

## **S.L.A.P.™ Your Teenager**

### **A Dramatic Change e-book for Parents**

- **Introduction:**

Sara and Aliza bring you another Dramatic Change™ e-book, this one a handbook to help parents learn more effective communication with their teenagers. Parents of teens often feel exhausted, frustrated and ineffective in the face of their once cute and compliant children striving vigorously toward adulthood.

We can offer parents some simple tools that can open up a more compassionate dialog with teenage children and find a path to understanding, trust, empathy and mutual respect. If you are a parent and want a more satisfying relationship with your teen, read on.

Dramatic Change™ delivers tools for solving conflicts at home, in social relationships and in the workplace. Our original methods combine Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Non-Violent Communication and other concepts. We use psychodrama in our live workshops to help people practice our different techniques through role-playing. We believe that all people, including your obnoxious teenagers, are capable of change. We know, because we are stupid-parents-who-know-nothing-about-life, too.

- **Has this ever happened in your house?**

On a typical evening, you walk into your home after a long day and there are your precious teenage children, hanging out in your living room with five of their teenage friends. You love that they hang out at your house — it means you are THAT parent! You are COOL! You are so happy! Until you see the kitchen.

Eight hungry teenagers raided your fridge and cooked pancakes! YES! That was so adult and independent of them! YAY! But oh, the mess...

You hold your tongue for as long as possible, but you can't resist. You say, "you are all going to clean this up, right?"

They chorus "Of course we are!"

And you feel happy and comforted and continue to be the cool parent.

You and your partner go out for the evening, and when you return you open the kitchen door — to the same colossal mess.

You can't believe it!

- **Why your method might not be working**

Now, it's important to start with the most basic assumption that you can't change anyone else, you can only change yourself.

If that's not clear, we'll say it again:

**You can't change anyone else, you can only change yourself.**

Got that?? Ok. Moving forward.

The next step is to understand that...

**When we change our own behavior, others around us will shift in response.**

We parents have learned behaviors that are hard to change. Many of us react to stressors the same way our parents reacted — even if we hated it then — because we lack the skills, the awareness and the confidence to act differently. One problem with this is that sometimes poor, destructive communication gets us the result we want in the moment. Like shouting, for example.

Shouting at our kids does in fact get them off the couch, and often they will even comply with our request in the aftermath of a grown-up sized tantrum.

But there is a cost.

By shouting we convey a loss of control that often translates as a lack of trust to our teenage children. Shouting demands at teenagers often results in the slamming of the door, in both the literal and metaphorical sense.

If we can remember our goal in times of stress, we are more likely to act in a less destructive manner.

What exactly is that goal?

Our job is to help our teenagers reach adulthood.

That should be pretty obvious to us, but we often lose sight of the target when our teenagers are, in fact, acting like children.

Shouting does not help them with their developmental task, which is to individuate, separate and become whole people on their own.

What does help is to allow them to arrive at the natural consequences of their actions.

**The magic word here is ALLOW.**

Parents of teenagers live with a delicate balance. We are called upon to both maintain boundaries and guidelines so our teens feel secure and have clarity, and to allow them to fail, to make mistakes and to discover their own power and responsibilities. This can be a Herculean task for parents.

The number one skill that can help us strike this balance is creating more space between our perception and our reaction time.

Creating more space opens up the possibility that we will be able to evolve our parenting as our children grow. It allows us to step back and ask ourselves if the way we are speaking might be the obstacle to getting what we want from our teens.

So let's get back to our scenario.

You come home and see the same mess you saw four hours ago.

You choose how you respond.

Choice number one: **GET YOUR ASSES UP OFF THAT COUCH AND CLEAN THE KITCHEN!**

Chances are good that eight asses will scramble to the kitchen and clean it. That is one method to achieve the desired result. However, what did we achieve?

### **COMPLIANCE.**

Compliance is gratifying, but it does not help teenagers become more aware, more independent or more compassionate as they reach toward adulthood.

Choice number two: S.L.A.P.™!!!!!!!

**You have the power! You have so much more power to change things than you know!**

- **How our method might work better**

Instead of getting annoyed and angry, you:

### **STOP!**

Take four deep cleansing breaths. Close your eyes. Take a mini vacation to Italy in your mind. Observe the trigger. When I saw the mess, I felt...what? Disappointed? Disrespected? Tired? Alone? In the quiet of those breaths, accept the feelings, but do not act on the impulse those feelings usually drive.

## **LISTEN!**

When they see you at the door, taking your deep breaths, they might suddenly remember the promise they made to clean the kitchen. Listen to what they say to you in those moments. They are sorry. They got distracted. The movie is almost over, can it wait 12 more minutes?

## **ASK!**

By asking leading questions, we enable our teens to feel more understood. This is a key element in getting the result we want. Ask about the movie. What did you see? How was it? Did you forget about the kitchen? If you don't see any remorse, or if no one moves toward the waiting kitchen door, take it up a notch.

And by this I mean, tell them how you feel. Go back to step one and recall the feelings. "When I saw the kitchen, I felt hurt." Then walk out. Teenagers get a bad rap for being narcissistic, but that's not exactly true. They are preoccupied with the tornado of change in their hormonal and emotional maelstrom. But most teenagers do care a great deal about others. Look at how they treat their friends. The caring is in there. I promise you, they DO care about how you feel. They love you and they do not want you to feel hurt, disappointed or angry at them.

## **PRACTICE!**

It's not easy to change our behavior. It takes practice. It takes perspective, and it takes persistence. Try something different every day, just once. See how your teenagers are capable of change!

Remember, the goal is not compliance. The goal is individuation, the developmental task of a teenager becoming an adult. With your support and guidance, they can rock this adulthood thing.

Welcome to Dramatic Change's™ original S.L.A.P.™ method. Try it out! If you would like to learn more about S.L.A.P.™ or Dramatic Change™, please check out our e-learning modules, join our user forum or book us for a workshop in your city. We look forward to hearing from you!

Dramatic Change™: Delivering conflict solutions for everyone.