

When It's Time to Act

[Image]For parents, there is no worse feeling than watching your child spin out of control while nothing you do seems to make any difference. If your teenager's behavior is giving you feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and fear, I would like to offer you some suggestions.

First, stop what you are doing and start a new way of thinking in regard to how you are handling the situation. Albert Einstein defined insanity as “*Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.*” If your home is feeling a little insane these days, perhaps you need to change how it operates.

Start in a new direction by first talking to others, like your friends, pastor, youth minister, your parents, your child's teachers, and the rest of the family. You need to gain wisdom and a sense of reality regarding the situation. Are you blowing it out of proportion, or perhaps not even noticing how bad it has become? Is your teenager just acting out at home, or are they behaving even worse when away from home? People around you will know, and they can help you gain perspective.

Accepting the reality of the problem is difficult for some parents. They won't acknowledge it because to them it would be accepting responsibility for failure. Others tend to see just the good and believe no wrong in their children. They are blinded to what everyone around them can already see; that is, until it becomes a full blown crisis or tragedy. So when you come to a right “realization,” don't hesitate to begin your search for a resolution by validating your suspicions with those around you. They know what's going on and will be glad that you finally see the light.

WHAT IS AN “OUT OF CONTROL TEEN”? An out of control teenager is one who doesn't appear to have the internal ability to function within established boundaries and rules of the home or society. Their behaviors, if allowed to continue, could have dangerous or grave consequences for them physically, for their future, or for your family.

When Is It Time to Act?

I'm sure you wish this situation wasn't at your doorstep. But it is, so you have to act on your child's behalf. And no matter how lonely it might be, or how difficult it might appear; no matter what your child's response, you must act quickly.

STEP ONE: INVESTIGATE

It is critical to ask questions to get to the root of what is causing your child's change in behavior. Is he depressed? Is he being bullied, abused, or using drugs or alcohol? Has a major loss happened in your family recently? Most of the time, parents find out way too late about underlying causes of a child's behavior. Communication is key at this time. If the lines of communication are down, then re-establish them—forcing communication if need be. Require time from your child to discuss how they're doing before you pay their next car insurance bill, give them gas money, or hand over the keys

to the car. Determine to establish the lines of communication and make sure you ask lots of questions.

Find out how your child is acting outside of the home. Talk to your child's teachers and coaches, kids at church, your own parents, your siblings, their siblings, your friends, their friends, their youth minister and just about anyone who has had contact with your child. See if they have any insights into why your child's behavior has changed. In fact, if your teen's friends show up at your home, don't be afraid to ask them what's going on. Some will be honest, as they might be just as concerned as well. Just make sure you ask questions, and ask everyone to be honest with you.

STEP TWO: SET BOUNDARIES

Establish and communicate clear boundaries for behavior by all members of your family (not just your wayward teen). Determine what you hold to be true and the principles upon which you will base your rules for living. Communicate and live by these boundaries, rather than "shooting from the hip" every time something comes up. Make a policy and procedure manual for your home, so everyone knows what to expect. Spend some time determining how you want to live and put some feet to it to ensure that all understand those boundaries.

STEP THREE: ESTABLISH AND ENFORCE CONSEQUENCES

Once boundaries are in place, there must be reasonable consequences for inappropriate behavior, and they must be enforced, or your credibility goes right out the window. And keep in mind that they must be enforced for all members of the family, not just your teen, so they don't feel singled out.

Parents today tend to be so relational that they find it hard to send a strong message to "not go this way" for fear of losing their relationship. But what most parents don't understand is that kids do want direction, correction and help in moving through the transition to adulthood. Tom Landry once said, "*A coach makes people do things they don't want to do so they can get to a place where they do want to be.*" Parents must do the same for their children.

STEP FOUR: GET OUTSIDE HELP

"He who asks is a fool for five minutes, but he who does not ask remains a fool forever." — Chinese Proverb

Perhaps your child's issues are deeper and they'll need professional counseling or medication to get through it. And maybe you'll need counseling to get through it as well. Find a good counselor that specializes in teen behavior, and trust what they recommend. If you're going to pick and choose the counsel you receive, then you'll more than likely just continue to do what you want, and your child will continue to spin out of control. Don't let old beliefs about medicine control your new decisions that have to be made for your child. If your child is depressed or anxious, has ADD, or OCD, can't sleep at night, is bi-polar, or has a true mental condition that demands medication, don't let your outdated boundaries prevent your child from getting help from something that is essential to their well being.

Hospitalization may even be needed if you feel that your child is a danger to himself or herself. Extreme cutting, eating disorders, bizarre behavior, extreme depression, suicidal thoughts, or excessive drug or alcohol abuse are just a few of the symptoms that might warrant hospitalization. Don't

hesitate to hospitalize your child just because you don't know what it is. It's better to be safe than sorry.

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