

## Behavioral problems with teens

By behavioral problems with teens, there are so many types. We see teens that don't go to school, having fun going to the theater or roaming the shopping centers during school hours. There are those teens involved in illegal activities: like selling drugs, transporting drugs, transporting money in exchange of drugs. We see other kids intimidating, bullying, and persecuting other kids. You have teens that refuse to follow parent's rules at home. Some kids give into prostitution while others get involved in recruiting other kids into prostitution. And, then you have the typical case of the child or teen that has learned to argue, but in excess.

### Arguing

For many teachers or educators, working in schools or in child care units for teens, teens' arguing is one of the major behavioral problems we tend to encounter. For instance, in this unit, there was this kid who would not accept that he could not call his father whenever he wanted, even though the reason was explained to him, many times. (He was always trying to convince his father to take him back immediately, without making the necessary changes in his personal life. So staff and parents agreed to implement a cadre where the kid had specific moments in the week to call his father.) But, the kid kept arguing that the rule was not just and that it had actually been changed...trying to get us to believe that the rule no-longer applied. We kept telling this kid that we had instructions to follow. After a good 5 to 10 minutes challenging our position, he would take a few minutes off, then come back and challenge again our positions. He would say that he understood what we explained to him, but he didn't agree. Why would he not stop arguing? What function was it serving him to keep challenging the educators in this unit? This example is many out of thousands of possible similar situations.

We often encounter teens, with certain traits, that have this tendency to argue. Kids with a low self-esteem and past abusive treatment tend to want to control their social environment in order to get what they want. Being overly ignored in their younger age, they developed a need to take things into their own hands. Kids with attachment issues often will either argue constantly or, otherwise, totally ignore the adult, but still seek satisfaction of their desires or needs, by their own way. Their ability to be receptive to the adult's teaching or instructions or comments is inhibited. The minute they sense a certain level of frustration to their wishes, desires, needs, they embark on a self-serving mode, commonly known in Schema Therapy, as a compensatory mode. In this case, they overcompensate by a form of attack. Lucky, this type of attack is mostly irritating and energy consuming for the adults; but, could escalate into more dramatic situations.

This kid's persistent effort to obtain satisfaction by arguing was irritating. But it is a good example of the part of the work that many educators deal with day by day. It requires patience and calmness but complete firmness when dealing with such a behavior. How do we deal with such a behavior? First, we must ask ourselves if such a behavior is something that is considered characteristic in this kid's attitude, that is, something considered as a chronic problem or simply a onetime situation, or if you want, a situational problem. If we know our kid to be trustworthy and responsible, we must respect that this behavior is normal in a way for the kid to get attention and have someone listen to his arguments in order to obtain satisfaction. What attitude will the adult adopt? Showing respect is expressed by taking time to listen to the teen, thus showing consideration and giving dignity. If the adult does not give time for such a behavior, the kid might develop a pathological disposition where he feels a growing need to comply and subjugate him or herself, disregarding his or her personnel needs. Or, on the other hand, because he hasn't felt listened, his level of frustration might actually increase in intensity. Thus, if by increasing in intensity and in frequency, the kid realises that he has won finally what he hoped to get; then, the pattern of arguing has been installed.

This can be hurtful for is self-esteem after a while, for the kid has learned that he can push the boundaries of rules and moral guide lines to self serve his personnel interest, or if you accept, his Ego. But, by doing so, he will draw upon him or herself a level of social disrespect that he or she will surely sense to the point where it is imprinted. We can thus assume that the kid will unconsciously or consciously develop a sense of shame.

Sometimes the adult must foster maturity by treating the teen as a partner and not a subordinate person, but with due diligence. I cannot write about all values here but it will be important, for a rule of cohesion, that the parents of kids have a thorough common understanding of their values that they desire to inculcate progressively to their kids. For instance, what time should a 14 year old kid be in bed; or, should I let my 15 year old daughter have her boyfriend for sleep at home; should I let my kid smoke pot. This main rule goes for all adults working or supervising kids, to a certain level too.

Thus knowing their values, in advance, allows for a proper and healthy social structure and cohesion that creates a sense of security. Things will go much smoother if they are known and discussed in advance between both parents. Knowing where and when to stop a behavior has a comforting effect for everybody, even if the kid doesn't acknowledge it at first. We often see kids who have known no boundaries earlier in life, so it becomes a greater challenge for them to abide by rules or instructions that conflict with their own desires.

## Conclusion

Most certainly, such a behavior will probably happen earlier in age. And, in one way, such challenging behaviors are actually normal and healthy because they allow for some psychological growing. Seeking coherence and common sense, expressing oneself, learning to obtain satisfaction of ones desires or needs are only a few examples of why it is actually normal and expected from our kids to try to challenge us. It is important for parents to respond in a respectful way when their kid starts to use this type of behavior. Rules of interaction must be stipulated between parents and kids, such as: a proper and respectful dialogue is taught and values, beliefs, norms are identified regarding the level of democracy that will be accepted in the house.