



American College of Pediatricians

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Patient Information Handout

PARENTING YOUR TEEN

YOUR TEENAGER NEEDS YOU! Although teens often act as if they don't need you and don't want to be seen with you, many surveys show that teens actually want their parents to be involved in their lives – to attend their athletic events, to ask about their friends, to spend time with them, to hold them accountable, and to share their dreams and goals.

Teenagers are continuing to develop physically, emotionally, and mentally. They need your support, involvement and encouragement as they mature. Just as you protected your child when he was two years old by not allowing him to cross the street by himself, so your teenager needs you now to protect him from the dangerous influences of our society. Research has shown that teens do not have fully-matured brains and therefore lack the wisdom to make major decisions.

Here are some general principles of parenting teens that you may find helpful. If you have more questions, please feel free to ask your pediatrician for additional resources.

Teens (just like everyone) want to be respected

- Compliment and praise your teen when he makes good choices and decisions.
- Compliment him in front of your friends.
- Encourage your teen to set goals (short-term and long-term) and help your teen reach these goals. *This is the best way to develop self-confidence and competence*

Teens need to be “connected” to their family. Teens engage in fewer “high risk” behaviors (smoking, drinking, abusing drugs, becoming sexually active) when they are “connected” to their family. Some helpful ways to stay connected include:

- Eating meals together – and communicating. Turn off the television and other electronics while you eat.
- Participating in activities together – go biking, hiking, camping together.
- Participating in religious activities together.
- Participating in community service together – volunteer together at your favorite charity.
- To improve connectedness, don't allow teens to have televisions or other media in their bedrooms. These devices usually promote isolation from the family.
- Limiting *everyone's* use of media so more activities are shared together.

Teens do better in homes with “hands on parenting”. “Hands on parenting” means that the parents are involved in most aspects of their teens' lives and set limits on their activities. Yet, as he demonstrates responsibilities, more freedoms are granted. This may include:

- Monitoring what teens watch on television.
- Monitoring what teens do on the Internet.
- Monitoring call and text history periodically on his cell phone.
- Restricting what CDs, DVDs, video / computer games are purchased and used.
- Imposing a curfew.
- Knowing where teens are after school and on weekends.

- Assigning teens regular chores.
- Teens with chronic medical issues need continued guidance from their parents concerning their health and care.

Teens need you to convey your values

- Teach your teens your values in all areas of life – moral convictions, financial responsibility, work ethic, social and community responsibilities.
- Tell your teen that you disapprove of teen smoking, alcohol and drug use, and sexual activity. Explain why. Your teens are listening!

Teens need to learn the relationship between responsibility and privilege. Parents should not allow their teens to have privileges that are not appropriate for the teenagers' age or level of maturity/responsibility. If your teen is not diligent about her homework, it is unlikely that she is ready to be diligent in driving a car, or monitoring her own medication if she has a chronic condition.

Teens need to know your rules (your limits) and the consequences if they break the rules.

Teens need to know that you will be flexible in areas that do not violate your ethics or values.

Teens should always be provided with a “way out” of dangerous situations. Let your teen know that you can always be called to “rescue” her from a dangerous situation – no questions asked. Your goal is to assure that your teen remains safe.

Teens need to stay busy. Teens who participate in extracurricular activities (sports, drama, music, art, church) are much less likely to have time to get into trouble. But, be careful. Teens who work more than 20 hours a week at a paying job do less well in school.

Teens need to learn new tasks. Help your teen attain new levels of competence that will help him function later in life – balancing a check book, budgeting, cooking, basic sewing, cleaning, using tools, doing the laundry, unclogging a drain and changing a flat tire are just a few of many necessary life skills that your teen needs to learn.