

Avoiding trouble with Elevens, Twelves & Teens

Many things can cause Elevens and Twelves and teenagers to show difficult behaviours but increasingly the biggest issue is their independence. Their adamant demands for independence and freedom, which start in earnest at eleven, are the beginning of personal autonomy, individuation and ultimately self-actualisation – so this is about serious personal growth and needs our support and wisdom.

In addition, although behaviour is always complex we need to remember that normal healthy children and young people actually want be good and want to live up to their own moral standards and they want things to be fair. But they also need their basic needs to be met, to be recognised as individuals and be given the chance to learn to be capable and independent. If we can meet these basic needs with full awareness, they may, most of the time, be the good people they really want to be and may not respond with reluctance and rebellion as a protest or cry for help. Of course, the longer they have not had their needs met, the more entrenched rebellious behaviours will be and the longer it will take to change those behaviours. But it is never too late to start. Here are some reminders of areas to think about and suggestions for what might help.

The brief checklist list for avoiding trouble!

Basic needs

- Sleep, Healthy food, Exercise
- Parental support for safety, routines and warmth
- Clear boundaries and guidelines for living
- Need for individual recognition and acceptance
- Independence & power
- Understanding temperament and age factors

Other sources of trouble

- Jealousy/competition
- Frustration/Fears
- Stress/sickness/emotional upset/School stresses
- Getting children to do things and accommodating their lack of energy
- Risk and the need for trust
- Overstimulation
- Unrealistic parent expectations/ Parent reactions

The detailed checklist & what helps.

Meeting basic needs

Sleep

Most children and adults today need more sleep than they are getting. This is particularly so for adolescents whom sleep researchers are finding need much more sleep (9 to 10 hours) – as much as younger children. Unfortunately adolescents' lives are more and more busy, with homework to be done in the evenings and more social activities on weekends, which can interfere with early nights. It is no wonder they are often tired and so try to catch up on sleep with weekend sleep-ins. However, everyone needs to understand that sleeping in during the morning does not provide the same healing sleep as early nights. Liver function is subtly compromised by constant very late nights.

What helps? Teach them the value of sleep and to be more aware of the consequences of lack of

sleep – not being able to get up in the mornings, crankiness, difficulty concentrating at school, getting sick more easily, reduced ability to stand up for themselves etc. so they are more motivated to take responsibility for themselves. Better quality sleep is helped by calm activities around regular bed times. Screen time (especially video games) should be avoided before bed. There need to be clear rules and agreements about turning phones off at night to protect sleep for teenagers. Without such rules some teens may text and talk through the night. A warm quality sharing time with a parent at bedtime can sometimes deepen the child-parent relationship, though parents need to be respectful of the pre-teen/teen's openness to this each time; they should not feel it as an imposition by you. They may just need quiet unwinding time by themselves.

Food

Energy levels at the preteens and teens ages can fluctuate enormously. Their lack of energy is often interpreted as laziness, but have compassion here – they are often very tired and you may need to be prepared to renegotiate times for tasks to be done. However your children also need to know that nutritious food is essential for energy, health and well being and they need to know how to get the right food for their energy needs.

What helps? Educate them about how low blood sugar is brought on by hunger or the wrong foods, and causes physical and emotional weakness; that sugar rich and refined carbohydrate foods, especially sweetened drinks,

create a spike and then a drop in energy and that low energy and tiredness compromise concentration and learning and also may result in irritability and mood swings. Emphasise that whole, fresh foods and proteins provide more sustained energy and that it is important to make sure they have a good breakfast to support their academic work at school. Help them to prepare breakfast if necessary.

