

## CHAPTER 16

# Am I My Own Boss?

At school after the last lesson Marina saw that her friend's backpack was tightly stuffed and came to know that her friend was going to leave home and stay at the home of an acquaintance who had agreed to give her shelter for a week or so.

Marina: "Cool down!"

Sveta: "I am sick and tired of that home! I'm sick of my parents and their constant moralizing and complaining, those tedious Sunday dinner-parties, their acquaintances and colleagues with their children, heaps of dirty dishes in the evening. Everything. All this reminds me that it has been decided for me where I am to study, with whom I am to make friends, what clothes I am to wear! Dad's sister, Aunt Irina, knows better than I how I should live. Why doesn't she mind her own

business? Why doesn't Mom like any of my friends? I

understand her hints about Kirill perfectly! I have to introduce them to each of my new friends for them to be examined. If you knew how sick and tired I am of being interrogated daily! My life is my life."

Marina: "One doesn't choose one's parents."

Sveta: "Oh, don't you start! You know your parents never contradict you. You may do what you please, there are no restrictions for you. By the way, when did you come home last night?"

Marina: "Who cares when I came in? I come home and it's empty. No one even says hello. Mother cares only about her problems, father is sitting buried in a newspaper. I speak with your mother more than with my own."



Since the day we were born, our parents have been responsible for us. We depend on them. Whether we like it or not, we begin our life in our parents' home. Most of the time it is comfortable: We have everything we need and spend our time happily, at least in the first years of life. We learn to walk, often cry and are naughty, but often we are showered with generosity and kindness.

But then everything changes and conflicts between parents and children arise. The story does not seem to have a happy ending. Why does a parent's embrace seem too tight, and the next moment their care feels like domestic tyranny? Why are parents so easily offended?

### What parents say...

Teenagers are rude; they have no respect; they forget how much their parents have done for them. They were such sweet children when they were small.

They know nothing about life, they haven't seen hard work, but they are so arrogant in judging everything.

They don't take responsibility for their actions, but want to be treated as grown-ups. Yet the consequences are left for the parents to deal with.

Sometimes they like to shock their elders with their obscene behavior.

They wear ugly clothes, listen to horrible music and behave defiantly. You never know what to expect from them.

### What teenagers say...

Parents want us to copy them. They want to see their own youth in us, while we don't want to repeat their mistakes.

Parents are worried about what neighbors will say—and their friends, and their friends' neighbors, and their friends' friends.

Parents are so boring, we have nothing to talk about.

They get offended at any little thing. Mother starts crying, father is shouting. Then we are not on speaking terms for weeks during which time we don't get any allowance.

They envy us because when they were young they didn't have enough fun. So they don't allow us to be free.

Which side do you agree with?

Which particular statements sound true to you?

In the life of each person there comes a time when one has to bear responsibility for one's actions. For parents, who have been used to guiding and controlling their child, this may be difficult to accept. Parents need to remember that the aim of their efforts and love ultimately is not to bring up an obedient child but to let their child form an independent personality.

As we grow up, we take one step at a time toward independence: the first day at school, the first great friendship, the first date, the first holiday away from home, the first wages, graduating from school, etc. Through these transitions both children and parents experience great joy, which is often mixed with sadness and sometimes struggle. Some children become free of their parents through tragic and painful circumstances: a mother dies, a father drinks, or parents divorce.



Still, these are only variations of one inevitable process: Parents lose control of their children, while children gain greater freedom of thought and action. On this new level of relationship parents and children must learn again to trust each other, to support each other and to respect each other's feelings. We must never forget that we owe our present independence and adulthood to our parents. They were our first teachers and educators. They were the first to give us ideas about this world. They read our first books to us, and looking at our parents we learned to make decisions, to forgive others and to laugh.

For teenagers, independence often means distancing oneself from nagging parents. They may spend all their time with their friends, disagree with

their parents on everything and want to do things their own way. However, this form of independence may actually be an escape. Does adulthood really express itself in smoking, hanging around in the street all day long, and using obscenities before teachers and parents? That's not adulthood. That kind of behavior is taking a huge backward step away from adulthood.

Being an adult means to take responsibility for one's actions, to have control over one's emotions, and to avoid hurting loved ones. Being "grown-up" means thinking seriously about the future, without hoping that parents will take care of it or that it will sort itself out.

Because we feel grown-up, we expect to be treated as such. So it is painful for us not to find that kind of respect. Yet, have we tried to help our parents accept our independence and respect our decisions? Let us develop our relationships with parents, teachers and friends in a different, more adult manner. Let us avoid thinking in a self-centered and self-serving way. We should make the effort to understand our parents and find compassion for them. Now we, who consider ourselves grown-up, are responsible for our relationship with our parents. This means that we are not dependent on them in every respect, but that we consciously choose to have an attitude of respect, gratitude, forgiveness, understanding and obedience. This is a difficult choice for a grown-up.

What are the main reasons for disagreements between parents and children? Is it money, clothes, friends, or coming home late?

