

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 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 aspects of our society.

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 for her good choices and decisions.

Let your teen hear you complimenting him in front of your friends.

Encourage your teen to set goals (short-term and long-term) and make plans to help your teen reach her goals. This is the best way to develop self-esteem.

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

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. This may include:

Monitoring what teens watch on television

Monitoring what teens do on the Internet

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 need you to convey your values

Teach your teens your values in all areas of life – finances (and use / abuse of credit), work ethic / responsibility, social and community responsibilities

Tell your teen if you disapprove of teen smoking, alcohol and drug use, sexual activity. 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 does not pay attention to her homework, it is unlikely that she is ready to pay attention while driving a car.

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 competent that will help him function later in life – balancing a check book, budgeting, cooking, doing the laundry are all necessary life skills that your teen needs to learn.

