

Information Sheet – Parenting Series

Parenting Adolescents

Differences of opinion which arise between individuals are a normal part of life. During their children's adolescence, parents may have difficulty adjusting their attitude from being the "all-knowing" individual to allow for their teenagers' emerging opinions and independence. The 'black-and-white' mindset of "I'm right/you're wrong" (whether held by the parent or the adolescent) is not helpful in settling disagreements.

Conflict Escalators & De-escalators

Common, unhelpful behaviours can arise during parent/adolescent interactions, that escalate conflict and damage relationships. These include:

- Blaming, put-downs, threats, insults
- Talking over the top of each other
- Swearing/sarcasm
- Bringing up the past
- Stonewalling (i.e. refusing to discuss the issue)
- Demands, criticism, accusations, comparisons
- Giving orders or advice
- Exaggerating
- Facial expressions (e.g. scowling, eye-rolling)
- Verbalising (e.g. groaning, sighing, mocking)
- Gestures (e.g. shaking head, hands on hips)

Behaviours that will de-escalate conflict:

- Listening without interrupting or trying to "win"
- Reflecting back what you've heard and checking understanding
- Using "I" statements to state your point of view
- Owning your own feelings
- Avoiding getting hooked by negative comments/abuse
- Sticking to the issue at hand
- Being accurate
- Being open to negotiation
- Relaxing your body and slowing your breathing
- Lowering the volume of your voice

- Keeping your messages concise; avoiding monologues
- Apologising if warranted.

Sometimes nothing will be resolved while both parties are emotional, and it will be helpful to take a **Time-Out** for an agreed length of time, to calm yourselves before revisiting the issue. During your Time-Outs, do something soothing or burn off some energy.

Once everyone is calm, the use of humour can also be very helpful to lighten the mood and encourage reconnection.

Engaging Adolescents' Co-operation

A frequent point of conflict is when parents need their adolescent to complete a task, as teens often resist being told what to do. Following are some helpful tips for parents:

- Describe your request simply, concisely and respectfully;
- Be clear about your expectations (e.g., timing, standards);
- Consider offering a choice of tasks.

Unhelpful ways to try and elicit co-operation include:

- Ordering
- Demeaning/criticising
- Threats
- Lectures
- Angry reprimands
- Nagging.

Alternatives to Punishment

For adolescents, it can be more useful to work together with their parents to devise a consequence for misbehaviour. This can involve inviting your teen to express their point of view, then expressing your own along with your clear expectations of behaviour. You can then let your adolescent know how they can make amends (perhaps provide a choice) and act on what is decided.