



PARENT TRUST

FOR WASHINGTON CHILDREN

Adolescent Back Talk

An enlightened father recently noted, *The more responsibility I give my son - without being overly protective - the nicer he is.*"

This parent has discovered that back talk ceases when we allow our teens enough opportunity to suffer and learn from their own mistakes. Generally, Adolescents who talk back have parents who get angry and then rescue them from the consequences of their actions.

There is hope for teens who display obnoxious, rebellious and difficult behavior. The following explores ways to handle the three main reasons for back talk.

1. Teens talk back when we threaten their autonomy and independence.

If your child was basically loving through the fifth or sixth grade, back talk usually clears up when you listen to your son or daughter's ideas and when you present your thoughts without trying to make your teen adopt your position. This approach provides your teen with love combined with the right to fail.

Teens may test us to see if we will rescue them. But most back talk ends after they find out we will only continue to lovingly provide our point of view in a non-angry way and allow them to suffer the consequences of their behavior.

A conversation that lets teens know they are responsible for their actions might go something like this:

Mom: *"Robert, sometimes you and I have a difficult time together. How do you feel about this?"*

Robert: *"You're always on my case - you tell me what to do all the time. It makes me mad!"*

Mom: *"I know it does. I realize that I'm always trying to make sure you do the right thing and not get into trouble - but I'm not giving you the right to 'blow it' for yourself. I just wanted to apologize. Everyone has the right to make mistakes. I love you too much to keep trying to save you and make sure everything goes all right."*



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Robert: (stunned) *"Well ...that's okay, Mom."*

2. All of us have the inalienable right to protest.

Just as griping about taxes makes us feel better about having to pay them, teens often feel more understood when their parents accept their protests. There is then no reason for them to up the ante to disrespect. But, in cases of extreme disrespect, it may be best to ask you teen to come back later. A wise parent says, *"I have trouble listening to this."* rather than, *"Don't talk that way!"*

3. Back talk may be a symptom of a deeper problem.

When back talk is one of several other symptoms, including poor school behavior or irresponsibility, a different approach may be necessary. Instead of allowing more freedom with consequences, parental structure may need to be tightened and consequences imposed rather than being allowed to occur naturally. Professional help is in order when teen problems are deeper than back talk and failure in school.

Tip of the Day

Teens Talk Back When We Threaten Their Independence

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