

Strategy 1



Top Ten Reasons Why Teens Are Out of Control

Why Is My Teen Acting Like This?

If you've asked this question, you're not alone. I've heard it from thousands of parents—and I've asked it myself as a parent with two out-of-control or extreme teen boys.

Before you can help your teen, you need to understand *why* they're acting out. Without that, it's like trying to fix a car without knowing what's broken.

Here's the hard part: there are too many opinions and too many parenting "experts." Maybe you've already read books, watched videos, and tried things that didn't work.

So why trust this one?

Fair question.

Start by reading the "Top Ten Reasons" below and then ask yourself: *Do any of these reasons sound like what's happening to my teen?*

If even one of them hits home, keep reading. In the next eight strategies, you will find answers and tools that you can use right away that actually work quickly.

In the first edition, I gave seven reasons why teens spiral out of control.

This updated edition includes ten reasons. I've added these four additional reasons:

- Entitlement
- Lack of self-control
- Unhealed trauma
- Technology power struggles or Tech Wars

Reason #1: Entitlement

An entitled teen acts like the world owes them—without putting in the effort. They believe rules don't apply to them. They expect special treatment just because they want it.

To them, wants and needs are the same thing. If they want an iPhone, they think they *need* one. This mindset often leads to selfish, self-centered, and demanding behavior—and if left unchecked, it can grow into arrogance, playing the victim, and refusing to take responsibility for anything.

They will also crumble at the first sign of adversity because they have never had to work for anything. It was just handed to them. In turn, they lack *resiliency*. This is why so many kids today quit their jobs if it requires too much effort.

You may hear things like this from an entitled teenager:

- “I don't have to follow the rules.”
- “Give me what I want or you'll regret it.”
- “It's not my fault.”
- “I don't deserve this.”
- “I'll do it only if you pay me.”
- “What's in it for me?”
- “Why should I?”

Entitlement fuels out-of-control behavior.

If your teen believes they're above the rules, they'll fight any limits you set. And if they don't get their way, they may argue, lash out, or even threaten you.

"MY SON ACTS LIKE THE WORLD OWES HIM—AND I'M AFRAID TO PUSH BACK"

Nick was sixteen and already giving up on life.

He refused to go to school. He wouldn't get a job. He stayed up all night gaming, slept all day, and exploded with anger anytime his parents asked him to do anything.

His parents were heartbroken. They had tried everything they knew. Therapy. Talking. Giving him space. Giving him stuff. Nothing worked.

They came to me in tears, asking, "What happened to our son? He used to be so sweet. Now he's angry all the time. He doesn't care about anything."

When I met Nick, there was no trauma in his background. No abuse. No mental illness. But there was something else: a deep sense of entitlement.

Nick truly believed he shouldn't have to do anything he didn't feel like doing. Not school. Not chores. Not even saying "thank you." He believed the world—and his parents—owed him.

Why?

Because every time his parents tried to set a boundary, they backed off.

They were afraid limits would damage his self-worth and that he was "*psychologically frail*." They didn't want to push him "too hard" or cause him "too much" stress.

But the result? Nick became stuck—angry, unmotivated, and depressed.

He had been handed everything . . . but had nothing to work toward. He didn't know how to handle frustration or effort. And worst of all, he had stopped believing in himself.

His parents weren't lazy or neglectful. But love without limits creates entitlement. And entitlement leaves teens powerless, frustrated, and lost.

Sound familiar? You're not alone. Today, many teens are overindulged. And many parents fear that firm rules will hurt their child's self-esteem.

But here's the truth: Kids need limits. Without them, entitlement grows. And so does conflict, defiance, and hopelessness.

I've struggled with entitlement with my twin sons. As a parent, I've given in when I shouldn't have—even when I knew better. You're not a bad parent, if this has happened in your home. You're human. To make matters worse, everything around us screams entitlement and self-centeredness. "If it feels good . . . do it. You are the center of the universe."

The good news?

You can turn entitlement around. I'll show you how in the next chapters—with real tools that work to stop entitlement cold in its tracks.

