

## **YOU HAVE A DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR ADULT CHILDREN**

Your relationship with your adult children is troubled. One of them is not working full time and usually only comes to you when he wants money. He drinks too much and you think he may be dabbling in the drug scene. You have tried to help him in various ways but he is unpredictable and generally irresponsible. He often becomes angry with you because you have found it necessary to refuse to give him money when he asks. You know it will be spent on the wrong things so you have told him he needs to stand on his own two feet now and earn his own money. His brother is altogether different; he has a job and takes responsibility for his life. However, because you have stopped helping the wayward son his brother feels you have done the wrong thing and thinks you are cruel. This, therefore, has caused difficulty in your relationship with both sons. You still love them but their actions make the relationship very difficult.

Where did it all start? You tried to rear your children to be independent and well-adjusted by instilling in them values to live by; so what went wrong?

Some children are born with a difficult temperament. I remember a family who lived opposite us. The young parents had 3 children. The 2 eldest boys, about 12 and 9 years old, were exemplary children always well-behaved. Then the parents had a third boy who was a very active child. From the time he was born they had problems and as he grew into a toddler, he became naughty and more and more difficult to handle. He loved to irritate his older brothers by hiding their clothes and their schoolwork. As he grew older he would get up in the middle of the night and steal food from the kitchen. He had to be watched carefully as he often tried to run away. That boy would have grown up by now and I don't know whether he ever outgrew his bad behaviour. Certainly he came from a good home, full of love and care for each other and all the children. What I have said is merely an illustration that some children seem to come into this world with aggressive tendencies that are difficult to control.

Other children may start their lives with promise and deteriorate because of problems in the household or difficult behaviour may begin after a particularly debilitating illness. Some children may be autistic or demonstrate a disorder such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). There are those children who have been given every advantage in life from a very loving household and yet they opt out of school and later seem to opt out of life and particularly out of the lives of those who loved them. The latter may be what has happened to you.

The reality of life is that things often do not work out the way you may want them to. "So what", what can you do? Do you give up on them both and walk away to live your own life? Do you try to come to an understanding with the "good" brother and forget the one who has gone off the rails? Or do you keep trying with both of them? There is no magic "right way" to act but giving up on another human being, particularly your own flesh and blood, does not seem the way to go.

The choice is yours. It would seem to be easy way out to walk away from a difficult situation but when that situation concerns family, it becomes very complex. There is always a bond between a parent and son, however hard one may try to break it. A strong and positive relationship, however, needs both parties to contribute to that relationship to make it work. So you may be in a quandary about what to do. If you allow the whole situation to play on your mind you can become upset and depressed and make things worse. If you allow your emotions and thoughts to run rampant you may walk away and never see either son again. That is a worst case scenario. There is a better choice – that, without interfering in their lives, you keep on doing all that you can to draw both sons back into the fold as responsible and loving adults.

A lot of adult children are the way they are today because behavioural problems were never addressed as children. It may also be necessary for you to look long and hard at your parenting skills and any problems that may have arisen during the years of raising your children. It is obvious that no parent is perfect, but, if you honestly look back over those years, there may be a time or times where one particular child ‘went over the edge’ and was unable to handle some emotional areas in his life. There may be a combination of factors such as genetics, the environment or some particular experience that happened that had a deep impact on a young mind. Only do these exercises with the attitude that something that happened in childhood may aid you to help your sons now and build a better relationship with them. It is important that you don’t apportion blame to anyone, including yourself and certainly don’t move into the area of having feelings of guilt.

“So what” do you do? Do you stand your ground and tell one son to ‘get a life’ and pull himself together, clean himself up from drugs and get a job? And do you tell the other son that he is being unfair to you by taking sides with his brother against his parent? That would seem to be trying to win a war by meeting the other army head on. You might win some battles but there are going to be a lot of casualties along the way – and one of them may be you!

If you want to win the war it may be better to come in from the flanks. It will be a matter of using your mind to your advantage and using wisdom to work out what can be done. When family is involved, never withdraw your love from either son. That doesn’t mean being wishy-washy; it may mean hard love at times. Throwing money at the wayward son will not help but keep the door open to your home to both sons. Offer meals to him and a bed sometimes when he really needs it but don’t question too much. Allow time for him to trust you again. Once trust is re-established you may be able to help him by getting him to drug rehabilitation classes. By taking the softly, softly approach you may also regain your other son’s trust as he sees you are trying to help. It is important to have him on side by telling him you want to help his brother get back on track and you need his help. It may take time and a lot of effort and it will need both of you working together to make any impact.

In the long run, both sons are grown, emancipated men and they hold the key to their own lives. As a parent, never give up on them and always be there for them.

Perhaps those sons never got around to learning the importance of gratitude. When you have a thankful heart and you are grateful for what you have, good things happen to you. Life is peaceful, relaxed and harmonious and flows along bringing favourable opportunities. Take time to say “thank you” to parents for the years they have given you and for their teaching; thank your partner and children for their love and thank friends for being faithful. It is only a little word but it has a world of meaning.