

RESPECT

MEN & WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER TO
END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

When your teenager is being violent to you....

It's easy for parents to feel guilty and ashamed when teenagers are abusive and violent and people are quick to point the finger, especially at mums. However research shows that it's incredibly common – about 20% of teenagers are violent to their parents (mostly to mothers) and about 10% seriously so. Please be reassured that mostly the young people using violence have 'good enough' parents and that there is no 'perfect parent' in the world. Sometimes peer groups, wider society and media or a violent or absent parent will have been much more influential than you. So rather than beat yourself up over worrying how you are part of the problem, it's much more fruitful to think about how you could become part of the solution....

Remember:

- Teenager's violence to parents can be serious and frightening
- Both you and your children have a right to live without fear and - at a deep level - want family life to improve
- Your teenager needs to feel that you are teaching him or her because you care
- It's likely to get worse before it can get better. Be prepared for a backlash if you are suddenly trying to be firm. Most children will test your resolve and may even become more violent.
- Under stressful conditions both of you will want to revert to old patterns of arguing. As the adult you will have to try to rise above this.
- You will make mistakes and you need to face them, learn from them, make repairs and continue.

Stop unhelpful patterns:

Whether or not your teenager carries a label like ADHD or learning difficulties there's no excuse for their violence. On the other hand, all teenagers are working against a tide of hormones and you can't expect them to show self control if can't do so yourself. So look to stop your own unhelpful patterns, such as escalating power struggles, your own temper tantrums, lectures, unrealistically high standards or expectations and battles with your partner. In particular stop smacking them – they need to learn ways to solve conflicts other than with violence and smacking them is only likely to make them angrier and more dangerous to you.

Making a family agreement:

When things are getting really out of hand in your family, try to choose a moment of calm to call a family meeting and make an agreement. Sometimes just listening to each other one at a time (take turns, if need be time yourselves for equal airspace) can help relieve the problems a bit.

You should all be aware that these agreements won't work just like that. Your problems have taken a long time brewing and will take a long time to dispel. You will need to meet again every few weeks just to discuss what is and isn't working in your agreement and to

revise it. Most importantly of all you will need to hold to it – both symbolically and practically this is vital if you are to regain some control. The main reason consequences won't work is that they aren't stuck to. So make them realistic and choose things within your control. Be prepared to rattle a good atmosphere by holding to a consequence 'after the event', don't just give it up when the young person is behaving again.

Step 1 - Setting goals:

What EXACTLY are the behaviours you are concerned about? Prioritise – which can be ignored for now and which are most important to change (especially anything that endangers any of you). This is asked to each family member- you all may want to change things about other family members. Keep goals to a minimum though – one or two for each family member to work on is enough.

Step 2 - Analysing the problem:

When does the problem seem to take over? Is there a pattern? what kinds of things do you argue about? Is there a particular time of day?

What immediately precedes and follows it?

Step 3 – explaining a simple anger management technique:

Ideally your teenager (and anyone else in the family who is losing their temper) will learn this simple technique. First they will need to notice their sore points and the signals that they are about to be abusive. What sets them off? What runs through their head at these times? How do they wind themselves up? How do they begin to feel physically and emotionally as they do this? These are signals that some cooling off is needed.

Next time they notice these signals, they need to take some time out. They need to go out (but for no more than two hours) or find a place in the house to get away from the rest of the family. They need to find something that will calm them down. Some people use a mp3 player to listen to music or go for a run or a cycle to work off the adrenalin, others go to the gym or for a swim. Others talk to someone who they know can calm them. They shouldn't return to the family until they are calm again but should let them know where they are and that they are safe.

Step 4 - Setting consequences:

Each person begins suggesting consequences for themselves: What consequences and rewards might be enough to motivate you to change this behaviour? (without them being unrealistically large or ineffectually small). If some consequences rely on a level of cooperation (eg grounding) then have a backup consequence for if the person refuses to comply that is totally in your control. Try to choose things that can be 'paid off' within 24 hours. You can choose from:

- All the things you pay for including treats (going out, bicycles, trainers) and non-vital things for daily life (eg sweets, haircuts, clothes, telephone bills)
- All the services you perform such as driving them around, cooking for them and cleaning
- All the privileges you allow them such as going out or having friends over, using computers, TVs, staying up late, sleeping in late, playing their music, using makeup, using phones, taking part in activities and so on

Example agreement:

The young person will get £1 per day pocket money instead of random amounts in fits and starts

Every time the young person swears...he will be fined 5p from his daily £1 pocket money.

Every time he breaks something in anger...he will be fined 50p from his £1 pocket money.

Every time the YP is violent...he will be fined 50p from his £1 pocket money. If the YP has lost all their pocket money for a day, s/he will have his/her bike removed for a day.

If mum asks the young person to do something repeatedly without giving him/her a reasonable chance to do it, or if she yells at or swears at the young person in arguments ...she will put £3 into the consequence box.

finer will be saved up for family outings to reward the family for good weeks.

Step 5 - What if?:

It is an important part of 'Consequences' to decide what to do if they aren't kept to. Try to maintain consistency in the reward and consequence systems even where these don't seem to work right away. Importantly, you don't need to mention the consequence during the argument at all if things are already heated – it will escalate the argument and anyway the young person is unlikely to care - but this doesn't mean that the consequences won't work in the long run.

Example 'what ifs'

If Mum puts in the fining consequence but the young person continues to swear... Mum should exit from the situation to avoid escalation.

Deduct money at end of evening as per usual - do not keep saying 'That's another fine.' as this will wind the young person up further.

If the young person says 'I don't care'...ignore this – simply do not respond.

If the young person feels that mum has lectured him repeatedly while she insists she didn't...Mum should pay the fine this time and next time be clearer about the rule – eg. agree that once the young person can reflect back mum's request then if she continues to repeat it before an hour has passed she will be fined

If the young person gets money from elsewhere, eg friends... this should be ignored – the young person probably won't get money consistently and will still want the reward.

If the young person escalates all his/her behaviour when parent puts in a consequence...you will need to evoke the safety plan and fine as usual.

You should also always make a safety plan for what cannot be ignored. This should cover what to do in the event that all else fails and family members are at physical risk.

Step 6 - Safety planning:

When will you know it's not safe? What can you do at that point to keep safe? Your safety plan should no longer be aimed at changing each other's behaviour but should revert simply to staying safe at all costs.

Example safety plan:

If the young person simply hits or kicks and then stops ... the contract is followed, but need not be mentioned at the time. Do not get into an argument or ask why or lecture. Exit from the situation if need be to avoid escalation.

If the young person starts to smash things or follow Mum around spitting, hitting etc....If it is daytime, then Mum is to exit the room for 10 minutes so that everybody can calm down

If the young person follows... he will be asked to go to his bedroom to have some time out

If he does not calm down... mum will lock herself and other siblings into a sanctuary room (you will need to put locks on more than one of your internal doors to ensure you have a sanctuary – most local domestic violence forums of the council can direct you to your local 'sanctuary scheme' who can advise and even pay for this). She will call a family member or the police to come and help.

Getting support

Any time you're struggling, get some support – here's some ideas:

Parentline plus – 0808 800 2222

Respect – advice line for those using violence in close relationships including young men and women – 0808 802 4040

Women's aid – for women and children experiencing domestic violence – 0808 2000247

Respect - advice line for male victims - tel. 0808 801 0327

Victim support (you don't need to have reported a crime) - 0845 3030900

Samaritans – 0845 7909090

Childline – 0800 1111

Stick at it. Good luck.