

BUTTON PUSHING TACTICS

Parents

1. Preaching or Using Clichés. As soon as adolescents hear lectures coming with clichés like “when I was your age,” they go deaf. Adolescents do not want to hear how bad they are or how good another family member is by comparison. They will usually get angry, walk away or ignore the parent. In turn, the parents get angry and the argument escalates.
2. Talking in Chapters. Keep it brief. For example, instead of saying “Please take out the garbage,” parents go on and on with “I have told you for weeks and weeks...”
3. Labeling. Adolescents hate when parents say they are “always” this way or that. Can be dangerous and become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
4. Futurizing. This happens when parents talk about their teenager’s future within a negative framework. “You’ll never get into college.” “No one will hire you.” Results in teenager’s shutting the parents out with hurt feelings, resentment, and anger.
5. Instant Problem-solving. Adolescents feel they are different from everyone else and their emotions are new, personal and unique. Parents mean well by saying they understand just how the teen feels and offering instant solutions, but the teenager just needs to feel that s/he was heard.
6. Questioning the Adolescent’s Restlessness and Discontent. Developmentally this is a time of uncertainty, self-consciousness, moodiness and suffering. These feelings usually pass over time. “What is the matter with you” questions are not unanswerable. Even if the teen did know what the problem was, they could not say, “Look Mom or Dad, I am torn by conflicting emotions, engulfed by irrational urges, and confused by raging hormones.”
7. Not Tolerating Experimental Behavior. Okay to express disapproval once. If parents focus on clothes, hairstyles, and the like, however, they will find themselves pulled into power struggles. Experimentation is the developmental norm. Pick your battles. Save energy for the important issues.
8. Collecting Criticisms. These damage the teenager’s spirit and often take years to heal (if ever).

Teenagers

1. “You never let me do anything!” Invites the parents to point out specific times that they have let the teen do what s/he wanted. Diverts from real issues.
2. “You don’t love me!” Intended to induce guilt and make the parents question their self-worth.
3. “I hate you. You’re a _____!” Meant to get the parents to lose their tempers. Clouds parents’ thought processes and limits their ability to enforce consequences.
4. “You’re not my real mother/father. I don’t have to listen to you!” Unnerves stepparents, but is rarely about biology. It is another tactic designed to fluster the parent and divert from the real issue.
5. Disgusted look, improper gesture, whiny voice. Body language, gestures and tone of voice are some of the most powerful tools an adolescent may use to play with someone’s emotions.
6. “I’m going to leave/run away” (and other assorted threats). This is an effective tool to get parents to back off from exerting authority.
7. “I hate school!” Invites a lecture on how the teen is throwing away his future. Teens have difficulty seeing past tomorrow, so many do not see failing school as a problem in the immediate future. They do know education is important to parents, however, and use this statement to their advantage.

RESPONDING NONREACTIVELY AND CALMLY

- 1. Exiting and waiting.** This has to be explained to the teenager earlier and signals (1) the argument is getting too heated to be productive; or (2) the adolescent is disrespectful; or (3) the adolescent is using unacceptable language or tone of voice. It is a form of timeout.
- 2. Staying short and to the point.** (For every two minutes parents stay in an argument, they could probably deduct 5 years from their chronological age.)
- 3. Using deflectors.** Use repetition with “nevertheless,” “no expectations,” “that is the rule.”
- 4. Creating secret signals.** If both parents are involved, they can “coach” each other with signs.
- 5. Speaking in one parental voice.** “United we stand, divided we fall.”
- 6. Considering if the behavior is worth confrontation.** Choose your battles or everyone will burn.
- 7. Energizing and recharging.** Life needs balance. Marriages need nurturing without teenagers. Parents need to pursue other interests too to avoid burnout.
- 8. Staying in the present.** Leave the past and future out of it.
- 9. Separating misbehavior from personal attacks.** View the behavior as an attempt for control (see pushed buttons and goals of misbehavior chart).
- 10. Restoring good feelings.** Often this is difficult because parents have been hurt, think that teenager will take advantage, or are afraid teenager will push them away.

LAST LAUGH

PARENTING FOR WUSSES

Describe, don't accuse.



Give "I" messages.



Let the child participate in problem-solving.



Allow him or her a choice.



Clearly state the consequence of the misdeed.



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