

PARENTING young teens

Tools for Effective Parents



Parenting young teens is no easy task. Parents as well as children must adapt to the pre- and early teens' rapidly changing bodies and normal behavior changes — growing independence and challenges to authority. No one technique will work for every parent or every child. Here are some strategies to:

- strengthen your relationship with your young teen
- deal with problems when they arise
- help your young teen become a responsible, caring adult

Listen for feelings and praise good behavior.

When your child comes to you with a problem or when he or she expresses strong feelings, try to say something like, "Sounds like you're feeling...." It helps the child to know that you want to understand. If your son comes home after school and says, "The teacher is a jerk. He yelled at me in front of everyone," you might say, "Sounds like you were embarrassed."

Young teens learn better from praise than from scolding. Praise your child for specific actions he or she has done. If your child does a good job raking the lawn, you might say, "The lawn looks nice. You've cleaned under the trees, bagged the leaves, and put the rake away. Thanks for doing such a good job."

Also, use special privileges and one-on-one time instead of material objects to reward good behavior. For example, if your son complained last week about helping with chores, but this week doesn't complain and does the work, let him stay up later on the weekend or go on an outing with you.

Keep one-on-one time and family-fun time.

Spending one-on-one time with your son or daughter is a special time and can let your child know you enjoy being together. You might take turns with each child in the family going out for breakfast, playing a board game, or going for a bike ride together. Also, having fun together as a family builds good feelings that can help you through hard times. Ask your young teen to help plan family events, such as a vacation. He or she could look up information on the Internet about the place you're going, the route, stops on the way, and features to see.

Use driving time to talk. Most parents of young teens spend time driving their child to practices, lessons, or friends' homes. Young teens may be more willing to talk on the road than at home. On the way to soccer practice, you might say, "Tell me about school today."

Talk about values.

Let your child know what you believe and consider important. Use times such as talks about happenings at school, in the news, or on the Internet or a TV show, to talk about your values. For example, after watching a TV program in which a passenger was hurt when a drunk character wrecked his car, you might say, "This is why we think it's best not to drink and drive. How do you think the character could have handled the situation if this had been real life?"

Use "I" statements.

Let your child know how you feel, why you feel this way, and what you want him or her to do. Say, "I feel (state how you feel) when you (state specifically what the child does) because (state why you feel that way). This is what I want you to do (state what behavior you want from the child)." If your daughter forgets to turn off her curling iron, you might say, "I worry when you leave the curling iron on because it could start a fire. Please go turn it off right now."

Practice reflective listening.

When you are working with your child to solve a problem, stop to sum up what he or she has said. This lets your child know you have really heard his or her ideas. Resist the temptation to criticize or lecture. For example, your daughter might say, "I hate the way I look. Everything looks dumb on me." Perhaps sum up what you heard her say with, "Sounds like you're pretty frustrated over the way your clothes look on you."

Wait until you are calm to deal with a problem.

Discussing a problem when either you or your child is upset can lead to fighting and more anger. For example, your daughter sasses you when you ask her to clean her room. You become angry, but you tell her you'll discuss her sassing after you've cooled down.

Talk about rules and consequences.

Talk about rules and consequences before putting them into practice. Rules give young teens structure for living; consequences help them learn from the rules. Natural consequences let a child learn from what happens naturally. The parent does not scold, lecture, or rescue. For example, if a young teen wants to stay up late to watch the end of a movie, he may be tired the next morning when he has to wake up and go to school.

Logical consequences are created and should be reasonable, respectful, and related to the rule. For example, when your daughter comes home too late one

evening, remind her that the consequence is not going out the next evening.

Solve problems together and follow through with decisions.

Work with your child, listen to his/her point of view, brainstorm solutions, and choose options to try. Rather than expect young people to follow your rules without question, engage them in making the rules. When taken seriously, young teens have many good ideas. If your son received a low grade in social studies, discuss ways he might improve his grade — such as finishing homework or asking a teacher for help. Listen to his ideas; don't lecture. After agreeing on consequences, follow through by reminding your child about his or her agreement. If your son agreed to empty the garbage after supper, but it's still under the sink, find him and give a short reminder to take out the garbage.

Consider young teen development.

Weigh normal young teen development against poor behavior. Normal changes include wanting more independence, spending more time with friends or alone, and challenging authority. However, young teens need to know that actions such as staying out too late can cause worry. If it bothers you that your child wants to be with friends all the time, note that this is normal and healthy. Plan times that you and your young teen can spend together.

Be an information seeker.

It's never too late to try new solutions to problems with your child. Talk to other parents for ideas and support. Read books on teen development and on the changes parents go through as their children grow up. New knowledge and ideas can help you make more thoughtful and reasoned decisions.

Prepared by Kimberly Greder, associate professor and family life extension state specialist and Melissa Schnurr, doctoral candidate, human development and family studies, Iowa State University. Taken from materials originally prepared by Virginia K. Molgaard, former family life specialist.

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