

TEENAGE ATTITUDE, HOMEWORK, ETC.

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PARENT: My fourteen year old is driving me crazy. School work isn't getting done, attitude problems—what can I do?

SANDY: I work with kids we are losing and have found direct questions like, "What the heck are you doing?" don't work. Sometimes, saying, "I realize this is stupid. Please humor me. If we had a magic wand and we could change something in your life, what would it be?" If he says, "School" say, "OK. Let's say that you can't change anything outside of you. What would you change about you?"

Teenagers especially, like to blame "them" for their problems. It is important they realize they are in charge of how they live their lives. Even when they can't change the circumstances (burn down the school, send certain teachers to the moon one-way, etc.), they are still in control of how they choose to live each moment.

I'd be interested in how your child feels about how intelligent he is in relationship to other students. How you determine this is with a direct question: "In relationship to the other students in your school, grade yourself from 0 to 10 in terms of your ability to learn and do the necessary school work." Don't counter whatever he says, just accept it. If he says, "0", say, "Tell me more about that."

If he thinks he is dumb, what's the use of trying? If he thinks school is dumb and what you learn is dumb and he has no use for it, show him what he would earn each month working at a fast food store. Then have him work with you on an estimated list of possible expenses when he is out on his own (rent, car, insurance, food, utilities, play, medical, etc.) He will come out over eight hundred dollars short each month.

THE TICKET TO A GOOD JOB IN MOST CASES (not wanting to judge anyone's educational choices) IS TO (AT LEAST) GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL.

What I've found with students we are losing is that a "banana" works better than punishment. What does he like to do? One boy I was working with turned his whole "do nothing" life around with the bait being going surfing with his father on a Saturday. What does your son like to do? (Concert, computer, roller blade, etc.) Then make a trade: "If you choose to do all of your work, stay in school and (whatever else you want from him)...for (one month), we will trade you (X). If he shows himself that he can do the work, that motivation is his only downfall—then doing the necessary work becomes a choice he must make.

Take him out to dinner and talk from your heart. "I'm so worried and I don't have a clue what to do. I want you to graduate from high school at the very least. What do you want from me right now?" (Don't get defensive. If you don't know what to say, say, "Tell me more....")