

Taken from:

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Pre-reading questions

1. What are the main causes for problems between parents and children?
2. Which things will you do differently to your children when it's your turn to be a parent?

The awkward period of adolescence is difficult to endure for most parents. It marks a time when children start to develop their own personalities and find everything their parents told them to do when they were younger is repulsive to them now. They think their parents do not understand them, but when their parents ask them questions because they want to understand them, they are simply told that they are being nosey. It is like a bloody war with many casualties on both sides! But what turns these little angels into such horrible monsters? Is it reality television? Violent computer games? Too many additives in their fast food? Or is the answer simply hormonal?

The law in Britain states that no child can be left home alone until they have reached the age of thirteen. Parents must find someone who is older than fifteen to look after their children when they want to go out. This means that some children enter their puberty believing that their homes are prisons and their parents are the guards. These prison guards decide what they eat, when they eat it, and at what time they must return to their cell (bedroom) and sleep, only to be woken again the following morning to perform this daily grind all over again.

This, of course, is usually just the opinion of the child. As parents are legally responsible for their children until they are eighteen years old, they have an obligation, by law, to make sure that their little darlings keep away from danger. Having children of this age is like a prison sentence for parents too, as they cannot go out when they want without arranging a suitable baby-sitter first.

„Are relationships between Czech parents and their adolescent children any better? Czech teenagers are expected to help around the house more than their British counterparts. Some parents think their children have become lackadaisical and are neglecting their duties at home, but this is because a lot of teenagers have their own activities to do now, too, such as schoolwork or hobbies.

How many times can parents be heard accusing their child of "treating the house like a hotel" or saying, "When I was your age, I had to listen to my parents. and obey them"? Are these parents just repeating the mistakes and clichés of their parents, or does it come, rather, from their concern and wish to over protect their children?

For example, Czech fathers find it impossible to relax if they know that their little girl is at a 'sordid' discotheque. They pace the floor at home and try not to imagine all the terrible things the horrible spotty hormone-driven boys could be doing to daddy's princess. They cannot go to the pub with their friends because, if they do, they will only get maudlin and worry even more. They find it difficult to accept that their innocent daughter is changing into young woman, and one day they won't be the only important man in her life any more.

There are, of course, many reasons for the bad relations that exist between some parents and their children, but most of them come from the fact that they are from different generations with their own ideas and values. Misunderstandings are commonplace because the children are exposed to different kinds of influences to which their parents were not. Peer groups play a major role in a child's development of identity, therefore parents do not have the same possibilities to be exposed to what the latest trend in the playground is, or to the latest fashion or dating tips from the teen magazines that their children read. So things such as pop music are incomprehensible to most parents, because they are expressing ideas and situations that cannot relate to their lives.

Can anything be done to bridge this perilous generation gap? How about a little acceptance and understanding on both sides? If children are only controlled and restricted by their parents they are not going to be able to develop into true individuals. It is important for them to realise at the same time that they must be more socially aware of others (including their parents) and remember who is paying for their upkeep and whose house they live in.

Although adolescents are the future of the country, they should understand that the world does not revolve around them and their friends, but instead there should be a careful balance between tolerance and self-

expression. Parents have to accept that they cannot keep their children as babies forever, or dissuade them from their road to discovery, and that means that one day they will have to face the inevitable and let them leave the nest!

An important lesson in reasoning and discovery must be learnt by both sides if there is to be any resolution to the hostilities. Like most problems in the world, the key is communication. Children must keep in mind that their parents were young once too, and parents can do a lot to help their children with the knowledge they gained when they were growing up. Fashions may come and go, but the agony of adolescence remains.

So adolescence may be a 'frenzied' experience for both parents and teenagers alike. It is also the start of an exciting period of self-realisation when many important decisions will have to be made. It does not have to be a hormonal and generation driven war, but instead should be an important learning environment for all. After all, mistakes are inevitable, but it doesn't mean that you have to keep on making them, instead of learning from them. Adolescence is difficult enough, but it can be much easier if you face it together.

After-reading questions

1. What does British law state about children being on their own at home? Contrast this law with the Czech reality.
2. What are some of the causes of bad relations between parents and children from the author's point of view?
3. What are some of the solutions suggested in the article?