



Troubled Teens

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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It is sad to think about the young celebrities who have recently been making headlines because of their drug and alcohol abuse, law-breaking antics and disrespect for society. They tend to blame those around them and the justice system because they are facing jail terms or ordered into rehabilitation. It seems pretty obvious that these individuals have not been held accountable for their actions for so long that they have begun to believe that they have the right to do as they please.

I have been part of discussions where some people blame the teen or young adult for their choices while others blame the parents for the permissiveness that they have given their children since birth. It's hard to figure out where the problem lies because sometimes troubled teens come from great homes whereas great teens can come from troubled homes. And we all know families that have several children, each of which is completely different from the others despite the common environment. Some things are just a mystery! There are three attitudes that have become quite prevalent in the past few years in our society which I think have interfered for some with the development of what could be healthy parent-child relationships.

The first is that many parents want to be "friends" with their child or children. Over the years, some women have told me that they had a child because they felt unloved, rejected or lonely and thought that a child would fill the needs that adults failed to meet for them in the past. Other parents have the idea that a child is like a beautiful doll that they can place on a shelf to admire and then bring down to dress up and show off to family and friends. Still others treat their children like friends who they don't want to upset or lose.

Children seldom meet the deepest needs of the parent and even if they do, an unhealthy situation can result. When a parent places the need to be "friends" above the need to parent the child in a responsible manner, the whole dynamic is affected. God placed children in families so the children's needs will be met by the parents - not the other way around. Secondly, today's teens seem to have a concept of "ours". They think that what belongs to the parent is "ours". I remember my son's friend who was asking for a car and argued "But dad, we're rich". His father's reply was "No son, I'm rich. You are poor".

When children think that they don't have to work for anything, they are not motivated to develop skills, use creativity to earn discretionary money for their "wants" or plan a career that will enhance their future. Many times, I see the anguish of parents who have adult children still living at home because they do not believe they need to develop healthy independence. Some have careers where they are actually earning more than the parents but enjoy "free room and board" not only for themselves but sometimes even for their partners and children. Thirdly, sometimes children have a sense of "entitlement" where they think that the world owes them not only a living but a luxurious lifestyle. Their mindset is that they deserve respect but that they don't have to give it or earn it. If asked to do simple household chores they state that it is their room and the parents have no right to ask them to clean it. Teachers who give low marks for shoddy work are criticized by the child as being "incompetent" or "unfair". When they are brought into a Courtroom for breaking the law, the teens are appalled at the nerve of the police or judge for causing trouble for them.

Often parents ask for advice about raising their troubled teens and I tell them that it is totally acceptable and necessary to have and enforce family rules that teach responsibility in a healthy manner. It will not harm a child to hold a part-time job as long as it doesn't interfere with school work (which is the child's primary "job"). Trying to be your child's "friend" will interfere with your ability to parent appropriately and, as the child's model you will need to demonstrate the consistency, maturity and responsibility which you want them to emulate. Finally, if the child or teen is not complying, consider what is done when one country invades another. The first task is to "bomb the supplies". Allowances, cell phones and computers are not a "rite of passage" and can be taken away from children or teens who are not doing what is required of them.

It isn't easy to raise children and teenagers - especially if you haven't done it before or had any training and there isn't any exact formula to ensure that a child will "turn out" well. There are, however, techniques and guidelines that will help with the task of raising healthy and responsible children.

If you are struggling in the area of parenting, perhaps talking with a psychologist will help to get things back on track for you and your family. And remember, it isn't weakness to ask for help - it's a weakness not to ask!