



TIPS of the Month

MARCH 2023

TEENAGE POWER
struggles



**Military Family
Resource Centre**
Montreal Region

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"I always thought that there would be some discipline issues with my kids when they got to be teenagers because I hoped that they would have a lot of spunk, that they would do adventurous things, that would push the limits. But I never thought that they would fight me so hard! Their father doesn't live with us, and so he is not here to back me up. They should at least respect me! I am afraid that our relationship is blowing up in my face!"

A little perspective

If you are experiencing frequent arguments with your teen, you are getting habituated to fighting (even if it's unpleasant). Habits can be like reflexes, they happen without thinking; at the first hint of conflict, you act like you are already in the midst of the fight. You are in a power struggle, a lose-lose situation. How can you accept surrendering power, and still provide for the safety of your teen and maintain your relationship?

- Try to understand things from your teen's point of view, while remembering that as a teenager, they have a capacity for strong emotion *without filters or experience*.
- Show empathy with your teen's emotions even if you don't agree with their actions.
- Let go of the idea of control- you can only control how **you** act with your teen, and hopefully your teen will learn to control him/ herself. It is easier to do that if the teen participates in negotiating the rules and boundaries.
- Try to access your teen's reasonable self. Discuss why things are not working and ask for suggestions.
- Educate yourself and your teen on the subjects that are contentious.

Teens are developing a sense of identity: calm, respectful interactions with an adult will help them to believe that they can face things calmly and confidently. Like all people, teens need to be seen, heard, understood and supported.

Some suggestions for talking with your teen:

- Don't make it about you. "The curfew (or whatever rule is in question) is to keep you safe and to help keep you rested so you can practice self-discipline. It doesn't seem to be working. Can you share why it's not working from your point of view?" This approach is compassionate and appeals to your teen to share with you what isn't working.
- Share your ethics with your teen. "Is this way of behaving making you feel good about yourself? What will make you feel proud of yourself?"
- Ask your teen what their goals and hopes are. If they express something clearly, try to negotiate ways to support your teen in becoming what they want to be. If your teen cannot express a goal or a hope for themselves, maybe they are afraid of being judged, or maybe they have not got enough confidence to believe in the future. They need encouragement and compassion.
- If the situation is explosive, get help before there is violence. Resources are available at the CLSC and the MFRC.



As a parent, how can I maintain my well-being?

- Conflicts are always stressful. Be patient.
- Stay focused on the fact that the problem is complex, and you can only control the way that you behave. How do you want your teen to remember this event and how you acted? Will your decision promote a trusting relationship with your teen?
- Invite your teen's contribution to the decisions you will make.
- Maintain your own physical health.
- Practice breathing exercises to maintain calm when you feel strong emotions.
- Admit when you need help, to yourself and your teen, and seek it out.

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

- Excessive smartphone and social media use is associated with mental distress, self-injurious behaviour and suicidality in teenagers. (Smartphones, social media use and youth mental health Elia Abi-Jaoude, MSc MD, Karline Treurnicht Naylor, MPH MD, and Antonio Pignatiello, MD, CMAJ. 2020 Feb 10; 192(6): E136–E141.)
- Every CLSC has a program for families, CAF, Crise Ados Familles. This service is available from the afternoon until evening, and can be accessed by calling 811, option 2, and requesting to speak to a social worker about a family crisis.
- The MFRC has social workers ready to work with you and your family, if you make the request. Call (450) 358-7099. Ext. 2917 and ask for an appointment with a social worker.

References

- Teen Brain, Teen Mind- What Parents Need to Know to Survive the Adolescent Years, Dr. Ron Clavier, 2009, Key Porter Books Limited
- How to Talk So Teens Will Listen and Listen So Teens Will Talk, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, 2005, Harper Collins
- The Power of Showing Up, Daniel Siegel, M.D., and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D., 2021, Ballantyne Books
- How to Avoid Power Struggles with Your Teen, Ugo Uche, posted July 3, 2017
- Parenting My Teen- 4 Tips for Staying Out of the Power Struggle, Kristen Craren, posted October 8, 2020

Need help?

Contact Psychosocial Intake at the Military Family Resource Centre, Montreal Region:

Saint-Hubert: 450-462-8777, Ext. 6821 and Saint-Jean: 450-358-7099, Ext. 2917 or SvcPersCRFMSoutienPsySt-Jean@forces.gc.ca