

# THE PARENTS' CHAT ROOM

By: Dr. Maulik Trivedi

1. I am 16 years old. My parents don't beat me up and they give me some freedom, but I cannot continue living at home with them under their rules. They want me to go to medical school but I hate the idea of it. They keep saying it is for my future, but I don't see myself as a doctor and they don't understand my point of view. Money and status are very important to them, all I want to do is go to school, study Political Science and have fun in life. My friends can make decisions about their life, why not me? I cannot leave home, obviously, since I can't take care of myself financially but I need to do something before I actually end up with a career I don't want.

You, my dear, have just expressed the greatest desire among the 16 year olds. At the same time, you have also raised the blood pressure of many parents reading this. You certainly sound very sure about how you feel. Would it surprise you to learn that your parents probably feel equally 'right' in their position. Go figure! Of course, as a

sixteen year old, you know everyone has a right to have their own opinion. And, right now, you are probably wishing your parents would understand yours. Would it surprise you, also, to learn that they want you to better understand exactly the same thing? Confused?

They also want you to understand their reasons for having their opinion. And you want them to understand your reasons. We could go back and forth like this forever and still end up at the same dilemma. Now, you must be confused. So what can be done?

Well, here are some suggestions to start with. First, keep your parents engaged in a dialogue. Because your

parents are afraid for your future, they are stubborn about their position. And, because you are afraid to get stuck with a future you don't want, you are not going to budge from your point of the argument. Discussing things always helps both sides become more familiar with the other side of the argument. That doesn't mean that one side will give in to the other. What it means is that both sides will be able to come up with a new way to look at the same situation. This will ultimately allow the two sides to come up with new ideas for a common solution. The shared responsibility for solving a common problem will not only lead to a mutually agreeable solution, but also allow for trust to develop between the two sides. This trust will help avoid many similar situations in the future and add a new richness to your relationship.

Also, as a 16 year old, you will have to imagine where your parents are coming from. They have the perspective of their experience, and that means good experiences as well as bad. Whether you see it that way or not, they are sincerely worried about your future. You may think that is ridiculous, but the simple fact is that they are. So, it is in your best interest to help them feel comfortable about your future as much as possible and in as many ways as possible. Argu-

ing with them is probably the last thing you want to do. That would only make them feel like they are more right. Do you think that you are doing the best to win over their support? What might be some different ways to do that? If you spend a little time thinking, you're sure to figure it out.

You can also be sure that in many cultures, and especially the south asian culture, parents think of having prestige and money as the symbols of security. They want to assure this as the most important asset for their children. So, when a 16 year old tells them about wanting to major in political science, it is hard for them to imagine a lucrative career for their child. Very likely, your parents may already be projecting a 'poor' outlook for your future. They may believe that you will find happiness automatically when you have a stable financial future. To help them see your viewpoint, they may need to be educated about different types of career opportunities that await

political science graduates. They may also need help in understanding the value of happiness that is not tied to financial security. What ever you do, do it with an open mind. You may find out that as you set out to change your parents, you will also have opportunities that you will discover, and perhaps, even change yourself.

The other thing to do to speed up the process is to keep emotions out of the way and work with logic. If when discussing things, you or your parents become angry, just take a break from each other. Continue the conversation at another time. Getting a mutually respected third party involved may be a good idea

to consider.

Finally, remember that fear and anger are the biggest detriments to resolving most relationship dilemmas. What you can learn from managing your life experiences in spite of your fears and frustrations will make you better prepared for the rest of your life. Ultimately, honesty and trust will conquer with simplicity what no army can with force.

Yes, you are absolutely right that you can not leave their home at 16. I invite you to see this as an opportunity rather than a punishment. If you are focused on escaping from their home at 18, you'll have missed the opportunity to help yourself and your parents grow from the experience.

Coincidentally, if you watch Hindi movies, you are in luck. A recent release called '3 idiots' addresses the same issue from the south asian cultural perspective in a very comical way. It is sure to broaden perspectives for the adolescent as well as the parent. Good Luck.

Dr. Trivedi is a Board-Certified Psychiatrist. He treats children, adolescents and adults.

Please send your questions to [parentschatroom@citymasala.com](mailto:parentschatroom@citymasala.com)

