

Seven Steps for Restoring a Rebellious Child

By Jim Burns, Ph.D.

Historically, rebellion has long been associated with adolescence. Our culture accepts the perspective that rebellion is a necessary companion to the teenage years, when in reality, this perception goes beyond reality. In my experience, most teenagers go through seasons where they exhibit some mild symptoms of rebellion, such as questioning and argumentation. Still, in most cases, these seasons are a necessary and even helpful part of the maturity process, as teens move toward becoming independent adults. As parents, our challenge is to let our kids test a limit now and then without going over “the line.”

On the other hand, plenty of parents have the daily challenge of living with and parenting kids who are on their way to – or are already living in – full-blown rebellion. Recently, I spoke with one of the leading experts on parenting kids through rebellion, Dr. Tim Kimmel, whose book *Why Christian Kids Rebel*, lends great insight into how parents can work to restore rebellious children. In my interview with Dr. Kimmel, he shared seven steps parents can take in this restoration process, and in this tip sheet, I’m passing along these steps to you.

1. Pray, Pray, Pray! Take your rebellious child before the Lord before you try to “fix” him or her. We need to ask God for His wisdom and perspective regarding our child. We also need to ask God to expose sin in our own lives. Oftentimes, our kids’ rebellion is a reflection of our own inappropriate attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, ask God to use the people and circumstances of your child’s life in turning him or her around.

2. Take the first step. Even though you likely have experienced pain, cost, insult or embarrassment due to your child’s behavior, don’t wait for your rebellious son or daughter to come to you. You are the parent – the adult – in the relationship, so it’s your responsibility to reach out first.

3. Identify with the pain that your child is experiencing. It’s not unusual for parents to look to their own pain when their child rebels, particularly when the child is responsible for inflicting the pain they feel. But, parents ought to look beyond themselves to their child’s pain. Think about it – kids don’t get angry and rebel for no reason. It may be necessary for you to look beyond your child’s behavior to identify the source of his or her pain. This can be a painstaking process in and of itself, but well worth the effort.

4. Own up to your part in the problem. We all make mistakes. There are no perfect parents. If you have a rebellious child, like it or not, you’ve had a hand in influencing your child. When parents own up to their role in the child’s rebellion, it disarms the child from being able to constantly hold the parents’ “sins” against them as the reason for the rebellion.

5. Deal with the problem and not with the person. Don’t attack your rebellious child’s character. Instead, deal with the inappropriate behavior. For example, if you found that your child lied to you, focusing on character, referring to him or her as a “liar” over and over, does nothing to get beyond the problem. Instead, working through the issue itself will also address the importance of character without attacking.

6. Determine to cooperate rather than compete. Browbeating your rebellious child (“Do this...” “Don’t do that...” “I wish you would...” “Why don’t you...”) simply doesn’t work. Instead, work on rebuilding the relationship and reconnecting your hearts. Find the time to just talk – not about issues dealing with “rebellion” – but about life. This is a great way to demonstrate grace at work; it assures our children that we don’t love them just when they behave appropriately, but rather we love them for who they are.

7. Aim at restoring rather than resolving. You may never be able to resolve all problems your rebellious child has encountered or caused, nor the consequences of his or her behavior. Do what you can do in terms of resolution, but focus your aim primarily on restoring your relationship. The role of Christian parents, when it comes to conflict resolution with their child, is not victory *over* the child, but unity *with* the child.