

Common Stresses for Parents of Teens

Janet and Greg are finding life with a teenager difficult. They used to do more with their son, Jeff, 15, but now he is busy with his own friends and activities.



If he needs to be picked up from practice, he just texts. He often argues with them about rules and always seems to need money for something. They are dreading the time when Jeff's younger brother and sister also will be teens.

The teen years bring new stresses for many families because the parent-child relationship changes. Teens want to express and act on their ideas. Parents may miss the family fun they had when their child was younger. Parents are also changing and have challenges of their own—jobs, homes, extended family, and busy schedules. It helps to understand the normal changes during teen years and to know when teens might be headed for serious problems. Your teen needs firm limits and consequences when rules are broken, but your teen also needs to be sure of your continued love.

Research shows that positive parental and family interactions make a big difference in the lives of teens. Keeping communication open with teens protects them from serious problems and helps them learn to develop responsibility. Parents need to allow teens to become more independent, yet still find ways to spend time together.

- Understand that it's normal for teens to spend less time with family.
- Make specific times for family (e.g., Sunday night popcorn and board games or an evening out for pizza).
- Ask your teen to help plan family events (attending a sports event or holiday celebration).
- Spend one-on-one time. Go for a walk, bike ride, or for ice cream.
- Use trips in the car as a time to talk.
- Try to see things from your teen's point of view.
- Avoid using time together for criticizing or lecturing.
- Monitor how your teen spends time and who he hangs out with. If you are uncomfortable with either, talk to your teen.

Disagreements about Rules

Thirteen-year-old Josh wants to argue over everything his parents expect. He says chores are “not fair” and only wants to play video games and text his friends. He seems to question everything.

It's normal for teens to want to think for themselves and challenge rules or argue. It is a rare teen who always cleans his or her room, does homework on time, and helps with chores without arguing. Remain calm and:

- Work with your teen to make a short list of rules.
- Concentrate on the most important rules.
- See that your teen does what he/she has agreed to. Instead of arguing, say, “Nevertheless you agreed to...”

- Talk with your teen about problems when you are both calm.
- Compliment and give privileges when rules are followed.
- Give small consequences when a small rule is broken (e.g., a 5-minute chore for watching TV instead of doing homework).
- Save big consequences for big problems (like coming home very late.)

How can you balance it all?

It takes time and energy to deal effectively with a teenager. You may have your own worries—stress from job hunting or job overload; time pressures from family and community activities; relationship problems; or concerns with other family members.

- Take time for yourself; even 10 minutes a day can help.
- Spend time each week on a hobby.
- Exercise with a spouse, a friend, or your teen.
- Talk to other parents of teens. Find out what works for them.
- Say “no” to outside demands.
- Remember your spiritual life. Read, talk with friends, attend religious services.

Manage Your Time and Money

Teens often have activities that compete with family time and wants or needs that increase costs. Here are some ways to manage time and money when you have teenagers.

- As a family, set priorities for family, school, and work, and use those priorities to make decisions about the use of time and money.
- Have a master calendar of important events. Give teens the responsibility of putting their events on the calendar.
- Have teens take responsibility for time management.
- If a 14-year-old wants you at a soccer game, he/she should put the event on the master calendar.
- Be wary of teens working long hours at part-time jobs. Work may teach responsibility and provide income but should not interfere with school.

Eat Well, Be Well

Research shows that teens who eat meals with their families have higher academic achievement, fewer behavioral problems, higher quality relationships with peers and parents, and eat more nutritious meals, when compared to teens who do not eat meals with their families. If you cannot eat a family meal together, healthful eating and living are possible.

Here are some tips to help your family eat well and be well:

- Put fresh fruits on the counter or table where they’re easy to see and grab.
- Keep a bag of vegetables in the freezer, ready to thaw and eat.
- Keep fruit that’s canned in juice on hand.
- Use vegetables and fruits that need little peeling or chopping—baby carrots, bananas, and grapes.
- Keep bottles of water in the refrigerator.
- Visit MyPlate.gov for dietary guidelines.

Decide what foods your family should eat, then keep a supply of those foods in ready-to-eat or easy-to-fix form.

Teens in Serious Trouble

Research shows that teens need parental involvement, love, guidance, supervision, support, and consistency. Remember to:

- Reward positive behavior.
- Talk to your teens about their interests and find ways to say “I love you.”
- Involve teens in setting clear rules and consequences.
- Be consistent—follow through on consequences.
- Do not speak in anger—apply consequences when calm.
- Respect your teen. Acknowledge their growing independence and ability to make decisions.

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