Reason #2: No Written Plan with Clear Boundaries

Another reason why your teen may be out of control: There's no written plan. No clear boundaries.

Instead, rules get spoken but not written, rewards change with the day, and consequences depend on the moment—or your mood. No wonder you feel worn out while your teen seems to run the show. For example, let's say you tell your teen, "No more disrespect." But you never define what disrespect actually looks like. You don't write it down. You assume they *know* what you mean.

But they don't. Or—they pretend not to. And just like that, your teen finds the loophole.

I call this *literal disease*. *Literal disease* is your teen's superpower: twisting your words and finding every loophole like a seasoned lawyer. Without a written plan and clear boundaries, they'll outtalk, outmaneuver, and outlast you—until they're running the show.

They become a lawyer. You become the defendant.

LITERAL DISEASE: MY TEEN'S SECRET "SUPERPOWER"

Fifteen-year-old Alex had this literal disease game mastered.

His mom had finally had enough. She announced: "That's it—no more disrespect!"

But the mom didn't write anything down on paper. She didn't list what counted as disrespect. Deep down, she hoped just saying it would be enough.

It wasn't and she paid for it later.

Later that week, she asked Alex to take out the trash.

Alex rolled his eyes, mumbled something under his breath, and kept scrolling on his phone.

Mom: Alex! That was totally disrespectful. Turn off the TV and go to your room.

Alex (*smirking*): Wait, what? You never said mumbling was disrespectful. Or eye-rolling.

Mom: You knew what I meant. Don't play dumb. Go!

Alex: Not happening. You're just making stuff up again. I'm not a mind reader.

Alex didn't move.

Mom didn't know what to say.

She was angry. She was tired. She gave up.

Mom (*defeated*): Fine. Whatever.

Alex smiled. He had won. Again. And deep down, his mom knew: next time would be worse.

If your rules aren't written down, your teen will rewrite them—to work for them, not for you.

Without a clear plan in writing, your teen decides what's "fair." You lose control, and they gain it. The result? More backtalk. More battles. More chaos.

But it doesn't have to stay this way.

In Strategies 4 and 5, I will show you how to create a written plan that shuts every loophole. You will set clear rules, real rewards, and firm consequences—so you can stop yelling, stop second-guessing, and start leading with calm, confident authority.

Reason #3: Lack of Self-Control

Which is the best predictor of your teen's future happiness as they enter adulthood?

- A. Being smart
- B. Good grades
- C. Feeling good about themselves
- D. Having self-control
- E. Being open to new ideas

The answer is D—self-control.

Research shows that teens with poor self-control are more likely to struggle later in life. They often have more health problems, money troubles, relationship conflicts, bounce from job to job, and/or get into legal troubles.

Many parents don't realize how powerful self-control really is to help their child be successful.

WHAT IS SELF-CONTROL?

Self-control means your teen can stay calm, even when things don't go their way. It means they can wait, listen, and think before they act. Teens with self-control can handle hard things and work toward their goals. Teens without it may yell, give up, play the victim, or get angry fast.

At home, this might look like swearing, disrespect, or even violence—especially whenever they hear the word *no*.

Self-control isn't born. It's taught. No one is born with it. Kids learn self-control from the adults around them.

They learn it when:

1. You stay calm and show self-control yourself.
2. They grow up with clear rules and boundaries.
3. You teach them simple ways to calm down—like deep breathing.

Teens who feel **entitled** often **lack self-control**.

They think they deserve everything *now*—and they don't know how to wait patiently or cope with any adversity. At the first sign of trouble or discomfort, they give up or blame others.

But this can change.

Later in the book, you will get step-by-step tools to help your teen

build real self-control. And when they learn self-control, things begin to change—for them and for you.

“WHAT IS SELF-CONTROL?”—A WAKE-UP CALL

Kayla was twelve. Her mom called me in tears.

“She won’t do chores. She vapes nonstop. She comes and goes as she pleases. I can’t stop her. She won’t listen to anything I say.”

When they came in, I asked if there were any written rules or consequences for misbehavior.

Before Mom could speak, Kayla snapped.