Provide regular meal times to allow the digestive system to prepare for food intake before food comes. Allowing time for congenial family meals supports better digestion as well as emotional wellbeing. Teach them to observe themselves and how they react to foods or lack of it so they can

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increasingly take responsibility for their health, their teeth and their energy levels. Teach them how to cook nutritious food, how to create balanced meals and how to make healthy snacks and alternatives to junk food and drinks. If they participate in preparing meals, and even take responsibility for some meals, by the time they leave home, they should know how to cook basic,

Exercise

Children of all ages need exercise more than ever. Physical exercise and movement enlivens all the systems in the body, improves mental clarity, provides a sense of wellbeing and promotes better sleep. Lack of exercise deprives the child of these things. Physical exercise is also a good outlet for the strong emotional experiences driven by hormonal changes in puberty and beyond.

What helps? Teach them that the body needs exercise and movement for wellbeing. The main threat to this at these ages is screen time and technology use. If there are clear limits for the use of technology (preferably less than an hour a day

healthy meals. Finally, teach them that often when it seems hardest to find time and energy to take care our health this is the time when we need to do it most. This is true for sleep, exercise and food. Often the less happy and less healthy we are, the less care we take of ourselves which in turn makes us even less happy and less healthy.

on a weekday) most young people will be more active. Now is the appropriate time for organised sports. Now is the time to teach them about personal safety, how to be safe on the roads on bikes, on walks, on runs in the park, on buses so that they can be increasingly independent, more active and less dependent on you and your car. If you notice your child is not very active, go for walks or runs with them. Book them into a class involving physical activity if they say they'd like to go etc. Sometimes you need to provide the will power to get them started. Finally, ask yourself if you are doing enough exercise yourself. Good modelling is very helpful in all these areas.

Parental support for safety, routines & warmth

All of us, but particularly children, need to feel some predictability in life and the feeling of safety this can bring. Part of this is in the regularity of daily routines and having enough time so that life is not hurried. It means providing emotional support and acceptance. These all reduce stress and support healthy growth and living. The role of the parent is to try to unobtrusively make home into a haven.

What helps? Provide order in your house, good daily routines and ways of doing things. Regular meal times and bed times support good health by improving digestion and sleep quality. If you can keep your household as little hurried and stressed as possible it becomes a haven in which the family can recover from the hectic outside world. Changing hormones in

pre-teens and teens can add to the chaos with emotional instabilities. They still need your help to bring order into their lives, but for you to do this peripherally in the environment and democratically. Still give warnings and reminders regarding time but increasingly encourage them to take responsibility for ordering their own lives. This is not about doing everything for them, but supporting them to do things more and more themselves.

Be prepared sometimes to give them time to get some order into their bedrooms and lives, NOT by taking over, but by asking "How can I help?" and making time available, facilitating unobtrusively. Be respectful of their time, space, projects and activities as you expect them to respect you and others. Remember they don't

go into your room and re-organise it while you

are out. They need support but also respect.

Clear Boundaries & guidelines for living

Your family rules and guidelines need to be as clear as ever with the expectation that everyone will adhere to them, so that home remains a safe place to be – both physically and emotionally. However some things will now need to be explained more and negotiated more, so that your pre-teens and teens can gradually take on more and more moral responsibility for themselves.

What helps? Increasingly you may need to talk over why you have certain rules and guidelines and have them participate in the making of some of these rules so that they feel they are *their* rules as well. They need to understand them, so don't be affronted when they demand to know why, just set about clarifying for yourself why and explain it to them. Give yourself time if you have to. "Good question. I will have to think about that more and I'll talk about it with you tonight." If they see you are going to take them seriously, they may drop any demands that are not in fact, serious ones.

Another reason to explain your rules to young people is because they are less likely to do things that they themselves judge are wrong, so they need to understand why things are wrong, unsafe, preferred etc. They need to feel respect for the reasons behind your rules and guidelines. Better still, it helps if they feel ownership of them as our rules and guidelines. Teenagers and children will add their own rules to the house rules, like "Don't touch my things without asking." "Don't borrow my clothes or my soccer ball." They are also making such rules when they put a sign on their bedroom door which says "Keep out!" Encourage the family to take note of their need, not offence; it needs respect.

