

# The Column for Parents

The New Year is already one month old, a time for resolutions and new beginnings. This month Juliet Platt and Catherine Albert of ParentZone look at how to deal with pre-teen sarcasm, and help teens deal with heartbreak.

## My ten-year-old son has developed a very sarcastic attitude which causes a lot of arguments at home. What can I do?

Between the ages of nine and thirteen our children are entering "pre-teenage". They are changing physically in preparation for puberty, and their thought processes are becoming more sophisticated. They've grown out of innocently asking curious questions about what they are noticing around them, and suddenly they seem to know it all and to be exceedingly world weary.

It is important that as parents we don't allow their attitude to push our buttons and cause arguments. Their behaviour is a sign of normal changes in their cognitive development. It might be ugly to listen to, but it is really them testing out their own thinking.

Topical conversations at the dinner-table or on the journey to school will give your son opportunities to practise articulating his ideas. Avoid dismissing any of his thoughts or judgments; just help him to express them in different ways.

We also need to remember that no matter how off-putting the sarcasm is, our pre-teen children still need to feel love and affection from us. It pays to be extra vigilant for those moments when they just need a hug – and to respond without delay.

## What's the best thing to do to help teenagers get over relationship break-ups?

Resist the temptation to wheel out lines like "there are plenty more fish in the sea". Teenage relationships can be intense, and as parents we need to respect the depth of feelings our teens are experiencing. It is a very sad time and it can be torture for us to see our kids heartbroken.

Be available as a shoulder to cry on, and no matter how bitter or even relieved you might privately feel that the relationship is over, it is vital that you keep your judgments to yourself.

Try not to join in with the anger and bitterness – it might sound unrealistic but your teen will benefit more in the long run from being gently persuaded to see things from their ex's perspective.

Be responsive to your son or daughter's needs at this time. A little extra leeway at home and a lot of "tlc" are needed, but be aware not to encourage them to develop avoidance strategies, or to turn a drama into a crisis.

Treat them a little bit to give them a confidence boost. Inviting a couple of girl friends over for a soppy film, a good cry and an industrial size bar of chocolate can work wonders, or a "boys only" trip to paint-balling or go-karting.

These young people are passed the stage where mum can make everything better, but they do need your support as they start learning lessons about grown up lives and mistakes.

## Feedback

You have asked for feedback and ideas on parenting. I would like to strongly recommend all parents visit the Lighthouse Bookshop in Highworth. Here you will find some excellent books on relationships and family life.

I can personally recommend the following:

*The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman (for every couple)

*Love Must Be Tough* by James Dobson (for relationships in crisis)

*The Strong-Willed Child* by James Dobson (for parents of young children)

*Teenagers - What every parent has to know* by Rob Parsons (this will give you a brilliant insight into what is going on with your teenager).

Also recommended are:

*The 60 minute Father and The 60 minute Mother* - both by Rob Parsons (for those in a hurry)

*The Baby Book* - How to enjoy Year 1 by Rachel Waddilove

Also the series of books entitled *The Parent Talk Guides*, by Steve Chalke

Most of these authors have written a wide variety of books on family life and come highly recommended.

P Reid

Write to [Juliet@treetopcoaching.com](mailto:Juliet@treetopcoaching.com) with your questions, thought and experiences of parenting. We are always on the lookout for different ideas, hints and tips for how to improve things for ourselves and our children.