“F**k you!” she screamed, spat in my face, and stormed out.

I wiped off the spit on my face and then turned to Mom.

“Is that okay with you? Do you want to bring her back in and set a limit?”

“No,” she whispered. “If I push her, she might explode even more.”

Then I asked, “Does Kayla ever show self-control?”

Mom blinked.

“What’s self-control?” she asked.

That was the moment I knew: There would be no second session. No plan. No change.

If a parent doesn’t see self-control as essential, a child never will.

Kayla had no reason to change—no boundary, no structure, no one holding the line.

Reason #4: Button-Pushing

When your teen doesn’t want to follow a rule or request, they often try to upset you on purpose. This is called *button-pushing*—and your teen knows exactly how to do it.

For some parents, it’s eye-rolling, swearing, or a rude tone. For others, it’s words like “I hate you,” “You’re not my real parent,” or “You can’t make me.”

Age doesn’t matter. A three-year-old can push buttons just as well as an eighteen-year-old.

Teens know that if they get you angry enough, you'll lose control or back down. That's their goal—to win the power struggle. But it works both ways. Parents often push back by nagging, yelling, or lecturing—which only adds fuel to the fire.

This back-and-forth creates what I call *interactional trauma*—emotional damage caused by constant fighting. It leaves behind pain, bitterness, and unforgiveness with both of you.

We usually think of trauma as something big, like abuse, divorce, or grief. But daily button-pushing can be just as harmful. Why? Because drama equals trauma.

Many parents have told me, “Dr. Sells, I still love my child, but I don't like them anymore.” And teens say the same: “I love my parents, but I don't like them.” If this sounds like your home, don't lose hope. In Strategy 2, you'll learn button busters—practical tools to stop the fights and take back peace.

“IN MINUTES, I WAS NO LONGER THE ADULT”

At the beginning of the argument, I was forty-five years old. Calm. In control. The parent. But within five minutes of the bickering, I felt myself slipping to age thirty. My voice got sharper. My patience started to vanish.

With every insult and eye roll, I dropped further. Twenty-five. Then twenty. Before I knew it, I was sixteen—right there with my son, yelling, blaming, pushing his buttons just like he was pushing mine. We weren't parent and teen anymore. We were just two angry kids, locked in a tug-of-war for power and control.

And the truth is—it's been like this for years. This toxic button-pushing dance. We're not just worn out . . . we're starting to hate each other.

I still love my son—but if I'm really honest—I don't like him anymore. I don't know how to stop this.”

—Signed,
A Frustrated Parent

Reason #5: Unhealed Trauma

Your teen's out-of-control behavior may be about more than just a lack of consistent discipline. It could be trauma related as well.

Not just the trauma of button-pushing and daily power struggles—but deeper unhealed wounds:

- ☑ Parents who leave
- ☑ Broken trust
- ☑ Abuse that no one talks about
- ☑ Feeling like the lost child, unloved, and unseen

If trauma goes untreated, your teen's problems will keep coming back—like a weed you keep cutting but never pull out by the root. That's why your teen may change for a while . . . then spiral again.

When I wrote the first edition of this book more than twenty-five years ago, few people truly understood how trauma fuels extreme teen behavior. But through years of research—and by writing *Treating the Traumatized Child*—I discovered ten hands-on tools, found in Strategy 6, to help you address your teen's trauma head-on with real, practical steps that work.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN LOVE GOES MISSING

Twelve-year-old Jamal was sent to me because he was threatening his parents and younger siblings. He had already been placed in a residential program. But soon after coming home, the aggression came right back.

His parents were exhausted, broken, and out of answers. They had tried everything. They sat in my office as a last resort.

After asking some deep questions, we found what was missing: They were correcting Jamal—without connecting to him. They had rules, yes. But the love had gone missing.

Jamal's dad shared something painful. A year ago, after Jamal shoved his mother during a meltdown, Dad pulled away. He stopped hugging Jamal. Stopped the weekend outings. Stopped showing warmth.

I looked at him and asked gently, “Do you think Jamal’s aggression got worse after you stopped those hugs and outings?”

