

Places for Struggling Teens™

Published by
Woodbury Reports, Inc.™

"It is more important to get it right, than to get it first."

October 2010 - Issue #194

Children In Control



How Much Is Healthy?
By Lon Woodbury

Children manipulate. Every parent knows this as an almost universal law of child behavior. It is the person who has never been a parent who sometimes buys into some idealistic mantra like "A Child Would Not Lie," a belief that was very common in the 1970's when many of our child abuse laws were written. But, how can you tell when a child is being straight forward, or when the child is being manipulative?

Educational Consultant Marla Simon found a great article that gives six major patterns of manipulation a child (especially teens) will use to get their way. Written by Lisa Zarnoksky and titled Six Ways Your Teen Is Playing You, I would hope that all parents of teens would study it. Perhaps it would be even more enlightening to adults who haven't had the parenting experience and are confused by all the conflicting claims of how to understand what children are doing, and accusations that the parent is the problem, or the child needs fixing etc. This brings up the question as to why children might manipulate. Simply to say that they manipulate to get their way doesn't really answer the question.

I think it comes down to a matter of control in order to gain security. They manipulate for control and thus hope they will then be secure when they get their way. Every living thing, and especially humans, wants to be in control of their own life. Even children want their views and thoughts to at least matter. Much of the acting out teens do are an attempt to gain control over their lives, and manipulation is sometimes used when the child feels they have no control over their lives and are feeling very insecure. When, in their view, their views, needs and/or wants are ignored, or brushed aside as being "childish," is when a child escalates. Manipulation, temper tantrums, lying, and anger are all efforts at control to solve their own problems by an escalation to try regaining some control over their lives and that elusive goal of security.

Being inexperienced, these efforts are often counter-productive and the child often winds up being their own worst enemy. It is the adults' responsibility to understand what is happening in the child's head and work to help the child gain some control of his/her life. They need to teach the child healthy ways to obtain some control so they no longer have a feeling of powerlessness.

The child needs to be taught how to gain control in positive ways in appropriate matters, and also taught that in other ways they shouldn't be in charge. The goal is a process of learning how to be an adult, and part of that knows when they should be in charge, and when they need to allow others to be in charge.

As the old saying goes, sometimes you drive the bus, and sometimes you just ride in the bus, and a mature adult will know which is appropriate.

Response

By: Dodge Johnson, Educational Consultant, IECA, NACAC, CEP

[The following was in response to this essay on LinkedIn.com. I think the writer added good insight to the topic of control so I am including it here with his permission. -Lon]

Of course teens play their parents, and methods Ms. Zamosky describes are as good as any in classifying a pretty imaginative range of tools. And there's no question that kids will fight for autonomy, even in things they aren't ready to handle. Sometimes, though they protest, they are even grateful when limits are set if for no other reason than that they don't want to deal with peer pressure.

What bothers me is the assumption in her piece that the parents are right and the kids are wrong. And I don't think that's always true, particularly in this age of helicopter parents, which I see all the time in my college

Continued: **Response/ 2**

Visit Reports:
Falcon Ridge Ranch/ 2
At The Crossroads/ 4
Kolob Canyon RTC/ 5

New Perspectives:
SeaChange Hawaii/ 6
River Centre Clinic/ 6
Tarzana Treatment Centers/ 7
Calvary Ranch/ 8
Lyman Ward Military Academy/ 9
Reality Ranch Military Camp/ 9

Seen N' Heard: 10

[Essays and articles appearing in this publication are the opinions of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the policy of Woodbury Reports, Inc.,™ or StrugglingTeens.com.™ We urge our readers to conduct their own investigation of the products and services identified herein.]