

MENDING BROKEN FENCES

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We often feel defeated in our parenting efforts particularly when it comes to our teens. We do the very best we know how, but sometimes our kids just don't turn out as we hoped and prayed they would. If we were only given a second, third and fourth chance to 'do it better' we know we would eventually get it right. However, in the process of raising our kids things can go wrong. Often hurtful things are said, blame is thrown around and sometimes we even feel that bridges with our children have been burned.

When it comes down to it, what we want is a 'win/win' situation where our teens and we, parents, are satisfied with one another's performance. I was taught that for both sides to win, there needed to be compromise. However, I heard a great talk the other night on how to achieve the 'win/win' situation without compromise.

Our speakers explained that both sides CAN win when they ask each other, "What will make this a win situation for you?" Then act on it. I heard a great illustration on this subject once. Two kids were fighting over an orange. Their mother got so sick of them arguing that she took the orange off them without asking what they each wanted. One wanted the orange, and the other the peel. There was a 'win/win' sitting right there, but neither asked the question, "What will make this a win for you?"

As kids reach their teens they start developing independence. This is the period when muscles are flexed and heads are butted. We expect our teens to use their brains, but we are often not willing to give up control. While our values should remain the same, the application we set for our small children needs to be adjusted somewhat as our kids reach their teens. Much of the conflict would be avoided if we were to keep a healthy communication going with our kids. Yes, they will be influenced by their peers, but if we train them to follow our expectations, give them boundaries AND explain the reasons why we set these, we are much more likely to gain their cooperation and retain their respect. Teens do not want parents to be their friends. They want them to be parents, to be there to give them sound advice, to guide them through rough times, help them make wise choices, and pick them up when they make mistakes, rather than constantly chastise them for poor decisions.

Kids want parents to be appropriate role models and to prepare them for all the possible scenarios they may face through their teen and adult years. I tell parents that their kids have bunches of grapes in their heads. Each grape has the answer to a decision they need to make. If we do not place the information they need inside each of those 'grapes' prior to a 'particular circumstance,

children will default to whatever their peers are doing or whatever feels good at the time.

We can establish a 'win/win' situation with our teens when we have laid down strong family values and when we model them ourselves. If you ask your children what will make their teen years a 'win' situation for them, they will invariably tell you the following. They want your unconditional love and care, your training and advice, your trust, your protection and your leadership. They do not want broken fences and burned bridges.

If you feel there is a rift in your relationship with your child, it is never too late to mend the fence. Even if you feel your child is at fault, you make the first move to reestablish a healthy relationship. Come with an open and forgiving mindset. Ask them what will make a 'win' situation for them in your relationship. Explain what will make a 'win' for you. You need each other. Your future grandchildren will need you in their lives.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.