Tears filled his eyes. “Much, much worse,” he whispered.

That was it. Underneath Jamal’s outbursts was a deeper wound—emotional abandonment. He felt unloved. And that hurt slowly turned from anger into rage.

All the consequences in the world wouldn’t fix it. Not residential care. Not police involvement. Not stricter limits. Because no one had healed the root trauma. The emotional wounds.

I asked both parents to show themselves grace. They weren’t bad parents. They just didn’t know what trauma had done to their family.

But now they did. And with that knowledge, they had the power to change the future.

I asked Dad to write Jamal a letter—an honest apology to read in front of the family. Mom asked to do the same. She had pulled away too.

When they read the letters out loud, no one could hold back tears. They told Jamal, “You’re still responsible for your actions. That hasn’t changed.”

But then came the words that broke open the hearts in the room: “We’re sorry we pulled away. We stopped showing you love when you needed it most.”

They didn’t excuse the behavior—but they owned their part in the pain. And then, they offered a way back.

Dad looked at Jamal and asked, “Can I start giving you bedtime hugs again?”

Mom added, “Pancake breakfasts on Saturdays—no matter what. Not because you’ve been good or bad that week but just because . . . we love you with no conditions.”

“You still belong,” they said. “You’re not a throwaway child.”

That moment, something cracked open in Jamal’s heart. He began to sob, not just cry. And for the first time in a long time—he let himself be held.

His sisters jumped in: “No way! You’re our big brother. We need you too.”

They asked if they could hug him. Through tears, Jamal whispered softly, “Yes.”

Even I started crying as I had the privilege to be there as it happened.

A child who felt thrown away—was found again.

Jamal didn't change overnight. The anger didn't vanish in a day. But as the weeks passed, his walls began to crumble. The rage gave way to trust. He tested their love—over and over. But this time, the love didn't fade or go . . . missing. The family held firm.

His parents understood now: Correction *without* connection didn't work. They vowed to never let their son feel unloved again.

WARNING: NOT ALL EXTREME BEHAVIOR IS TRAUMA

As you try to understand your teen's behavior, keep these two key truths in mind:

1. Not all extreme behavior is caused by trauma.

Sometimes a duck is just a duck. Your teen's out-of-control behavior may not be caused by trauma. It might stem from things like inconsistent discipline, weak boundaries, empty threats, entitlement, or poor self-control—or any of the other nine reasons in this chapter. If you see your teen as *psychologically fragile* from past trauma, you might withdraw all discipline. This is a big mistake. For example, if the real issue is straight up disrespect, your teen may need consistent discipline to build resiliency rather than more talk therapy. In Strategy 4, I will go over how to tell the difference so that you can avoid going down the wrong path.

2. Some teens use "trauma" as a free pass.

Teens are smart. Many teens I've worked over the years have admitted: "If my parents think I'm traumatized, they won't make me follow rules or hold me accountable if I don't listen."

Even if your teen isn't traumatized, they may act like they are—because it gets them what they want. But here's the truth: even teens who have experienced real trauma still need structure, discipline, and consistent consequences. .

In Jamal's story, his parents didn't stop holding him accountable. What changed was *how* they corrected him—with both connection and love. It's a moving glimpse into how both love and limits together can transform a hurting teen from the inside out.

In Strategy 4, I'll help you figure out whether your teen's extreme behavior is caused by trauma or if it's a separate issue.

Read the Appendix at the end of this book for guidance on how to find the right trauma-informed counselor for your family.

Reason #6: Drunk with Power

When your teen controls the mood of your home through extreme behaviors, they no longer act like a child—they're running the show. They're not ready for that kind of power. They have too much power for their developmental britches or authority beyond their maturity levels.

Instead of focusing on being a teenager—going to school, playing sports, hanging out with friends, dating, getting a job—your teen uses their energy to stay in charge. They test limits, find loopholes, and make sure you're the one walking on eggshells.

In short: they're "drunk with power".

To make matters worse, some teens will do whatever it takes to hold on to power. I call this *parent abuse* or *teen terrorism*.

