

# Domineering teenagers. Are parents losing the battle?

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More and more parents are reporting that they're being abused by their adolescent or adult sons, and sometimes even by daughters. It's easy to put aggression down to the teenage hormonal rush, but when it gets out of hand parents feel helpless and don't know what to do. Living with aggressive teens can lead to depression or anxiety and even family breakdown. It's vital to understand how this situation can arise in order to prevent it happening.

You've probably heard that children of authoritarian or confrontational parents are likely to become rebellious; and children who grow up in families with violence or drug abuse may also be abusive or violent. However, recent studies have shown that some current trends in parenting may also create abusive or violent teenagers.

Parents who are warm and loving, but fail to set limits on their children's behaviour, over-indulge them, or treat them as more mature than they are may also raise self-absorbed, or even violent young adults. This is called permissive parenting. These parents look like good parents because they have a close relationship with their kids, particularly in pre-teen years, but if this is not balanced with authority and discipline the results can be disastrous for children and families.

## Signs of permissive parenting include:

- Not supervising children, not setting limits, eg bed time, and ignoring misbehaviour
- Giving in to pestering
- Acting like your child's best friend rather than as an authoritative adult
- Not setting and using consequences for misbehaviour
- Allowing children to make decisions before they've had enough life experience
- Buying lots of things for children

Another parenting trend is to use children as emotional confidantes, sharing thoughts, feelings and decision-making with the child that should be shared with their partner or another adult. This can make a child feel like their parent's partner instead of their child.

We have gone overboard in involving our children in decision-making - parents put the wishes of the child ahead of their parental responsibility. It's the parent's job to be in charge and to set guidelines, not to be their child's best friend. Permissive parenting can result in teens who:

- have lower self-esteem
- do poorly in school and have little interest in their education
- have low motivation and lack persistence and resilience
- are easily bored and frustrated
- are impulsive, and have difficulty controlling their emotions
- may bully parents and peers.

## How to be the parent your child needs

If parents provide, right from the start, a warm and caring style combined with:

- good routines
- clear limits and rules, with appropriate consequences if they're broken
- high but reasonable expectations
- encouragement to persevere
- maintaining parental authority

they will raise young adults with genuine self-esteem, confidence and internal motivation. If they don't start when their children are young, it will be too late by the time they reach adolescence.