

“Help! My kids are driving me crazy!”

How to manage their behavior while maintaining the relationship

Let’s face it. These days adolescence seems to be “taking kids over” years before age 13. A friend of mine told her 11-year old, “I just can’t allow all this drama. You’re not even 12 yet!” The fact is, because of the media, social influences, diet, or a combination of all three, kids are entering adolescence much earlier than in generations past. When the pituitary gland says its time to grow-up, there’s not much anyone can do to slow the process down! But there IS hope! Psychologists agree that maintaining a connection with our kids during the adolescent phase is critical to their success in navigating its challenges. They also agree on various strategies for managing certain “undesirable” behaviors...

Many parenting experts suggest that a healthy connection with your kids can be boiled down to two key concepts – Love and Limits. Though you may have heard this before, you may not have been given practical applications. First, let’s discuss what these concepts DON’T mean. Love doesn’t mean being your child’s best friend. It’s not about protecting your child from experiencing consequences for their actions or avoiding tough conversations to “keep the peace.” Limits don’t

shield your child from the outside world (this can create fear, timidity, or even rebellion). And they aren’t merely forms of punishment. A successful combination of love and limits will build your kids’ confidence and security while setting boundaries so they can understand, and successfully engage with, the world they’re encountering.

Author and psychologist, Dr. John Townsend developed four principles for boundary setting that, in his words, “provide stability, focus, and clarity to parents who want to establish healthy and appropriate boundaries with their teen.” These four “anchors” are: Love, Truth, Freedom, and Reality.

- **Love** conveys that the behavior, not your child, is the issue. You’re letting your child know that you’re on their side and want their best.
- **Truth** reflects “real world” responsibility. It makes rules clear so that there are no misunderstandings when a line has been crossed. For example, you could say, “Disregarding your curfew is not ok in this house. Whether you agree or not, it is the rule here.”



Katie Gohde,
MA, LAPC
LifeGate Counseling @
Peachtree

**“These days
adolescence
seems to
be ‘taking
kids over’
years before
age 13.”**

How to manage their behavior while maintaining the relationship, *continued*



- **Freedom** eliminates nagging and power struggles because it communicates that, by and large, you can't force your kids to choose the right thing. Your child's experience of choosing poorly (and experiencing the consequence for that choice) is often necessary as he learns to choose wisely. Saying, "I can't force you to come home on time, but if you choose to disobey the rule, I will restrict your privileges" puts the ball in his court to make the right choice.
- **Reality** teaches your kids that life is not a free for all. When they experience meaningful consequences for their actions (set and enforced by you), they start to learn that responsibility, not rebellion, is what ultimately leads to freedom in the world.

You may be thinking, "these are great principles, in theory, but when it's World War 3 in our house, they just don't work." It's true that little to nothing fruitful or productive can

be accomplished when tensions are mounting and emotions are flying high. In my experience as a counselor, many families have found it helpful to adhere to certain "conflict resolution rules" in order to avoid chaos and strained relationships. For instance, you might designate a time and place for family meetings, where certain parameters are in place (respectful tone of voice and body language). It's important to remember that we're all human and when a hot button is pushed, it can be hard to reel in our emotions. When you sense yourself becoming too aroused, it may be necessary to take a break, and set a time to re-convene.

Love and Limits - simple words with lasting impact. Though they'll never admit it, kids don't want to run the show. They need to experience the security that comes from knowing their parents are in charge. Your consistency in showing love AND setting limits will communicate that you cherish your relationship with your kids but are adult enough to reinforce boundaries.

**Life Gate**
Counseling @ Peachtree
growing ♦ enriching ♦ thriving