

# Talking tactics

Many an exasperated parent of a teenager has declared in jest that the best way of handling adolescents is to bury them at 13 and dig them up at 21, thus avoiding the most turbulent years.

Nevertheless, as we all live in the real world, dealing with adolescents is a fact of life and nobody ever pretended it was easy. However, there are strategies we can use when we get caught up in a negative emotional cycle with a teenager.

Adults and teenagers need to be able to talk about their dissatisfaction and grievances. It's an essential part of any relationship. The difficulty is how to manage the situation without feeling emotionally flooded, when the teenager is becoming more distressed while telling you what is wrong, and you are responding in kind.

This is where there may be a temptation to use attack tactics, such as name calling, raising your voice or even violence, when a parent may hit a child or the child pushes the parent. These behaviours are unacceptable, and don't work. Episodes like this can put a rift in your relationship that becomes hard to mend.

As soon as you feel yourself getting hot under the collar and risking losing your ability to manage your behaviour and emotions, take a break. At this point, your teenager will also be getting agitated, so tell them you can hear that this issue is really important to them, but it would be best to take time out. Make an appointment for later when you can both sit down with a coffee or a cool drink and then discuss it.

Make sure your teenager knows you want to hear what they have to say. For difficult issues an egg timer will ensure that both sides can have an uninterrupted three minutes of expressing views. Summarise or write down what your child is telling you and get them to check that you have understood them correctly. Have them do the same for you.

Explain that while this may not solve the problems, it will help a lot if you understand each other's issues.

Keep your focus on their behaviour, not their character. Tell them why their behaviour is the real problem, but reassure them that they are not the sum of their behaviour, and that you do value them.

Parents are only human beings who do lose their tempers. If this happens, don't be afraid to apologise to your teenager for your less-than-perfect behaviour. You might be pleasantly surprised at how well this is received.

## Survival tips

- **Adults and teenagers need to be able to air their grievances to each other**
- **Avoid arguments escalating by making a time for discussion when you are both calm**
- **Make sure that teenagers feel their points of view are being heard by you and vice versa.**