



Parenting Teens with Love & Logic

By Cliff Crain, MFT

One of the best parenting books available for parents of teenagers (or pre-teens) is **Parenting Teens with Love & Logic** by Jim Fay. Here we will look at a few of the many ideas shared in this best selling book.

Dr. Fay asks us to begin thinking of ourselves as more of a loving consultant than as parents. This is because we all have preconceived ideas about how parents “ought” to be, and many of our ideas come from our personal childhood experience. Many of these old ideas are not that helpful or accurate. Once we see clearly that it is our function as effective parents to prepare our children for the future, then we can begin to see our self as a “loving consultant” who has the task of helping our children prepare for adult life. Children become better prepared for the “real world” they will face as adults when they are given opportunities to learn from the consequences of their decisions. It should be noted here that this process, teaching our children by letting them experience consequences, could begin when the child is still a toddler; but it is never too late and in this article we are exploring ideas for the parents of teenagers.

There are three basic styles of parenting. There is the **DRILL SARGEANT MODEL**. This style is the one where the parent sees his role as the boss of the teenager. This style leads to teens who are responsive when the parent is watching, but they lack personal integrity. This style erodes the self-confidence of the teenager.



The second style, which is very popular these days and may seem normal, is the **HELICOPTER MODEL**. Parents using this style are usually very well intentioned. They love their children and practice lax discipline. They give in to the teen and are not consistent with their discipline. Like an army helicopter, they practice swooping in and saving their teen when ever the teen is in trouble. This style erodes the teens self confidence and teaches the teen that someone will (and should) save them whenever there is a crisis.



The third style is that of the **LOVING CONSULTANT**. This is the style that helps the teenager learn from their choices.

The message a loving consultant is constantly giving to his/her child is that “I love you completely and I hope that you make good decisions, since the quality of your life is directly related to your decisions.” This message is given both verbally and non-verbally by the effective parent, the “love and logic parent consultant.” The message is



given clearly when the child is not deprived of the learning that is inherent in facing the consequences for the decisions he or she has made.

So the parent's job is to model a person who is relaxed and who takes good care of himself/herself. This means the parent does not yell, rant, nag, threaten, or get too upset by the teenager's behavior. When we do any of those things, we ARE NOT taking good care of our self. A "love & logic" parent learns to step back from the current situation and take some nice deep breaths to calm down. Once calm, the parent can creatively thinking of how he/she can lovingly hand the problem created **by** the teenager back **to** the teenager. The goal here is not to punish (which serves to build resentment and a payback-attitude in the child), but to help the child learn from his or her choices.

Now, ideally, the parent or loving consultant has thought about the situation in advance and has spelled out exactly what the consequences are for various inappropriate choices, However, in the real world, we are often caught off-guard by our teenager's behavior choices. This is OK, as the parent simply goes back to some basic love and logic rules. To begin with, the parent remembers to stay relaxed and think about how to lovingly hand the problem back to the child. When confronted by a problem, the parent uses the Love & Logic Discipline Model (in box below)

The Love & Logic Discipline Model: Seven Steps

- #1 Remain calm. Do not get upset.
- #2 Think of ways to gently hand the problem to the teenager.
- #3 Never tell the teen what the teen feels or must do.
- #4 Always tell the teen the action that you, the parent, will be taking.
- #5 Offer the teen choices that the you can live with.
- #6 **Follow through with action** – doing what you said you would do.
- #7 Stay compassionate and loving while using only a few words (no lectures).

It is very important to do the above with empathy for the child and the situation if this technique is to be truly successful. It might sound like something like this, "As we discussed, I am sorry you chose not do your chores. Now you will be missing out on going to the dance." Let the consequence do the teaching.

If the above seems to make some sense, but you need more guidance and support, please do your family a favor by investing time and energy in some of the Love & Logic materials by Jim Fay. You can check out all the materials created by Jim Fay and his helpers by visiting the website: www.loveandlogic.com/



Good luck in your efforts to become a "love and logic" parent!