

Spotlighting Teen Issues

for
Parents

Teen Relationships

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As parents, you want your teens to have an easy transition into adulthood. You want them to have friends and be liked at school. While you want to encourage them, you also worry that they may choose the wrong friends and be negatively influenced by them.

In addition, the teenage years bring changes in your child's view of you: parents who once knew everything suddenly don't understand anything. This attitude is normal, but it doesn't make parenting easier!

Pointers for Parents

- Having a positive relationship with teens involves interacting with love, understanding, consistency and respect. These attributes will help build their self-esteem and social skills.
- Be as involved with your teen's activities as you can. Attend functions that allow you to know who your teen is associating with. Allow your teen to invite friends to your home.

- Make boundaries fair and consistent. Have teen input in discussing the rules. Many teens will be more cooperative if they are part of deciding on the rules and the consequences of breaking those rules.
- Encourage independent thought and expression. Many parents and teens see this as a control issue. This can turn into a real battle — one that is very destructive to healthy parenting. Respect your teen's ability to show a sense of independence. In this way, teens can develop a healthy sense of self and an enhanced ability to resist peer pressure.

Communication Is the Key

The way you talk to your teen is important. In the heat of argument, you may find yourself attacking your teen's personality as well as the particular behavior. A practical approach is to start your sentences with the word "I," followed by a statement of your feelings. "I don't like it when you use that kind of language," or "I'm really upset when you take your anger out on me." This way you will avoid laying blame. In other words, speak as you would be spoken to.

The way you listen is important, too.



Try to understand the feelings behind your teen's actions or words. When you respond, start your sentences with the word "I," as in "I can tell you are pretty frustrated," or "I can see that you are really fed up." We all want to feel heard and understood, especially when we are upset. Remember to listen twice as much as you talk.

Here are some do's and don'ts for parent-teen communication:

- Don't lecture or preach. It has been said that the average teen goes deaf after hearing about five sentences.
- Don't argue with your teens ideas. However, you need to make your views clear by saying, "This is what I believe," "I have a different opinion," and "This is the way I see it."
- Don't talk down to your teen. There's nothing more irritating than a condescending tone.
- Don't set limits you can't enforce. If you set a limit, be prepared to follow through.
- Do focus on the behavior — not the person.
- Do think ahead about what you will say and how you will say it.
- Do keep your messages clear and concise.
- Do stick to one issue at a time.

Tips for Avoiding Conflict

When you see reasons to be concerned, it's especially important to remember to be patient and follow these suggestions.

- Avoid criticizing your teen's friends. Remember that criticizing your teen's choice of friends feels like a personal attack.
- Recognize WHO your teen is becoming: Identity (Who they are) versus. Image (Trendy expressions of youth). Help your teen understand the difference.
- Always be ready to listen and communicate.
- Accept your teen's decisions based on principles and encourage their independence. Teens have to learn to live their own lives!
- Let your teen know of your concerns and feelings.
- Remember that we learn valuable lessons from our mistakes. Be willing to discuss mistakes rationally.
- Seek professional help if necessary.

Tips for Parenting Teens in Relationships

- Create an atmosphere of honesty, mutual trust and respect.
- Put yourself in their place. Don't forget what being a teenager was like.
- There will be conflicts with your teen, so pick your battles. Do not pick apart everything!
- Teach your teen about healthy relationships and how to avoid unhealthy relationships.
- Talk about the difference between love and infatuation.
- Discuss the negative effects of controlling relationships.
- Set appropriate relationship examples.
- Do not rush young people into dating relationships. Encourage group activities.
- Encourage teens to get to know lots of people and not limit themselves to one relationship.
- Be willing to discuss questions about sexuality. Share your values. Guide teens to develop their own personal value system
- Teens need to have relationships with adults who will share their own experiences, views, values and feelings.

For More Information

Am I in a Healthy Relationship? TeensHealth. http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/question/emotions/healthy_relationship.html

Healthy Relationships: A Guide for Teens. The Center for Young Women's Health. http://www.youngwomenshealth.org/healthy_relat.html

Healthy Relationships — Health and Well-Being. Advocates for Youth. <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/youth/health/relationships/index.htm>

Communication is Key — Healthy Teen Relationships. Centra Health. <http://www.centrahealth.com/news/digest/May 05/article5.aspx>

Parenting Teens. Focus Adolescent Services. <http://www.focusas.com/Parenting.html>

12 Ways to Help your Teens Grow Up Sexually Healthy. Peel Public Health. <http://www.peelregion.ca/health/commhlth/parov1yr/teen.htm>

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SP681-O 7/06 07-0008