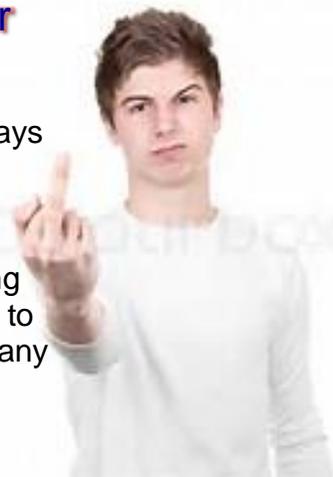


Creating A Difficult/Angry Teenager

By Cliff Crain, MFT

With the current rash of violence in our country, there is always the question “How did this happen?” In my thirty-plus years as an educator, it is not unusual to hear parents complain that they just cannot understand how their teenage son or daughter became so angry, distant and/or difficult. Actually, there are many early-warning signs and some simple rules that parents generally follow that help to create the angry, distant and/or difficult teen. Here they are (not in any particular order):



RULE #1 Deny the seriousness of the child’s problems.

Never believe teachers or others who voice concerns about your wonderful young child. Obviously, they just don’t know your child. Use sayings like “boys will be boys” to excuse inappropriate behaviors.

RULE #2 Deny the value of candidly evaluating how you were parented.

Use phrases like “I had a normal childhood” and “my parents loved me” to keep you from honestly seeing issues that you bring from your own childhood. It is your “duty” to love your parents.



RULE #3 Blame the school, a specific teacher, and/or an ex-spouse.

Live in the past, complain about others and play the victim role. Always deny your own ability to effect positive change.

RULE #4 Be an overly indulgent parent.

Think of your child as a little adult. Try to be your child’s best friend. You are doing your job by giving him/her freedom. Don’t ask them to do chores or anything that might upset them.



RULE #5 Be a perfectionist.

By continually correcting your child and demanding the very best, you can create a deeply felt sense of inner-shame. Your child will learn that he/she is never good enough as they are.

RULE #6 Allow older siblings to tease and degrade the younger siblings.

Excuse and tolerate these behaviors as normal.

RULE #7 Never teach your children about honesty and respect for others.

Even more important, make sure you model a “me-first” attitude and a lack of concern for other people (“It’s their problem!”).

RULE #8 Stay busy and stressed-out.

Use your life situation as an excuse for being totally stressed, with little or no time to develop loving relationships in your family. The kids need more toys and activities, they don’t really need you.



RULE #9 Never allow members of your family to be upset.

Only allow “positive” feelings in your family. They should not bring up conflicts or problems from the past. Make sure children realize that there is something wrong with “them” if they express sadness, anger, or disappointments. This will shame them into smiling.

RULE #10 Never set clear age-appropriate boundaries.

Children should be able to figure out what is right or wrong without a lot of time and energy explaining rules and limits. They should know how much sleep they need and when to do their homework without your help.



RULE #11 Use a sporadic discipline system.

It is always best to try to scare or shame them into behaving. When they misbehave, try nagging, lecturing, or yelling. If that fails, try grounding-for-a-month or spanking, depending upon the time of day and your energy level. Never clarify expectations and consequences. If you are tired, just give up and forget the whole thing.

RULE #12 Assume that children will learn social skills at school.

It is hard enough getting these kids to clean their room. You are not responsible for helping them learn social skills: like sharing, listening, playing fair, and how to make and keep friends.

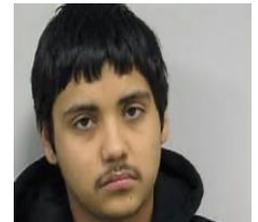


RULE #13 Live through your child.

Do not make time for yourself and / or having adult friends. Use being a parent as an excuse for not taking good care of yourself. This puts lots of pressure on your child to take care of you.

RULE #14 Know that being a good parent comes naturally.

Know that you are helpless to improve your family situation. You already are doing all you can do. It’s not your fault... (if your children have anger-problems, it’s just the way they are!). Avoid reading parenting books or taking parenting classes.



The above list is certainly not a complete list, but it does give the reader a glimpse of the “secret unwritten rules” often followed by well-intentioned parents. The use of any one of them can create serious long-term problems for the child and the family. The problems created often do not manifest immediately, but show up as the child moves into the teenage years and beyond.

