

How to avoid the self-justification/poor behaviour trap with teens.

Problem:

Child: Makes a mistake, a poor choice, a “bad” decision, an error in judgment, etc.

Parent responds: “What were you thinking?” – a statement that means “Boy, are you *stupid*.”

Parent proceeds to give a lecture about values and how the child should have done things differently and how it would have worked out better, etc.

“Ironically, this natural tendency to lecture may be one of the worst things a family member or friend can do.”* A lecture just makes children more defensive and pushes them further into self-justification as a way to protect the self against the fear of being stupid/incompetent, etc. The child who is already embarrassed will withdraw further into themselves and clam up, refusing to tell anyone what he or she is doing. And what they are doing is more of the same behaviour in an effort to prove that what they were thinking was perfectly sensible (i.e., “I’ll show you – it will be different this time and I’ll be vindicated”).

Solution:

Parents can stop this scenario from happening by showing their kids respect and support through the use of **Active Listening** and **Socratic Questioning**.

*This quote and the ideas on this page are taken from the book entitled, “Mistakes Were Made (but not by *me*)”, authored by Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, 2007, p.231).