

# DIFFICULT TEEN

There is little in life that creates more anxiety than having a teenager who seems out of control. Experiencing emotional outbursts, being lied to, or staying up at night worrying about their safety can greatly damage your relationship with your teen. You may have tried different approaches to help them—being tough one day and then trying to show mercy the next—but nothing really seems to make a difference. Watching your teen continue to make bad choices can leave you torn between wanting them to just learn the hard way and being afraid of what they might do in the heat of the moment. What steps can you take now to best help your child?

## **STEP ONE: Assess your relationship**

As teen expert Josh McDowell has said, “Rules without relationship leads to rebellion.” Considering that your teen’s emotions and behavior are being affected by a surge of changing hormones, it’s vital for you to maintain as strong a relationship as possible in the midst of whatever they may be going through. Here are some questions to evaluate your relationship:

- Is our relationship generally healthy with a few bumps, or generally unhealthy with rare moments of connection?
- Am I spending time with my teen doing things we enjoy together to create a solid foundation for when tensions occur?
- Does my child feel deeply loved or heavily criticized? (1 Peter 4:8)
- Are my spouse and I on the same page – or is their increased tension because we are not rowing together?
- Has the relationship deteriorated to the point we need pastoral or professional guidance?

What if the relationship is weak? Maybe you’ve been relationally disconnected for a long time, or maybe your teen is a stepchild who has never really accepted you as his or her parent. You can increase your ability to have influence by being available, listening, and really trying to understand. Dr. James Dobson stresses the value of routine family connections as a way to cultivate relationship. He cites research showing the positive difference parents make when they are available for their teens in the morning, after school, at dinnertime, and at bedtime. If your current routine is making these connections difficult, it may be time for a change.

## **STEP TWO: Be the parent**

Some parents interpret the need for relationship as a call to be good friends to their teens, but you need to be the parent—the one who brings stability and structure to the child’s life by setting boundaries and expectations. It can be challenging to direct your teen in a way that doesn’t exasperate him or her (Ephesians 6:4) when you feel disrespected. As the adult, you need to sacrifice your hurt feelings and anger and to lovingly direct your teen. Ephesians 4:15 says “speak the truth in love.” Ask God to show you when to be tough and when to be gentle.

## **STEP THREE: Consider seeking professional help**

Do you find yourself asking any of these questions? How can I find out if my child is using drugs or alcohol? Is my daughter having sex, and if so, what should I do? Why does my child seem so depressed? I think my son is looking at on-line pornography. What do I do? Problems such as alcohol or drug use, pornography addiction, sexual experimentation, severe depression and other challenges may fall beyond your understanding and require the help of counselors and experts who can bring Biblical wisdom along with professional understanding of teens and risky behavior.

## **EASTVIEW RESOURCE:**

Sara Thompson – Counselor: [sthompson@eastview.church](mailto:sthompson@eastview.church)

## **RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:**

- **Tough Guys and Drama Queens** by Mark Gregston (also available as video series on RightNowMedia)
- **Boundaries With Teens** by John Townsend
- *Grace Based Parenting* – Video series on RightNowMedia