

PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION: SOLUTION TO ADOLESCENT PROBLEMS

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Finding solution to adolescents' problems is a global issue. It is my belief that attempts at providing solutions to adolescent related problems must be linked closely to the family. This is because the family is the smallest unit in the society, and it is what happens in the family that is reflected in the larger society. The family can therefore control what happens in the larger society. Lack of adequate information and proper guidance is at the root of all the problems associated with adolescence. If this is the case, then communication in the home needs to be looked at, with special emphasis on how it could be used effectively to address the problems that have already been identified.

Communication in the Home:

The type and level of communication in the home determines, to a large extent, what type of adults the adolescents in a family will grow up to be. When there is the need for a child to get information on any issue, the first choice of any child should be the parents and not the friends. The parents need to create the atmosphere for this to happen through a good family rapport, predicated on proper and sincere communication in the home. Communication should be instructive and interactive. Instructive communication should be used up to a certain age. By the time the children start to put their views on issues across when the need arises, which is the case during the adolescent period, then communication has to shift to interactive rather than force the adolescents to do certain things they would not want to do.

Communication in the home has to be two-way. This does not start in one day. This has to be built gradually through reactions to questions asked by adolescents and how they have been encouraged either to ask more questions or to shut up when they are talked to. There are times when as parents, you have to put your foot down. However, when doing that, you have to explain in a caring way, why you need to do that. For example, if you tell your teenage daughter that she must come back from a party at 6.00 pm, you know it could be dangerous for her to come back late, especially if she is coming back alone and not knowing the type of food she might have been served there, you might want her to come back home to eat at home and also to sleep properly so as not to have any hang-over. If this is presented to her caringly, she would know you have her interest at heart and would be able to answer her friends adequately should they start making jest of her going home early. This way, she would not see you as restricting her movement, or feel that you do not trust her. On the contrary, she would feel you care for her, and so, is not likely to rebel. Naturally then, she would want to reach you first if she has any problems.

There is the need to give reasons for every decision taken on behalf of the adolescent or else they would feel you do not trust them or have confidence in them. Issues that concern the whole family should be thrown open for discussion, even if you have

already made up your mind on what to do. In such cases, they are made to feel they are important in the decision making process at home. At other times, if you have to discuss issues concerning them, you can tell them what you think is best for them. Be sure to highlight the possible consequences of the options they may be considering. Most of the time, they will go along your way.

Another thing to note is that as parents, you have to practice what you preach. It is no use telling your teenagers that smoking and drinking is bad when you indulge in them. They will definitely start with the butt of cigarette in the ash tray and the beer or other alcohol you stock at home. There are parents who do not allow their adolescent children go out because they do not want them to get involved in premarital sex while they send them on errands to their concubines. All these create problems.

Of all the issues that should be discussed in the home, issues related to sexuality are the ones not discussed. This is mainly because of the **taboos** associated with most things that are linked to sexuality. It is believed that sexual issues should be discussed behind closed doors. Those who discuss that at all either present them in form of moral doctrine in frightening pictures, thinking that would deter the adolescent. But by their nature, adolescents are inquisitive and adventurous. They will one day find out the truth and it is the parents that would have failed in such circumstances. There is, therefore, the need to be open and provide the right answers to questions asked by the adolescent on sexuality. It is true that discussing conception or contraception with your son or daughter might not be so pleasant because of how the society views such discussions, but the result of not talking to them sincerely and promptly would be more embarrassing. So, it is better to endure that unpleasant one hour or so in your living room than live through a life-time of self-pity, blame and embarrassment.

Some parents, especially single parents because of their past mistakes, try to be too hard on their adolescent children without telling them why. The children, after some time, would revolt and sometimes challenge their parents' moral standing for correcting them. There is the need to explain things to your children so as to clear their minds of whatever doubts they might have concerning your behaviour at times. The best time to give information on sexuality to the adolescents, especially girls, is before they fall in love. This is because by the time they are in love, they will no longer be interested in long term consequences of whatever action they take to keep their relationships. They would want to love for the present. Boys should also not be left out while giving information on sexuality. They need to be informed and educated about how to handle relationships and respect the opposite sex instead of seeing them as frontiers to be conquered.

Tips for Parents

Parents should realize that adolescents left by themselves would most likely make the wrong decisions because they would want to please their friends, which in most cases, gets them into trouble. So, it is necessary for parents to be around for their adolescent children whenever they need them.

You must take time to study your adolescent children especially for mood changes. There may be things they are confused about and need clarification for. That means you have to be there to see them most days before they sleep. Maybe their friends have ridiculed them, say for not smoking with them when you have told them smoking is not good for them. In such circumstances, what they need is reassurance that they have taken the right decision not joining their friends. But if you are not there, they would be forced to try one day just to please their friends and show they are no weaklings and then, you would wonder where you went wrong.

As stated earlier, you should try to put instructions or advise across to your adolescent children as lovingly as possible. Shouting and beating only drives them further away from you.

Put your children in the know about your family's financial situation. Do not think they are too young to understand. If they ask for something you cannot afford, let them know instead of promising them and giving them false hopes. Let them know that they do not have to be like the Jones to be appreciated. They have to be brought up to be contented with what they have.

Encourage your children – both male and female – to bring their friends home. That way, you will be able to know the type of friends they have and can register your displeasure if you have any reason to feel they should not be in certain companies.

For the sake of your children, try to keep a stable home as much as possible. The psychological effect of broken home on children is too enormous to be swept under the carpet.

Please avoid thinking for your children all the time. Entrust some responsibilities to them. That way, they feel that they are an important part of the family. For instance, a boy that has been told to lock everywhere at night would have it in mind that wherever he is, he has to get back not too late to lock up everywhere and keep everybody secure in the house. He feels very responsible that way and would not want to do anything to shake that confidence you have in him.

You should not favour one child over another. Rather, you as parents should encourage them by giving praises as often as is necessary and discipline them with understanding. Some parents have been known to beat up one child for another or make one work more than the other. Some even beat so mercilessly that the child begins to wonder if he is actually not an orphan. Remember that the victims of today are the perpetrators of tomorrow. The one you pamper at the expense of another today will grow up to believe that, that is an expected way of life.

For a child you have done everything for sincerely, and still he or she goes round the bend, you can only put the child in prayer. Rejection, disowning or pushing the child out of the house will not help.

Try to win your child over through love and care and share in their hopes and aspirations.

Be bold to discuss anything with your children at will and answer all their questions as sincerely as possible. Do not say they are too young to know. You might not be around at the time you feel they are old enough and the deed might have been done.

When your adolescent gets involved in any of the problems associated with adolescence, hope is not lost. The name of the game is **love**. Show them some more love so as to help them get back into the mainstream or else their criminal friends will accept them.

Encourage your adolescent children to get involved in extra-curricular activities like sports, Boys Scout, Girls Guide, etc so that they can have useful avenues for burning off their excess energies. If they are committed to some of the above, they will be kept busy when they are not studying and this will keep them away from naughty social activities.