It also helps them to know that rules and guidelines are not things imposed just on children. Healthy rules, boundaries and guidelines provide protection and support to all of us in a greater way in the legal system or in a lesser way in adult households and communities. Agreements about how we want to live help to prevent conflict and facilitate clearer communication and expectations in our ways of living together. Young adults living together also have to negotiate how the chores get done and about how we let people know we are okay.

As their moral sense develops you can more consciously share about what your values are and how important these are to you and why. These create a basis for what we do in our lives and in guiding our children, whatever their age. We model our values constantly in what we do or say. For example, when we have the guideline that every human being is worthy of respect and understanding – no matter their race, religion or capabilities – and your child complains of the behaviour of another child, you might encourage empathy, rather than condemnation with your response. "I wonder why he behaved that way? Do you think he is lonely? Scared?" This not only offers understanding to the other child but also offers your own child insight into his or her behaviour when it is less than kind or respectful. It models what you are trying to do in being understanding, rather than judgemental, with your own children. This approach does not condone unacceptable behaviour, of course, but does try to use understanding as a way to get to the root of why the misbehaviour occurred, which can then be used to help develop strategies to avoid such behaviour in the future.

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It also helps everyone to be more tolerant and patient with others.

Another guideline might be about being a loving family, about respecting and supporting each other which includes everyone having a part in helping around the house, because this is what a community is. Let allowances or pocket money be given as a free gift; this creates a space in which participation in household tasks can be accepted as a free gift to the family too. When helping is seen as something that can be paid for by pocket money/allowances, (or by default by deprivation of allowance) it gives a very different message. Of course special one-off jobs can be used to earn money, but a healthy basic guideline can be that 'we are part of a family and everyone does their bit to help'.

Here is a chance to teach negotiations skills, to work out what can be done, by whom and when, with least resistance. The reality is some

people like vacuuming and some people don't. Be flexible. There is no reason why any of us should be forced to do the job we hate if there is a perfectly acceptable alternative. Getting the tasks done when they need to be done, and finding a time when pre-teens and teens have time and energy to do them in their busy lives is another challenge we will consider below.

So we find that pre-teens and teenagers still need guidance and support, with clear rules and guidelines, but it needs to be as much in your example and what you do, as in what you say. It is not helpful to try to be an equal friend with a child of eleven, but you can be a beloved mentor in their lives. Note that wishy washy unclear boundaries confuse older children and teens as they did younger children, but are now more likely to get rebellious responses just as much as rigid, unexplained rules do.

Need for individual recognition & acceptance

As has been said in the profiles from Ten onwards, it is incredibly important for children to recognise the importance of, not only our need to belong to our social group, but also for each individual to be true to him or herself. We too, need to be true to our individual children. They need to be truly met, *recognised as an individual*, with *acceptance* for who they are in temperament, in abilities, in interests. They need to be *seen*. When you see them, they can *see themselves* reflected back from you. This is a key to healthy development.

When older children feel unseen and misunderstood it creates a deep sadness and what psychiatrist Karen Horney called a 'basic anxiety', which can be covered by withdrawal, in resignation, by becoming clingy and overly appeasing, or by increasing arguments and rebelliousness.

It is often said that teenagers are rebellious and *have* to be rebellious, but this is actually unhelpful, if we do not then look at what they actually need from us. Horney suggested children need both love *and* the resistance of others, or 'friction', as Horney called it, to learn about the self and relationship. To bring more insight to this, it is helpful to look more closely at how Horney described this process in *Neurosis and human growth: the struggle towards self-realization*, (Norton, New York, 1991 Pg 18-19)

She described what a healthy child needs:

Only the individual himself can develop his given potentialities. But, like any other living organism, the human individual needs favourable conditions for his growth "from acorn into oak tree"; he needs an atmosphere of warmth to give him both a feeling of inner security and the inner freedom enabling him to have his own feelings and thoughts and to

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express himself. He needs the good will of others, not only to help him in his many needs but to guide and encourage him to become a mature and fulfilled individual. He also needs healthy friction with the wishes and will of others. If he can thus grow *with* others, in love and in friction, he will also grow in accordance with his real self.

