

Power Parenting and Teenagers

Contributed by Mark Gregston
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Sometimes the most powerful thing you can do as a parent is to give up some of your power in order to empower your teenager. I tell parents all the time, if you want your child to grow up, you have to let go of some of the power and control over their life.

It boils down to one very simple concept — the best way to empower your teenager is to gradually share the power you have, allowing them more and more control and responsibility for their own decisions.

{bot_wrgoogle}For the helicopter parent, the habit of picking up the slack, covering all the bases, answering all the questions, solving all the problems, and making everything easy for their teen is not doing the teenager any real favors. Instead, it keeps them immature, dependent and powerless.

Responsibility becomes an internal life force when parents empower a child to make decisions, line out their options, define the consequences, and then let them choose.

If your teenager is fully capable of doing well, communicate that belief to him by handing over more and more control and responsibility. Fortunately, most teens want to take control of things in their life — so let them. Let them make choices, but also let them bear the responsibility for those choices. Line out their options, define the consequences, and then let them choose. Then, don't rescue them or hold back one bit in relation to enforcing consequences for their poor choices. And don't forget to congratulate and reward them for making good choices!

When empowered, your teen's expectations will shift away from leaning on mom and dad to fix everything, to understanding that they are the ones responsible for how things turn out. They may make many mistakes before they begin to understand what good decision-making looks like. And they may even try every trick in the book to get you to rescue them out of their poor choices. But don't do it! Hold them responsible, just as they will some day be held accountable as an adult.

When to Exercise Full Parental Power

Now, let me address the family dealing with a teen who is already spinning out of control or has issues with drugs or alcohol. This issue is entirely different. In this day and age, a child choosing to self-destruct or to live a dangerous lifestyle could end up in serious trouble, or could even die. In situations like this, empowerment shifts back to the parent, who must intervene and retake decisive control.

In this case, I recommend taking whatever measures are necessary to insure the safety of your teen. It's up to you to create a solution, such as counseling or rehab, or he may need to live somewhere else while going through this. And you, too, will need to surround yourself with good counsel and a group of godly friends who are willing to pray with you and encourage you.

Before you determine the needed changes, get the right kind of counsel to map out a plan of action. Then, with plan in hand, and with all the power you can muster, communicate this message: "Honey - we love you. Nothing you do or say will make us love you any less, and nothing you do or say will make us love you any more. But we are not going to live like this anymore. Since you are not making the right choices on your own, here is what will change in your life, as

of today…”

As always, we’re here to help in this process and especially to help you map out your plan of action. Call our Help line at 866-700-3264 or visit our FamilyCrisisCoaching.com web page for more information. Or, look into our quarterly Families in Crisis Conference, coming up in late January. More about the 3-day retreat can be seen at www.FamilyCrisisConference.com.

In Closing…

I want to share a heartbreaking email message I just this minute received as I was finishing writing this article, this time from a teenager…

I have been in a program before but was kicked out because I didn’t want to obey the rules. When I got out I realized I needed help and wish I could go back. I suffer from depression and cut myself. I attempted suicide and almost died, then went to a program and didn’t want help so didn’t take it. I can be very verbally abusive to my parents and do hit them. I was adopted and have had lots of issues with that. I need help and am willing to do whatever it takes to receive it. –Marie (age 15)

Some may believe that teenage problems are generally trivial and “child’s play,” or that parents are just overreacting. I hope that such a plea for help from a dear 15 year old teenager sheds a different light on the struggles of teenagers today and what we deal with every day here at the Heartlight Residential Counseling Center.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Mark Gregston is an author, speaker, national radio host, and the founder of the Heartlight Residential Counseling Center for Struggling Teens. More teen parenting <http://www.markgregston.com>.