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THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

December 22, 2011

Arguing with your teen? Why that might be a good thing

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Globe and Mail Blog

Teenagers who can hold their own with parents are more likely to resist peer pressure, study finds

Parents, if sitting down to dinner each night with your teenager feels like the umpteenth instalment in a lengthy Supreme Court battle, take heart. Your argumentative kid is also likely to speak up for herself when it comes to peer pressure around stuff you don't want them to do.

A study done at the University of Virginia with teens at ages 13, 15 and 16, found that "teens who hold their own in family discussions were better at standing up to peer influences to use drugs or alcohol," according to a statement released by the university [http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2011-12/sfri-twe121511.php]. The study appears in the journal *Child Development*.

The best protected were teens who persuaded their mothers, in particular, with "reasoned arguments, rather than with pressure, whining or insults," when talking about topics including friends, school and rules.

"What we find is the right kind of argument is one where a teen and the parent are trying to persuade each other with calm reasoning," lead author Joseph Allen, the Hugh P. Kelly professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, told the Canadian Press [<http://www.ctv.ca/ctvnews/health/20111222/parents-teens-peer-pressure-111222/#ixzz1hjihczqw>].

"This is very different from bullying or shouting or pressuring or whining, or just withdrawing, which are all kind of other approaches teens sometimes use to get their way."

Dr. Allen told CP that home-based debates seem to act as practice for standing up to peer pressure in the larger world.

The researchers looked at more than 150 teens and their parents. It was a racially, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse group, according to the university's statement. "Researchers used not just the youths' own reports, but information from parents and peers. They also observed teens' social interactions with family members and peers."

Debating clubs across the country will likely cheer the news. If you're the parent of the teen, do you? How do arguments go in your house?



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