She then described what happens if children do not get this support:

[If the child does not experience these things], the child does not develop a feeling of belonging, of “we,” but instead a profound insecurity and vague apprehensiveness, for which I use the term *basic anxiety*. It is his feeling of being isolated and helpless in a world conceived as potentially hostile. The cramping pressure of his basic anxiety prevents the child from relating himself to others with the spontaneity of his real feelings, and forces him to find ways to cope with them. He must (unconsciously) deal with them in ways which do not arouse, or increase, but rather allay his basic anxiety. The particular attitudes resulting from such unconscious strategical necessity are determined both by the child's given temperament and by the contingencies of the environment. Briefly, he may try to cling to the most powerful person around him; he may try to rebel and fight; he may try to shut others out of his inner life and withdraw emotionally from them. In principle, this means that he can move towards, against, or away from others.

...these are complementary capacities necessary for good human relations. But in the child who feels himself on precarious ground because of his basic anxiety, these moves become extreme and rigid. Affection, for instance, becomes clinging; compliance becomes appeasement. Similarly, he is driven to rebel or to keep aloof,

without reference to his real feelings and regardless of the inappropriateness of his attitude in a particular situation. The degree of blindness and rigidity in his attitudes is in proportion to the intensity of the basic anxiety lurking within him.

Excessive rebellion, withdrawal and unreasonable rigidity around parents, and excessive clinging to and compliance with powerful peers are indeed often seen in adolescence, and need to be better understood in the context of basic anxiety rather than just seen as ‘normal’. Horney also explored further what happens if the pressures of basic anxieties continue.

Of course if adults are providing healthy relationship ‘friction’, one can expect a little fiery reactivity at times; it is when rebellion and/or withdrawal become entrenched and peer pressures become obsessive that there should be more concern.

The biggest danger for most of you likely to be reading this, especially parents, is that life is so full and stressful that it gives little time for ‘sacred space’ with each child, private time together when you turn the phone off, allow no interruptions and give yourselves time to be together. Of course, if your teenager is already very rebellious or withdrawn, they may not want to hear about spending time with you alone, but they need to hear that you care about doing it and you will have to find ways to convince them that you are serious about giving things up to do it. This deep recognition and acceptance of them as an individual also needs to be felt coming from all the adults in their lives: parents, teachers, the counsellor, their coach. Thus the power of this recognition cannot be over-emphasised. Research has shown that the memory of having even one such person who truly recognised them as an individual, at some point in their life, may prevent a suicide.

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What helps? Children and teenagers need absolute acceptance of who they are, with unconditional love and recognition. That means you love their essential selves even if they do not meet your expectations of what you want them to be, or hoped they would be. Separate their behaviour, their choice of clothes, hairdo, music etc from who they are inside, that individual who came to you at birth. Give them loving attention and recognition before they have to seek it. Give them sacred time with you alone; really listen to them! In this time ask them about themselves, their friends, their interests, and 'what they've been thinking about recently'. Make a point of remembering what they tell you so you can ask follow up questions another day (write down some reminders after the conversation if that

Independence & power

Children and adolescents have a deep need to feel independent, autonomous and powerful at times, but due to their inexperience this needs to happen within the safety of clear order, guidelines and wisdom provided by the parents. Elevens may wake you up to this increasing need in very challenging ways. In terms of consciousness, one could say that Elevens have, like the Ancient Greeks had, a dawning democratic spirit; they need, and will, demand a say in things, though this is as yet a still dependent democracy! The Ancients Greeks had slaves after all.

What helps? Listen carefully for demands for independence and facilitate it where it is possible, teaching safety and good sense along the way. Use the demands for independence to remind you that it may be time to hand over a little more responsibility for themselves to the children. Bit by bit they become autonomous individuals,

Inappropriate parental power

From Eleven on, a new approach to authority is becoming necessary. If we use our own parental

helps).. If they share private stories, respect their confidences and, if appropriate, share some of your own similar experiences. This says "I trust you". Join in with, or educate yourself about, their passions and hobbies so that you can talk about their interests with them.

