

Parenting Teens Just Got Easier!
Parenting Teens Just Got Easier! is a free monthly eZine
for parents of pre-teens and teens
by Patt and Steve Saso, Saso Seminars

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March 19, 2008 6-9 pm

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March 2008 Featured Article
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Could Your Teen use a Dose of -- Constructive Criticism?

By Patt Saso

www.SasoSeminars.com

Parents may be surprised to learn that how they motivate their child might actually be a problem.

Take the Jones family. Their son's grades are slipping. They are upset because there's not much time left in the grading period. They know Jon can do better. Sitting in my office I asked them to describe the problem.

Mom opened with constructive criticism. *Jon, I don't know what's wrong with you. You are smart and capable, but very lazy.*

Dad chimed in, *He never cares about anything. He has a bad attitude. We've tried everything!*

As a parent coach, I often witness parents using this method.

Anger erupts when their child doesn't conform.

No such thing as *constructive criticism*

Constructive criticism is harmful. It attacks a person's character in an attempt to persuade. Complaining turns into blaming.

Another way parents turn a concern into criticism is by using accusing words like: *You always ... You never... You should.*

The unspoken message is that Jon is the problem because he is flawed...*lazy, bad attitude and never cares.*

Learning to complain without blame

Without awareness this method of motivation was actually part of the problem. Personal attacks were contributing to Jon feeling hurt, sad and depressed.

When people are depressed they have low motivation and desire. These parents have to learn to complain without blame.

The difference between complaining and blaming

A complaint describes the problem by focusing on specific behaviors. It contains no judgments of being

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right or wrong. It communicates respectfully the message that you care.

If the Jones had made a complaint, instead of constructive criticism, it might have sounded like this.

Jon, I am worried about your school progress this quarter (specific). There's not much time left in this grading period and your English paper is still due (specific). When I see you spend all afternoon on the computer (specific) I am concerned about how you are going to complete it.

Notice no blame. No insults, negative labels, put-downs or comparisons.

How to make a complaint

No one wants to be forced into doing something. Teens need to know how much you care before they respect what you want for them. Include the following when making a complaint:

1. **Identify specific behaviors.** Be calm and keep your tone neutral when stating your observations...*poor grades, not much time left in grading period, amount of time on the computer, time to complete your project.*
2. **Focus on the current situation when making observations.** Do not draw in the past. The Jones parents brought in the past by stating...*What's wrong with you...smart, but lazy...never cares about anything.*
3. **Identify whose problem it is.** Poor grades belongs to the student...*I am concerned about how you are going to complete it.* Parents who assume responsibility will find themselves in a stressful situation like the Jones family.
4. **Identify the needs of the child.** Help connect solutions to problems. A complaint focuses on helping the child identify the problem...*poor school progress, late English paper, time is running out...with a possible solution...spend less time playing on the computer to finish English paper.*

Complaining instead of blaming teaches responsibility. Hurtful remarks damage a child's self-worth. It's a skill to give feedback without judgment.

By practicing making a complaint rather than criticizing, you will reduce conflict between you and your teen. And if you need help developing this skill--give me a ring!

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- **Sam got into Bellarmine! This was a result of the instruction and practice he received in your program. –Sam S.**
- **The high school application process can be extremely overwhelming! The HSPT course and the Essay Writing Workshop gave our son the tools he need to build his confidence and get into the school of his choice. –mother**

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Until next time,

Patt & Steve Saso

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