Parent abuse or teen terrorism occurs when your teen uses their extreme behavior intentionally to scare or pressure you into backing down. This happens when you initially set rules or consequences. It's their creative way to try to stay in charge.

Here's how it works:

You say, "You're grounded."

They fire back, "If you don't let me go out, I'll run away," or "I'll blow up and trash the house."

They up the ante and get worse. If you get scared and give in, they win. And they know it. It's like emotional blackmail on steroids. It feels like abuse or being terrorized in your own home. That "win" gives them all the power. The worst part is, your teen will use this parent-abuse tactic again and again if it works—and if you keep backing down and giving up your authority.

This kind of parent abuse happened in our home with our son Jesse

(he's given me full permission to share this in our story below). You might be shocked at how quickly my wife and I backed down. And yes—I literally wrote the book on this stuff. But when it's your own child, it's a whole different story sometimes.

Jesse knew exactly where we were weak. He knew our fears around his drug use. And he used those fears to stay in control. We were vulnerable—and he knew it.

WHEN EVERY "NO" FEELS LIKE A DRUG WAR

Our fifteen-year-old son Jesse was struggling to stay sober from marijuana. He knew I was anxious about it.

We had a clear written contract in place: if Jesse failed a random drug test, he'd lose access to his iPhone until he tested clean again. (With today's high THC levels, marijuana can stay in the system for over thirty days or more.)

When my wife and I tried to enforce the agreement, Jesse pushed back hard with creative parent abuse tactics.

He said, "If you take my phone, I will get too stressed out. I need my phone to stay sober. If you take it, I'll smoke again and again and again."

It was parent abuse—clever, creative, and calculated. He knew exactly where to strike. He used fear and emotional blackmail to get us to back down.

And the truth be told? It worked. We gave in.

Even though I literally wrote the book on this stuff, we blew it. Jesse kept his phone.

And worst of all? He got high a week later anyway.

I felt used and resentful.

But here's the good news: *We failed forward.*

The next time he tested dirty, we followed through. We took the phone, no matter what he said or threatened. And something changed. Our son had fewer relapses. With clear limits, drug counseling, and support from Narcotics Anonymous, he stayed sober.

Strategy 5 gives you the eight techniques to stop the *drunk with power* games and to stop *parent abuse*. Just don't leave this book lying

around for your teen to find—it's full of trade secrets that they don't need to know about.

Read this book in bed with a flashlight under the covers. I'm only half joking.

Knowledge is power. And for once, you deserve to be two steps ahead of your teen—not two steps behind.

Reason #7: Technology Power Struggles

Tech wars are one of the biggest reasons for disrespect in families today. Many parents tell me it's the number one source of daily conflict. And it's no wonder—research shows teens now spend over eight hours a day on phones or gaming. For many, screen time is like a drug.

And like any addiction, taking the “drug” away causes withdrawal. As a result, when you set limits on tech, your teen often explodes in anger, shuts down, gets anxious or even depressed. They will then beg, lie, argue, or even threaten like a drug addict just to get their devices back—and to avoid future tech limits.

When my first book came out in 2000, flip phones were in use. They were made for calling and texting, nothing more. Then came the smartphone—putting a supercomputer with nonstop access to social media and gaming into every teen's pocket.

That changed everything.

According to Jonathan Haidt's powerful book *The Anxious Generation*, between 2010 and 2015, childhood moved from *play-based* to *phone-based*. Instead of playing outside, solving problems with friends, and learning social skills, kids started spending their free time glued to screens.

It was a massive shift. Haidt says this rewiring of teen brains is the single biggest reason for today's explosion in our kids rapid mental health decline in areas such as anxiety, depression, and even suicide. Tech and the resulting mental health decline is happening worldwide all at the same time.

So when you set screen limits, don't be surprised if your teen pushes back or has withdrawal symptoms like a drug addict. That's why Strategy

5 includes a special section just for this problem: “Technique #8: Special Circumstances—Technology.”

This strategy will show you how to end the tech wars—so your teen reconnects with life and with you, not just Wi-Fi. Technology can be part of what they do, but it shouldn’t be the only thing they do.

