



# Dr. Jenn

**DR. JENN BERMAN**

If you have a child over the age of 12, you have probably heard the words "I hate you" or "You're so lame" shouted in your direction more than once. Having a teen in the house is often not fun. They can make you yearn for the sleep-deprived days of dirty diapers and colic.

More serious issues, such as divorce, substance abuse, sexual abuse, depression, and mental illness can cause teens to act out more than usual, although even in the best of circumstances some acting out is to be expected. Much of the discord between parent and teen is normal and even developmentally expected. While this may not make it any easier to tolerate, sometimes knowledge is power... or at least it can provide you with a modicum of sanity. Here are the five reasons your teen probably hates you:

**Individuation**--Individuation is the process of becoming an independent person in thought, belief and behavior. All kids go through this process and this developmental step often causes teens to devalue their parents. The teen that is close to her parents must push them away in order to become her own person and, hopefully, will be able to eventually form a new, more adult relationship with her parents.

To add to the conflict of individuation, teens are old enough to have the desire for independence while still being too young to actually accomplish that goal. They are still dependant on you for transportation, money, and basic caretaking. This conflict causes teens a lot of unconscious anxiety, which often looks like a temper tantrum aimed at Mom and Dad.

**Brain Development**--Scientists who once thought that brain development was complete by the age of four or five have now discovered that brain maturity is not complete until the early twenties. The cerebral cortex, including the parietal lobes, which are in charge of logic and spatial reasoning, are still growing in teenagers. In addition, the frontal lobes, or prefrontal cortex, which helps us resist impulses and plan ahead, is still under-developed in your teen. That part of the brain dictates good or bad judgment and is one of the last areas of the brain to develop. According to author Dr. Michael Bradley, "...this wild brain development may create new, unpredictable thought pathways, wherein action thoughts can outrace judgment capacities just as they did in early childhood."

As a result it may feel like your teen is

# Why Your Teenager Hates You

intentionally trying to hurt you when, the truth is, their brains have not yet mastered impulse control. When you come home from vacation to find your house trashed from the party your teen had, it feels like it is an intentionally malicious act when in fact it may just be that your child has not mastered consequential thinking.

**Identity**--One of your teen's primary developmental tasks is to form her own identity or sense of self. This self-doubt and confusion can be anxiety provoking. Teens typically need to experiment with different social groups, friends, clothes, and activities in order to discover themselves. During this confusing time, she is particularly sensitive to criticism. She desperately wants your approval, but doesn't want to want your approval. This conflict only makes her resent you and the power you have over her. A simple example of this dynamic from the book *I'm Not Mvud, I Just Hate You*, captures this dynamic. "Ironically, just as your daughter is criticizing you for any and all faults, what she craves for herself is plenty of reassurance and unlimited support. Even if she is constantly and relentlessly disparaging about your wardrobe, for example, she still wants your approval of the outfit she selected for a special occasion."

**"Nay" Sayers**--A parent's job is to make boundaries and help children learn how to make good decisions. As a result, parents must tell their teens "no" a lot. Teens are in that in-between stage of development where they are able to do many adult activities, but are still dependant on their parents for help in executing their plans. Conflict and power struggles are a necessary way of life during this developmental stage. Generally speaking, parents take the emotional brunt of this clash.

**Stress**--Today's teens deal with more stress than any other generation. They are exposed to more explicit adult information before they are able to develop the emotional tools necessary to deal with the content. They are faced with serious issues like AIDS, terrorism, guns in schools, GHBs and other mind-altering date-rape drugs, and internet predators, in addition to the typical difficulties of your own teenage years. It is impossible for a parent to anticipate and protect their teen from all of the modern day hazards of life. Because children generally associate parents with security, soothing, and comfort, teens often unconsciously resent their parent's inability to protect them. Add to that the already difficult time you have understanding what your teen goes through on a daily basis and there are bound to be misunderstandings and

resentments.

The good news is that your teen probably doesn't hate you. She is an impulsive, identity deprived, stressed-out kid who yearns for your support and approval, while at the same time wanting to be independent and self-sufficient. Power struggles and conflicts between parent and child are unavoidable during this stage of life. The other good news is that she will outgrow these years and so will you.

*Dr. Jenn Berman is a psychotherapist and sports psychology consultant. She regularly appears on tele-*

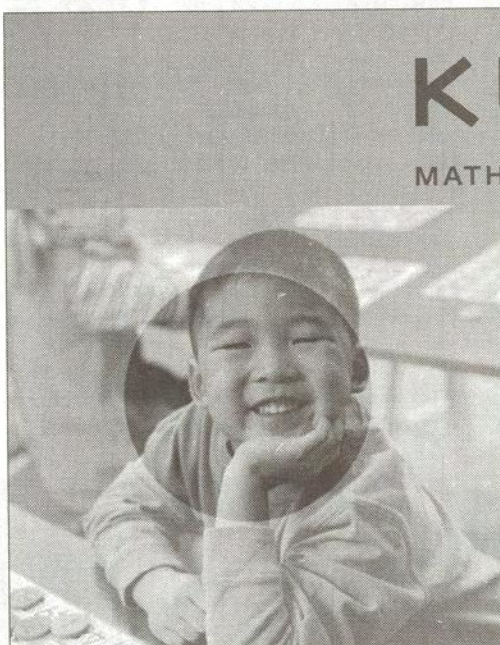
*vision and radio as an expert on psychological issues. For questions, comments, or advice to be used in one of her columns, she can be reached through her website at [www.DoctorJenn.com](http://www.DoctorJenn.com).*

#### Resources:

*How to Negotiate with kids...Even when you think you shouldn't* by Scott Brown, \$14, [www.penguin.com](http://www.penguin.com)

*Hearing is Believing: How words can make or break your kids* by Elisa Medhus, MD, \$14.95, [www.newworldlibrary.com](http://www.newworldlibrary.com)

*Stop Arguing with Your Kids* by Michael P. Nichols, PhD, \$15.95, [www.guilford.com](http://www.guilford.com)



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