

LESSON 17

HOW TO TALK ABOUT ARGUMENTS AND RECONCILIATION

The Winter Formal had rolled around, and I was just about to head out the door. Janet had begged me to buy some hideous, pastel-colored thing- "Come on, Alex, can't you wear anything besides black?" -but I refused. I was already going to this dance-with Walter Chen, no less-and there was no way I was going to go to it dressed as a cupcake. I had picked out a simple, long black dress, which I was wearing with my trusty old Doc Martens. Just to appease Janet, I wore a little lipstick and put some sparkly clips in my hair.

Too bad I wasn't in a party mood. My dad and I had been fighting all week and I was totally exhausted. Mike and Wayne started off really enjoying it, but soon even they got tired of seeing Dad and I go at it every night, and took to eating dinner in their room in protest. Yesterday I got so fed up that I sat down and wrote out a five-page essay on why I should be allowed to go abroad next year. I told him I wanted to see more of the world before I went back to school, and that it would build my character. I told him I wanted to find myself. I was sure it would be no help, but I was just so tired of arguing about it.

I was about to head out the door when my dad came out of his study, holding my essay. "Alex -" he started.

I looked at my watch impatiently. "Dad, I really have to go right now, okay? I have to pick up Walter from his chess tournament and then go to this stupid formal. Can we talk about this tomorrow?"

He looked stem. "No, we can't." Then he took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "Alex, you're totally right."

Excuse me?

"I am?" I said.

"Yeah," he said, and sat down on the couch. "I've been pushing this college thing way too hard. This"-he waved my essay-"is pretty good stuff. I forget what a good writer you are." He smiled and then sighed. "Ever since your mom died, I've been pushing you kids pretty hard. Especially you, since those two clowns" here he gestured up at the twins' room - "are a hopeless case until they finally get over puberty."

"So... ." I said carefully, "It's okay for me not to go to college next year?"

He sighed again. "Yes, I suppose so. But you have to come up with a detailed plan for me-there's no way I'm just going to buy you a one-way ticket to God-knows-where and leave it at that."

I laughed. "Okay, Dad. I can work with that." I looked at my watch. "Shoot, I really should go get Walter now if I'm going to make this dance." "Walter? Walter Chen?" Dad looked puzzled. "You mean, that nerd you beat in the spelling bee?"

"Yup, that's the one," I said.

"But I thought you were going out with that hoodlum musician."

"Dad," I whined and then blushed. "He's not a hoodlum. And besides, you're not supposed to know about any of that."

Dad grinned. "Alex, you have the loudest phone voice I've ever heard. There's a lot I'm not supposed to know about." My mind started racing-did he know about that dirt bike incident? or the time Janet and I cut class to drive to Mexico?-but before I could ask him any questions he was hustling me out the door. "Go pick up your nerd date," he said. "And don't stay out too late!"

WORDS ABOUT ARGUMENTS

Last week, my father launched into along **tirade** about how not going to college next year would ruin my life.

tirade (n): a long outraged speech

RELATED WORDS

These words are all about angry talking.

My father started by **admonishing** me in a kind, fatherly way. When that didn't work, though, he moved on to **chastising** me loudly whenever he could. He kept **carping** on and on about it: at the dinner table, on the way to the supermarket, at the dentist's office. It was all I could do not to hurl **maledictions** at him to match all his

aspersions of me.

admonish (v): to rebuke, to scold gently

chastise (v): to criticize heavily. Admonish is a much milder word than chastise.

carp (v): to keep complaining about something

malediction (n): a curse

aspersion (n): criticism

I was in a **quandary**. I really didn't want to be in school next year, but I hated to have my dad so mad at me.

quandary (n): a puzzling situation

The quandary left me **exasperated**.

exasperated (adj): fed up and angry

I had no idea how to **extricate** myself from the situation.

extricate (v): to disentangle oneself from a sticky situation

I was so **disaffected** by the whole thing. Why was my dad acting like such a child?

disaffected (adj): disappointed and dissatisfied

I guess now I know where my brothers get their **pugnacious** attitude.

pugnacious (adj): aggressive

Unluckily for my dad, I was just as **obstinate** as he was, and I wasn't about to just give up.

obstinate (*adj*): stubborn

I thought I presented a really strong **rationale** in my essay for being allowed to travel.

rationale (*n*): line of reasoning

WORDS ABOUT MAKING UP

I was really happy when my dad and I **reconciled**-I hate having so much tension in the house!

reconcile (*v*): to make up. The word can also mean "to accept that something you dislike won't change." As in, "My dad had to reconcile himself to the fact that I wasn't going to college next year."

