

“CONNECTED” PARENTING

Research has shown us how to parent children so that they have the best chance of navigating their adolescent years without participating in high risk behaviors. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health was an in depth evaluation of thousands of teens and their parents who were interviewed at least 4 times over at least a ten year period. The number one factor that helped protect teens from becoming involved in any high risk behavior (including drug and alcohol use and sexual activity) was a feeling of “connectedness” with their parents. Adolescents who felt close to their parents, felt their parents and family members cared for them, and were satisfied with their family relationships were less likely to become involved in risky activities.

So, how can you “connect” with your children so they will feel connected to you as adolescents?

1. Share meal times together

Many studies show benefits when children eat meals with their parents. Remember – the beneficial effect of mealtime is not due to the food you are eating, but rather the benefit comes because you are sharing time and sharing values as well as role-modeling problem solving skills.

2. Encourage your children to do chores at home

Chores help children learn how to do a task and also help children learn how to be responsible. But chores are most important because they help your children learn that they are an important part of the family. “My family needs me” is the message the child hears when he hears it is dinner time and he knows his job is to put the napkins on the table.

3. Work on projects together

Working together to accomplish a task bonds parents and children together. Looking at the finished project, the family can see the tangible benefits of planning and interacting together to achieve a goal.

4. Play together – and just spend fun time together

5. ***Laugh together.*** There is something about laughing together that helps bond people together. Set aside some time after dinner to tell jokes or share funny stories. Children love seeing their parents acting “silly” or doing something unexpected.

6. Experience nature together

Children have better mental and physical health when they are outdoors and outdoor experiences are the best way to experience “shared risk” – see number 7.

7. Volunteer together

This is a powerful way for families to bond and connect. Children realize their lives are important when they are serving others.

8. “Shared risk” experiences

When you have experienced a frightening situation with another person, you are more likely to feel a special connection with that individual. The same is true for families, so look for opportunities to experience some “frightening” times together – sharing a roller-coaster ride, hiking and seeing a snake cross your path, white-water rafting. Outdoor activities lend themselves to “shared risk” adventures.

9. Share values

Your children and adolescents are listening – especially if you practice what you preach. Take time to explain and explore your values together. Develop activities that you can do as a family that support your values.

10. Listen to your children and teens. Ask them questions about their interests and learn from them

11. Spend time with your children's friends.

Open your home to your children's friends and make your home the one that everyone wants to come to for fun activities. Offer to drive your teen and her friends on outings. You will make sure they arrive home safely and will learn a lot about their interests while you are with them.

12. Share your expectations.

The Adolescent Health Study also showed that teens make better choices when their parents talk about their expectations.

13. Talk with your teens about their goals

...and help them develop plans for achieving their goals. Adolescents need help in planning and problem solving, so show them how to divide their goals into smaller, more easily accomplished tasks.

14. Encourage your children and teens to express their individuality.

Help them find unique interests and develop their talents so they will have an area in which they can excel.

15. Keep your promises. When you keep your promise to your child, you are demonstrating in a very powerful way that you value your child. Make small promises that you can easily keep – like reading a book together, going for a walk together, or cooking together.

Then...keep your promise!

16. Share religious experiences. Spend time together worshipping and sharing your religious values and ceremonies.

We hope these ideas help you strengthen the bond with your child.

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