

# Dealing with Adolescent Behaviour

Provided by Ronald Morrish, Author of *Secrets of Discipline & With All Due Respect*

Contact: [ronaldmorrish@bell.net](mailto:ronaldmorrish@bell.net)

Web site: [www.realdiscipline.com](http://www.realdiscipline.com)

## Brain Research

The prefrontal cortex (organizing self, using good judgment, analyzing and problem-solving, planning, etc.) is "under reconstruction" for a lengthy period of time. Many decisions are made in the emotional part of brain. Keep in mind that:

- during the "pruning" process, millions of "dead ends" will make it difficult for them to store and retrieve information effectively;
- decisions tend to be made on the basis of emotion and immediate gratification, not reasoning and problem-solving;
- they may need more reminders than when they were younger;
- they are likely to consider all advice to be criticism;
- their ability to organize themselves may be dismal;
- their motivation may be very low.
- good judgment may be lacking

## Hormones Affect Sleep

Many adolescents suffer constantly from sleep deprivation (poor sleep patterns, not enough sleep, poor quality sleep, etc.). There may be a significant delay between the act of getting up and the act of waking up. In between those two times, they can do procedural actions (get dressed and go to school) but not cognitive problem-solving.

## Other Insights

- They start to connect more with peers and less with adults. Socializing and networking with peers becomes a constant focus. Their choice of friends may dramatically influence actions and goals. Status in the peer group is everything - being "unfriended" may be devastating.
- They want to be unique without being different from anyone else.
- They may be full of self-doubt and easily embarrassed.
- Their reluctance to answer personal questions reflects the development of private lives.
- Fairness is a major issue – as it relates to everyone else's actions but not their own.
- They often find themselves caught between two different character traits - loyalty and honesty.
- Communication gap? - Typically, adolescents think they are about three years older than they really are & adults speak to them as if they are about three years younger than they really are.
- Adolescents often believe they can handle just about any situation and that they are invulnerable (what happens to others won't happen to them). They take risks without considering consequences.
- Throughout history, adolescents "left the nest" about 15 years of age and this was reflected in their "attitude". Now, they live at home much longer but the "tired of being told what to do" is still there.

## Suggestions

- **Avoid "face-offs":** The adolescent brain mis-responds to face-to-face intense "discussions" about behaviour. Young children think "This must be serious" but adolescents act as if it's a lecture (you will feel the wall go up) or a critique (the debate will begin). You're better off discussing behaviour while walking with the adolescent, sitting next to them or having them assist you with a task. Try having lunch with them.
- **Use "delayed discussions":** This is the time when hormones govern behaviour – adolescents frequently misinterpret social cues and situations, over-react to criticism, and reject discussions aimed at problem-solving. Delay discussions until non-emotional times, have discussions "off-site" when possible, and avoid confrontational techniques.
- **Stress prevention:** Discuss situations *before* there is a problem, so there won't be a problem. Too many people say nothing until an incident has occurred.
- **Right/right discussions:** Just because an adult believes their point of view is correct doesn't mean that an adolescent's point of view is wrong. Adolescents have their own view of the world. From their perspective, they think they are right. The trick to having a great discussion is to avoid playing win/lose. Instead, listen to the adolescent's point of view and acknowledge it. Then express your own. Remember the rule that no adolescent listens to an adult who won't listen to an adolescent.
- **Be firm and confident:** Yelling and threatening are "power" techniques which never result in success when dealing with an adolescent. Almost invariably, the result is confrontation, attitude and resistance. It's better to use authority, not power. The voice of someone who knows how to be in charge is an assertive voice - firm and confident.
- **Be friendly, but not friends:** It's important to maintain good rapport because it changes the adolescent's perception of being controlled into a sense of being guided. Children interpret adult actions in the light of the relationship. Avoid embarrassing your children. However, rapport is about being friendly, not friends. When adults try to be friends with children, they are reluctant to make unpopular decisions - and there are lots of those in effective discipline.
- **Give them reasonable opportunities to spread their wings:** Allow adolescents to make the choices which they are ready to handle. Let them develop their own interests and styles.
- **Use a positive approach to discipline:** Communicate your expectations for doing things right, not just the consequences for doing things wrong. When issues arise, focus on the need to take ownership for problems and solve them. Use punishment as a last resort, not a first response.
- **Attach demands and lessons to real-life situations and goals:** Adolescents want to see purpose and justice in everything around them (except their own behaviour). Use the world of work, driving, babysitting, etc, as a reference point for your demands.
- **Be patient but also be persistent:** Get used to repeating instructions, setting deadlines and redirecting your adolescent. You may think it shouldn't be necessary - but it is.