

Adults Just Don't Understand Me

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Are you tired of always being in the wrong? Does it seem like you can't do anything right when it comes to your teachers and parents? Why won't they just listen to me? Do these questions ever run through your head at any time? There are young people everywhere who feel the exact same way. The question now is what am I doing so wrong?

Many teens feel that they simply cannot talk to adults, mainly parents, about anything. Do not be alarmed if you feel this way; it is perfectly normal. As children mature into adolescence, they begin to have attitudes about the parenting they experience, and studies of children have found that adolescents' feelings of trust and communication with their parents play a role in their own emotional regulation strategies (Jung, Y. K, 2007). As teens mature they usually begin to gain a sense of independence. This time is frequently when the tension with adults begins. The tension may arise as you gain independence from your parents after being dependent on them for many years. Once you begin to walk in independence, your parents may feel that you no longer need them, thus removing their "purpose". Having their sense of purpose removed can be a big deal for parents. They go from having the answers to your problems, to potentially becoming the problem. Parents can easily become threatened by your independence.

Parents and adolescents often differ in how they perceive parental behaviors (Hillaker, B. D., Brophy-Herb, H., Villarruel, F. A., & Haas, B. E., 2008). According to psychologist Erik Erikson adolescents are in a time where they are trying to achieve

a stable sense of self (Riesch, S. K., Coleman, R., Glowacki, J. S., & Konings, K.,1997). Parents may feel unneeded as you mature, and you may feel that they disagree with all of your ideas. As you become less dependent on your parents, you may feel a sense of competition with them and find that every conversation with your parents turns into an argument. These arguments may occur because your parents feel you no longer need them or value their opinion

Example: Imagine if you had an experiment that you worked on for months and months. Then you began to see that your project was slowly becoming successful and would be ready to present at the science fair the next month after a few more tweaks. And all of the sudden, your classmate began to finish the project and proceeded to present it for you and receive all the credit for your hard work. How would you feel? Think of yourself in this scenario as the classmate and your parents as the researcher. This is how parents may view their children, they work so hard to equip you for life and then out of nowhere you jump in control of the equipping and pretty much gives them the vibe they are no longer needed.

Once parents feel they are no longer needed, they can become defensive with you. This does not necessarily occur because they dislike the way you do things but probably more likely because they no longer feel that you need them. When you love something dearly you become protective and defensive of that thing to ensure that it is surrounded by success.

In understanding that parent's goals are not to take control of your life you can begin to reflect on how you can keep the peace at home. Believe it or not, including parents in your decision-making can result in fewer disagreements

because it allows them to feel that they have not lost all control in raising you. Research has shown that parents play an important role in how their children cope with and experience negative emotions (Jung, 2007). Your parent's input could actually benefit you if you're open to conversing with them.

After reading this you may think, "you don't know my mom", or "I understand but this does not really help my situation". If so, then maybe the following tips presented by Dr. Debra Fulghum Bruce (WebMD, 2007) can help you communicate more effectively with your parents.

- **Get your thoughts together.** Before you talk to your parents, grab a pen and paper and write down the concerns and/or problems that you have with your normal communication. You'll feel more prepared when your thoughts are in order. (You can scratch through thoughts that may be hurtful or disrespectful. It's probably best not to bring these up just yet.)
- **Plan a time to talk with your parents .** Schedule a time with no distractions so you can focus on your issues. Avoid talking before bedtime or dinnertime, or right after your parents get home from work. Make sure you and your parents are rested and not hungry. If you have siblings, ask that they leave so you can be alone with your parents.
- **Don't throw dirt!** When you do talk with your parents, speak about the here and now. Avoid bringing up what they said the last time you asked, or how they ignored you when you

discussed this previously. Start fresh with no grudges. Try to establish basic ground rules for talking that you all agree upon.

- **Keep it all about "you."** When you talk to your parents, avoid telling them what your best friend's parents allow or what they let your sister or brother do several years ago. Avoid threatening them, and keep the talk on a personal, caring level.
- **Be sensible and even-tempered.** Suggest to your parents that you explain your concerns or needs first. Then ask if they can give their reaction without being critical or emotional.
- **Keep your composure.** Be cool. State your side logically, without yelling or name-calling
- **Try not to act defensive.** (this needs an example – what do you mean by not acting defensive? That's when parents' moods often turn sour! Stay objective and logical. Deal with facts.
- **Stand tall.** By attempting to talk to your parents openly -- and without emotional outbursts -- you are showing them you are adult enough to be responsible for your actions.
- **Ask for feedback.** Let your parents know that what they say is important to you. Tell them you want to open up to them because you have confidence in them. They will be impressed that you are talking with them instead of one of your peers.
- **Get a third party to mediate.** If talking to your parents is simply impossible (and only you can judge that), perhaps a

mediator might help. A mediator is a third person that helps people talk with each other and make compromises. A good mediator might be a mutual family friend, a relative, a trusted teacher/counselor at your school, or a neighbor who you know well. In some situations, teens may stand a better chance of getting their parents to listen when there is another trusted adult in the room.

These ideas are not guaranteed to make your parents change, but they should improve communication between you and your parents. You must understand that your parents do not want to make your life difficult. Be mindful that you are their child and they want you to make decisions that will lead you to success. So the next time you feel as though you're being ignored or misunderstood, try to reflect on what you really mean to your parents. The next time you experience conflict with your parents, try using the ideas above to build a better relationship with them.

Studies have also shown that youth who perceive "open-communication" with their parents are less likely to engage in health-risk activities such as alcohol/drug use, sexual activity, and tobacco use (Williams-Wheeler, 2011). Simply by becoming open with your parents you have the potential to shifting the outcome of your life on your terms while involving your parents at the same time.

Additional Resources:

For additional information about communicating with your parents and other adults, please visit the following websites:

http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/advice/parent_problems2.html

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

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