Find ways for the young person to legitimately feel a part of what is going on in the family, to feel absolute acceptance of his or her individual specialness and also to feel capable and useful (the legitimate sense of his or her own power). In this way you draw out the best in them, you draw out the good in them. But with adolescents this needs to be done with absolute respect and genuine-ness. You cannot pretend. And it must respect their privacy.

within the wisdom and support adults offer. We need to allow them to experience their personal power in legitimate ways but also remember that they want to see our legitimate power too—they really want us to be authorities worthy of their respect. Despite their criticism, they do still love and respect us when we are worthy of it and they want our company! Try to keep the balance between giving children and teenagers a legitimate and healthy sense of their own power and competence and helping them to feel safe to be themselves and to grow within *our* legitimate power and authority and the forms we give to that.

Check the *Development profiles* to be aware of just how much each age is likely to demand their independence, freedom or power, or to be treated as an individual.

power in a tyrannical rigid autocratic way children can react by withdrawing (passive

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resistance) or more likely, by rebelling (e.g. with angry, revengeful, demanding or tyrannical behaviours). On the other hand, if we mis-use our potential parental power by being too weak (too unclear about our values and boundaries, too lacking in our own inner authority and belief in ourselves as important guides for our children – Barbara Coloroso calls this the ‘jelly fish parent’) then despite our lovingness, children can again

Understanding temperament & age factors

As we have said already, feeling misunderstood is a major source of sadness, anger, resentment and rebelliousness in children as they get older. Their temperamental tendencies and their developmental needs need to be understood and worked with in positive ways.

What helps? Try to understand your child’s basic temperamental tendencies. These have been named in different ways over the ages, but naming is not as important as observing. The four classic basic temperaments of choleric, melancholic, sanguine and phlegmatic are useful. Introverted and extroverted can reveal what is a basic tendency in a child. Are they predominantly thinkers, or feelers or doers? The planetary types are particularly useful because they fit with the six repeating stages which the Gesell Institute of Child Development described in child development. They are described in relation to specific ages in the *Development profiles* and *A brief description of planet qualities* provides an overview of each character type. What is important is to recognise your child’s tendencies and accept

become angry, revengeful, demanding or tyrannical in their behaviour. It is as if their difficult behaviour is the only way they can say: “Take notice of me! I do not feel safe with all this freedom! Stop me! Hold me!” At Eleven, sometimes adults who cannot meet their children’s needs start to lose their children and don’t get them back for a long time.

these, helping them to celebrate the gifts they offer. If they are introverted and sensitive, give them more protection and time. If they are hardy and active, give them more physical challenges and clear boundaries. But don’t try to make the one into the other. If their basic temperamental traits are very different from yours, you may have to make an extra effort to understand and accept them.

Understand your child’s developmental stage

Read the *Development Profile* for the age of your child, also keeping in mind your child’s basic temperamental tendencies. Work with what the child of this age needs. It may be at this age they are fairly conservative and want to practice skills they already have, or they may be wanting adventure or more social activities. Fine tune your expectations and your support. They may need love or relationship, or more self-empowerment, or more freedom. All these are useful pointers to how you can support them and avoid difficult behaviours.

Other sources of trouble

Jealousy & Competition

With an increasing moral self righteousness, children from early on demand that things have to be fair! This is particularly so for Elevens. If they sense that more attention is put on others, like siblings, or when they compare themselves with others or how others are treated, children can fear loss of power, or inadequacy, even abandonment.

What helps? What is needed is unconditional love, emphasising a child's own worth, the specialness of what his or her age brings, of each child having a very special place in this family. Help them to understand each of us is unique, we are not the same as others. "In our family we do

Frustration

One may have a vague parental hope that as children get older and more mature their frustrated behaviours might lessen, but no! In fact increasingly parents have the potential to be the source of the frustration and hormonal fluctuations can make expressions of frustration all the more potent.

