

*A soft answer turns away
wrath, but a harsh word stirs
up anger. Proverbs 15:1*

One of the hardest things in the world to do is to respond to your teen as they are throwing an attitude rather than reacting to them. What's the difference? Reacting is based on emotion which we all know is rampant when dealing with a teenager. We respond to the situation when we step back from the emotion and take a moment to think through what is really going on. It's not easy!

A lot of the things we get personally offended by, and the things that fracture our relationship, are caused by very clear biological and physiological reasons.

Many of the reasons why our heart relationship is fractured and broken is because we don't understand the context of what's going on in our teenager and we can lose a sense of empathy for where they are in their life.

This great truth is the first thought that you can bring to your minds and hearts when your teenager opens the door of frustration in your relationship.

Here are three quick thoughts that you can go through, like a checklist in your head, to keep you from losing your temper:

- 1) Pray this short prayer first: "God give me grace in the moment." It is impossible to maintain control of your emotion apart from the grace of God, so be willing to ask for it.
- 2) Ask yourself, "What can I teach them right now?" This thought will keep you focused on the greater parenting task which is teaching them the beliefs and life skills they need to become an adult.
- 3) Consider the context. What physical changes could be causing this behavior? What relational pressures or circumstances might be fueling your teenager's emotional response?

Source: ministrytoparents.com

What is the
difference between

Reacting and Responding



Reacting vs. Responding

Your cell phone rings and it's your teenager, and they are crying ... hysterically. They barely tapped the car in front of them, and they absolutely swear they weren't on the phone. Somehow the officer doesn't believe them. Now, as a parent, you have a choice on how to handle this. You can either react or respond. Reacting is easy, responding isn't.

Our reactions are governed by emotions while our responses are governed by the ability to think through the situation.

Responding shows your teen that you love them enough to stop for a moment and make sure what you are saying or doing is based on truth and not emotion. Reacting can be a really selfish act. We want to get our point across at all costs. Sometimes the cost is just a little too high. It can cost the trust our teens have in us. It can cost the time it takes to rebuild that trust in our relationship.

This is a biggie, and it can be a deal breaker. Can your teen trust that you will respond and not react to any given situation? There are lots and lots of situations! Have the courage to ask your teen if you respond or react, and then give them permission to tell you how they wish you would handle these situations. It takes a brave and humble parent to realize that before we can teach our teens this concept, maybe we should learn it for ourselves!

There are a number of reasons your teen struggles with their attitude. Learning how to respond instead of react is a life long lesson that has to be learned on a daily basis. If we can understand where our teen is coming from, we can give them tools to learn this more effectively.

Understanding Your Teen

1. Your teen will, at times, make irrational decisions. Their brains have not completely developed. By the age of 6 years, our child's brain is 95% developed. But the greatest surge in growth is the adolescent years. They quite literally are incapable of making mature decisions.
2. The part of our teen's brain that controls reasoning is still underdeveloped at this point. They tend to use a different part of the brain that is geared towards instinctual decisions or risk taking.
3. Peer pressure is a large influence in our teen's decisions. They very much care what their friends think. If their friends are reactionary, odds are your teen is also.
4. At this point of our teen's development, they are trying to become independent of us. They are learning who they are, and our opinions tend to get in the way. How confusing it is when they feel one way and we are demanding another. It's no wonder they react intensely.

5. Our teens are beginning to learn that situations are not always black and white. It is so much easier when the answer is an absolute, right or wrong. They are learning to think for themselves. But they have to know what they believe first.

6. Your teen's personality can play a large part in how they respond to certain situations. Some are sensitive and appear not to react outwardly. Inwardly, however, they could be screaming at you. Some teens are passionately vocal. They are very certain you know exactly how they feel. They all deserve our respect and guidance.

Key Tool: Breathe

There is one tool that you can use that might help you learn to respond rather than react. It's called breathing. I know, profound, right? But you would be amazed at how well this works! It gives you a moment to lower your blood pressure. Extra oxygen always helps. And those few precious moments it takes to breathe a few extra times may be the difference between teaching them and arguing with them. I would prefer teaching every time.

Our teen's attitude towards responding vs. reacting will be as varied as they are. But often it will reflect our own attitude. Check yourself. Do you react or respond? Here is your test. See if you breathe first!