

## Why Making Life Too Easy is Hard on Your Teen

Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to do something yourself instead of asking your teen? It gets done right, you avoid an argument, and you have successfully sustained the household peace for a few more minutes. Enforcing consequences to broken rules takes even more energy. So why not 'give in' to your teenager and 'get on' with your life? Because life and the world simply do not work that way.

Some laws cannot be broken. The law of gravity is a good example. Frankly I am really glad God is into structure and orderliness. When I put my foot out of bed in the morning I never have to wonder if it is going down or up. It does bring me pain when I fall and hurt myself or I am golfing and the hill takes my ball even further away from the hole than I had planned. But that's the way gravity works. The same all the time. I don't blame others and I am never confused when I get caught breaking the law of gravity. Is your teenager confused by the mixed messages you might be sending by allowing the world to revolve around them?

The law of cause and effect is another such unbreakable law. The Bible says what we sow, we grow. A tree is known by its fruit. It works in the garden with vegetables as well as it works in our homes raising teenagers. If you "do everything" for your child and raise up a lazy, selfish, sixteen year old; you, your child, and the rest of the world will be picking up the pieces the rest of his life.

The sports world shows us that what you train in practice you can trust during competition. Practice makes permanent patterns of performance. Tiger Woods can only pull off miraculous shots during the intense pressure of the Masters because he has practiced the same shots over and over with the encouraging watchful eye of his coach. Motivational speaker Zig Ziglar says, "If you are easy on yourself, life will be tough, but if you are tough on yourself life will be easy".

I recently counseled and prayed with a family that are paying a heavy price for not following through on discipline, homework, friends, drugs, and punishment. All of these things take work, effort and at times, confrontation. Skills these parents simply didn't seem to have. Their main concern was being friends with their children and keeping the peace no matter the cost.

When their son was a teen they knew he was smoking marijuana but could never catch him and always seemed to be a step too slow to find his latest hiding place. The boy never did chores and turned into a selfish, lazy, obnoxious brat. He married, had a daughter, but refused to stop his selfish habit of smoking pot. She became an alcoholic by the age of twelve. Ironically, her dad could never seem to stop her from drinking just as his dad couldn't stop him from smoking. He made jokes about his daughters' behavior when friends challenged him.

Today she is a single mother of two small children. During my last contact with the grand parents I was told she was waiting to be sentenced for breaking and entering, which could bring a twenty year sentence and her children are about to be placed in foster care.

What happened? She was raised by parents that loved her just as her dad was. They were both given a good education, had all the latest toys and gadgets, TV's in their rooms and cell phones. They lacked a key ingredient that leads to a healthy successful life. Delayed gratification. They never had to wait or work for what they wanted. Fussing or pouting did the job. They don't have a clue what it means to do volunteer work for others, budget your money or have a savings account, read a book instead of chatting on their PC, or do chores and homework before going out to play.

Proverbs says, "Train up a child in the way they should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." The girl in my sad but all too frequent story has nothing to return to because she was never trained. Training means modeling. Showing how to do something and then walking beside the child as they do it. As they mature you don't watch them, you clearly communicate what you 'expect' then have the energy and wisdom to 'inspect'. You follow through to the end.

Nature gives us the caterpillar in the cocoon as another wonderful example. It's struggle leaves its viewers feeling sorry for the seemingly endless effort it has to put forth to emerge as a beautiful butterfly. Just as many loving yet unwise parents, some have helped by breaking open the many layers of the cocoon only to find a crippled or dying butterfly. It develops the strength to fly by fighting its way out just as God had it planned all along.

A wise grandfather once told me, "Parenting is the most demanding and at the same time most important job any one will ever have. You can either put the proper effort in now with your children or wait twenty years and raise your grandchildren."

Holly and I put the effort into our children and I'll admit it was the most demanding job we've ever undertaken. But I'm glad we did. We are now being blessed with three grown children who are running their own lives, walking with the Lord, getting and advancing in their careers, and raising well-behaved grandchildren for us to love and enjoy.

I want the same for you. When you don't know what to do with your teen, think of the advice you would give a neighbor if they asked. When you find yourself too emotionally involved ask yourself how you would react if a friend's teen treated you like yours does. Then get some support and stick to your decision.

Children seldom respect parents, teachers or coaches who are too weak to demand their best effort and enforce discipline. Watch the movies, "Hoosiers" or "Remember The Titans" then set up boundaries for your child and be willing to be the 'bad guy' when it comes to enforcing them. Being the 'bad guy' doesn't mean being a tyrant or loveless warden.

Author John White helped me a great deal when I was in the ‘thick of things’ with my eighteen year old twins. In his best selling book “Parents in Pain” (Overcoming the Hurt and Frustration of Problem Children) Inner Varsity Press, he says on page 181, “What do children need? And how well can parents meet their needs? Children need acceptance. They need praise and appreciation. They need to learn they can trust their parents not to deceive them or to break promises. They need consistency and fairness. They need to feel that their fears, their desires, their feelings, their inexplicable impulses, their frustrations and their inabilities are understood by their parents. They need to know exactly where the limits are, what is permitted and what is prohibited. They need to know that the home is a safe place, a place of refuge, a place where they have no need to be afraid. They need warm approval when they do well and firm correction when they do wrong. They need to learn a sense of proportion. They need to know that their parents are stronger than they are, able to weather the storms and dangers of the outer world and also able to stand up to their (children’s) rages and unreasonable demands.

Paul W. Swets, in his easy to read and very practical book “How To Talk So Your Teen Will Listen” Word Publishing, teaches that parents need a standard by which to make decisions. He says to think of the end goal and keep it in mind when deciding what you should do for your teen versus what they should do for themselves. On page 97 he writes:

“I find the following goal helpful.

To train my children how to make wise decisions  
and take full responsibility for their choices.

He then gives you questions to answer to test the goal. Write yes or no by these choices.

1. \_\_\_ Set out your teen’s clothes for the next day.
2. \_\_\_ Wake up your teen every morning.
3. \_\_\_ Make job appointments for your teens.
4. \_\_\_ Say, “Do this because I said so.”
5. \_\_\_ Ask your teen what they think the solution is to a problem you face at work.
6. \_\_\_ Ask what your teen would do if someone tried to sell them a term paper they could turn in as their own.
7. \_\_\_ Say No, give reasons, and remain firm about an action that is not acceptable to us.

When measured against a goal, a course of action usually becomes clear instantly.”

I hope these words and examples have helped you be the kind of parent your teen needs to become the kind of person you, he, and the Lord will be proud of. Remember, being easy on your teen today is setting them up for a much harder tomorrow.

## 5 best ways of telling if your child has it Too Easy

5. They get upset if you don't set out their clothes and do their homework each day.
4. You get a call at work from your teen asking if there is any milk in the refrigerator instead of looking themselves.
3. The high school principal calls demanding that you should do detention for your teen because your son convinced him it's your responsibility to get him up on time and do his homework.
2. Your adult daughter throws a tantrum in front of her boss demanding a raise. She said it always worked at home.
1. Your daughter has her first baby but refused to name her telling the hospital to let the grandparents name it sense they will most likely be raising it.