What helps? Our role is to get to the source of the frustration and teach them how to achieve what they want eventually, be it in skill

Fears

Older children and adolescents still have fears, though some ages are more fearful than others and they have more control of what they do about their fears. Children can still experience fear of new situations, of being alone, threats to their feelings of safety etc.

What helps? We need to watch for reluctance about doing things and talk through what can

not treat each person the same – we meet each one's needs as needs arise, in ways that are right for each person. Sometimes one person gets more time, or more of something, sometimes another does." "We value individual effort over comparative achievements." Make sure each one feels wanted and valued. Make sure you do not compare children with others or show favouritism. See also *Sibling Rivalry* for further thoughts on encouraging harmony, not rivalry, within the family. Eleven is a peak time for fights with siblings, so be careful not to aggravate things with comparisons with better behaved ages! Eleven can be quite a hard age to be.

development or in a social interaction. Show understanding at their frustration rather than reacting to the difficult behaviour brought on by their frustration. Take responsibility for your own part in it if appropriate. Make what they want to do possible, if it is appropriate, without you doing it for them. In relationship conflicts, help them to articulate their needs better and respect their need for extra 'protection' from demands, interference and hassling from siblings, even yourself.

help. They need adults who can listen and help them to problem solve, to find strategies for dealing with fears or for finding new courage for dealing with new anxiety producing challenges etc. We need to understand the nature of the fear, and work to bring it into a new context of probabilities, protective strategies, re-affirmed support, or whatever will help.

Stressed, sick, emotionally upset

Even adults present more difficult, not so acceptable, behaviours if they are stressed, sick, tired or emotionally upset. It is not surprising that children find it hard to hold themselves together at such times. They need help, not admonitions, although reminders about boundaries are still important. "I know you are tired and upset, but remember in our house we don't hurt others with words or otherwise..."

What helps? Acknowledge their problem diplomatically so that they know you understand it is hard for them right now. You might have to remind them about what behaviours are not

School stresses

In these years many stresses can come from school. Emotional life can be painful if friendships are disrupted or harassment is occurring. Stress and unhappiness over this can overflow at home.

What helps? Make sure there are sufficient unscheduled quiet times after school. Arrange extra scheduled activities so they are spaced through the week, not every consecutive night after school. Drop activities if necessary. Remember too much can be self defeating.

As we said for earlier ages, the social interactions of the class are complicated, sometimes painful, and are big life lessons. They provide an opportunity to teach your child the power of love and care for others, a healthy base for self-empowerment. Encourage your children from the start to be kind and friendly to everyone in the

Getting children to do things & accommodating lack of energy

Pre-teens and younger teenagers experience quite a lot of deep fatigue at times. The Gesell Institute of Child Development described this at a time long before increases in screen time, technology and social media started to eat into children's sleep times. It may be that the children's

acceptance in your family, but your understanding will also show them you are on their side and want to help. Take the pressure off children at the times when you know they are vulnerable. Encourage them to give themselves space. Make them feel nurtured and cared for. Use massage to calm them, lavender oil is relaxing, especially at night. Consider a relaxing herbal tea like chamomile. Keep the daily routines strong. In sickness give their bodies time to heal properly, with an extra quiet day after a day with a temperature, for example. Give them more sleep. Protect them from the interference of siblings.

class, always, and to avoid being trapped in exclusive friendship cliques. This is a rule that is useful to follow even at university and in the work place later. Emphasise that a person can still have special friends but to learn to be friendly with everyone else as well. This will ease their way if friends are absent, leave the class or they have a disagreement and will protect your children's social wellbeing. Teach them to have understanding and compassion for everyone, the isolated children and the bullies too. Help them to see that every child needs to be recognised and acknowledged, just as they do themselves and that this makes everyone better people. You may also have to help them to have clear personal boundaries and be able to say 'no' diplomatically to others. Kind children can be pestered by rejected children.

enthusiasm out in the world saps the available energy so at home they have little left to offer in helping around the house with tasks. This is not just laziness, as adults often assume; their fatigue and also their physical discomforts like sore feet or aching legs need to be taken seriously and

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accommodated somehow, while they still do their share to help.

