

Losing Control and Liking It
Discussion Guide

Introduction

How has your view of control changed since your teen was a toddler? How has it stayed the same?

“You’re on your way to losing control of your teenager.” How do you feel about that statement? Why?

Which of the following do you hope to learn most about in this group? Why?

- why control is such a flash point between parents and teens
- what a parent’s real job description is—and isn’t
- how to balance control, influence, and responsibility
- when to step back and do nothing
- how to make and enforce rules
- how to pick battles
- when to get outside help
- how to deal with an “adult” teenager

PART I: Getting Too Much of a Grip
Chapter 1: Control: It’s Not Your Department

In which of the following areas do you most see control issues arising with your teenager?

- driving a car
- dating
- chores
- homework
- personal appearance
- church involvement
- food
- other _____

What did control look like in your family as you were growing up? How was it expressed?

What does control look like in your present family? How would you like it to look?

Which of the following do you think might help most in the way you handle control and your teenager? Why?

- changing some of the “records” you play on your mental jukebox
- realizing that you can’t make your teenager turn out “right”
- remembering that God’s children didn’t obey Him, either
- knowing that Proverbs 22:6 is a principle, not a guarantee
- praying the Serenity Prayer once a day

Chapter 2: The Real Job of Parenting

If you’re a dad, how are you already validating your teenager? If you’re a mom, how are you nurturing? Do you think your children are getting enough validation and nurture? How do you know?

Who validates and nurtures you? How?

“Parenting a teenager begins when he or she is born.” When does it end? Will there be a time when your son or daughter no longer needs your validation or nurture? Explain.

Which of these seems like the biggest roadblock to doing your job as a parent? What advice in this chapter could help you overcome it?

- the judgment of other parents
- having a teen with emotional problems

- being a single parent
- spending my time on control instead
- other _____

Chapter 3: Why Teens (and Parents) Go Out of Control

In what ways have you seen your teenager “moving away” from you in the last year? Be specific.

In which of the following areas have you been able to make the healthy shift from “hands-on” parent to “hands-off but available” parent? Can you give an example? If you haven’t been able to do this, how might the advice in this chapter help?

- homework
- sleep habits
- personal hygiene
- Internet use
- spiritual life

Which of the following song titles best describes how busy your family is as a whole? Which best describes how busy each family member is? How might busyness be affecting parent-teen conflict in your home?

- “I Go Crazy”
- “No Time”
- “Lazy Days”
- “Under Pressure”

If you could use an “over-stimulation detector” in your home, where would it go off? How would a power outage affect the stimulation level in your family? Short of confiscating all electrical devices, how can you keep stimulation to a healthy level?

Chapter 4: Free Will: “You Have the Right to Remain Stupid”

If God had put you in charge of the Garden of Eden, would you have stopped Adam and Eve from eating the forbidden fruit? Why or why not?

What was your first reaction when you read the bumper sticker slogan “People have the right to be stupid”? Why? Can you come up with another slogan that summarizes the message of this chapter?

How do you see free will being lived out by your teenager? How do you feel about that?

What are the differences between the two ideas in each of the following pairs? How are the differences important?

- The First Rule of Life and “I don’t care what you do”
- The Second Rule of Life and “You’re making a big mistake”
- The Third Rule of Life and “I’ll make you pay for this”

How would you apply the Three Rules of Life to each of the following situations?

- Your teenager wants to take up skydiving.
- Your teenager keeps putting off applying to college.
- Your teenager is arrested for shoplifting.

PART II: Control and Your Goal

Chapter 5: HOLDERS, TOSSERS, GRABERS, and FOLDERS

Which of the following would you like to control? How do you feel about not being able to control them?

- the weather
- the government

- gas prices
- your teenager

How would you explain the Control Grid to a six-year-old? to your parents? to your teenager? What would you tell them about your tendency to HOLD, TOSS, GRAB, or FOLD?

What about the Control Grid is most helpful to you? Why?

Would it be best to HOLD or FOLD in the following situations? Why? In order to do that, what principles from this chapter would you need to remember?

- Your teenager wants you to get him out of a class with an “unfair” teacher.
- Your teenager’s cell phone was stolen, and he can’t afford a new one.
- You suspect that your teen is being pressured to join a gang.
- Your teenager wants to sing a song in the school talent show that mocks religious people.
- Your teen refuses to use the eye drops the doctor prescribed for an infection.

Chapter 6: Three Habits of Highly Controlling People

Do you ever see yourself falling into the “should” thinking pattern? If so, when does it tend to happen? Are the “should” statements aimed more often at yourself, at others, or both?

In which of the following areas are you already giving your teenager legitimate choices? How is he or she handling those so far?

- curfews
- clothing

- music
- time management
- prayer

Choose one of the following scenarios and work through it with a partner, using the “Let’s Make a Deal” exercise in this chapter. Then talk about what you learned from this process.

- Your daughter wasn’t accepted by the college she applied to, and you think you “should” have pushed her harder to get better grades.
- You don’t want to pay \$120 to rent a tuxedo for your son to wear to the prom, but think you “should” because other parents are spending that much.
- Your son isn’t interested in going to the church youth group retreat, but you think he “should” be.
- You don’t want to let your 17-year-old daughter go to an R-rated movie with her friends, but you think you “should” so that she won’t feel left out.

