



## How to Have a Negative Relationship with Your Teen

If you don't want your teen to press your "buttons," (e.g., "I hate you", "You always do this") don't press his or her buttons. Listed below are the things parents say, which cause teens to become defensive, stop listening, and/or become angry. A few of these may be appropriate to say when the teen (and parent) are calm, but they *never* seem to work (even if they seem accurate) when the teen is already feeling defensive or angry.

1. **Preaching or using clichés:** As soon as teens hear lectures beginning with clichés like, "When I was your age..." they instantly go deaf. Besides, they really don't care how good they have it compared to others. If the teen has heard something 100 times before, why believe that telling them something 101 times will suddenly make it better?
2. **Remembering the "good old days":** With rare exception, don't tell teens what it was like when you were a kid. Your intentions may be noble, but teens, because of where they are developmentally, believe they are unique and different.
3. **Talking in chapters:** Teens may ask a short question but not receive a short answer. The more you talk, the more chance the teen will only pick up on the negative. When asking them to do something say, "Please take out the garbage" not, "I have told you for weeks and weeks to take the garbage out. How many times do we have to go through this? I am sick and tired..."
4. **Labeling:** Don't use extreme words like "always" or labels like "lazy" because the teen will eventually live up to these labels. Focus on the problem instead of a label. For example, it is one thing to say, "I'm worried about your use of drugs" it is another to say, "You're acting like a *drug addict*" or "you will *never* change"
5. **Futurizing:** Future statements like, "You'll never go to college", "No one will hire you", or "You'll never get a date with that attitude" only foster resentment and cause the teen to tune you out. Keep the focus on the here and now.
6. **Instant Problem Solving:** Similar to avoiding clichés, don't minimize the teen's problems by telling them something glib. They need to be listened to rather than offered something simplistic. Yes, it takes more time to listen, but do you really have time not to listen?
7. **Collecting their mistakes:** No one likes to have their face rubbed in mud. Some parents keep a mental scorecard handy for rehashing past behavior problems during current arguments. Doing this would cause anyone to become defensive. You may be right, but does hammering away at the past really help?
8. **Personalizing:** Telling the teen how their actions make you feel like a "bad" mother or father will only make the teen shut down. If nothing else, they will avoid opening up to you in the future because they don't want to make you feel bad. Yes, you can share your feelings, but don't make it sound like you are putting your emotional well being on his or her shoulders. Guilt trips generally aren't appreciated (e.g., Parent to teen: "I guess I've failed you").



9. **Comparing:** Telling a teen how similar they are (or different they are) from another family member (e.g., siblings, uncle, *ex-spouse*), will only make them resentful toward you and the other family member.