WHEN SCREEN TIME BECOMES A WAR ZONE

Sixteen-year-old Jen was sent to me because of extreme disrespect. From the very first session, it was clear what had taken over her life—and her family’s peace: her iPhone.

Jen was glued to her phone for up to twelve hours a day. She stayed up most nights until four AM scrolling, texting, and gaming. Sleep was nearly impossible. To get through the day, she pounded two or three energy drinks every morning just to function. The caffeine only made the insomnia worse. It was a vicious cycle.

Her parents were exhausted and overwhelmed—but also terrified. They admitted they were afraid to set any screen-time limits. Every time they tried, Jen exploded.

She was a master at using parent abuse to stay in control. She’d throw dishes, punch walls, scream, and break things—just to keep her phone. And on the rare occasions her parents did take the phone away, Jen escalated. She started making threats of suicide. It was pure manipulation, and she knew it worked. The fear of losing her pushed her parents into giving the phone back . . . every time.

Her parents were paralyzed by guilt and fear. They could see the signs—how Jen’s outbursts and behavior mirrored withdrawal symptoms from drugs or alcohol. But unlike rehab centers that treat substance abuse, they had no plan, no tools, and no backup. Just the sinking feeling that their daughter was slipping away.

And Jen knew it. She knew they wouldn’t hold the line. She knew they didn’t know how.

Jen turned her iPhone into a massive power struggle for the entire household—complete with tantrums, threats, and 3 AM scrolling marathons. It may seem funny . . . until it’s your teen. The good news? This book gives you the tools to win the tech wars.

Reason #8: Peer Power

Friends have a huge influence on your teen's heart, mind, and behavior—especially in the age of social media.

If your teen is surrounded by positive friends, they're more likely to make good choices. But if their peer group makes poor decisions, your teen may copy them—and spin further out of control. Social media makes this even harder by pushing nonstop messages from influencers your teen may admire, even if those influencers lead them in the wrong direction.

The teen years are tough. Around ages eleven to thirteen, your child is stuck between being a kid and wanting adult freedom. That's confusing. It also makes them even more desperate to fit in.

Most teens care more about what their friends think than what their parents say. To stay accepted, they often follow unspoken group rules—no matter the cost. These rules may involve drinking, stealing, sex, drugs, or breaking your rules at home. That's why peer pressure is so powerful. Your teen may follow the crowd blindly—even when it's self-destructive—just to stay with the group.

In Strategy 3, I show how to turn peer pressure into peer support. And in Strategy 8, I'll show you how to rebuild your emotional connection with your teen—so their bond with you becomes stronger than their pull toward negative friends or toxic influencers.

WATCHING HER FALL FOR THE WRONG ONE

Sixteen-year-old Ali barely spoke to her parents. There was no warmth, no connection—just silence and distance. So when she met Jason, a twenty-one-year-old man who showered her with attention, Ali clung to it.

He gave her something she was starving for: affection.

Soon, Jason became her whole world. She cut off her friends. She let him control where she went, what she wore, and who she talked to.

Then, the abuse started. If Jason had a bad day at work, he'd punch her in the stomach. Ali still defended him. "It's okay," she said. "He tells me he loves me."

That lie cost her everything. She got pregnant. Jason disappeared. Her parents—heartbroken and overwhelmed—kicked her out.

Today, Ali is with another man just like Jason. The cycle continues. But it didn't have to.

If Ali's parents had found a way to reconnect—to rebuild trust, show love, and set boundaries early—Jason might never have had that kind of hold on her.

The truth is: the best defense against toxic peers and predators is a strong emotional bond with you. When teens feel seen and loved at home, they're less likely to chase counterfeit love somewhere else.

Negative peers can take control of your teen's heart and mind—but you can fight back with something stronger: a deeper, more nurturing connection.

Reason #9: When Outsiders Take Over Your Job

Many parents don't realize how easy it is to misuse outsiders. But it happens all the time—and it can make things worse, not better.