Imagine the following situation. You have planned to spend the weekend in the country with your friends, but your mother is firmly against it. What will you do? You may consider yourself grown-up enough to go to the country without your parents' permission and merely inform them about it. There are different ways to approach this situation. One way is to state in an angry voice, in front of your friends, that you are ashamed and are sick and tired of staying at home with our parents. This possibility will more than likely result in upsetting and hurting your mother.

How can this situation be approached differently? First of all, let us look at this situation from a different point of view. Why doesn't your mother want to let you go? Can she really want you to have no friends and to grow up dull, reserved, clinging to her apron strings all your life? Certainly not. She is just worried about you and does not want you to get into bad company and begin smoking and drinking. Every time she hears news reports about crime, your mother most probably holds her breath and is worried sick. She is afraid something has happened to her child. Try to understand your mother and to relieve her fears, even if they are exaggerated. Give her more details about your friends, their families, their interests and hobbies and about what you talk about. It might be worthwhile to introduce them to your mother. Promise her that you will be careful and will call her and tell that everything is all right. Offer to help her with the household work on the following weekend.

But if it turns out that you have to stay at home, don't create unnecessary conflicts with your parents. The more they know you, the more they will trust you and the less they will worry when you come home late.

What should you do if your parents do not like your best friend? First of all, at least listen to the opinion of your elders. The right to choose your friends is yours, but you should give your parents' experience and intuition some thought. You could tell them more about your friend, and try to understand what your parents dislike about him or her. If your mother resents your friend calling you for a walk late at night, or the fact that your schoolwork has deteriorated due to these walks, then you should think about it seriously. But if your mother simply doesn't like your friend's hairstyle, tell her what it is that you like so much about your friend and what makes him or her so special.

*Victor:* "Say, Grandfather, when Dad was a teenager, did you make him come home by 11 pm and give you a report on everything?"

*Grandfather:* "Not at all. I trusted your father. Even when he was a small lad."

*Victor:* "That's what I am talking about. I'm sixteen. There are things I can decide by myself and wouldn't like to share with my parents. Sixteen is old enough to get some freedom, isn't it, Grandfather?"

*Grandfather:* "Certainly, sixteen is a good age to begin to keep your room tidy by yourself. Just remember what a mess you and your friends made in the apartment during your parents' holiday! You think you are grown-up, don't you? Possibly, but first you must prove it to your elders and win their trust and understanding. Do you know how your father won my trust? He had a hard time, but he didn't slam the door. Instead he told me what he didn't like and tried to understand me as well."



Every family and culture has certain traditions and forms of relationship between parents and children. They are always relationships of love and filial loyalty. There is no doubt that as time goes by, the relative positions of parents and children change. The children become stronger, and the parents become weaker. The children grow up and mature while the parents grow old. However, the deep respect and esteem for one's parents remain unchanged. Parents' love for their children is also unchanged.

Children respond to love from their parents with deep loyalty and faithfulness. Children will always have that

kind of respect for their parents, no matter what happens. Parental authority is based not on their being older and wiser but rather on the special position the parents hold in the family. The family is a special kind of community that they have created, nurtured and invested all their love in. These bonds that we share will remain forever. No one can give us what our parents have given us.

"Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the God thy Lord giveth you."

— Exodus 20:12

Something to think about



- Why do we need our parents' presence and guidance, even as we grow older?
- On the other hand, why does the care of parents often seem exaggerated and overbearing?

## An Impossible Father

A father had three sons. He had a plot of land that had to be cleared of trees so that it could be cultivated. The father asked his first son to take an axe and chop down the trees. The trees were numerous, and they were so hard that they were called “iron bark.” On top of that it was a scorching day.

The first son dutifully started to work. Soon, however, it became clear that the edge of the axe was blunt and the axe-handle was loose. He had worked and sweated for many hours before his mind started to drift to the river behind the yard, and he began to think that his father was wrong. At last he decided that his father would understand if he went to the river. So off he ran. The father could see him from the window and was very upset.

The father put the axe in its place and asked his second son to do the same. The second son likewise obediently started to work. Soon he too realized that the edge of the axe was blunt and the handle was loose and did not hold the axe well. But if his father had told him to do it, he would do it, and nothing would stop him, for everyone knew how obliging and strong-willed he was. Still, he thought, how could his father be so stupid as to expect that any person could work under such conditions? The axe kept falling on his foot, and by midday he had lost his determination and stopped working. The father saw from the window what was going on and again was very upset.

The father picked up the axe and turned to his third son. The third son took up the work obediently. Soon he too saw that the edge had gone blunt and the axe-handle was loose. The sun was in its zenith. An hour later he began to think:

“Father is no fool. He understands the work can’t be done like this. I think I’ll go and talk to him—he will think of something.”

He turned to the house. The father could see his son from the window and felt hope in his heart.

“Father, it is impossible!”

“What is it, son?”

“Look, the axe edge is blunt and the axe-handle does not hold it at all. Besides it is so hot! I thought we could talk it over.”

The father’s face was illuminated by joy. It was the thing he had been waiting for—trust.

“Certainly, let me help you. First we shall sharpen the axe and fix the handle, and then why shouldn’t I go down and swing the axe together with you?”