

# Three types of behaviour

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When teenagers are really playing up and the battle is in full swing, we find ourselves dealing with all unacceptable behaviour with equal anger. It feels very much as if they do everything deliberately to annoy us. The reality is that this is not quite true. The following are three areas of behaviour that all people present at some time or other.

## 1 Teenage irresponsibilities

Teenagers do all manner of silly things and tell us: 'I didn't do it on purpose' or 'You just don't understand do you?' They are silly things that we as adults feel don't need to happen. We assume our teenager is doing them just to wind us up even more. Everyone does these silly things. However, very often when teenagers do it, we end up disciplining them for it. Examples of these things might include losing things such as keys, books, and homework. It is interesting that when adults do these things, we have a good excuse for it, 'I am so busy - how can I be expected to remember everything?' or 'I've got so much to think about'. Teenagers' responses are the same.

The usual response from the adult is: 'What did you do that for?' with the teenager answering with 'O yeah, right! Like I meant to do it!' The truth is they did not do it on purpose, it just happened. Another example might be missing the last bus or forgetting to do things. These things need to be handled, of course, but need to be put into context with the more serious aspects of behaviour. Have you ever broken anything or put coffee in the teapot?

## 2 Behaviour linked to the stage of development

We all know that living with a teenager can have its ups and downs. Talk to any parent of a teenager and they will confirm this. The trouble is, even though we know that teenagers need to go through this period to help them to mature into adulthood, going through it is another matter! Teenage years are a stage in our development when we wonder, experiment and try out many aspects of life. Teenagers want to reach their goal without working through the experiences they need before they get there.

Do you remember an adult saying to you: 'You think you know it all but you don't you know. I've been around a lot longer than you have'. or 'Believe me I know'.

The most difficult thing about living with teenagers is that, in some aspects of their development, they may appear very mature, for example in the way they look. Underneath this they may still be catching up with their confidence at socialising and conversation. We know from the Harry Enfield sketches that Kevin is funny because he depicts the way that many teenagers present through this very difficult developmental stage. Other examples might include ear piercing, tattoos, gothic style of dress or moodiness.

This is a stage of development when a teenager is wondering: 'Who am I?' 'What do I want to be?' We also know that this is a time when developmentally children can be vulnerable to negative influences. This has been, and always will be, the same throughout time.

None of these things are done deliberately to annoy us. The teenager is unable to fulfil what we require of them without going through these stages and often learning through trial and error.

### 3 Challenge to authority

This is the most serious aspect of teenage behaviour. Defiance and stubbornness come into this category. In this situation, the teenager is usually very aware of what they are up to and will take a stand against us and say: 'No. Get lost!'

It may be that we have instructed them to do something and they deliberately do precisely what we have told them not to do. The challenge is 'What are you going to do about it?' This indeed is the most serious aspect of behaviour. Many of us have backed away from these challenges only to find our teenager challenges us more and more frequently. We need to take on this challenge and we need to win.

If we accept that our teenager just refuses to do anything that we say, they will end up controlling us and treating us with contempt. The truth of the matter is that the power they have developed can leave them feeling insecure and actually afraid of the power they have. They live their lives out of control. In fact, we have to become stronger than them to take the control back.

When we do start to take back the control, they will still challenge and test out, but they need to do this to see just what we are made of and whether we really mean it. It is part of exploring and testing out life.

#### **4 Behaviour linked to life experience/trauma**

- Ordinary event triggering flashbacks (i.e. taste, touch, sounds, etc.)
- Re-enactment of events (either in play or response)
- Exaggerated responses (tearfulness, depression, morbid thoughts, memory, aggression)
- Avoidance, denial, closed down

(Circles of Harm- Surviving paedophilia and network abuse- Kate Cairns)

