



How to Deal with a Rude Teenager

The teen years bring special challenges. Teens generally want more freedom than they had as children. They are more influenced by peers and movies. They are often less compliant. They are more likely to be rude to parents, siblings, and others.

As teenagers try out their ideas on family members, they may sound very confident. If challenged, they may be very defensive. This can be irritating if we do not understand them. If we see a teenager as a relatively inexperienced person struggling to become an adult, we can be more patient and supportive.

Haim Ginott, one of the world's greatest psychologists, tells that it is common, when our teens get in trouble, to take sides against them. He suggests that they need an advocate, someone who will understand their situation and help them. We do not condone misbehavior, but "in the most difficult situations [the parent] tries to see the extenuating circumstances and to provide aid and hope."

It may help us to remember back when we were teens. Most of us felt very lonely and clumsy at times. If we were lucky, we had people who were patient with us, who loved us, who saw past the weaknesses.

Sometimes teens will make outlandish statements with bold bravado. "The problem with our country is . . ." It is very tempting to react to their arrogance and to their misinformation. If we understand them, we react in a different way. "I'm glad you are taking an interest in our country. What things might help us do better?"

Sometimes teens demand freedom to do foolish things. Again, it is easy to criticize them, but growth starts with understanding. "It would be fun to go to the lake for the weekend with your friends." "You are a person who likes adventure."

Understanding is not the same thing as agreement. We can understand their enthusiasm and still resist the conclusion. "What concerns do you have about the trip?" We can also start creative cooperation with our teens when we use the right words and attitude: "It would be fun for you to go to the lake with your friends. I have some concerns. Let's talk about them and see if we can find some solutions."

It is popular to portray the teen years as a time of storm and strife. The reality is that there are bumps and jars in the process of growing up but, when we are patient and understanding, the teen years can be a time of growth and closeness unlike anything that came before.