

Choices

The scene begins with a young teenager, Chris, sitting slumped in a chair staring at a blank TV screen. Chris looks at the clock, both concerned and annoyed. A key slides into the front door lock – someone trying to be quiet. An adult, Chris’s parent, enters. The parent closes the door quietly, takes shoes off so as not to make a noise, and creeps past without noticing Chris.

Chris: (accusing) 7.30 you said.

Parent: (jumping, turning and sounding guilty) Chris ... Hi ... What are you doing up so late?
(looking at watch) You should have been in bed hours ago.

Chris: You should have been home hours ago. (glaring) Don’t promises mean anything to you?

Parent: (sighs) I know. I had to work back late. Sorry. (fumbling with cups to cover discomfort)
Want a cup of tea? Anyway, you’d probably do better without me helping you with your assignment.

Chris: Where’ve you been?

Parent: (humour) Have you been taking ‘parent’ tablets? That’s what I’m supposed to say?
(mimicking) Where have you been? (no reaction from Chris but an accusing glare)
Okay. Go into sulk mode. I was working late and that’s the end of it. Now get to bed.
It’s a school day tomorrow.

Chris: (tapping watch sarcastically) Today.

Parent: Bed!

Chris: We were supposed to go late-night shopping for my birthday party.

Parent: (getting annoyed) Well, we didn’t. And I didn’t help you with your assignment either.
I’m a failure as a parent. Now go to bed before I lose my temper.

Chris: It’s on Saturday.

Parent: It won’t be on any day if you don’t get to bed. Have you cleaned your teeth?

Chris: I’ve already invited people and we haven’t bought anything. This place is a dump. I’ll look like a dork.

Parent: Teeth! And watch your language.

Chris: I will ... look like a (pause, contemplates saying ‘dork’) an idiot. I’ll ...

Parent: I, I, I. Can’t you stop thinking about yourself for one tiny second? Birthdays cost money. I have to work overtime. End of story.

Chris: I want my burger money back. I’ll buy some stuff myself. (goes for wallet which has been placed on table)

Parent: (pushing) Get away from there. (snatches wallet from Chris’s hand)





- Chris: (angry) It's my money. I worked for it. Give it back. 30
- Parent: (flustered) I'll give it back tomorrow.
- Chris: (trying to grab the wallet) I want it now! (scuffling over the wallet) Give it to me.
- Parent: Leave it alone. Stop it or you'll be sorry.
- Chris: It's mine! (Chris snaps it away, skips backward, opens it and stares — pause — silence) Where is it? You've spent my money! 35
- Parent: (unconvincing) I had to pay some bills.
- Chris: (grabbing a pile of letters from a box and throwing them into the air) Bills! You never pay bills. I should know. I'm the one who has to answer the phone when they call.
- Parent: That's right. Play the martyr. There's a hammer and nails in the cupboard.
- Chris: Other kids' parents have got jobs like you. How come they don't live like this? 40
- Parent: (dismissive) How would you know what —
- Chris: We talk —
- Parent: You'd better not be spreading stories about me —
- Chris: (challenging) Where's all our money go?
- Parent: Our money? My money! 45
- Chris: Burger —
- Parent: (fumbles in drawer) Forty-five lousy dollars! Here's a cheque if you're too tight to help out. (scrawls cheque) Here take it! And from now on you keep your money and I'll keep mine and you can do whatever you like. Here! Take it!
- Chris: I don't want it. 50
- Parent: Take it!
- Chris: It'll probably bounce anyway. (Parent slaps the table as anger boils over. Tension. Silence. Both look confused. Eye contact. Parent finally turns away fumbling for a cigarette.)
- Parent: (subdued) Sorry. 55
- Chris: I thought you'd given up.
- Parent: (groans in anguish) Listen. I don't like myself very much right now so just stop. It's easy to kick someone when they're down. Teenagers aren't the only ones who hate themselves you know.
- Chris: (pause, in a quieter voice) How did you know I hate myself? 60