What helps? It may be that, at such times of fatigue in their pre-teens and teens, adults need to be willing to re-negotiate when and what work is done. Offering opportunities to negotiate different ways of doing things is empowering and allows children to show initiative and responsibility.

As an example, we can repeat what we wrote in the profile for Eleven, an age which can be particularly hard to manage:

Getting cooperation for help with household tasks is a real challenge with Eleven. As the Gesell research reveals: 'Eleven not only hates work but resists doing it and acts badly when required to help.' They show rebelliousness against parents, resistance to imposed tasks and proprieties, and can be inconsistent, critical, self-willed, awkward, troublesome and difficult to guide.

Negotiation over tasks to be done gives Elevens a chance to feel more independent and gives them the freedom to step forward to offer, rather than be forced from behind. Being flexible in your expectations can help here. What tasks really matter (health and safety) what are a matter of taste or habit (well-made beds)? Are there some tasks which are more bearable to do for your Eleven than others? We all have preferences, some like to put the garbage out, or help cook dinner, but not do dishes. What can be offered as "work" possibilities that would be helpful to you in some way? Be creative in this. Don't get stuck

Risk and the need for trust

While new research is showing that teenagers, and perhaps younger children in whom sexual hormones are also already active, are not good at evaluating risk in the moment, it may be that *healthy* children and teenagers can be far more sensible than this implies.

on everyday tasks. Occasional (sweeping the porch) or one off tasks (cleaning cobwebs) can be helpful too. So can beautifying and "spoiling" tasks. It may be in picking fresh flowers or bringing you a cup of tea, or making a pancake breakfast for the family on Sundays. What is important is that every person contributes in some way to the well-being of the family. Sometimes creating a list to choose from helps in this.

A very helpful question to ask from now on is: "What would help?" (for you to be able to do this better, to feel happy about it and so on.) Or if all else fails, "What would be least bad?" Can some "structural changes" (like providing a dirty clothes basket to throw clothes into!) help avoid some sources of conflict in the first place? Problem solving together is educational and empowering, and might give their excessive criticism a positive outlet. But do it when you and they have energy, in the good times. This is creative parenting.

Getting pre-teens and teenagers to help around the house can be a source of friction in the family. Try not to use guilt as a motivator for teenagers (or anyone!) to get work done, though it may be tempting to do so, for it is not particularly healthy as a motivator for action. We do not want to produce guilt ridden adults. Ask your children what else would motivate them, why they think the work isn't being done and what they can do to change.

What helps? I believe we can teach children to evaluate risk better. We can help them to be emotionally healthy enough so that they feel less compulsion to be impulsive, rebellious and vulnerable to peer pressure to do risky things? We can teach them to sensibly assess risk and

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voluntarily avoid situations which are unsafe, or ask for support to make them safer—for example to be picked up at a reasonable time from a party or to avoid a sleepover with less responsible peers. We can teach them to make sensible decisions most of the time, when those decisions are based on respect for themselves and for others. Working with teenagers individually in building trust and encouraging responsible behaviour helps here. Unfounded parental fears and reactions do not help.

If you have taught your children well, trust them. There is a sad danger that parents who have

Unrealistic Parental Expectations

Much difficult behaviour occurs because children feel misunderstood, often because adults are expecting too much of them. Misinterpreting deep weariness as laziness is a good example. Also development in children is not incremental. Children may be capable and more responsible at one age and then more rebellious and unhelpful in the the next age.

