

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FOR PARENTS

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By Satish Purohit

Rebellion is a necessary part of growing up, but it can be very hard on parents. Here's how to resolve those nagging issues with your kids

The minefield of parenting was never as treacherous as it is today, with children exposed to so much so soon. And it is not easy on children either as they negotiate, bargain and argue hard to strike an equilibrium in their relationships with their parents. They're caught between their desire for space and their need to be protected from a world that is unfolding in degrees before their eyes.



Twelve-year-old Ishna Gaba doesn't want to be told what she must stock faith in; her mother Shalini has come around to respecting her views (PIC:NILESH WAIRKAR);

Sometimes children's tantrums are a cry for attention, believes Vandana Upadhyay (PIC:RAJU SHELAR); Leena Menon feels teens must learn to be responsible for themselves (PIC: RAJU SHELAR); Rituja Dixit feels that parenting inevitably involves tough love (PIC: K C SINGH)

Parental love struggles to find its way but it is a messy affair, and the results are often less than satisfactory.

Thirteen-year-old Danielle Bregoli, who has been charged with theft, drug abuse and assault, became a YouTube sensation after she appeared on Dr Phil's show in September last year — for some, it's amusing viewing, for others, something they relate with, and therein lies the danger. Bregoli's tantrums, often violent, had escalated to a point where Ann, her mother, who was given to abusive behaviour herself, threw her hands up in despair and said she was ready to give up on her daughter altogether. After much counselling and a rehab programme, the teen is only reported to have become worse. So, if you're looking for simple answers or absolute solutions, there are none. But, experts and parents offer some tips on how you can manage conflict smoothly.

Where is it coming from?

Thirty-one-year-old Vandana Upadhyay, a mother of two who teaches speech and drama at Poddar International School, says, parent-child arguments and disagreements are often about issues that are not visible immediately. "After a day at work, I found my 10-year-old son Ekansh's tantrums exhausting," shares Upadhyay. "Is he was asked to lift his uniform or bag or books from the floor, he would try to strike a bargain, asking, in return, for junk food, or to be allowed to play games on my phone or to be taken for a holiday," she says.

"However, then, I began noticing that Ekansh would always agree to do whatever he had been asked to after all that fussing, despite the fact that I did not succumb to his pressure. I gradually realised that he was throwing a tantrum because he missed me when I was away and simply wanted my attention. The tantrums were merely his way of compensating for my absence. It was not as much about the things he was demanding. And, I came to realise that children and their motivations have to be understood if such conflicts are to be resolved," says Upadhyay.

Your turn to back down?

Sixty-five-year-old Brigadier Sushil Bhasin, a father of two and author of the recently published book *Design Your Life (Shape Yourself to Shape Your Destiny)*, says that if 12 years of parenting have taught him anything, it's "Always be the best version of yourself because your children are observing you. Be a role model and give your children the room to be their best versions." He shares an anecdote. "Aneesh, my son, was brilliant with computers but he was not otherwise academically-inclined. My wife and I were very worried about this, and it inevitably led to friction and arguments, until we decided to let him have his way and quit college to take up photography. Today, we are glad we decided to call a truce and let him have his way. I believe it's important for parents to understand that it's OK and sometimes necessary for them to back down too, when the occasion calls for it."

Now 32, his son, Aneesh Bhasin who has co-founded Hipcask, a food and drink company based in Mumbai, says, "My friends were mystified by my decision. I was 17 and it was 2003 and we were in Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh where, to most people, 'photography' meant taking passport and wedding snaps. No one understood my decision. I'm grateful to my parents for reassuring me, for saying that it's OK for me to not attend college. This allowed me to pursue my passion, something that would have been impossible otherwise."

Mama don't preach

Forty-year-old Shalini Gaba, an organisational development consultant based in Mumbai, and mother of 12-year-old Ishna, says she has raised her daughter to be independent. "Ishna saw that I choose for myself and wondered why the same privileges could not be extended to her. She disliked my intrusions, and demanded to know why she was being made to do something against her will. We used to have these long-drawn arguments, and there appeared to be no end to it."

Ishna says she wants her mother to understand that she isn't interested in rituals, temples and religion. "I don't like to be told what I should believe in. At one point there were way too many temple visits and I found it difficult to understand why we were doing it as often as were," says Ishna. + Gaba says she that in the last few months, she has consciously begun to respect her daughter's space more than she used to. "I have stopped checking her phone. Over dinner, we sometimes discuss boys she is teased about in school or her crushes. It helps that my ex-husband and I present a united front when it comes to parenting responsibilities," explains Gaba.

The curfew conundrum

Leena Menon, a 44-year-old homemaker based in Mumbai, and mother to 12-year-old Kiara and 17-year-old Kirtana, says that eventually all parents have to deal with issues pertaining to alcohol, relationships, choice of friends, and curfews. "I am okay with my children faltering from time to time. They're only human. Once my daughter came home way past the curfew. She told me that she expected me to ground her and that it was fine for me to do so. I stayed calm, and told her that she was a responsible girl who knew what was right and wrong. This approach forced her to introspect and take responsibility for herself, and she has never come home late again," Menon shares.

Kirtana says it is tough being a teen. "I think we argue with our parents because all of us are very vocal — in my opinion, that's a good thing though perhaps an utter drain of energy. I need space, but I also need my parents to parent and to be there for me when required. I know it's asking for a lot," she smiles. "With time, as I see more of life, I feel I'll understand my parents better. When a relationship I was in soured, I became a little more aware of what a marriage must involve. I am learning."

Persistence is necessary

Thirty-six-year-old Rituja Dixit, Founder and CEO of Learning Linkups, a corporate training platform, and mother of six-year-old Aarya, says parenting inevitably involves tough love.

"It was not a good feeling to see my daughter lose heart when she could not skate well immediately. She is too young to understand that one has to go through some hardship before one gets good at something new," says Dixit.

"Aarya tried hard to find ways to work around my insistence. She tried to miss the class. She would at times leave her kit in the class and tell the teacher that she had forgotten it home. But I persisted. Three months later when I saw her skating like a breeze, my eyes teared up," says Dixit, sharing that her husband, 37-year-old Atul Sharma, a sales director with an American company, had a big role to play in encouraging their child.

Mix it up

Indu Kering Mathur, an education officer at Appejay Education Society, Navi Mumbai, says discipline and freedom must go hand in hand. "Excessive regimentation and discipline can impair the ecosystem at home and may cause irreparable damage to the child's mental health. It may make a child aggressive, diminish his or her confidence and even encourage a violent streak."

Mathur says there are two approaches to disciplining a child: participative and regulatory. Participative is, for instance, where the child may drink alcohol in the presence of the parent and understand the nuances of it. Regulatory is when a ground rule is communicated on the subject, in this case, on the subject of drinking. "When it comes to romantic associations, parents must handle these with tact — the aim should be to make the child feel like he or she is in a comfort zone when discussing the issue with you."

Riddhi Doshi Patel, a counselling psychologist from Mumbai, whose practice focuses on behavioural issues pertaining to children aged three to 17, says that parents today strive to be 'liberal.' "Usually, both parties in the conflict have valid points to make. Good parenting is about finding the middle

ground,” she says.

■ Parents need to understand that it’s OK and sometimes necessary for them to back down

– Brigadier Sushil Bhasin

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