



STOP LECTURING:

Guiding Adolescents to Make Their Own Wise Decisions

We care so deeply about our children that we try to protect them from getting emotionally or physically hurt. Sometimes we know exactly where their mistakes will lead them. After all, we have gained the wisdom from having made many mistakes on our own.

To protect them, we launch into a lecture to make sure they understand where they may be headed. But instead of giving your child a lecture about what to avoid, what if you taught them how to think through a problem and make a good decision?



When children are guided to think things through they are more likely to see the link between their actions and consequences. This prepares children to make safer decisions. It also may make them less rebellious because there is little reason for a child to reject a plan they have come up with themselves.

● REASONS WHY LECTURES ARE INEFFECTIVE

- > **Lectures are too future oriented.** Children and younger adolescents think about the present and have a tough time imagining how something they do now will affect the future.
- > **Lectures move too quickly.** In seconds, a lecture goes from point A to point B to point C to point D. Children cannot make the connections from A to D when you are moving that fast. They miss the points you are trying to make.
- > **Even though your lecture is aimed at protecting your child from something bad that might happen in the future, all they hear is your panic and disappointment.** Because they cannot see the future in the way you can, they may see your emotion as unreasonable.
- > **Lectures often include our fear about how our children will be manipulated by others.** Children and younger adolescents tend to see people in simple terms (good or bad, what they can do for me). They are not yet good at seeing shades of grey or grasping hidden motivations.
- > **All people (even adults) can't think things through when they are stressed.** Lecturing your teen when they are stressed simply won't work.

● HOW TO GET YOUR POINT ACROSS WITHOUT LECTURING

- > **Take one step at a time.** Going from Point A through D rapidly is overwhelming for a child, but going from Point A to Point B makes sense. Give your child time to process each step before moving on.
 1. Your child will learn very little if you approach schoolwork with the following angry lecture.
 - **Don't Say,** *"You're being lazy and you're not spending any time on your schoolwork. What kind of future will you have? You'll never get into a decent college! You'll never make anything of yourself if you don't get to work."*

- > **Instead**, break it down into one step at a time. Make a conversation out of it. Let him respond at each point.
- > *“I worry that if you don’t study tonight, you will not do well on your history test tomorrow (Point A). You’ve been working hard this year, but if you slow down now it will really affect your grades this quarter (Point B).”*

2. Once your child has figured out the first idea (Point B), it is okay to move on.

- *“I don’t want you to feel even more pressure next quarter to have to make up your grades. No one needs that extra pressure. Investing a little bit of time now will make it easier for you later (Point C).”*
 - > Now he knows there is something in it for him to study today, so it is okay to move on.
 - > *“I really care about your learning. History is an important subject. And the truth is that your grades will make a difference into which college you’ll be able to go to (Point D).”*



> **Have a two-sided conversation.** Encourage your child to ask questions and to problem solve.

- Try asking open-ended questions like, *“What do you think happens to grades when kids stay out late every night?”*

> **Teach how others may manipulate them in ways that don’t feel too personal.** Adolescents especially are offended when adults suggest their friends may try to pressure or take advantage of them. When we fit this into our “lectures” it sometimes makes them frustrated and angry.

- Use advertisements as a way to introduce your child to the ways in which people can try to manipulate others.
- Look for teachable moments:
 - > When watching TV with your child, you might ask, *“Why is Jade being so mean to Victoria?”*
 - > When driving by a group of kids, you might ask, *“Do you think all the kids in that group want to hang out in this weather? I wonder if they feel they have to, just so that they can stay part of the group?”*
- Explain how people use “lines” to try to get others to do what they want. You might talk about how you heard that some people try to “egg good kids on.”
 - > *“You look like your always doing the ‘right thing’. I bet no one will notice if you walk out of this store with these glasses on.”*

● STRATEGIES TO KEEP CONVERSATIONS GOING SMOOTHLY

> **Stay calm.** Hold back any strong feelings in reaction to something your child tells you. If you react with judgment, your child will be less likely to come to you in the future.

- Keep your emotions in check and don’t dive in until you can have a calm and thoughtful discussion.
- Try breathing in and out 3 times or counting to 10 before you respond. Or, just be honest and try saying, *“I need some time to really think through what you told me before I can respond to you.”*

- Be careful about how you discuss your child's friends. Your teen will shut down and get defensive the second he thinks you are criticizing his friends. When you make the conversation about safety, teens will better tolerate the discussion.
- **Don't Say:** *"You can't hang out at Ezra's house tonight. I haven't liked his attitude recently."*
 - > Your son will think, *"Why does she hate my friends? Fine, I'll meet him in the park."*
 - > **Instead Say:** *"I've always liked Ezra. I'm worried that he hasn't been making safe decisions lately. I don't want you to be unsafe. I do not want you to ride in his car or hang out at his house. You are welcome to have him here if you like."*
- > **Wait until your child is calm.** When people are stressed they feel defensive and even well-meaning advice can be taken as criticism.
 - If you your child to get the most out of your advice, wait until a moment of calm to talk.

When young people figure things out for themselves (with guidance from you!), they feel good about the solutions. They have no reason to rebel against decisions they have made themselves.

SOURCES:

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This work was developed by The Craig-Dalsimer Division of Adolescent Medicine of The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, in collaboration with The Child, Adolescent, and Family Behavioral Health Office, U.S. Army Medical Command, and The Military Child Education Coalition®.

Thank YOU



A PUBLIC EDUCATION MOVEMENT
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This publication has been made possible by a grant from the Bob Woodruff Foundation.



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