

Discipline and Teens

Dr. Don Dinkmeyer, Jr.

Co-Author, STEP Programs

How many of us have ever been a teen? What do you recall from those years of change and challenge? How did our parents handle the changes, and challenges?

Let's understand some of the issues surrounding teen discipline. Teens are in a "neverland" – not a child, not an adult. They think, however, they are adult and often act as if they are not bound by any parental constraints. Their physical attributes can become more adult-like than their thinking abilities.

The use of logical consequences and choices becomes important when disciplining teens. *At all times, discipline should be a learning experience.* It is often helpful to negotiate the consequences with the teen. Statements such as "What would you do if you were the parent?" or "What would be fair?" have two underlying assumptions – there is mutual respect, and this consequence is being established for a future situation.

It is, in my experience, almost impossible to create consequences at the moment the problem occurs. Tensions are too high and statements are often not well thought out.

With teens, the steps are simply:

- Identify the goal
- Decide who owns the problem
- Offer choices
- Follow through

When having trouble with consequences, consider these factors:

- Examine your attitude and maintain mutual respect
- Allow the teen to experience the consequence
- Check to see if the consequence fits the misbehavior
- Add more time to the consequence if the teen continues to misbehave

Having an open attitude does not mean being a push-over. *It means expecting respect, but giving it, too.*

A key phrase is "I see you've decided to..." and stating the consequence. Another way to respond to protests is a firm "Nevertheless, you've decided to..."

Many parents expect a teen to never experience a consequence. This is unrealistic. For example, when curfew is missed, the choice is made. If the consequence is applied, missed curfew is in fact a learning experience. Our goal is to help teens understand and experience the "cause and effect" relationship between their decisions and what follows next. Our goal is to teach self-discipline.

Much of teen discipline is about limits outside the immediate household – speed limits on highways, curfew limits, limits on what can or cannot be consumed. It seems there is little difference between parenting a two-year old with repetitive "don't" and telling a teen "you can't".

The clearer the limits, the better. "Don't be back late" is different from "be back by 1130", for example. When limits are exceeded, consequences apply. If this is applied only in a reactive, "hit and run" approach using heated words at the moments of conflict, discipline fails.

Teen discipline focuses on respect, choices, positive expectations, and firmness.

Discussion

1. What is an example of a natural consequence with a teen?
2. Identify a discipline issue and brainstorm several consequences that fit the steps discussed above.
3. What is an example of a vague or unclear consequence? A clear consequence?
4. How would you complete this sentence, "I learned..."

PERMISSION TO COPY FOR USE IN THE STEP PROGRAMS GRANTED BY STEP PUBLISHERS, LLC. © 2011