

# Why Mothers and Teen-Age Daughters Fight

Quarrels are normal at this stage—but there are ways of lessening the sting and keeping the hurts from becoming lasting ones

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with Flora Rheta Schreiber



**"M**OTHER, I'd rather do it myself!" laments the teen-age daughter. And the mother replies, "But I only want to be helpful, dear."

Scenes like this occur in every home where there are mothers and teen-age daughters. It is part of normal growing pains for mother as well as for daughter. Daughter must grow up and break away gracefully; mother must grow up, with equal grace, by allowing her to do so.

But quarreling between them is their passport to declaring their independence of each other, and it is more usual during the difficult teens than it was when daughter was younger or will be after she enters her twenties.

How can these teen-year quarrels be diminished or avoided? It takes effort and understanding on both sides. Mothers should stop being perfectionists with imperfect children. Children aren't perfect, and mothers should accept daughters as they are instead of trying to make them over into what they would like them to be. They should stop listening to daughters through ears that judge in terms of the mother's past rather than of the daughter's present.

Daughters, for their part, should stop assuming that mother is always wrong just because she is a mother. A teen-age girl is justified in declaring her independence only when she has first proved her self-reliance.

Quarreling will be lessened, too, if mothers and daughters, despite their clashes over specific issues, try to maintain the bond of affection and understanding they have built through the years. That bond can and should survive the break-

ing of the dependence between them.

A common cause of quarreling is that mother and daughter are too much alike. I know a mother and daughter who are equally extroverted. As a result, they compete for center stage, and their battles are the kind of personality clash that would take place between any two women of such similar temperament. Their weapon against quarreling is humor. "Oh, Mother, you're on" or "Yes, my darling daughter, it's your move" goes far toward nipping the verbal explosion that might otherwise take place when they vie with each other.

**A**NOTHER MOTHER admits that most of the quarrels she has with her daughter arise from the fact that they are so different. She says, "Amy makes me ashamed of what I was at her age; she has a mind of her own, and I was just a carbon copy of my mother." This pair should shout, "Vive la différence!" Instead of brooding that her daughter has a mind of her own, this mother should be proud of her—and of herself for having allowed her daughter to be a free spirit.

Other mothers trigger quarrels by trying to make their daughters "everything that I myself was not." They invite rebellion by overcrowding their daughters' lives with "you shoulds" and "you oughts." Ironically, when these daughters become "everything" that the mother was not, the mother often resents it. A woman of very little education, who made great financial sacrifices to send her daughter to college, later resented the daughter for having more cultivated manners than she had. Once, when the girl declined an invitation to dinner at an aunt's house,

this mother flared, "Oh, your relatives aren't good enough for you. My fine lady wants to be invited to Park Avenue!"

Quarrels are normal when they take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect, with both parties seeking agreement, not deadlock. Quarrels become abnormal when they are incessant and when they are used as a stage on which to act out one's emotional problems.

**S**UCH QUARRELS take place when a mother resents her daughter's quite natural affinity to her father. One mother, for instance, deliberately provoked quarrels by refusing to play tennis with her daughter or husband although she would play eagerly with their friends. But when father and daughter played together, she accused the daughter of "monopolizing Daddy."

One daughter provoked quarrels by refusing to break her dependency on her mother even though the mother tried to make her do so. This 16-year-old girl refused to go to the beauty parlor because she wanted mother to set her hair. She wouldn't accept a date until her mother had approved. But the mother wanted her to make her own decisions. Quarrels ensued.

There are no shortcuts to surmounting this difficult period. Some quarrels reflect deep-rooted difficulties and require the help of a trained psychologist or psychiatrist. The total absence of any quarreling may be equally neurotic and may also call for professional help, for it is as abnormal never to quarrel as to do so all the time.

But fortunately the only "doctoring" that most quarrels between mothers and their teen-age daughters require is a little common sense.

## COVER:

As the 1963 baseball season opens this week, handsome Detroit Tiger Rocky Colavito is ready for the pennant chase, and his adoring fans are ready to cheer him on (see p. 7). Photograph by Ozzie Sweet.

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