Outsiders come in two types:

- **Natural outsiders** are people already in your life—like grandparents, friends, or neighbors.
- **Non-natural outsiders** are professionals—like counselors, probation officers, hospitals, the police, or the school.

Outsiders can help, but only when they play a supporting role. Trouble starts when they take over your job as the parent. Here's how it happens:

If your teen acts out and you immediately call the police, a relative, or a counselor every time to handle it for you—you are giving away your parent authority. Or maybe your teen's therapist works only with them one-on-one and not with you or the rest of the family. That's another red flag. In both cases, someone else is stepping in to fix the problem . . . *instead of you.*

This often feels like it's the right thing to do. You even get a short

break from the chaos. That's called a *honeymoon period*—but it doesn't last. Why not? Because you did not do the work to hold your son or daughter accountable.

The non-natural outsider did.

When that happens, teens learn two dangerous lies:

I don't have to change—someone else will fix it.

My parents can't handle me.

Even worse, your teen may become dependent on treatment—and stop believing they can change at home. This is called *learned helplessness*. Both you and your teen can start to feel powerless, waiting for professionals to fix things. When that happens, you risk losing one of the most powerful tools for growth—resiliency.

In Strategy 3, you'll learn how to rally your village, define each person's role through a town meeting, and bring outsiders alongside you as natural helpers to reclaim your authority, break free from learned helplessness, and get your teen back on track for good.

THE HONEYMOON IS OVER

Fourteen-year-old Patricia ran away constantly. Her parents were scared and out of answers. In desperation, they sent her to a six-month residential program.

At first, Patricia cried and begged to come home. Her parents held firm.

When she returned, it felt like a miracle—she was respectful, calm, and no longer ran away. For the first time in years, peace returned. But it didn't last.

Within weeks after the honeymoon period was over, Patricia was back to her old behaviors and started running again. When her parents threatened to send her back, she laughed in their faces.

"You can't," she said. "You already used up all the insurance money." When asked why she did well in the program but not at home, Patricia said, "The staff did the work. My parents didn't change. At the program, no actually meant "no". At home, it's just empty threats. My dad backs down. My mom talks tough but caves almost every time."

She added, "The residential staff never showed my parents how to

take charge. It was all about individual therapy. There was almost no family work or family change. So when I came back, nothing was different. My family was the same as when I left. And now I'm headed back to residential for a second stay, even if they have to take out a second mortgage."

Patricia's story is a stark warning:

Change that doesn't include the whole family is change that doesn't last.

This book will show you how to take back your lost parental authority—so the changes in your teen don't evaporate as soon as the honeymoon period is over. This is the perfect lead-in to "Strategy 3: It Takes a Village"—where you'll learn how to rally your *natural* support team and take back your role as the leader of your family.

Reason #10: Your Teen Is Two Steps Ahead of You

Extreme teens have a hidden skill: they think two steps ahead of you.

If you're not ready, your teen will win almost every time—and your contracts won't stand a chance. They'll scan every rule for weak spots, like a lawyer hunting loopholes or Superman with X-ray vision. It's what I call a kind of "literal disease"—only much more advanced. Here's how it shows up.

You say, "Clean your room."

They pick up one sock.

You say, "This room isn't clean!"

They smile and say, "You didn't say what clean meant."

Now you're arguing. You're frustrated. You walk away saying, "Forget it."

They walk away thinking, *That worked. I'll use it again.*

This isn't just manipulation—it's the strategy of a master chess player. Your teen is smart.

They're practicing how to stay in control. They play out every what-if scenario in their mind before you do to stay one move ahead.

Most parents don't see it coming. And that's exactly why their contracts fail.

Strategy 7 will teach you how to beat them at their own game—with a tool called *troubleshooting*.

You'll learn how to plan ahead with simple questions like:

- What will I do if they say no?
- What if they refuse to hand over their phone?
- What if they won't let me check for self-harm?

If you don't ask these questions in advance, your teen will. And they'll win—before you even start implementing your contract.

But with the right tools, you can stay calm, stay strong, and stay two steps ahead. That's how you take back your lost authority—understand their secret moves and debunk them.