Now our house was in a state of **accord**.

accord (*n*): agreement; a state of harmony

Dad's apology made me feel **vindicated**.

vindicate (*v*): to show that someone was justified and correct

Underneath it all, Dad is a really **benevolent** guy who just wants his kids to be happy.

benevolent (*adj*): kindly

I try to have **compassion** for what he's going through. It's tough to raise three obnoxious teenagers by yourself.

compassion (*n*): to feel sympathy for another's misfortunes

RELATED WORDS

I'm sure that, once I have kids of my own, I'll really **empathize** with him.

empathize (*v*): to identify with another person's feelings

My dad was really **contrite** about having been so obdurate.

contrite (*adj*): genuinely apologetic

Here are some other words about being wrong and being sorry.

I was touched by how **penitent** he was and how badly he wanted to make **amends**. He **expiated** himself by being super-nice to me and barely raising a fuss when I came home from the formal at 3 in the morning. I think he realized that he was Just as **culpable** for the fight as I was.

penitent (*adj*): genuinely apologetic

amends (*n*): something done or given to make up for having done wrong

expiate (*v*): to make amends

culpable (*adj*): at fault

Because he was being so reasonable, I **acceded** to his wishes that I come up with a detailed plan for next year.

accede (*v*): to consent to something

At first I did it just to **placate** him, but then I realized that coming up with a plan would be a really good idea.

placate (*v*): to please someone in order to make someone less angry

I **delineated** exactly what my goals were for the year.

delineate (*v*): to explain something in detail

My brothers were amazed at how **docile** I became.

docile (*adj*): meek, easy to control

WORDS ABOUT PROMISES

Dad told me his permission wasn't **unconditional**. I had to take lots of steps to make sure my trip was safe and well-planned.

unconditional (*adj*): guaranteed with no strings attached

His permission would be **tentative** until I came up with a plan.

tentative (*adj*): not definite; likely to change before it is final.

He was very **explicit** on that issue.

explicit (*adj*): very clear. The adjective can also mean "very open and direct about sexuality." As in: "My brothers like to hide explicit magazines under their beds."

He **stipulated** that I had to go as part of a program, and not on my own.

stipulate (*v*): to specify something as part of an agreement or contract

That was his only **mandate**-other than that, I was free to choose where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do.

mandate (*n*): an official order

I gave him my **assurance** that I would plan it out very carefully.

assurance (*n*): something offered to inspire confidence

We made a **covenant** that he wouldn't micromanage my trip as long as I kept him informed of all my plans.

covenant (*n*): a binding promise or contract

At first I was worried he'd **rescind** his promise, but he didn't.

rescind (*v*): to take back something (like a promise or an argument)

WORDS OF FATHERLY ADVICE

My dad likes giving me advice-he gets a kick out of being all **paternal**.

paternal (*adj*): relating to fathers

RELATED WORDS

maternal (*adj*): relating to mothers

fraternal (*adj*): relating to brothers

There's no corresponding word for "relating to sisters" (sexist, much?) But just like the root *frater* means "brother," *soror* means "sister" - hence the words fraternity and sorority.

I was glad my dad didn't **interrogate** me about Rex, but maybe I should have asked his advice.

interrogate (*v*): to question aggressively

He's pretty **intuitive** when it comes to guys. I guess it helps that he was one, once.

intuitive (*adj*): known instinctively

I'm sure he would have told me to be **resilient**, and that teenage boys were a dime a dozen.

resilient (*adj*): able to bounce back from hardship

These are some other words Dad likes to use about making it through bad times.

Dad always tells me that **adversity** toughens you up and increases your personal **fortitude**. Handling these things coolly and learning **forbearance** is the first step to becoming an adult (so, he doesn't always follow his own advice ...).

adversity (*n*): trouble, suffering

fortitude (*n*): strength, stamina

forbearance (*n*): self-control

Dad never wants me to be **submissive** to boys. Submissive to him, yes, but he sees himself as a special exception.

submissive (*adj*): easily giving in

He always wants me to **advocate** for myself-which I think is why he responded so well to that essay.

advocate (*v*): to stand up for something

Dad would tell me to be **objective** about the situation with Rex and think about it unemotionally.

objective (*adj*): without bias or personal involvement

The antonym of objective is **subjective** (*adj*): based on opinions and feelings.

If I had decided to stay home from the formal and mope, Dad would have **goaded** me to go.

goad (*v*): to prompt, to provoke

A synonym for goad is **exhort** (*v*): to urge someone to do something.

I think that my dad would secretly be very happy if I chose to **forsake** boys forever. Dad doesn't trust most teenage guys.

forsake (*v*): to give something up