

# Parenting

**WHEN I LOOK BACK** on all the things I have done in the past, good or bad, I wonder what it was that inspired me to do it. On some things I wonder, was it the cool thing to do? did it make me feel good? did it make me feel bad? or did my friend tell me to do it?



did I see it on TV? All these questions seem to puzzle us when we are young, but as we get older we say, "What was I thinking?" I did a lot of dumb crazy things when growing up. Was I was looking for attention, the admiration of my peers, power, or just something I can't explain. There are so many things that teenagers go through, often times very destructive. Some learn from their mistakes, but some are less fortunate.

There was a guy his whole life who never thought about doing drugs. He drank sometimes but it never seem to affect any of his judgements. One day he made a decision to 'experiment' with drugs, just to see what they will like. The affects of this drug made him see snakes coming out of the walls, "like they were trying to get me" as he describes. He did all he could to get away from them, and his only apparent choice was diving through his bedroom window. He was treated for multiple lacerations to his face, stomach, and legs. By a stroke of luck he lived through this painful experience, and now he's probably looking back wondering, what made me set all my convictions aside to do something so stupid. It's a crazy thing but it is something that plagues our youth today.

Sometimes I wonder where I would be if I could change one thing in my past. If I could change one thing in my past, what would I change, would it make a difference? I think the thing I would change is to take my parents advice and not have moved out of their house when I was not ready. It is true, the day I went looking for a place of my own, I run into the guy that I would ultimately go on a crime spree with. I was blinded by all the dangers out there with the sparkle of quick money, fast motorcycles, and fancy restaurants. I had it set in my mind that I knew everything, without considering for a second I might not, and in the process I hurt many innocent people.

Some parents have a wisdom they've experienced as teenagers themselves. It's hard to picture your mother and father actually being young and hip once, but that's just because of the many differences one generation has to the next. Parents and teenagers need to find a way to tear down that barrier which causes us to be narrow-minded towards each others thoughts and feelings. One way of breaking down this barrier is to draft out a contract between you and your child.

Contracts are essential in any kind of relationship between an adult and a teenager, and I'll explain why. A contract in which each has had an opportunity to work out is more likely to succeed. It is a statement that you will do something, and the other person

agrees to, and that they will, in turn, do something that is also acceptable to you. A good contract provides a basis for understanding each other. It sets the rules. If you have agreed to a set of rules, and each of you always follows your rules, you know you can depend on each other to do what you think he or she is supposed to do. If you don't have a contract, there is no agreement and no basis for getting along. If you frequently find yourself in conflict, fighting, or arguing, you may not have a clear contract. When people say, "You said" or "You promised" or "Your not fair" and so on, the trouble may be because of a lack of a contract. Without a contract, friends and family members often wind up with a lot of unpleasant and unhappy feelings.

To make this work, it takes both parent and child to be honest, autonomous (standing up on your own two feet and express exactly what you believe), having integrity, and being enthusiastic, and most importantly, a willingness to be open minded to each others ideas. Contracts are not orders, they are simply agreements drawn up by and between consenting people. If it's one sided, it's a dictated rule, and may not work.

A contract is based on the understanding that you will (and you agree to this) keep the contract. Integrity is the basis for all trust between people and is built on conformity to mutually agreed upon rules of behaviour. Thus, you build integrity by following the rules to which you've agreed . If you don't like the rule, work on re-writing it and agreeing with it. But obey it until it's changed. That's integrity.

Try to follow these simple rules for making a contract:

- 1:** Never make a contract when either the parent or teenager is angry.
- 2:** Limit the talk to one simple topic, ie; telephone, curfew, allowance, household chores, etc... Make one contract work first, then do another. Success builds trust and confidence. If dad says he'll do something, and does it, you will trust him on the next thing.
- 3:** Be open. There is more than one way to meet each others needs. Keep in mind you love each other, and you are trying to live more happily with one another. Teenagers need to know that you are trying to get used to their new need for freedom, and it scares you.
- 4:** Consequences clause: What happens if one or the other does not do what you have agreed on? Don't automatically go for punishment. But describe rewardable consequences. For example: If dad doesn't fulfil his part of an agreement, dad takes his son or daughter to a restaurant or movie of their choice, and the same goes for the son or daughter. If the son or daughter fails to fulfil his or her part of the agreement... guess who gets to wash the family car?
- 5:** Give, because you love, not to get. In business contracts, you, "give to get". in a family contract, you give because you care about others, and they care about you.
- 6:** Make sure each of you come away with a good feeling.
- 7:** Write down your agreements, read it aloud, and post it somewhere.
- 8:** Plan to review your agreement, how it's working and if it needs to be changed every couple of weeks or as the need arises.

Make sure that both people get something out of a contract, so it isn't all one-sided. If each person gives something because he or she cares about the other, the contract will work out well.

This is just one of many ideas to explore a new form of communication between children and adults. After these barriers are removed, a teenager may be more willing to discuss topics such as sex, drugs, and violence etc... too young.

What does the future hold for the generations to come? I strongly feel violence on T.V., and in other forms of entertainment play a big role in the violence that is played out from our streets, and our children's classroom. At some point someone's child watched a show, heard a song, or read some underground newsletter, that inspired him or her to do a minor, and in most cases, very violent crime.

What I'm asking from you is to share with myself and others, cases you know of where the media (i.e music-TV-literature etc...) has played a part in your sons or daughters, or friends' crimes ...or even your own. Knowledge is our tool against this rising epidemic. We need to teach our children the difference between fantasy and reality ...before it's too late!