

ADOLESCENCE

Understanding TEEN REBELLION

Whether it is questioning rules, insolence towards elders or "acting out" to "fit in" with peers, there are deeper reasons for your adolescent's rebellious behaviour, says **Arundhati Nath**



Does it anger you when your teen openly flouts rules at home/school or answers back rudely? Do you often wonder how your innocent child has transformed into an unruly and rebellious teen?

Adolescence is a period of intense physical, psychological and emotional change. During the teen years, children experience angst, highs and lows and are very vulnerable to peer, parental and academic pressure. Therefore, it's a challenge for adolescents to deal with emotions equably and think rationally.

In his best-seller book *What's Happening to My Teen?* *Uncovering the Sources of Rebellion* (2009), American author

Mark Gregston wrote that contemporary teens live in a world that is vastly different from the world their parents grew up in. "Today's teen culture is full of confusing values and misleading principles. The media sensationalises everything and misguided focus on fame and celebrity encourages competition in presentation, possessions and experimentation."

THE TEENAGE BRAIN

A 2015 study of the University of Southern California reveals that teenage rebellion is "often triggered by a young person's need to assert individuality, as well as a desire to

separate from parents". An earlier 2014 study conducted by Duke University, USA, highlighted that "teenage brains are different than of adults and this makes them more likely to rebel". This study found that during adolescence, the limbic system connects and communicates with the rest of the brain differently than it does during adulthood. This makes many adolescents susceptible to risky behaviour.

The reasons behind teenage rebellion are numerous. Teens are anxious to be accepted within their peer group, prompting them to be 'cool' and dress inappropriately, and experiment with drugs and/or alcohol. Many teens rebel because they want attention, and are trying to establish their personal identities and find life's purpose. It's normative for them to assert their independence and resist parental advice and control.

According to US-based psychologist Carl E Pickhardt there are two common types of teen rebellion — "rebellion of non-conformity and rebellion of non-compliance". In both types, he says, rebellion attracts adult attention by offending it. Young people rebel against their self-interest, engage in self-defeating and self-destructive activities, experiment with high-risk behaviour, and injure valued relationships especially with parents and elders.

PARENTS AREN'T ALWAYS RIGHT

Riddhi Doshi Patel, a Mumbai-based child and adolescent psychologist and behavioural coach, believes that latter-day teens are far more empowered than previous generations and therefore parents need to modernise their reactions to contemporary adolescent behaviour. "Teenagers often understand the pros and cons of risky behaviour but when parents constantly nag and impose their adult authority, they are turned off. Parents need to stop preaching and lecturing. Instead they should engage in meaningful conversations with their teens. Parents aren't always right," says Patel.

Patel narrates the case of a young teen brought in for counselling by her mother who complained that she was very disobedient and rude. When the teen was asked for her side of the story, she recounted that her mother would constantly nag her about even the most trivial things such as drinking water every 15 minutes. Though the teen knew that water is important for her health, she was so tired of the constant nagging, that she started hating water and ended up suffering from dehydration.

"Children don't become rebellious suddenly; it takes years for resentment to build up. Therefore it's important to share an affectionate and open relationship with your teens, and desist from nagging and being over-protective. Involve teenage children in family decisions and activities. Moreover if, as parents, you have been giving in to your child's every demand from early childhood, be prepared for a rebellious adolescent when you suddenly start refusing their increasing demands. It's important for parents to be simultaneously loose and tight and set boundaries from

early childhood," says Patel who advises parents to support children through this stormy period of emotional stress rather than throw the rule book at them.



MANAGING REBELLIOUS TEENS

If you are struggling with a rebellious, unruly teenager, try the following, says Mark Goddard, writer for www.psychology24.org.

Acknowledge that rebellion is natural.

Bear in mind that teenage rebellion is natural and healthy. They are trying to establish their separate, independent personalities.

Remind them you are human as well. Allow them to see you upset. Tell them how much their behaviour hurts you. But don't become an emotional manipulator. Your teens will quickly discern emotional blackmail.

Treat them like adults. Teenagers yearn to be treated like adults. If they behave politely towards a family member, or do something you appreciate, thank them. Above all, don't ridicule or let anyone else in the family make sarcastic remarks about your teenager's acne, their changing bodies, and the like. Teenagers hate that.

Don't be too intrusive. If you suspect your child is being tempted into drug abuse, you have every right to intrude. But in general, make it clear that you love them unconditionally and are there for them if they want sympathy and advice.

(Source: <http://www.psychology24.org/deal-rebellious-teenager/>)