



David Grantham, Ed.D., Licensed Professional Counselor, Marriage and Family Therapist

Dear Dr. Grantham:

My wife and I are constantly arguing about how to raise our teenage son. We disagree about everything from the clothes he wears to discipline. She lets him get away with murder and accuses me of being too firm because I expect him be responsible. When our son picks up on this, he tries to manipulate both of us. What should we do to resolve this? J. B.

Dear J. B.

You obviously love your son and want to provide appropriate guidance for him during his teen years. One thing I notice from your description is that your son is doing to you what teens often do—divide the two of you by having you disagree about his upbringing. I suggest working out your differences privately in order to present a united front regarding boundaries and discipline. Your son will attempt to get his way by playing you against one another, not because he is mean but because he is looking for security. When you are inconsistent with discipline, this generates insecurity because he doesn't know where he stands.

Let me make some suggestions:

- Each of you make a list of priority areas (i.e. discipline techniques, school, dating, clothes, curfew, etc.)
- Sit down, compare lists, and select two priority issues.
- Develop a consistent response to each that you both can live with.
- Sit down together with your son and share what your plan. Avoid debating with your son if he disagrees. Just restate the plan.
- The hard part: Be firm and consistent. This is difficult at first but will get easier as time goes on.
- If you have difficulty with any of these steps, seek the support of a professional or experienced friend.