FIND THE LOOPHOLE BEFORE MOM DOES

Fifteen-year-old Tonya lost her phone for swearing. But instead of accepting the consequence, she went straight into planning mode.

She thought, *Where is the loophole that I can turn into my advantage?*

She remembered where her mom hid the phone—and that it wasn't locked up.

That night, while her mom was asleep, Tonya snuck into the bedroom, grabbed the phone, and stayed up all night texting and watching Netflix. Before morning, she put it right back.

Her plan worked perfectly—because Mom didn't think two steps ahead. If Mom had locked the phone away or given it to a neighbor, Tonya's plan would've failed. But Mom didn't, and Tonya won.

Later, when Mom started reading this book, Tonya panicked. She grabbed the book—and threw it out.

Why? Because Tonya didn't want her mom to learn her secret weapon: *how to stay two steps ahead*.

teen will try to outsmart you—not out of meanness, but creativity. Once you get that, it's easier to stop taking things so personally and start thinking two steps ahead just like your teen does.

Conclusion: Think Differently

If you're reading this right now, you've already done something brave.

You didn't give up.

You didn't walk away.

You turned the page.

And you took the first step toward healing your family.

Let me say this clearly: You are the hero.

Not a therapist. Not a school.

You. The parent who's still fighting for their teen.

I'm here as your coach—to guide you, support you, and hand you the tools to win back what matters most: peace in your house, restoration of your family, and your teen's heart.

Congrats, You've Just Completed Step 1 of the 3-Step Path

- ☒ **Step 1: Think differently (Strategy 1)**
- ☐ Step 2: Parent differently (Strategies 2–8)
- ☐ Step 3: See real, lasting change

This first strategy hopefully helped you see your teen in a new light—not as broken or bad, but as stuck. When you change how you see the problem, you unlock brand-new answers.

You're Not Powerless Anymore: Knowledge Is Empowering

You're no longer sitting in silence while the system focuses only on your teen.

You're not just a passenger on this journey. You are now the driver.

You can speak up. Ask for help that includes *you* and your whole family.

Armed with new knowledge, you can demand better mental health treatment—and get it.

In the 1980s, kids got cable companies to listen by saying to their parents, “I want my MTV.”

Guess what? It worked.

Now it's your turn.

If this book is changing things for you, go to your counselor or support team and say: "I want my eight strategies from *Parenting Your Out-of-Control Teenager*."

Because this time, you have specialized knowledge for extreme teen problems. And now, you're ready to lead even if you have to educate your counselor along the way.

Now it's time for step 2.

You've laid the foundation.

Now it's time to parent differently—with strength, clarity, and love.

We begin with "Strategy 2: Button-Pushing—Why Your Teen Wins Every Argument."

Let's turn the page and do this together.

I'll be with you as your coach every step of the way.

Chapter Summary for Strategy 1

There are ten reasons teens spiral out of control:

- Reason #1—Entitlement
- Reason #2—No written plan with clear boundaries
- Reason #3—Lack of self-control
- Reason #4—Button-pushing
- Reason #5—Unhealed trauma
- Reason #6—Drunk with power
- Reason #7—Technology power struggles
- Reason #8—Peer power
- Reason #9—When outsiders take over your job
- Reason #10—Your teen is two steps ahead of you

You may feel burned out, confused, or angry. You love your teen—but you might not like them very much right now. And that's okay.

Many teens use their smarts to avoid change, dodge rules, and push against limits. But deep down, they still crave your love and need your leadership. .

Parents often try plans that don't work—leaving the whole family feeling stuck and hopeless. What you need are the right tools and guidance to make real, lasting change. .

This book is a DIY (do-it-yourself) guide. But if things get too hard, it's okay to get professional help.

You can't change the past, but you *can* change today and tomorrow.

Connection matters. Correction without love won't heal your relationship.

You must understand what's really going on inside your teen before the right plan can work.

The way you see the problem shapes your solution. Be clear, specific, and consistent.

Write things down. Don't rely on spoken rules—your teen will find loopholes.

You can get outside help—but never give away your role as the parent. Authority and love must come from you.