

How to deal with your teen's angry words

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Being a parent of a young child can be a difficult job, but most parents haven't seen anything until the teen years arrive.

If you have a teenager living under your roof, you probably know all about the arguments and how they can go nowhere fast. Maybe you've wondered if there was another way to handle it that didn't involve arguing or yelling.

Christina Botto, author of "Help Me with My Teenager! A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents That Works," said there are some ways to help stop the arguments and help parents and teens see eye-to-eye.

"There is a bunch of different ways to go. Parents know their teens the best, just like the teen knows how to push a parent's buttons," Botto said. "The character or the way the teen acts comes into play with what way a parent handles it."

Botto said parents can choose among three ways of handling an issue with their teen: authority, understanding or selective hearing.

"The authority way would be saying, 'I'm not going to argue, so once you get loud or disrespectful, we'll stop and reconvene later after we both calm down.' Parents are in control of the situation," Botto said. "The understanding way is when a teen speaks, the parent tries to listen and understand. If the teen tells the parent, 'You don't understand,' the parent should ask why the teen thinks that."

The selective hearing way is to ignore certain comments and focus on a question.

"The question can open up a whole big area of explanation," Botto said. "Parents pick up on certain things and get defensive. An example would be if the teen asks why you stopped at a yellow light while driving. If you focus on the 'why,' you really give your reasons. You can give a valuable, indirect lesson, and you are also communicating."

Wendy Kraemer of Stroudsburg knows about arguing with teens firsthand. She is the mother of two girls — ages 14 and 17 — and said that between the ages of 13 and 15, her kids really like arguing.

"My oldest is past that phase now, but the youngest is in full force. My oldest slammed her door and stormed to her room constantly," Kraemer said. "Eventually, instead of letting her run away, I forced her to sit on the couch next to me until she calmed down. It worked to make the door slamming stop, but it didn't make her any less angry. I always tried to talk to her, and it always made me angry. Over time, I learned to diffuse the situation by just letting her run to her room and allowing myself to cool down. She would eventually come back down and we would talk."

Kraemer said it's a bit different with her 14-year-old daughter. She's more argumentative than her older sister.

"She did the door slamming, too. I got angry, too, trying to be the parent and 'what I say goes.' But teenagers are unreasonable, and they don't think they need the parent, so I learned to let her go to her room, but she is not allowed to slam the door," Kraemer said. "She stays in there and I stay in the house until we both calm down and talk. Usually by the time it all calms down, we both feel bad about arguing."

Dr. Ann McDonald, a psychiatrist at Pocono Medical Center, said parents should expect arguments with their teens, and that the teenage years are the trial-and-error years.

"As they are throwing out the seed for an argument, they are trying to get your feedback and will disagree with you no matter what you are saying," she said. "When talking to them, be prepared that they will only hear so much."

One thing parents need to impress upon their teens is: "I am here to listen." And keeping the lines of communication open is critical.

"Keep lines of communication open by understanding what your teen is saying. Teens haven't mastered the art of communication or expressing themselves properly. Parents have to help that along," Botto said. "Patience and self-confidence are important. As parents, it's our jobs to help our children with their problems."

One issue that can start an argument between parent and teen is freedom. Teens want it, and parents may be reluctant to give it.

"Freedom is something that needs to be earned," Botto said. "Have reasons for not wanting your teen to do something. Parents don't say no just to say no. Communicate the reasons why you're saying no."

Kraemer said her teens want a lot of freedom, but she doesn't like them running around all the time.

"I have created an environment in my home where the kids feel comfortable hanging out and talking. I try to talk with them at times, and at other times I leave them alone, but I am always home with them," Kraemer said. "But they do need to be given small freedoms, and as long as they follow the rules, you can loosen the reins a little bit."

One thing Kraemer said never works is engaging in confrontation. Talking, listening and forgiving are the better way to go.

"Forgive yourself, if every now and again you do end up in an argument with them. Their hormones are crazy, and sometimes you're having a bad day," she said. "No one is perfect."

McDonald said there are no magic words, and all people are different.

"What works with one child won't be the same as what works with another. The hardest thing that any parent does is not arguing back. It's so easy to blow up," McDonald said. "One of the most important things for parents is support. It's important to have it, or you think you are the only one going through it."