

The Teenage Years: Making Them Easier for Parents and Young People

'Sometimes I look at my daughter and cannot believe we are such good friends now,' said Lien. 'We had so many bad fights when she was a teenager that I thought we would end up hating each other.'

Lien's experience is not unique. For some families the teenage years can be difficult and filled with conflict. To some extent this is normal; after all it is a time when teenagers are coping with emotional and physical changes that can often make them moody and rebellious.

But for Lien these years were particularly difficult because, like many parents coming to Canada from overseas, she wanted to bring her children up according to the traditions of her home country. But this way was often very different to the Canadian way. At home families were stricter, but in Canada children had more freedom. Knowing that other girls in her class could go out on weekends or stay overnight at each other's houses, Lien's daughter wanted to do the same.

'She would argue with me every time I told her she could not go out,' Lien remembers. 'What made this worse was that my own parents were living with us and I could feel their disapproval. They disapproved of my daughter because she argued with me, and they disapproved of me because they thought I could not control her.'

It is a familiar story and it is not surprising that parents who are often working long hours to give their children a better life feel their children are disrespectful. But parents and young people both have something in common; both are struggling to come to terms with living with the values of two different cultures. At home teenagers may be expected to obey rules without question, yet outside the home they are growing up in a society where it is not necessarily considered disrespectful for young people to have strong opinions and think for themselves. Teenagers may want to please their parents, yet they also want to feel accepted by their Canadian friends.

Although it is normal for young people to be moody and difficult sometimes, this does not mean parents should tolerate unacceptable behaviour, but it helps if they can show patience and understanding. Teenagers may not have the same responsibilities as their parents, but they may still have things to worry about. They may feel under pressure to succeed at school, and under pressure to fit in with other young people. They may also be worried about issues like unemployment and the environment which make them feel uncertain about their future. They often feel unfairly criticised by adults too. When we read or hear news about young people in the media, it is likely to be about the bad things they do, rather than the good things. Yet the reality is that most young people are not troublemakers.

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What can parents do to avoid problems with teenagers? It is sometimes tempting to be very strict, but harsh discipline can make teenage behaviour worse. On the other hand, teenagers who have a good relationship with at least one parent have less risk of getting into serious trouble. Good ways for parents to improve their relationship with their children include

- Showing you care about them (even when they are being horrible)
- Taking an interest in them and the things they do
- Spending regular and relaxed time with them (even if you are busy) and finding things to do together you can both enjoy
- Letting them know you notice the good things that they do

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