

SURVIVING TEENAGERS

It might be difficult to accept, but a new approach to living happily with teenagers is for parents to look at their own behaviour.

treat
teenagers
differently
from before

"The key to getting teenagers to respect you is to respect them first," says Penny Palmano, who has written a best-selling book on teenagers. "You can't continue to treat them the same way that you have been treating them for the previous 12 years: they have opinions that count. **1** You'd be very upset. You'd never say that to an adult, because it shows a total lack of respect."

Palmano, who has a daughter aged 19 and a 16-year-old stepdaughter, has even allowed the children to hold several teenage parties at her home. They passed without problems. "I've found that if you have brought them up to do the right thing, and then trust them to do it, usually they'll behave well," she says. "I make them sandwiches and leave them alone. But I make it clear that they have to clear up any mess. **2** "

She agrees that teenagers can be irritating: enjoying a world that is free of responsibility, yet desperate for independence. She doesn't think, however, that they are trying to annoy you. Until recently, scientists assumed that the brain finished growing at about the age of 13 and that teenage problems were a result of rising hormones and a desire for independence. **3**

“This would explain why many teenagers can’t make good decisions, control their emotions, prioritise or concentrate on several different things at the same time. 4 It means that they do not intentionally do the wrong thing just to annoy their parents,” says Palmano.

The key to happiness for all, Palmano believes, is calm negotiation and compromise. If you want your teenagers to be home by 11 pm, explain why, but listen to their counter-arguments. If it’s a Saturday, you might consider agreeing to midnight (rather than 1 am, which is what they had in mind). 5 Instead, ask if they’ve had a problem with public transport and let it pass; they’ve almost managed what you asked. She urges a bit of perspective about other things, too. “There have been times when my daughter’s room has not been as tidy as I expected, but as she said once, ‘I’m a teenager – what do you expect? I’m not turning into a criminal, it’s just clothes on the floor.’”

“It’s vital to choose your battles carefully: don’t criticise teenagers for having an untidy room, then suddenly criticise them for other things. 6 One minute, it’s about an untidy room and the next, you’re saying, ‘And another thing ...’ and criticising them for everything.”

Adapted from *The Daily Telegraph*

- A But it turns out that the region of the brain that controls common sense and emotions is not fully mature until the early twenties.
 - B If they are up to 20 minutes late, don't react angrily.
 - C For example, they may find it difficult to make the right decision between watching television, ringing a friend, or finishing their homework.
 - D Parents often complain that teenagers can be charming to people outside the home but irritating to their family.
 - E I've never had a problem; in fact, the kitchen was sometimes cleaner than I'd left it.
 - F On these occasions, parents tend to mention all the other things that they may or may not have done wrong.
 - G Imagine if you'd spent two hours getting ready to go out for the evening and someone said, 'You're not going out looking like that, are you?'
-