Parental expectations sometimes creep in so slowly and subtly you may not even think they are there, and the children may think they are their own. These can be expectations that your children will be like you, have your values, have your drives and social, educational and economic ambitions. If they deviate from these we are often quick to deny them approval. Fear is often a driving force in this dynamic. Of course we want what we believe is best for our children, but now increasingly there needs to be the freedom for them to make their own choices as they mature. The challenge is to *give them time*, to *trust* that what we have given them in all the years before now will bring them to a healthy place eventually. It might take many more years but that is okay. It takes a long time to really grow up into our true selves.

trusted their children up to this point suddenly panic and withdraw their trust. Sure, teenagers may lie and make mistakes, just as we ourselves may have at their age, but it is more helpful to still have faith in them to grow to be responsible for their health and well being and to help them to learn from mistakes and make sure they are well informed. That makes them stronger and wiser. Trustworthiness comes out of being believed in and in being given the opportunities to show trustworthiness first.

What helps? Know what to expect at your child's age of development to adjust your expectations. They only gradually, through childhood, develop self control and the ability to carry through tasks requested by you (like cleaning up) without your support. They need second chances. They need you to be their "inner strength" and "supporter" for a long time to come. They need you to make their environment a healthy place to live in. They need your "consciousness" and your protection: they need you to be their "safety house" to come back to. They need you to set the boundaries clearly and firmly from a strong but loving inner authority. When they do not have these things, they can become stressed and this can result in what adults call misbehaviour.

Most of all they need you to respect and accept who they are and to be a worthy authority in their lives, prepared to stand up for what you believe in, including for their safety and well being. This is a complex road which needs integrity, wisdom, honesty, strength and courage as well as the willingness to look at your own fears and neurotic tendencies, which frequently teenagers can quite

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accurately and painfully identify for you. It needs conscious, creative and courageous living with

Parent's reactions

It is not quite politically correct to blame parents for what their children do because there is already too much pressure on parents to be the 'perfect' parent. But as conscientious parents it is important that we look at our own, as well as our children's behaviour when difficulties arise, because the reality is that what children do is often in reaction to what we as adults do or don't do. So much depends on us and our response to them.

What helps? We need to respond appropriately to what they need, not react emotionally to what they do. We need to be loving and strong, appreciative and honest, understanding and forgiving of ourselves and of them. Their needs should come first, for they depend on us, but our own needs also need to be met in order to be able to meet their needs calmly, without reactivity. It is not easy.

children, but it will be worth the effort.

A few things to remember when you are about to react: Think (count to 10?) before you speak. Keep your sense of humour along with clarity about your values and acceptable boundaries. Consider what is really important and be very firm and clear about that but don't make mountains out of molehills. Find the gesture of quiet inner authority! Are you part of the problem because you are too tired, stressed, sick yourself? Do you need to turn your phone off and have 'sacred time' with your child? Do you need private regathering time for yourself? When you hold back on reacting and say "I need a bit of time to myself to gather myself together, just give me space for ten minutes", you model self-care, self-control and self-empowerment. When you say "I need to think about this" you model that sometimes time to think is helpful in solving conflicts.

Finally, once again, remember that normal healthy children and teenagers actually want to be good and want to be able to live up to their own moral standards. But they also need their basic needs to be met and the chance to learn to be capable and independent, and to be trusted. When we can meet these basic needs with full awareness, they will, most of the time, be the good people they want to be and not have to present us with difficult behaviours to get help and attention. For an understanding of your child's more specific developmental needs check the Development Profiles for the child's age group. Specific parent worries about sexual activity, alcohol and other drugs and technology use in the pre-teen and teenage years are considered in three different articles mentioned below..

Further reading

Payne, Kim John, with Lisa M. Ross *Simplicity Parenting Using the Extraordinary Power of Less to Raise Calmer, Happier and More Secure kids*. (Ballantine Books Trade Paperbacks, New York, 2009)

Other articles of interest on the website

Building self-esteem, Sibling rivalry, Development Profiles, Sex and your teenager, Drugs and your teenager and Technology and your teenager.