

Q Dear Dr. Trivedi,
My 14 year old daughter is becoming impossible to manage! She only wants to wear what she wants to wear, which is inappropriate according to my husband and I. She doesn't tell us what is going on in her life, who her friends are, she has friends who come to meet her but talk to her outside our home and don't come in. She is constantly telling us how much she hates being at home and just wants to be 18 so that she can leave. I have tried to talk to her about the dangers that are out there in the world and she looks at me like I am talking in another language. I wish I could spank some sense into her.

A You are identifying a classic situation between a teenager and parents with some cultural factors added. Teenagers are all about seeking out their separate identity from their parents. For immigrant families, this often translates to abandoning their parent's culture and adopting a foreign one. This often leads to situations like yours. As teenagers, their peer group tends to be their main influence. Conflicting ideologies with parents leads them to fear rejection and subsequent limitation in freedom of choice. This leads most teenagers to either rebel against their parents, or to the contrary, practice their independent choice without parent's knowledge.

You will need to establish an attitude of acceptance first.

By recognizing your 14 year old daughter's choices as different but accepting her as the same daughter you raised and loved all her life, you will build a communication bridge. Giving her space to express her individuality while expecting good judgment will help balance both side's interests. Trying to control her will only build resentment and distrust. Teaching responsibility while allowing freedom of choice will strengthen your relationship with her in the long run.

Acknowledging that the situation did not develop in a day or a week but over months will help keep things in proper perspective. It will take at least as long to resolve it. Your key is to have realistic expectations and willingness to make compromises with your daughter. Pick your battles about the most important issues and let the little things go.

Q Dear Dr. Trivedi,
I am debating about bringing up the issue of religion with my children. I have never been very religious and neither is my wife. My parents, who are very devout people, were visiting us for two months and they taught our children a few things. I see a little bit of calm in my children, I see them being more respectful of adults and other children, and I think that maybe being religious is helping them. How do I instill more of such values in them? We never used to take them to the Temple earlier, but now I want to start taking them every Sunday. Would it be awkward to try and set a pattern at this late stage? (they are 11 and 13 yrs old). What is the best way to deal with the issue of religion and religious rites?

A I must say, you seem to have answered your own question. Clearly, the religious influence has instilled a sense of calmness and respect for others in your children. You can nurture the same by giving your children more opportunities to experience spirituality. As your children have been an example, spirituality is a perfect counterbalance to the typical child's life these days. It allows for emotional balance and an accepting attitude.

Other ways to experience spirituality are volunteering, doing small good deeds on a regular basis and spending time with older people. Ultimately, you are not setting a pattern for something new at an awkward age, you are simply recognizing something innate in your children and helping them nurture it. It feels right because it is right.

Dr. Trivedi is a Board-Certified Psychiatrist. He treats children, adolescents and adults. Please visit www.MINDvantage.com for more information.

