



It can be lonely saying no, but it has to be said

We back down when our decisions enrage our kids and they refuse to speak to us. Stand firm, even if it eats you up

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Sometimes it feels impossible to say no to them and make it stick.

Going in, you're certain of the stance you want to take. But the process takes on a life of its own until you finally give in - even though you are no less sure that you were right. Somehow, it just came out differently.

This may sound familiar:

"Mom, can I stay out until 12:30 this Saturday night? There's this late movie that everybody is going to go to. Just this one time? Please?"

"No, Genevieve, that's just too late. You know your curfew is 11 p.m."

"But Mom. ..."

And as Genevieve gets increasingly angry at her mother's refusal to back down, her mother gets increasingly frustrated by her own failure to persuade her daughter to accept her decision.

Genevieve's mother wants to explain how it isn't going to ruin her daughter's life, that 12:30 really is too late; that soon, maybe even a year from now, Genevieve will be allowed to stay out later.

But no matter what she says, Genevieve only gets more angry.

"I hate you. I really do. You never want me to have fun."

"Oh, for goodness' sake. Can't you ever accept anything? All right. But if you get in so much as one minute after 12:30, so help me God, you won't go out for a year."

When it happens, you feel as if you've been taken to the cleaners by a really good con artist - again.

"It is so frustrating. I caved in against my better judgment. I was a wimp. And Genevieve is all 'I love you Mommy. I've got the best Mom in the world.'"

The truth is we don't like them to be mad at us. And that discomfort over being, at least temporarily, on opposite sides is a much bigger factor in how our decisions end up than we care to admit.

It can be lonely for parents. Really, it is not so different from when couples have a big argument.

"If I do stand firm, I'm there in the house and I know Genevieve's in her room hating me. It eats me up."

Let's say Genevieve's mother held firm and Genevieve stormed off to her room.

"Genevieve, can we talk?"

"No!"

"Please, honey."

"No! You're being mean."

And there really is nothing to talk about, because the only thing going on is that Genevieve is mad that she didn't get her way. And all she wants to hear is her mother changing her mind.

They're not going to like you if you're not letting them have their way. It's that simple.

Here's how to cope with the fallout when you hold your ground:

The first step is admitting to yourself that you hate it when they are mad at you.

Second, recognize that it really is not possible to convince a teenager that an unpopular decision isn't so bad. And unless you capitulate, all further discussion will only yield more anger.

Third, know that if you stay firm, if you do not reopen the discussion - which they may well try to do more than once - they'll get over it. They won't hate you any more - at least not until the next time you rule against them.

Fourth, and most importantly, tell yourself that if you are going to do your job as a parent of a teenager, sometimes you have to live with them not liking you. It can occasionally be lonely. But if you give in to spare your own feelings too often, you really are abandoning an important part of your role.

In order to be a good parent, you can't always have it both ways.

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