

10 RULES FOR PARENTS OF TEENS

New to teen

Mark Twain left home at 16 because his father was so stupid, and returned at 25 amazed at how much the old man had learned.

My daughter Lettie is 15 years old. Although she hasn't threatened to leave home, Lettie lets me know at various times how stupid I can be. Fortunately, she also gives me pointers on how to be a parent. Based on our conversations (and what follows are verbatim exchanges between my daughter and me), I've compiled *Lettie's 10 Rules for Parents of Teens*. I carry them always, and study them constantly. And, if I'm as lucky as Mark Twain's father, I'll be smart in just eight more years.

Rule 1: Don't hate the music I like. When you cringe and make a weird face about a song that I like, it's like you don't like me.

Rule 2: Don't like the music I like. If you like everything I like, how can I be me? I really hate it when you try to act like a teenager. You already had your turn. Now it's my turn.

Rule 3: Pay attention, Mom. If I act like something bugs me, that doesn't mean I don't like it. I mean like when I had to stay home with the chicken pox. You always phoned me from your work at nine o'clock and at noon. It bugged me. But I liked it. And one day you only called me at noon!

But I thought you thought I was being silly. I thought you didn't like it.

Well, yeah, but I sat by the phone waiting for your call at nine. And you didn't call. What were you doing? Was something more important than me?

Rule 4: If I act like something doesn't bug me, that doesn't mean I do like it. One night at dinner

territory? You'll soon learn

By Eva Conrad

you and Dad were teasing me about asking David out for frozen yogurt after school, and I didn't like it.

Well, I thought we were having a good time. You were laughing.

I was upset about the teasing, and I was even more ticked off because you weren't listening to me when I asked you two to stop.

Rule 5: Try to stay modern and with it. You talk like a textbook sometimes—you know, so old-sounding.

Well, I've tried a few new words, but you say I never say them right. You just laugh at me.

That's right—now you've caught on to the next rule. Ready?

Rule 6: You'll never be able to be modern and with it. Let's face it, you're old. And so you can never talk right. Like when you say, "Chill, babe" or "Cool," you just don't say it with the right attitude. The attitude has to be, "Hey, I'm cool and I know it, and that's cool." Old people just can't have that attitude.

Rule 7: Ignore my moods. I know this is your first time with a teenager, but you take my moods too seriously. You have to learn to ignore me when I tell you that my life is meaningless and I've lost the will to live. Like Megan's Mom. Megan is her fourth teenager. She knows how to do it. When Megan gets moody, her mom just goes out shopping and leaves Megan home alone. You'll learn.

Rule 8: Pay attention to me when I tell you my feelings. I mean, like when I'm serious that my life is meaningless, take the time to talk to me. When I really mean it, you know?

You mean when you thought your life was over because you got a deficiency notice in English?

No! That was no big deal. Ms. McCarthy was just trying to scare me. She didn't really mean that deficiency notice!

You mean when you thought your life was over because Mr. Williams called you "the Whiz Kid" in geometry?

No! You are too weird. That was funny. Besides, it sure made Steve sit up and take notice.

When, then, were you serious?

Well, when I got that big zit on my nose. And when I couldn't help Jeanne fix up her problem with her mom—that was really depressing.

Rule 9: Don't help me! I really hate it when you help me. I don't want to know how you think I should study or how you think I should pack for camp.

But there are some things you just don't know yet. There are some things I can still teach you.

Yes, but you don't understand. If you help me, how can I learn? It's OK to let me fall down. And shopping! When my friends are around, don't help me buy clothes.

But I thought you liked my opinion.

Well, that brings me to the last rule.

Rule 10: Help me! I like it when you help me when I want you to. I like to go shopping with you—alone. And when they had my class schedule all messed up at school, I needed your help to get it straightened out. And when Steve kept hitting me on the arm in class, and you and I had that great walk and talk—I liked your help then.

Do you think I'll ever learn all this?

Oh, yeah, but it will be too late for me. I'll be old by then. ■

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