When was the last time you fell into a “what if” worry thinking pattern? How could the index-card exercise in this chapter help you next time?

If after talking with you, the author suggested that you might be “living in the past,” how would you reply? Why? If your teenager accused you of the same thing, what would you say?

PART III: Turning Off the Power Struggle

Chapter 7: Dances of Influence

What are three ways in which your teenager takes after you? Do these seem to be due to your conscious efforts to be an influence or to other factors? What does this say about a parent’s ability to be influential?

When have you seen each of the four “dances” in your family? Which dance(s) do you find yourself engaging in most often, and with whom?

When would the following actions be examples of attempts to control? When would they be attempts to influence?

- grounding a teen who cheated on a final exam
- refusing to let your 16-year-old daughter date a 19-year-old male
- going to the video rental store with your 17-year-old son to make sure he doesn't choose an inappropriate movie
- putting a 30-gallon garbage can in the middle of your teen's messy room

Which of the following song lyrics do you think best sum up the message of this chapter? Why?

- "You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em."
- "Your mama don't dance, and your daddy don't rock 'n' roll."
- "We're not gonna take it anymore."
- "Save the last dance for me."

Chapter 8: Rules of Engagement

If you could have only five rules in your family, what would they be?

Think of two rules you have in your household. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 highest), how well do they meet the following criteria?

- specific
- quantitative
- enforceable
- keeping safety in
- keeping chaos out

Which of the following would you place in the "advice" category? Which are rules? Which are suggestions? How would you expect your teenager to respond in each case?

- "You might want to change the oil in the car before you go on that trip."
- "If I catch you looking at porn on the Web, you can kiss that computer good-bye."

- “In our family, we tithe.”
- “This is your week to scoop the cat litter box every day.”
- “It would make me very happy if you’d only go out with Christians.”
- “I’ve discovered that paying off my credit card each month keeps me out of debt.”

What are your “house definitions” of respect and disrespect? Are they clear to you and your teenager? How do you know?

Chapter 9: When They Make You So Mad (and Vice Versa)

Which of the people mentioned by name in this chapter (Rich, Micah, Ben, Glen, Zoë) reacted to anger as you usually do? Which reacted as your teenager usually does? What parent-teen interactions tend to trigger anger in your home?

When you become frustrated or angry, do you tend to break either of the rules mentioned in this chapter? If so, which one(s)? Which of the author’s suggestions might help you?

Which of the following makes you most uncomfortable when you see it in your teenager? when you feel it yourself? Has this discomfort ever tempted you to “seize control”? If so, what happened?

- anger
- disappointment
- sadness
- fear

How do you handle the painful side of life? What helps you “get through” the hurt? What can you do to help your teenager better deal with pain, sadness, anger, and disappointment?

Chapter 10: Intervention: When You Have to Step In

What’s the difference between unhealthy control and the kinds of intervention described in this chapter? How would you explain that to a troubled teenager?

Based on this chapter, where on the “continuum of care” would you start looking for help in each of the following situations?

- You find a bag of marijuana in your son’s sock drawer.
- Your daughter flunks three classes and can’t graduate from high school.
- Your son, who’s been bullied for years, keeps talking about wanting a gun.
- Your daughter seems depressed but not suicidal.
- Your son is accused by the couple next door of molesting their daughter.

What role would you like a church to play when one of its members has a rebellious or emotionally disturbed teenager? Have you ever seen a church get involved in such a situation? If so, what happened?

Name two people to whom you could turn if you needed support or help with your teenager tomorrow. If you can’t name two such people, how might the group provide assistance or connect you with someone who can?

Chapter 11: “But I’m 18!”

What’s easy—and hard—about having an 18-year-old adult at home, even if it’s just during the summer? If your teenager isn’t 18 yet, what do you think it will be like?

The author writes that when dealing with a young adult who won’t follow your house rules, it’s not personal—it’s business. What parts of that approach do you agree with? What parts do you disagree with?

Whether or not your teenager is 18, can you relate to any of the personal stories in this chapter? If so, which ones? Why?

Which of the following issues are you likely to face during the coming year? If your teen is 18, how does that complicate them? In what areas do you need more information? more wisdom? more prayer from the rest of the group?

- who pays for what
- decisions about college, jobs, or entering the military
- girlfriend or boyfriend problems
- church attendance

Chapter 12: Bringing It All Home

Do you think the quiz at the beginning of this chapter covered the most important principles in this book? If not, which would you add?

Look at Sarah’s story. Would reading this book be likely to help her? Why or why not? What do you think it would take to convince Sarah that, in the long run, she’d like “losing control”?

Which of the following questions do you think would be effective openers to conversations that could positively influence your teenager? Why?

- “You’re not planning to get one of those stupid nose rings, are you?”
- “Did I ever tell you about the time I got caught smoking at church camp?”
- “If I give you five bucks, will you listen to some advice?”
- “Is it just me, or did you sound kind of worried about the chemistry test?”
- “Would you teach me how to do text messaging?”
- “Is there a dead skunk in here, or did you forget to take a shower again?”

The author writes, “Losing control in a healthy way is worth every minute.” Ten years from now, what evidence would you like to be able to offer that he’s right?