

WHEN TEENS WON'T COMPLY

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I wonder how many of you agree with the theory that when teens are around thirteen years of age, Martians come down and abduct them, leaving us with complete strangers. These new house-guests look like our kids, but for all intents and purposes, nothing these strangers do or say resembles the kids we knew and loved before. They become morose, argumentative, distant, and make it quite clear that they are perfectly capable of running their own lives from now on without any help from us.

We know the reasons why kids go through this phase. Their physical development is creating some pretty drastic changes to their looks. Their hormones are kicking in big time, creating the need to deal with alien feelings. Parents are treating them like children one minute and expecting them to be adults the next. When you think back, you will agree that being a teen is the most difficult time in our lives.

So, as parents, how do we respond to the challenges our teens create for our families from around thirteen years old until they leave home? Here are three 'must haves' that will make this an easier transition on everyone. Anticipate changes and challenges. Have a strong family value system in place. Give your teens the value and respect they need to become confident adults.

Kids don't know what they are in for until it hits them, so it is vital that parents anticipate what teens will face before they ever get there. You know they will need to make decisions about sex, drugs, smoking, alcohol, financial management, taking responsibility for their own actions, abiding by parents values and rules, and being influenced by others. Their integrity is going to be challenged because they are no longer under their parents' continual supervision. You want them to do the right thing whether anyone is watching or not. So, take your preteens out camping or on some excursion where you are alone with them.

Encourage your kids to talk about their feelings and things that other kids are doing. Tell them both how and why they need to respond in a way that will honor God, themselves and their family. Strong written family values provide clear explanations, expectations, and training on how to make mature decisions. The reason why kids make poor choices is usually because there has been ineffective parent role modeling and the absence of the clear guidance and boundaries that family values give all family members.

Teens in particular need to feel valued. They need to be praised when they behave maturely, and they need a soft place to land when they make mistakes ... just like we all do. They feel valued when they are given responsibility, when their opinions are heard, and when they are corrected with love and respect.

When teens challenge values and house rules that are already in place, this needs to be dealt with immediately. They need to be reminded why the value/rule is in place and why they need to abide by it while they live at home.

If they will not comply there needs to be a serious consequence in place. If they are upsetting the family equilibrium, and they are eighteen years of age or older, then they need to find somewhere else to live.

Disrespect and non-compliance will not usually occur when teens feel like an integral, contributing member of the family. Communication lines need to be kept open, and discussion needs to be respectful. Oh, and by the way, you will be relieved to know that the Martians do bring our real kids back when they are around twenty. Unfortunately, there are some families where I think the aliens lost the address and we are stuck for many years with a pseudo-child!

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.