

THE PARENTS' CHAT ROOM

By: Dr. Maulik Trivedi

Q: Dear Dr. Trivedi, Me and my mom argue all the time. I am 15 and she is 39, there is not one hour where we are not arguing. We are always yelling at each other and my dad gets sick of it and just leaves the house. We try so hard to be calm in the house and not argue but we just end up yelling and no matter what, none of us feel like listening to each other. I want to get better with her and she said she does to. But every time we say that, it lasts a couple of days and its back to how we were. What can we do?

A: Dear Reader, being 15 and argumentative is natural. Most 15 year olds would see this as mom's problem entirely and blame her. Yet, it speaks of your budding maturity that you recognize this as a shared problem between you and your mother. By your willingness to share the responsibility of problem solving, you are already a step ahead.

It seems that you have even tried to work as a team to resolve this ongoing situation. And despite your best efforts, things wind up the same way in just a couple of days. It sounds like both of you go back to doing the same thing and wind up getting the same result. Nothing new! So the question is, what to do differently and where to begin with changing the interaction such that you work towards permanently repairing the relationship.

Here are some suggestions that either or both of you can use to remove argumentativeness from your relationship. At the very basic level, please recognize that an argument is merely words expressing two different viewpoints. Once you remove emotions from an argument, all you are left with is words spoken in loud voices and at fast speed. One can work towards stopping an argument very simply by changing any or all of these elements. So, if you want the arguments to end, every time you recognize that you are arguing, ask yourself, "Can I stop talking right now? Can I choose not to have the last word? What is more important to me in this argument, the argument or my relationship with the other person?"

Next, at a human relationship level, the following is also a possibility in many parent-child relationships. Remember, it is mom's nature to be protective towards her children. As children grow up, it is necessary for moms to allow more and more space for the child to make their own decisions, even when she knows that there's a better way to do something. Very often, moms' feelings of not wanting their child to be hurt even a little bit prevent them from allowing this

space. As a result, the parent keeps having an opinion on everything that a child does and the child risks becoming dependent on the parent's input. About the age of 16 is probably as far as parents can exercise this type of 'input' in today's world. Can you guess what happens if this 'input' doesn't stop?

In some cases, this type of interaction between a parent and a child continues into the child's adulthood. A parent keeps instructing a child who is approaching 18 or beyond. This hurts the child's own sense of independence in the long run. This type of interaction is tolerated up to a certain age. As the child reaches closer to age 18, they start feeling frustrated and dependent. In severe cases, this overprotective attitude of a parent can lead to the feeling of being trapped for the child. The child can even feel guilty in expressing their own viewpoint. At the same time, the child recognizes that

they have an inner personal need to do things as they feel is best for them and not just because this is how their parent feels. As you may imagine, this leads to strong opposing feelings of 'guilt' and 'frustration' in an adult who is still being treated like a child by their parent. The results are ongoing anger and arguments between the parent and the child. Both want things to get better but are unable act freely and independently. This perpetuates the conflicted relationship until one of them has the courage to change. Therefore, it is recommended that the transition in a parent child relationship begin to take place with slow but steady inclusion of independent actions. If this is too challenging, getting professional

help is strongly recommended.

Lastly, both you and your mom can each think independently about what impact each of you has on your surrounding. By choosing to argue all the time, you are affecting your home environment including the people in it. Arguments carry a negative energy that drives people away from you. You may want to think about that and observe your environment the next time you are in an argument.

In today's world, more than ever, we can all benefit from learning to express our opinions independently but without negativity. This would help harmonize all relationships. So, the next time you find yourself in an argument, ask yourself, "Who will have the last word?" And choose your answer wisely!

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

Please send your questions to parentschatroom@citymasala.com

