

Handling Those Teen Demands For More Responsibility

from the American Counseling Association

One of the most common areas of conflict as children enter the teenage years is the complaint that they're not babies anymore, that they can make their own decisions, that they deserve more freedom and responsibility.

It can be hard for many parents to deal with these complaints. After years of making most of your child's decisions and putting your child's needs first, you find yourself confronting a young adult who wants the freedom to face more of the world on his or her own.

Of course, we all recognize that our teenagers need increasing amounts of freedom and responsibility. It's a natural part of the developmental process.

We also realize there are very real reasons to go slow in allowing our teens more freedoms. Constant news reports of teen substance abuse, pregnancies, violence and much more naturally make us worry about the world our teen is facing.

But when we constantly say "no" to our teens' requests, trying to protect them just a little longer, the result is often family conflict, with our teenager pulling away and no longer confiding in us, or going behind our backs seeking the desired freedom.

To minimize such conflict, a simple solution is to improve communications.

Sit down with your teen and try to explain your fears and anxieties related to granting increased freedoms. While hearing about your worries may not win your teen's full acceptance or understanding, it can open up meaningful dialogues that can lead to acceptable compromises.

The next step is to allow increasing amounts of freedom and responsibilities – opportunities for your teenager to prove he or she really is ready to be more independent.

How much can you trust? How much responsibility should you grant? There are no absolute answers, just judgment calls you have to make based on your teen's personality and past performance.

Yes, mistakes will be made, but also note that most of the time things will turn out just fine. Try to understand that this is also a difficult and often confusing process for your teen.

Your decisions are still going to worry you, and may upset your teen at times, but when you make a conscious effort to allow increased levels of freedom and responsibility, while also fairly measuring how well your teen handles the changes, you should find that the struggles with your teenager should begin to diminish.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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