

## **20 Rules for Parents of Adolescents**

*By Jim Burns, Ph.D.*

Adolescence, the period between childhood and adulthood, has grown longer in our time. Kids are experiencing puberty earlier and staying connected to their parents later in life than previous generations. Thus, adolescence in many instances can be just as tough a season on parents as it is on the kids!

Recently, I interviewed Dr. Kevin Leman, the internationally known author and speaker for our radio broadcast, *HomeWord with Jim Burns*, about his new book, [\*Running the Rapids\*](#). In the book, Dr. Leman wrote a chapter titled “20 Rules for Surviving Your Kids’ Adolescence.” In this tip sheet, we’re passing along Dr. Leman’s rules along with some of my own comments.

1. **Follow Through.** I’m a big believer in disciplining with consistency. If you create an expectation and consequences for not meeting the expectation with your kids, follow through on it! By not following through, you send the message that your word isn’t worth anything.
2. **Watch Your Expectations.** All parents want the best for their kids. The trick is to help them set and then achieve their goals for themselves, rather than to expect them to live up to our goals for them.
3. **Accept Them Where They Are.** Adolescence is a very turbulent time for kids. They can be a roller coaster of moods, emotions and hormones all wrapped up together. If your daughter is brokenhearted over a “crush” that hasn’t worked out the way she had hoped, don’t belittle her or tease her over “puppy love.” Remember, “puppy love” is very real to “puppies.” Affirm their feelings. They are what they are – and they are real.
4. **Take Time To Listen.** This is part of what I call “The Power of Being There.” Your presence makes a difference. Kids see your presence and listening as a sign of caring and connectedness. Listening is the language of love. Listen to your kids. In doing so, you’ll be demonstrating honor, love, respect, empathy and acceptance.
5. **Respect Their Choices.** This is a tough one for parents. It’s hard to watch kids make choices that we don’t want them to make. Believe me, I understand. But, it’s our goal to move kids from dependence on us to independence, and this means we have to respect their choices. Obviously, in terms of choices, there are some areas where we would want to intervene, like drugs and alcohol for example. But, for the most part, in an age-appropriate way, we should allow our kids to make their choices and live with the consequences. Remember, one of the best ways to learn is by experiencing failure.
6. **Ask For Forgiveness.** When was the last time you asked for your child’s forgiveness? The parent who tries to come across as perfect is making a big mistake. In fact, you’ll

probably be amazed at how much credibility you gain with your children when you're honest with them about your shortcomings.

7. **Respect Their Privacy.** If your son is in his bedroom with the door closed – and you need to talk to him for whatever reason – respect his privacy by knocking on the door before entering. Of course, as a parent, you have every right to just walk on in, but a simple knock and asking if “now’s a good time” to have the conversation gives your son the opportunity to feel as though he actually bought into the process – rather than having it forced upon him.
8. **Communicate Clearly.** Good communication takes work. Make sure you work at listening to what your kids are actually saying. You might have to ask for clarification as terms and meanings change. Understand that you’ve grown up in a different time also – so be sure that your kids understand you!
9. **Do The Unexpected.** When it comes to discipline, be creative. No, you can’t beat kids over the head and force them to do things, but you can’t let them off the hook either. Dr. Leman uses the example of a child who was expected to prepare dinner. The child didn’t get around to it, so mom and dad went out to dinner alone and then took the meal’s expense from the child’s allowance. Dr. Leman says, “Doing the unexpected creates a long-lasting shock value.”
10. **Talk About Potential Problems.** This simply refers to talking issues over with your kids before they face them, like discussing with them when they’re eleven or twelve what to expect on a date and what problems they might encounter, rather than waiting ‘til they’re sixteen, on the eve of a first date.
11. **Don’t Act Like A Teenager.** You’re not one. Your kids know it. They are counting on you to act like a grown-up.
12. **Give Them Choices.** Adult life is full of choices. Help your kids move towards independence by making sure they have opportunities to make choices and to learn from the consequences of their choices. While practice may not make perfect, giving kids choices will help them learn how to make good decisions.
13. **Don’t Snowplow Their School Road.** This refers to allowing kids to be responsible for their own homework and school activities. Too many parents get involved in helping their kids with these – and unintentionally get in the way of the growth process their kids need to experience. While your kids need your encouragement, make sure you are teaching them about accountability and responsibility through their assignments and commitments.
14. **Don’t Show Them Off or Embarrass Them.** Okay, as parents, we tend toward one or the other of these extremes. Either we want to show off our kids for what a great job they’ve done on something (it makes us feel good about ourselves, make no mistake!) or we embarrass our kids in front of others because they’ve messed up or disappointed us. There are times for praise and times for rebuke, but make sure these are done in the right place and the right time.

15. **Don't Pick At Flaws.** Teens are painfully aware of their shortcomings. Generally, they don't need parents to remind them constantly of their weaknesses, failures and flaws. Nagging and criticizing doesn't make the list when it comes to effective parenting skills!
16. **Don't Spit In Their Soup.** Dr. Leman says that this is "when you add a little tagalong that has no other purpose than to make your teen feel guilty." An example: "Sure son, you can go to the game tonight. I'm glad someone in our family gets to go out and have fun. I'll be mowing the lawn."
17. **Don't Talk In Volumes.** Some parents just lie in wait for an opportunity to unload verbally to offer advice and instruction. Don't make every moment in life a "teachable" one. If your child needs new shoes and asks for them, you don't have to explain the proper way to walk to maximize the life of the shoes.
18. **Don't Smother Them With Praise.** While I think appropriate praise is important, if you heap too much praise on kids, they can hear the unintended message that you love them only when they perform at a high level. Find ways to praise and encourage without tying it to a specific performance or building up unrealistic hopes.
19. **Don't Make Icebergs Out Of Icicles.** Just a reminder to season your parenting with grace. We all make mistakes. We all have fallen short. Learn to extend the same grace to your kids that you would like others to extend to you.
20. **Handle Hassles Healthily.** Conflict between parents and kids from time to time is a fact of life. These times can either be a path to communication blockage and unloving behavior, or it can be a path to deeper communication, greater understanding, and loving behavior. Working through the conflict takes more emotional involvement than avoiding conflict, but it is the loving way to care for yourself, as well as your child.

(Adapted from the book, [Running the Rapids](#) by Dr. Kevin Leman)