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# TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN: TIPS FOR PARENTS

## BE AN INVOLVED PARENT

- Show interest in your teenager's activities and friends.
- Talk openly, honestly, and respectfully with your teenager.
- Set clear limits and expectations.
- Know what's going on at school and after school.
- Teach your teenager how to safely avoid violence.

**T**eenagers are no longer children, but they are not yet adults. While teenagers are developing more independent thoughts, feelings, and values, it is only natural for them to question their parents' rules, beliefs, and expectations. During this time of change, parents often worry about their teenager's safety.

### Encourage independence while teaching safety.

As teenagers are testing their new independent roles, it's not an easy time for parents. But if teens don't get love, security, and a feeling of safety from their family, they might look elsewhere, even toward friends who are a bad influence, such as gang members. One of the best ways parents can help their teenagers stay safe is to **teach them how to avoid violence.**

**Talking with your teen is one of the most important things you can do to help keep your child safe.**

## KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON

It's important to understand some of the typical behaviors and feelings of teenagers, even if your teenager thinks you don't!

### Teens are very interested in:

- New ways of doing things.
- The present, with little interest in the future. With maturity, the future becomes more important.

### Teens often:

- Feel awkward and believe they don't fit in.
- Behave childishly when stressed.

### Teens want:

- Role models for themselves.
- To be capable and needed.

## SET CLEAR LIMITS AND EXPECTATIONS

### Talk about limits to which you can both agree:

- Homework completion and school progress
- How many nights out each week, and how late
- After-school activities or jobs
- Allowance or money
- Safety in and around motor vehicles

### Clearly communicate any change in the original limits.

You have specific reasons for deciding to change what was agreed to. You aren't simply giving up because your teen didn't follow the rules.

## POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

Good communication—talking and listening—with your teenager may be the most important part of your relationship.

Since teens are forming their own identity and testing limits, some conversations may lead to



disagreements and become uncomfortable. Your goal is to have open, respectful, and honest conversations. Teens need to feel loved and that their point of view is respected, even when you disagree.

Positive communication gives teenagers a chance to:

- Learn how to talk honestly and respectfully with others, even when they disagree.
- Feel more confident in discussing their needs and feelings.
- Know that a positive attitude can keep them safe and out of fights.

### **Make a habit of talking about whatever makes your teen happy.**

No matter what your teen's interest—sports, music, clothing, TV, video games, friends, school—ask questions and learn what's going on.

**Try to eat together whenever possible.** Mealtimes are good times to talk and listen.

**Answer questions directly and honestly.**

**If you have made a mistake, admit it.** "I'm sorry" are very powerful words for a teenager to hear from parents.

**Notice your teen's feelings.** "You seem upset about your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_."

**Be aware of your own reactions and emotions.** Teenagers are great at saying or doing things that annoy their parents. Take time to think about your responses and decisions to your teen's requests.

**Offer your opinion without lecturing or judging.** Know that you may hear something with which you disagree. Avoid statements like, "That's stupid." or "You're wrong." Try saying, "I hear you, but this is how I see it..."

**Give all of your attention.** If the phone rings, don't answer it. It also is difficult to talk while doing other things, like watching TV.

**Offer assistance.** "Is there something I can do to help?"

## **WHEN TALKING IS DIFFICULT**

Yelling, threatening, blaming, and name-calling can only make matters worse. Sometimes teens just don't want to talk with their parents.

**Consider helping your teen find other caring adults who share your values. It may be easier to hear advice from one of these other adults.**

## **KEEPING YOUR TEEN SAFE**

**Know where your child is after school.** The most common time for teenagers to get into trouble is between 2:00 and 6:00 PM. If not supervised, this is often when teens fight, use drugs, and have sex.

**Talk with your child about carrying a weapon.** Carrying a weapon makes people feel bold, leading to foolish behaviors. Carrying a weapon gives a false sense of protection and makes your teen less safe.

**Teach your child that it takes more courage to walk away from a fight than to fight.** Most young people hurt in fights have been fighting with someone they know. Teach your child how to resolve problems without fighting. Your example is the best way for your child to learn this.

Let your teen know that it is more important to know how to walk away from a fight than how to win one, and that it is possible to stand up for yourself without fighting.

## **IF YOUR TEEN GETS INTO A FIGHT**

Often teenagers who get into a fight are just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Sometimes fighting is the only choice they know.

- Talk about what happened:**
- Find out what caused the fight. This helps avoid future fights. Did it start with an argument? An insult? Was it revenge? Did it result from being robbed? Getting jumped?
  - Listen to the whole story. Try not to interrupt, scold, judge, or problem solve. Just listen.

- Being hurt in a fight can be scary and embarrassing. It's important to pay attention to your teen's feelings.

### Find out if the fight is over:

- **Help resolve the problem.** "Are you still afraid? Are you thinking of getting even? Do you think the other person is looking for revenge?"
- **Involve your teen in finding a solution.** "What else could you have done besides fight? Is there someone else who can help you and \_\_\_\_\_ find a solution to this problem?"

### Develop a safety plan for the future:

- **Change routes to avoid known threats.** "Is there another way that you can get home? Can you leave home or school at a different time? Try not to travel alone."
- **Guard against robbery.** "Always know what's going on around you, especially if you are wearing new clothes or flashy jewelry. It may be better to just hand it over. Things can be replaced; you can't."

- **Seek a safe place when being followed.** "Walk or run into a store, police or fire station, or any other public building. Tell them it's an emergency and ask to use the phone to call for a ride. Or, go to a friend's home and get inside quickly."

### WHEN YOUR TEEN MAY NEED HELP

Your teen may need help if you notice any of the following warning signs:

- Not talking, or a change in communication style
- Feeling down most of the time—losing interest in friends or activities
- Change in school performance, skipping school, or maybe even dropping out
- Trouble with the law

If you or your teenager needs help, please contact your pediatrician.

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