

Rights and Privileges of Teens and Elders

By Dr. Karmann Armann

I have a teenage daughter and an elderly mother. I see so many similarities in how I interact with both of them when it comes to their rights and privileges. As mom has gotten older it has been difficult for her to let go of her independence, as my daughter has gotten older she has demanded more independence, so where do I draw the line? How do I help both of them achieve the goals of independence without compromising their safety, health and our relationship?

Both women are furiously independent. They both want to come and go as they please. They both have thoughts of how they should be allowed to do things they want to do without hindrance from anyone particularly a son or a father. How much of this is entitlement or is it rights? What can I or any family member offer to them that will be accepted as helpful and not as a nuisance?

Being a supportive family member means helping with independence and guidance. It also requires good listening skills with encouragement and affirmation of their choices. Listen without interruption to their thoughts, ideas and stories is important to having success in negotiating a solution. It's not always about solving a problem. Sometimes it is nice to get another person's perspective on their concerns. Often it is just the need to vent and have someone there to lean on without judgment or critical interjections.

Offer guidance and motivation to get their needs met without sounding dictatorial. I find they both want the ideas to be their own and it is tricky to have them agree to a solution which

may not necessarily be their own and is indeed emotional not problem focused.

We all have certain rights. I believe the basics are: a place to live, enough food to eat, clothing, and for children an education. In my list I add: be treated with love, respect and kindness and be protected from harm. Everything else is a privilege. Privileges are granted when you show you are worthy and capable of maintaining that privilege. We all work hard at getting those privileges and we are disappointed when we lose them.



For example, I had to tell my mom she would no longer be allowed to

drive. At first she pulled the "I'm the mother" card end of discussion. When I explained it was not about her need to drive, it was about her safety as well as the safety of those around her. She then understood, but she still wasn't happy about it. When my daughter got her driver's license she was 16. I placed restrictions on her driving before I allowed her to drive. When she broke one of my rules I had to take the keys away from her. She, too, was really angry with me. In both situations I was just as upset as they were, because the rules were made for their safety and security but they didn't see it that way. I now have a driver for mom and my daughter is complying with the rules.

They both could learn so much from each other. One has had a great life and one is just starting out on a great life's journey. They have given me purpose, joy and frustration. I would not have it any other way.