

Here's how to handle those "growing-up years"
when youngsters feel impelled to challenge
their parents' wishes, rules and orders

by Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg

with Llewellyn Miller



Drawings by Olivia Cole—Age 14

about the association, but she realized she would make the older girl doubly attractive to Joan if she forbade the companionship. Instead, she welcomed the bigger girl warmly at home, and even came to her defense when Joan's brothers made derisive remarks about her imitation of Marilyn Monroe. "Now boys," she told them, "you have a right to choose your friends, and Joan has a right to choose hers."

It wasn't long before Joan was able to decide without loss of face, "She's okay, but she's not my best friend any more. She can't play any games I like in those tight skirts, anyway."

THE MATTER of clothes produces many examples of behavior in both boys and girls that seems like rebellion but is far from it.

Dorothy, 13, spent all of her allowance on a pallid liquid make-up foundation and powder, and green eyeshadow. She hit the ceiling when told she could not wear it, and declared wildly that she wouldn't leave her room if she had to wear the "utterly revolting" new dress her mother had chosen "to make me look like a disgusting baby."

The make-up was in impossible taste. Her mother had to insist on banning it. The dress was pretty, suitable, and becoming. Dorothy's manner certainly was not. However, her mother sensibly did not make an issue of these things.

"You can play with the make-up all you want in your own room," she said, "but the dress is a different matter. You certainly don't have to wear it if you don't like it. We'll take it back tomorrow and you can help me find one you do like."

Dorothy's rebellion collapsed in the face of her mother's firmness on the necessary point combined with sympathetic latitude regarding the dress. What she was struggling for so vigorously was a visible symbol that her mother respected her independence. What she wanted, possibly more than the different dress she demanded so forcibly, was recognition that she was big enough to make her own choice.

The turn of the teens is a critical period. Parents need to exercise great tact with youngsters at this stage. They are easily insulted, eager for new freedoms, but still in need of loving approval and guidance from parents.

Children of any age have the right to be heard, but they are not helped to real independence by real rebellion. So we need to be alert for what they are trying to tell us when they act like rebels—and not ourselves react like dictators.

We keep their trust and love, and gain their cooperation if we remain not only consistent to our own standards but also sympathetic and flexible enough to see their side.

If we manage to keep this balance, we deserve that description of parents that is so well worth remembering: "Parents are people who should be young enough in heart to talk to—and old enough in wisdom to turn to."