

# Troubled Teens: Advice About Teen Boot Camps

By Vanessa Van Petten  
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*Hi Vanessa,*

*My son has been acting out and I have read about parents sending their kids away to boot camps and wilderness adventure camps. Do you think this is a good idea? Are they safe? –Worried Mom, Austin, TX*

Hi Worried Mom,

Parents often choose boot camps as an absolute last resort and are at the end of their rope by the time they need to contact a wilderness facility. If you have a troubled teen or your teen is acting out, try these solutions before thinking about camp:

- **Consistency and Routine:** Often times, teens rebel because of hormones or undesired change. Therefore, the more habits, systems and routines you have in the house the more consistency the teen will have in his/her life and the more likely they will find comfort in 'normalcy.'
- **Family and Community Involvement:** Family time and involving your teen or child in community activities with religious groups, community service or at YMCA's can help a teen find other outlets for anger or fear.
- **Break from bad friends:** Certain teens have 'bad' behavior because of negative influence from friends. Try to encourage activities in the community rather than hanging out with negative enablers. Or take a family trip to get away from these kids. Often times, sending teens to grandparents, aunt's or uncle's houses can be a sufficient break away from influencers.
- **Empowerment, love and support:** Some teens thrive off of any kind of attention, this means that punishments and arguments simply feed their need. So make sure to give them positive attention, tell them you have faith in them, that they are smart, and have a good future, show them you are there for them no matter what. Even if this does work immediately, as seen with my friend above, they will remember that you were there for them after this hard stage.

If you reach the end of your rope:

- **Family camps are better than boot camps:** There are many camps, especially church and temple camps that are for entire families. This is where all family members have activities together and separate and can be a good break and a time where you can bond away from the home, bad friends and trigger points.
- **Send them to a relative:** As mentioned above, sending teens to a relative's house for the summer or for a school break can help keep them out of trouble when there is no school and give them a

chance to connect in a different community.

- Do your research: If you must, there are some good ‘correction’ camps out there. Steer away from ‘tough love’ camps and make sure there are therapists working at the facility. Get referrals and do plenty of research and surprise visits, remember what camps want to show you, they will, and what they do not want to show you, they won’t.

If you are having a hard time with your teen remember that the relationship comes in cycles and do not be afraid to get outside help with a therapist, counselor or at their schools.

*Vanessa Van Petten is the author of the parenting book “You’re Grounded!” Her parenting tips as a family peacemaker have been featured in the Wall Street Journal, Fox 5 New York, and CBS. Please be sure to check out my site: [OnTeensToday.com](http://OnTeensToday.com) and email your questions for future columns to [vvanpetten@rrules.com](mailto:vvanpetten@rrules.com).*

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