



Button Pushing: What is it that makes you see red?

We all know what it feels like to have our buttons pushed. Something physical happens: a particular energy takes over, and we "see red." Adrenaline rushes; muscles tighten; palms sweat; voice changes. Your face looks really ugly, and you turn into somebody no one wants to be around. It happens to the best of us.



Name your buttons

Your teenager has this uncanny ability of knowing how to push your buttons. Buttons are words or actions that your teenager will intentionally use to try to make you lose control of your emotions and skilfully get what it is they ultimately want .

Take a moment now to think about your buttons - what are they labelled?

- "I hate you ---- you're such a loser of a parent!
- "Why won't you let me ---- everyone else's mother does?!"
- "I'm going to run away!"
- "I'm not going to school -----you can't make me!"
- "You're not my real mother/father, you can't tell me what to do!"
- "Yeah ---- whatever"
- Or actions such as: Door slamming, screaming, raving, silence,

When this happens, you become angry or frustrated; this leads to an inability to think clearly and effectively confirm agreements and consequences.

Teenagers have a reason for button pushing and each type often has a different motive. Understanding the motive and intended impact behind each button will hopefully help you neutralise its effectiveness. Think about your buttons - can you identify the purpose? Here are some examples to help you:

- "I hate you, you're such a loser of a parent!" Think: this is meant to get you to lose your temper through personal character attacks. This anger clouds your thought process and limits your ability to effectively enforce consequences.
- "You don't love me" Think: Teenagers will use this phrase to make you feel guilty and withdraw the rule or punishment.
- "I'm going to run away!" Think: Teenagers want to scare you into thinking the worst will happen if they do run away. It is a tactic to get you to back off and not enforce consequences
- "You're not my real mother or father" Think: Teenagers want to unnerve their non-biological parent and deliver a big guilt trip to take their focus off the real issue. Step parents will be well served by not taking it personally

When you can identify the trigger you can then take more control over your automatic reactions



What are your automatic reactions?

- You feel the rage and anger flood your body, and you react in a way you regret.
- Visions of your grown child unable to accomplish anything, alone and friendless or behind bars, loom vividly.
- Rational behaviour seems suddenly and completely out of reach
- Your spouse says, "Why do you always get so upset about that? Just let it ."
- You see fear on your teen's face
- You are at the end of your rope, swear you have tried everything, and nothing works.

The result of button pushing

You break connection with each other and it leaves both you and your teen feeling angry, defensive, frightened, and inadequate. Ultimately nothing productive results and/or the attempts to control push your teen farther from your intentions or teach her to obey you out of fear. Your teenager is not ultimately mean spirited or a bad person but has worked out how to manipulate the game to their best advantage. We as parents need to stay in control, be aware of what our buttons are, see them coming and then choose a more appropriate action.

Be proactive rather than reactive

Top 10 tips for button busting!

- Don't take it personally
- Breathe deeply 2-3 times and wait
- Recognise button pushing as a power game
- State your feelings - be conscious of your tone, facial expression and body language
- Avoid character assassination
- Listen from their point of view
- Violence is never acceptable
- Do apologise if you lose it
- Don't accuse, insult or use put downs
- Don't try to control or always feel that you must win!

Teens need a balance between love and boundaries and it is up to you, the adult, to maintain control over yourself so you can assist them in becoming a responsible, independent young adult.

"When children push your buttons, you react from your reptilian brain, and reptiles eat their young!"

Jane Nelson: Positive Discipline