REBELLION IN CHILDREN AND TEENS

To some extent, a degree of rebellion is good. It is a child’s way of becoming more independent and assertive. Psychiatrists worry the most about children who are totally compliant and get straight A’s. They are more likely to suffer from depression and even suicidal thoughts. When parents bring in a child or teen who is rebelling, we often treat the parents until the child gets better—but usually we treat the entire “family system” rather than just the rebellious child or teen. I highly recommend that parents study Boundaries for Kids by Dr. John Townsend and Dr. Henry Cloud, the leading Christian psychologists in America today.

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF REBELLION IN CHILDREN AND TEENS

1. SIN. We are all born with a sinful human nature so sometimes rebellion is simply the child being selfish and rebelling for sinful reasons.

2. PARENTS ARE TOO STRICT. Parents who have rules that are much stricter than the norm for Christian families in their community will naturally bring a sense of unfairness to the child or teen who is correct in protesting. When in doubt, see a professional Christian family counselor to help you come up with rules, chores and consequences that are within a normal range.

3. PARENTS ARE TOO LENIENT. King Solomon said that a child left to himself (to do whatever he wants to do) will end up bringing his mother to shame. If you spare the rod of discipline, Solomon said, you will spoil your child. We are born with a sinful nature, but love and discipline help us grow out of it sufficiently to live a normal Christian life. You will never be perfect and neither will your child. But you and your child can both become mature Christians.

4. PARENTS ARE INCONSISTENT. Often one parent is too strict and the other too lenient. Children will do just fine in a home that is a little bit too strict or a little bit too lenient, but will not do fine in a home where parents do not provide a united front. Parents can argue peaceably with each other in front of the kids about other things, to teach them how to resolve conflicts when they get married some day, but never argue about discipline in front of them. Split the difference in your rules and provide a united front, or see a professional Christian family counselor to help you decide what would be reasonable.

5. PARENTS EXPECT THEIR CHILDREN TO GO BY RULES THE PARENTS THEMSELVES DO NOT OBEY. Children do as we do much more than they do what we say. If you don’t want your children to be addicted to drugs or alcohol, don’t abuse alcohol or drugs yourself, including abusing prescription drugs. If you want them to be kind, unselfish and helpful to others, model that yourself.
6. **PARENTS DO NOT LISTEN TO THEIR CHILDREN'S FEELINGS.** If your child tells you, in a reasonable way, that he is feeling angry toward you, thank him for sharing his true feelings with you. You don’t have to agree that his anger is appropriate in that situation, and you may not change your mind, but you show your child respect by listening to his feelings. *Children who feel free to share their anger don’t have to rebel to act it out!*

7. **PARENTS PROJECT THEIR OWN FAULTS ON THEIR CHILDREN.** Matthew 7:3-5 says we often see the toothpick in our friend’s eye (or our child’s eye or our mate’s eye) instead of the log in our own eye. We probably all do this to some extent. It is part of being human. Most fathers are toughest on the oldest son because that child reminds him the most of things in himself that the father does not want to see. Likewise, most mothers are toughest on the oldest daughters for the same reason. Was it a coincidence that 15 of the first 16 astronauts were firstborn sons? I think not. They had to be perfectionistic to make it to the moon and back. I have had interactions with three astronauts and they are wonderful people, but definitely perfectionists. I projected on my own children at times. God showed me Matthew 7:3-5 in a dream one time, the day I went to a family counselor with my wife and "rebellious child." I was being too tough on that child for reminding me of things in myself that I had not seen.

8. **DIVORCE.** Divorce for biblical reasons is sometimes the best choice, but divorce for any reason, right or wrong, is tough on kids. If divorce cannot be avoided, get professional help for your children to help them work through the grief rather than acting out the grief through rebellion. And get counseling yourself, to help protect you from using your kids as tools to outdo or get vengeance on the other parent.

9. **REMARRY.** Adjusting to a new parent is also tough. Go to the Resources page at www.meierclinics.org to read my article on step parenting.

10. **DEPRESSION.** A child or teen who has always been a model citizen but quickly becomes rebellious is almost certainly depressed or may have some other mental illness. The illness may be a genetic one which usually is correctable with use of proper medications to correct the chemical imbalance. He may have bipolar or schizophrenia, or inherit depression. Frequently, the child has been abused by someone within the home or outside of the home. Children or teens who are abused physically, emotionally or sexually tend to keep it secret, blame themselves, develop lower self-esteem, stuff their anger and guilt, and become not only depressed but rebellious. A Christian psychiatrist would be necessary for genetic problems. A Christian family counselor can help dig out other root problems and help the child or teen recover from the trauma of abuse and from depression. Often a month or two of Christian counseling, sometimes mixed with an antidepressant if needed, brings the child or teen back to his pre-depression feelings and behaviors. Nutrition is poor in children and teens today also, and lack of the essential amino acids and/or Vitamin B6 can also cause depression. Regardless of the cause of depression, eating correctly is part of the cure. I highly recommend To Your Health Liquid Vitamins, available at www.tyh.us, because they contain not only all the vitamins most children or adults need, but also the essential amino acids and B6, so your child is more likely to recover from depression regardless of what else he may be eating or not eating.