



## **Parental Buttons**

**(that cause parents to get emotional and off the subject)**

Adapted from Scott Sells book, Treating the Tough Adolescent

1. "You never let me do anything" (never is a very long time don't you think?)
2. "You don't love me" (this is used on parents that love unconditionally)
3. "I hate you" or "You're an asshole/liar/bad parent" (personal attacks to make you lose your temper, and not be able to continue thinking clearly about their consequences)
4. "You're not my real mother / father, I don't have to listen to you" (Tactic to fluster you and cloud the issue – their behavior)
5. A disgusted look, improper gesture, or whiny voice. (very powerful way to manipulate your emotions, and influence you with your realizing it, pointing out that they are whining helps the parent stay objective like an uninvolved third party)
6. Finding the parent's most vulnerable area and preying on it. (This is not a personal attack just a very clever way to keep parents off balance, if they can keep you upset and focused on: their messy room, poor grades, dislike for going to church so you won't be able to focus on the real issues, their behavior.)
7. "I'm gonna kill/hurt you/myself/others" (These are meant to scare parents so they will back off and remove the pressure – this is a last resort when nothing else worked.)
8. "I'm gonna lie" – (This threat works great, immediately changing the subject from their behavior and consequences, to values and morals, so they can win, win, win.)
9. "I hate school" (Most parents value education, so this comment invites a lecture on their future. Teens cannot see past tomorrow; however, they know it is important to their parents and use it to their advantage.)
10. "I'm going to leave" (This scare tactic gets parents to back off for fear of what might become of their child if they run away and live on the streets, -- it is designed to keep parents from taking action or enforcing a rule or consequence.)
11. "There is never anything to eat" (This is designed to induce guilt and images of starving children, and make you feel like a rotten parent – translation "I don't want to have to actually make a sandwich.")



## Responses

- Exiting and waiting – say “We will talk only after everyone is calm,” then exit.
- Staying short and to the point – 2 minute, 5-year rule.
- Using deflectors “nevertheless” “regardless” “that is the rule” “no exceptions”.
- Creating secret signals – to signify that buttons are being pushed.
- Speaking in one parental voice – never allow them to divide and conquer.
- Asking whether a behavior is relevant – use the 1-10 scale.
- Energizing and recharging – take care of yourselves, get away.
- Staying in the present – forget the past focus on the present and future.
- Separating misbehavior from personal attacks – ask, “Why is my child saying this?”
- Restoring good feelings – being playful and using humor.
- Understanding the 5 levels of teen aggression – Whining and complaining, stubborn refusal, Verbal personal attacks, Threats of violence, Acts of violence.