



## How to Apply the 7 Secrets of Setting Boundaries for Teenagers – Tip Sheet

### Secret #1 - Remember your Teen is a Developing Adolescent

**TIP** – Understand the common signs and behaviours of each of the cornerstones of adolescent development. By doing this you can recognise which area is most prevalent in your teens life at any one time, and how to anticipate when those areas of development will impact them in the future. For example, if you know your teen is having troubles with friends, and would hate to lose those friendships, what could they do just to be accepted by their peer group? Maybe break a rule? Act inappropriately? Accept that teens will do silly and stupid things as they develop, so expect anything, and you will be prepared for almost anything.

### Secret #2 - Learn the Value of Compromise

**TIP** – Make sure you enter every conversation with your teen in a stable, focused and harmonious way. Don't confuse this with being too laid back or easy going. Rather, manage your emotions and reactions, while also addressing what needs to be addressed. Express your feelings openly, i.e. "I feel upset that you lied to me, but I understand why you might have done that. How about from now on, we make an agreement to be honest with each other, without judgement, until we've heard the full story from one another?" Say something like that to your teen, and you might be surprised at how responsive they'll be to you. It's all in the delivery, and be flexible where you can.

### Secret #3 - Set Boundaries that teach Cooperation and Responsibility

**TIP** – Prioritise teaching your teen cooperation, seeing it as an essential skill they'll need for life. And don't underestimate your teens willingness to take on responsibility. Teenagers are young adults, and want to be treated as adults. If they express this to you, give them a taste of adulthood, making it clear that aside from the privileges of being an adult, there also comes many responsibilities. Give your teen important jobs, with some guidance then leave them to work it out. Don't feel you have to show them exactly how to do something, and definitely don't rescue them at the first sign of struggle. Give them the space and time to work it out, and they will embrace the responsibility.

### Secret #4 – Communication is The Key

**TIP** – Know what your strengths in communication are. Know how your teen likes to be communicated to, and work with that to build rapport and listening. Know your outcome for the setting of a boundary, and ask your teen to determine what they see as being the positive outcome of the boundary, so they shift away from seeing it as a punishment. Talk simply, avoiding words or

phrases that are too adult or grown up for your teen, as they might feel you're trying to outsmart them or patronise them. Ask questions, and make sure the conversation is a two-way road.

### **Secret #5 - It's up to You to Lead the Conversation**

**TIP** - As the parent, you need to set the boundaries and enforce them. You cannot control your teens behaviours or feelings about the boundaries, but you can control what happens if they don't stick within your boundaries. Instead of using punishments, use consequences. Punishments to teens feel like a lesson being taught but it doesn't reinforce doing the right thing – it just emphasises what they did wrong. A consequence, is telling your teen what they will lose, miss out on or have to do they might not want to, if the boundary is not followed. Give them a chance to do the right thing first, as they know the consequence if they don't, and watch them do what's required if they think you will follow through and take away something they value, i.e. lock up the video games, reduce TV time, lower pocket money, enforce more cleaning, etc.

### **Secret 6 - Use the Power of Reinforcement**

**TIP** – Just as punishment is wrong, and consequences work better, don't use too much praise when your teen does something right, even if it's the smallest of efforts. Reward systems work better. If you jump from punishment to praise – praise to punishment, you are running hot and cold, and your teen will soon learn how to manipulate that against you, i.e. "Dad will get angry and make me sit in my room. When he's cooled down, I can come back out and things will go back to normal again" - this is a vicious cycle. Rather, make clear what the consequences are to your teen for not respecting boundaries, and also make clear the potential rewards when they do follow them. Make the reward equal in size and value to the amount of effort they make. For example, a teen shouldn't be given an extra \$20 pocket money just for doing some dishes. Rather, ask them to make sure they wash all their own dishes for a week to earn that extra \$20. They will learn how to work for what they want and see the value in hard work, which is a good lesson for every young person to learn. Huge rewards for little effort is not the wise way, as this could lead them to want instant gratification for doing very little. Hard work, over time is what brings the real, long-term rewards.

### **Secret #7 - Always Keep an Open Mind**

**TIP** – Know your Hot Buttons. What this means is to be fully aware of the things your teen does, or doesn't do, that ticks you off. If you don't manage this, your teen will pick it up and can use it against you. Teens are experts at getting what they want, and if they think they can pressure you or lead you into giving in or being lenient because to do so will relieve stress and guilt for you, they will use that to their advantage. Rather, be aware of your personal views and keep them out of the conversation when setting boundaries. Coming from a place of concern and nurturing – that you're setting boundaries to keep them safe and teach them the realities of life – is not personal and is for their gain as much yours. Even so, be prepared for your teen to push the boundaries anyway and make mistakes. We all make mistakes, and in leading by example, teach your teens to learn from their mistakes.

### **Extra Special Secret – Focus on the Relationship**

**TIP** – You don't have to be your teens best friend, and you certainly don't want to be their worst enemy. You are their parent, so you are there to love them, provide for them, and guide them down the path of becoming self-reliant, healthy and productive adults who contribute to society. Anything that grows from appreciation is invested in over and over for the long term. The same goes for relationships, and this should certainly be how to approach the everchanging relationship with your teen during their formative years of adolescence into young adult hood. Embrace the changes, go with the flow, and accept them as they are. Remember, actions speak louder than words, so if you live this way and treat them this way, they will do the same for themselves and others.

Try these tips when using the 7 Secrets to Setting Boundaries for Teenagers. Some will work better for you than others, and be willing to try them all. If you have any questions about the tips, or want to share your experiences in using them, please let me know by email at [info@brianmcaleer.com](mailto:info@brianmcaleer.com)

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian McAleer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brian McAleer

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