rights

What exactly are your rights? Well, they are really whatever you decide they should be. You see, you are the parent; therefore, you are really in control of the situation.

If your teenager is walking all over you, then the reason is because you permitted the relationship to get that way. The same way you unconsciously allowed this to happen you can consciously change it.

One of the obstacles you are up against is that since you have never claimed your personal rights before, your child feels that you have waved them already. He believes you don't have these rights anymore, and your teenager is going to feel cheated and resentful when you begin to claim your right to fair and equal treatment. If your teenager has been doing some of the things that are in your column and they bother you, it is probably because you have been taking fewer rights than you think are fair to you.

Now we are going to work on reestablishing your rights. To do this you will have to have a clear idea what rights you choose to have, be ready to stand on them and to defend them. What rights you choose are up to you; there are no rules here, except to be fair. **Note that these rights go both ways. Anything you wish to claim for yourself, you should be prepared to give to your teenager also.** That is the basis of having a fair and equitable relationship.

The following is a sample list of rights you might choose to have:

- The right to privacy.
- The right to enjoy a relationship with your spouse.
- The right to be free of fear of violence.
- The right to have your belongings safe.
- The right to your own private time.
- The right to have a reasonable amount of peace and quite.
- The right to be treated with courtesy.
- The right to be treated with respect.
- The right to close up the house at night and have no one enter or leave.
- The right to have everyone help in the home; no free loaders.

You may be thinking that since you have certain obligations by law, then you really cannot insist upon your rights. It is true that you are legally responsible for your children in most states; however, there is no law that states you must put up with disrespect, emotional and physical abuse. The same laws that require you to be responsible for your child require your child to attend school and obey your reasonable orders and follow your instructions. True, you may have financial obligations if your child does damage, but these obligations usually have a reasonable ceiling. Also, whether or not someone else is going to sue you for the damage your child does has nothing to do with your right to insist on good treatment from your child. More than that, in families where the parents stand up for themselves, teenagers are much more careful about doing damage to others in the first place.

Before you go further, open your workbook to Chapter 9 and create the list of rights that you choose to have, bearing in mind that you have to give them to your teenager also.

Be Prepared to Confront

It is one thing to decide on the rights you want but it is quite another thing to stand up for these rights. But that is exactly what you are going to need to do. You are going to have to defend what you have decided you want.

This might be the most difficult part of the process for you. No one enjoys confrontation; however, you are going to have to stand up for yourself and not allow your teenager to bully you. If your teenager is normal, he is going to fight back to keep what he perceives as his rights from being violated. So you might as well be prepared for the battle. You should know that it is quite normal to try to avoid conflict. Most people hate it and would prefer to avoid confrontation rather than engage in it. But you should know that the less afraid you are of conflict, and the more confident you are, the less likely major conflicts will occur.

What commonly happens when you stand up for your rights is that your child will fight back. He or she may do this in a variety of ways. Your teenager may attack you verbally by saying things like “You don’t care about me” or “I hate you.” He or she may punish you with the silent treatment or walk around with a gloomy abused look. Your child may get angry, have a tantrum or even break things. The reason for this is that when your teenager sees you standing up for yourself, he is going to act out in order to bully or blackmail you into giving in. However your child chooses to react, the more resolved you are to stand firm on your rights the less dramatic your teenager’s reaction will be. Tantrums take a lot of energy, and no one is going to put the energy into throwing a good tantrum when he sees that it is going to make no impression.

You may be avoiding confrontation because you really have no idea how to react to it. Many parents are at a loss of what to do when their children act out and they don’t know how to respond. If that is what is holding you back, we shall be discussing how to react to specific situations later in the program; so this is not going to be a problem for you by the time we finish.

I think we should point out that knowing how to stand up for yourself is an important life skill and is something that your child really does need to know. There is no better way for your child to learn this than to experience you doing it for yourself. With that in mind, you should view this process as part of your obligation to prepare your child for being an adult. In truth, this whole program can be viewed that way. Although the details may change, the basic conflicts that you are experiencing with your teenager are the same types of conflicts your grandparents had with your parents and the same types of conflicts your children will have with your grandchildren. By learning how to handle them properly, you are giving your teenager a valuable lesson on how to be a good parent for his or her future teenager. Conversely, if you ignore these problems or just feel helpless, you are setting your child up for similar difficulties when he or she is a parent.

Being Open

We have already discussed the importance of telling your teenager how you feel about certain situations. Again I stress, telling how you feel about a situation rather than what he should be doing. Expressing your feelings is a very important part of being a parent.

Most teenagers are completely unaware of what is going on around them. Most teenagers don't realize their parents have any feelings and even if they do they rarely take these feelings into account. This is not because they are callous or evil or selfish. It is more because that it just never occurs to them that their parents are also people. By openly expressing how you feel about things that your child is doing, you are reminding your teenager that he is not alone in the world. You also exist. Even if your teenager knows this, he often forgets. Sometimes just reminding your child that you do exist and that you have feelings too, is enough to take away a lot of the conflict.

Conclusion

I want to briefly summarize what we have said so far. We have been discussing how many of the problems you are having are caused by your own attitude toward the situation with your teenager. With that in mind, by changing your attitude you have the ability to turn things around completely and take charge of what is going on.

Here are some of the things to remember:

Remember Your Goals

You want to be a happy person and you want your teenager to grow up to be a normal responsible member of society who can function effectively and make his own decisions. Remember to focus on those things that promote these goals and avoid things that detract from them.

Look for the Good in Your Teenager

Your teenager is basically good. Much of the difficult or confusing behavior you are experiencing is a result of his immaturity. Your teenager is trying to grow up and the process is difficult for him. Much of the behavior you see is not an attempt to defy you; it comes from his need for independence and has nothing to do with you. A lot of times, your teenager may fight with you just to get you to take back control. Your teenager may feel overwhelmed and he is fighting with you as a way to get you to take away some of the responsibility. You can probably view most of the senseless conflicts this way.

Establish Equality

You should strive for an equal and equitable relationship with your teenager. That means you should receive respect and your child also needs your respect. It means you should have control of certain aspects of the relationship that directly affect you, and your teenager should have control of the things that don't affect you.

Decide Upon and Stand Up for Your Rights

This is a very important part of taking care of yourself. Also, realize that in addition to helping yourself, you are also teaching your teenager how to behave as a parent, which is an important lesson for him to learn.

Be Prepared for Conflict

It will happen. How much or how little depends on your attitude. The more firmly resolved you are to stand on your rights, the less conflict you will experience.

Be Open

By being open and honest with your teenager you will be much more successful in reducing conflict and developing your relationship.

Many times your teenager doesn't intend to hurt you, he just doesn't take into account that you have feelings. Teens are very self centered and tend to forget that their parents are human. By being open you are reminding them of this fact.