

Newsletter Article 2

From The "Terrible Two's" Thru The "Terrible Teens"

There is a passage in the Bible that says, "We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope..." A lot of parents not only find it difficult to persevere during the teen years let alone rejoice in the sufferings produced.

The teen years are both exciting and painful, just as the "terrible two's" were growth producing and frustrating at the same time. What makes the teen years more difficult is that more time has elapsed for the marriage relationship to have more tears in it, and the teen has had more years to practice how to manipulate mom and dad.

One way to more fully persevere and enjoy the teen years is to know that it is a great opportunity to undue some earlier mistakes and that you can leave a great legacy for your children and grandchildren. Here is what I mean.

In the growth and development of children there is a period that is called "rapproachment." Rapproachment means that a child is learning to grow more independent by pushing on the boundaries set for him or her, while at the same time feeling more vulnerable and dependent on the ones they are trying to separate from - you, the parent. The basic feeling is a rollercoaster ride where you can't see the next drop or turn because it comes so suddenly. Mix that with hormonal changes and you can have a real wild ride on your hands.

Rapproachment happens during the "terrible twos", from about 18-24 months, then again during adolescence. If you think of your teen as a sophisticated, oversized 2-year old with raging hormones, you get the picture. A lot of women tell me their husbands are still like that, but I won't go there in this article.

The main task of the parent during adolescence is to both support their teen in their task of becoming an adult individual, and, to maintain boundaries that help keep them, and you, safe.

When your teen or two year old is resistant to something, that means they are generally fighting for something else that is more important to them. I usually ask resistant teens what they are fighting for and if their strategy is working. There is usually a way to get their needs met rather than wreaking havoc on the parent.

Another important factor with teens, as well as with children at all ages, is that they behave in a way that, in their minds keeps the family system in balance. In other words, if mom is angry with dad a lot, and dad gets depressed and doesn't help out, the child will do something to get mom and dad talking to each other, even if it is an argument. The child then will take the side he or she thinks will be to their best advantage.