

**Are you preparing your kids for the real world?  
or protecting them from it?**

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Our 14-year old had just gotten her braces off after two years, at least 3 dozen trips to the orthodontist and \$ \_\_\_\_\_. To protect this investment the orthodontist provided her with a retainer to be worn at all times aside from mealtimes. Her father and I noticed the retainer being left in napkins on a few occasions and encouraged her to be more careful. We paid for the braces and the original retainer she would pay for any replacement. It didn't take long before the retainer went missing and the teen was frantically looking for someone to blame.

As parents we had to fight the urge to go into lecture mode. i.e. We talked about being more responsible. How could you lose it? Do you know how much this is going to cost to replace? We already spent.....and so on...Have you noticed that when parents get angry and go into lecture mode teens go into protective mode? Their eyes glaze over and they hear nothing!

Fortunately, we were equipped with Love and Logic parenting strategies. During our training we learned that teens learn best when their parents respond to poor choices with a heavy dose of empathy followed by a natural consequence. Once we were calm we approached our teen. With sincere empathy we said, "Oh gosh, lost the retainer...What do you need to do?" Her response was, "You need to get me a new one." We expected this response...

Often times when teens make a mistake parents lecture them about being more responsible then rescue them from the consequences of their behavior. While as parents our intentions are good this rescuing creates a dangerous problem for the teen. Teens that are not held accountable for poor choices don't think about how their next decision will affect them. They are being trained not to think about the potential consequences of their actions because on a subliminal level they know that mom or dad will take care of things. This distorted view of reality could in extreme cases have fatal consequences and will undoubtedly cause a harsh wake-up call when the teen enters adulthood. Rescuing also sends negative self esteem messages; you can't think for yourself. I have to solve your problems for you. You

don't have what it takes to be successful in life! Do you want to protect your teen from the real world or prepare her/him for it?

Back to Alison, like any teen she was optimistic that we would take care of the replacement retainer. Instead we said, "We paid for the first retainer you will need to pay for the replacement unless you can find it." At this point she hired her sister with one week's worth of allowance, to dig through five days of trash. Unfortunately, the retainer didn't show up. Reluctantly after some role-playing, she then called the orthodontist to explain the situation and set up an appointment to be fitted for a new retainer. The next part was especially hard for me as a parent. I drove her to the bank so that she could withdraw \$90 of her hard earned babysitting money to pay for it.

After the whole ordeal was over we noticed some positive changes in our teen. She was A LOT more responsible with the retainer and other belongings. She was not angry. Instead she grew in self-confidence after solving a major problem with some guidance from mom or dad. We believe that holding her accountable in a positive way helped to strengthen our relationship with her. Subsequently she has sought us out for suggestion on solving other problems. She doesn't always take our suggestions but she knows we are here for her.

Lee's Summit CARES will be offering a Parenting Teens with Love and Logic class in April. To learn more about this opportunity visit [www.lscares.org](http://www.lscares.org) or contact Bev Hatley at (816) 246-8000.

Kerri Gray is a Marriage and Family therapist. She is also an independent facilitator of the Love and Logic program. Kerri resides in Lee's Summit with her husband Phil and four daughters.