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Be calm, be controlled -- and listen

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QWe have a 15-year-old son who has zero respect for us and is constantly getting into trouble. Is there any hope?

AThere is always hope. But you can't address his behaviour until you improve your relationship with him. Keeping in mind you have to give respect to get it, go through the following steps in a calm and controlled manner:

n Tell him you are sorry for making mistakes in the past but you want to improve.

n Ask him for suggestions on how you can become a better parent. He'll probably give you a huge list of everything you've done wrong. That's OK; let him get it out of his system.

n Repeat what he's told you -- but you don't have to agree. This is all about listening.

Now it's time to validate and negotiate. You may say, "I agree that I nag you about cleaning up your room but if I promise to stop doing that, will you stop calling me foul names?"

Work your way up to the bigger issues over time. Thank him for his help. This process takes patience and understanding but it's a great start.

Focus on the positives

Parenting troubled teens isn't about taking blame; it's about taking responsibility for the solution. Rather than focusing on your teen's bad behaviour, start focusing on the positives. Praise him or her for keeping a clean bedroom, putting dishes in the dishwasher or getting an A in math. OK, OK, your teen is doing none of those things. You may have to dig deep to find the positives, but they're there. Focusing on the positives opens the door to discussing and working on the negatives.

Lisa Bunnage appears every Sunday in Live It!

Send your questions to:

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