- Parent: (face clouds then softens) We don't spend much time together any more, do we? (Chris is confused) Another two years and you won't want to spend any time with me at all. (shrugs, looking at Chris)
- Do you know I have no idea where I'm going or what I'm doing with my life any more? I have no goals. The only excitement I get out of life is those rotten machines. Those stupid hypnotic sounds. They stop you thinking. They were designed by a psychologist, you know. The Mafia were so impressed with the theory behind Skinner's rats that they went to the experts and asked them to design a machine where people would willingly throw their money away and come back for more. It's pathetic. It's absolutely pathetic. (pause) Maybe that's the answer. I'm one of Skinner's rats. 65
- Chris: There's nothing more depressing for kids my age than to learn that parents are just as stuffed up as they are. (pause) Even though I've had my suspicions for some time. (pause) Can I ask you a question? 70
- Parent: (a touch of humour) I'm not going to tell you the meaning of life. You'll have to find that out for yourself. 75
- Chris: If you're so cynical about life, why go to all the trouble to get us to believe in Santa and the Tooth Fairy?
- Parent: Having kids both strangles and enriches. No parents want their kids to grow up too quickly. The fairytale version of life is much more pleasant. Why do you think people like Tolkien were still writing about goblins and hobbits when they were old men? They didn't like the reality. They preferred the fairytale. 80
- Chris: If it's all that depressing why don't we just drop out? (eye contact) Serious question? It'd save me having to do any more homework.
- Parent: (considering) That's pretty pathetic. For both of us. (pause) On the other hand, that's the most interesting thing. 85
- Chris: What?
- Parent: Finding reasons not to do exactly that. Giving up is one of the most tempting things in the world. It sucks. But it's ever so tempting.
- Chris: Just like it's easier to be depressed rather than happy. It'd be nice if lollies didn't rot your teeth but they do. It'd be nice if vegetables tasted nice but they don't. If life's a T-shirt, wear it. If it shrinks, stretch it. 90
- Parent: Are you coming down with a touch of the 'owls'? You're sounding very wise.
- Chris: See, cable TV is educational. (mock sarcastic) If we could afford to get it on.
- Parent: We could. (pause) If I wasn't such a ... (eye contact and pause) dork. (smiles) You'll have to ... help me. I'm only a weak adult and I am addicted to poker machines. That's the first time I've said that and I hate it. You hate yourself. Then you offload the guilt by hating those around you. Soon it's everyone's fault except yours. I can intellectualise it. I just can't control it. (pause) Cable TV, huh? 95
- Chris: Yeah. I saw it on a sitcom. 100



- Parent: It's awful to know what's right but not be able to do it. The guilt eats you up. (unsure)
Perhaps we should talk a bit more. (pause) Bedtime.
- Chris: I'm not tired.
- Parent: Nor am I. Want to help me clean up this dump? 105
- Chris: This is not a dump. It's our home. (getting plastic garbage bags) Want me to say some more wise things?
- Parent: Only if I get a jelly bean when I get the right answer.
- Chris: Life is about people, not things. You learn more from the downs than the ups. You can't make other people happy until you're happy yourself. Everything is about mind over matter, but what makes life so interesting is that we constantly stuff it up. You can only do what you think is right at any given point in time, knowing that it may prove wrong further down the track. Don't be quick to judge. The wheel is always turning. Nothing stays the same. If you like someone, you forgive them. 110
- Parent: (moved) You remember all that bunkum? 115
- Chris: How do you think I've survived to the ripe old age of fourteen on Saturday?
- Parent: I'm sorry about lying to you. About the overtime.
- Chris: (smiling) That's all right. I lie to you all the time.
- Parent: You're enjoying this, aren't you?
- Chris: (smiling) Yep. 120
- Parent: I suppose you'll want to talk about sex next.
- Chris: (mock disgust) Not with you. (smiles)
- Parent: How about a new motto? I'll put it on the fridge where we can always see it.
- Chris: (sending up) We dib, dib, dib, dib. We dob, dob, dob, dob.
- Parent: Close. I was thinking more along the lines of 'Talk, Don't Taunt. Help, Don't Hinder'. 125
- Chris: It won't always work.
- Parent: It'd be boring if it did. Worth trying?
- Chris: (nods) Worth trying. (they continue to clean the room in silence)
- END

Source:
Gambling and health:
Communication skills
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