

QUESTION: Sometimes my husband acts like such a child! When I tell him to do something, he usually gets angry or just ignores me. If I ask him where he's going, he usually mumbles something I can't understand and is out the door. If I ask him where he's been, he has some smart-aleck reply. He tells me he will be home by six and comes home at 10 without any explanation or apology. We've been married 12 years, but sometimes I think I'm married to a teen-ager. Do you have any advice on how I can handle my "teen-age" husband?

ANSWER: Alas, it's true. When it comes to us guys, there's at least a little bit of a teen in all of us. I suspect that's also true for women, but men are significantly more obvious about it. Let me share a few thoughts with you about adolescent husbands (and their wives!)

It is not at all unusual, as your situation attests, for marriages to develop parent-child dynamics as years go by. Spouses begin treating each other like a "parent" or like a "child" instead of relating as two adults of the same generation. Let me use the language in your question to explain what I mean.

When you "tell" your husband to do something, you are approaching him as a parent relates to a child. Parents "tell," spouses "ask." Telling puts you in an authoritarian role, which invites a childish response from your husband. Asking, on the other hand, recognizes that you are two equal adults who have the right to say "yes" or "no" to requests you make of each other.

Now, here's the point that most people don't like to hear from me, but I believe it's an important truth in adult relationships. Adults don't have the right

to "tell" other adults what to do. (Exception: I would *not* recommend telling this to your boss, unless you are tired of your job. Supervisors *are* in a position of authority over other adults). When it comes to spouses, or even parents of adult children, however, the principle is true. Adults have the right to make their own choices about how they spend their time and energy.

It's time for a word to your husband. If you use what I'm saying to adopt an angry "you-can't tell-me-what-to-do" attitude toward your wife, then you really *are* acting like a teen-ager. Adults need to make *responsible* choices if their lives and the lives of those around them are going to function at their best.

It occurs to me that by now, I have probably angered you, your husband and 75% of my readers. But if anyone is still reading, I'll keep going.

Another aspect of parent-child marriages involves the difference between *asking permission* and *providing information*. It is possible your husband doesn't tell you where he's going or where he's been because it feels like asking permission from you. Adults don't have to ask permission, but responsible adults keep their partners informed. Adults don't get defensive, they simply give factual information about their separate plans and activities. Adults don't have to explain everything to their spouse, but responsible adults want their spouses to know where they are and what they are doing to keep them from wondering and worrying.

Marriages run much more smoothly and feel better to both of you when spouses stop treating each other like parents or children and respect each other as adults. Good luck in finding that kind of marriage at your house!

Questions may be sent to the Samaritan Counseling Center, 1850 Colfax Ave., Benton Harbor, MI 49022, faxed to (269) 926-6780 or emailed to pbambrick@samcounseling.org. Glenn Chapman, executive director of the Center, answered today's question.

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