

How to Respond When Your Teen Says These 6 Hurtful Things

Dealing with a moody adolescent and their hormones can challenge the best parents' patience and wisdom. When your teen says something that makes you bristle, it's all too easy to get drawn into an argument or a battle of wills rather than deal with what's going on beneath the surface.

So instead of seeing each of these common teenage comments as a criticism or a challenge to your authority, try to view them as an opportunity to engage your angry teenager in conversation and help them grow.

1. "It's not fair."

Sometimes a teen will say this as a tactic to get out of doing something like chores or homework. Other times they use it because they really believe that something really is unfair or unjust. Children often equate fairness with sameness or equality. For example, they might think because their 17-year-old brother has a curfew of 11 p.m. that they, a 14-year-old, should have the same curfew. So help them explore the issue at hand. Start by asking questions like, "Why do you think you should have the same curfew as your older brother?" "Have you earned that right?" Perhaps then share that their brother had an earlier curfew at their age.

2. "Everyone else is allowed to ..."

First, you may want to clarify who they mean by "everyone," and whether they know that for a fact. Ask whether you should check with their friends' parents. Use this as an opportunity to discuss your values as a family and the different values and standards other families may have, and why. Share with them how much you love them, and if you are not letting them do something, let them know you are making this decision

because you want what's best for them.

3. "This stinks."

I can understand how a parent can engage in a battle with their teen when they hear it or a worse phrase. However, a better response may be to ask their teen questions like, "So why do you feel that way?" "What would you suggest instead?" The key here is to get to their heart and understand why they are feeling this way.

4. "You can't make me."

Instead of getting into a verbal confrontation by responding with an, "Oh, yes I can!" The better way would be to agree with them by saying, "You're right, I can't make you. It's your choice; you have the freedom to choose." Then go on to share that if they make the choice not to do it, there will be consequences. Those consequences may be the natural result of them not doing something or may be consequences imposed by you.

5. "Whatever."

Typically this isn't offered as an acceptance of what you say; rather, it's about dismissing what you say as irrelevant, closing down further discussion. That may be because their emotions are flooded. So ask them how they are feeling. Are they angry, frustrated or disappointed? Then be sure to listen and ask follow-up questions.

6. "I hate you."

Hurtful as this is to hear, bite your lip. Simply snapping back, "Don't ever talk to me like that again" is not going to help. It may make you feel better momentarily, but it will just shut them down and confirm all their beliefs about how unreasonable you are. Ask them what they hate and why? Assure them that it's okay to have strong feelings, but they do need

to be responsible and respectful in the way they handle and express them. And remind them that you love them no matter what.

In all of these exchanges, always be looking to really see things from your teen's point of view. It could be that even though they are expressing themselves poorly, they have a point we need to hear. Here are five ways to help your teen learn to communicate better.

Above all, try to keep the communication channels open. Even a surly teen is better than a silent, simmering or sullen one.

Huddle up with your kids and ask, "How does it make you feel when I tell you what to do?" {eo}

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