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Opinion #42

What the newspapers won't tell you!

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PARENTING

Teenage Insanity

explained at last!

BY GLENN CAMPBELL

Monkeys can be clever. If you hang a banana just out of reach and leave a stick in their cage, they'll eventually figure out how to use the tool to obtain the treat.

Human teenagers are almost as smart. If you hang something they want just out of reach and give them the tools to attain it, they'll eventually learn to connect the two, but maybe not as quickly as the monkey.

First, they have to throw a tantrum, insisting it's IMPOSSIBLE to obtain the goal with those pitiful tools. They complain bitterly about your cruelty in not giving them the banana directly. Their strategy, of course, is to coerce you into fetching it for them.

But if you cave in and do what they demand, they only hate you for it. The more bananas you give them, they more they resent you and devalue what you've done for them. They'll take whatever you give, bitch about it, then demand you give even more.

Generally speaking, monkeys are easier to work with.

There seems to be vast misunderstanding among the general public about what a teenager is and what he expects from the world. Parents and other social workers often make the mistake of trying to reason with the teenager using words alone. They expect him to think like an adult, when in fact adults don't even think like adults most of the time.

He used to be this sweet little thing who saw you as a hero and followed you everywhere like a puppy. Then puberty kicked in and it was like *Invasion of the*

Body Snatchers. Everything you did became wrong and your old bag of tricks didn't work anymore.

We are pleased to report, however, that adolescent humans can be successfully managed and occasionally turned into productive citizens. You just have to think like they do.

Around puberty, a youth becomes afflicted with an overwhelming need for identity. He is driven to distinguish himself from all the other humans around him, which is no easy task. Spiked hair, outrageous fashions, risky behavior, graffiti—All are attempts to say, "Here I am!" They don't want to be a puppy anymore; they have to be their own dog.

This drive for identity is more powerful than anything else: food, sex, sleep, safety. It is also inherently something you can't do for them, even if they demand it.

Teens make fantastic rodeo riders because they're absolutely driven to make their mark while having very little common sense. This, of course, is what terrifies caregivers. What is the teen going to try next, and will it be fatal? If you give him the keys to the car, will he blow his brains out with it?

The solution is to not give him the keys to the car. In fact, a teen shouldn't be given anything. No keys, no bananas—nothing for free.

Consult the child abuse laws of your state. There are penalties for beating the kid, raising him in squalor or withholding basic nutrition or medical care.

Under the law, it is not considered child abuse if you fail to provide video

entertainment or decline to take him to the mall for the latest fashions. As much as he may cry child abuse, it isn't child abuse.

If it isn't abuse to withhold a discretionary entertainment or fashion, then why are you providing it?

Here at Family Court Chronicles, we firmly believe in one guiding principle of parenting: Every child should be required to pay for his own upbringing.

Maybe not the full retail cost, but whenever a kid wants something, he should have to pay a price for it. If he wants dinner, he must contribute something to dinner. If he wants a ride somewhere, he must do something to compensate you for your time and gas.

No matter how wealthy you may be, the best environment for your kid is one of moderate poverty where nothing is taken for granted. If you have assets, hide them. Give the kid nothing for free, apart from your time. If he has a goal, he has to use his own resources to obtain it.

If he asks you for something, your first response should be "What will you do for me?"

You want to connect the kid with the real demands of the world as quickly as possible. He's going to face them anyway when he moves out of your home, so why not start early?

Then the banana will have value, and you'll be amazed by the ingenuity of the monkey.

—G.C.

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