

Essentials for Parenting Teens

Things for Parents and Families to know

Teens experience many changes as they prepare to become adults. Understanding what's happening in your teens' life and in your relationship with them can help you support your teen—and yourself—during this interesting, rewarding, and often challenging time.

Specifically, the age of 11 to 17 years old, teens experience an increase in hormone levels which is accompanied by radical changes from their bodies to their emotions and social lives. These physical and emotional changes can be accompanied by feeling self-conscious, low self-esteem, frustration, and sadness. These are all normal and expected during this time for teens.

Relationship Changes

Parenting shifts during this time. Parents will go from directing almost all aspects of their children's lives to encouraging them to think for themselves. Offering suggestions and asking questions instead of directing teens on how to solve a problem can give the teen a sense of fulfillment while giving them real world experience. At this stage, teens are beginning to form their own thoughts and opinions about the world around them. It is normal to feel unappreciated and have a sense of loss during this transitional time. Many teens at this stage begin to spend more time outside of the home whether that be with their friends, having a job, or doing extracurricular activities. While this time is difficult, it is necessary for teens to become healthy and productive adults.

Self-Care

Parenting teens comes with its challenges. It requires an abundance of energy and patience. Teens may show strong emotions, mood changes, and uncertainty on what they want to do. Taking time to focus on your well-being and your needs (physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially), will allow you to be a positive role model for your teen.

Managing Emotions

An important part for parents is to help their teen manage and understand their emotions. The rational part of the brain is still developing so teens rely on the emotional center for decision making. This in turn brings about many different emotions, some at the same time. It is common to feel upset and react negatively when your teen does or says something. Try:

- Observing your teen to recognize emotion (tone of voice, posture, facial expression, behavior, etc.)
Listen, empathize, and avoid judgment
- Ask how they feel (don't tell them how they feel) Coach
from a place of calmness
- Pause and become aware of your own emotions if needed
- If you need to step away to gather yourself or your emotions, that is normal!
- Walk into another room
- Take deep breaths
- Get a drink of water or eat
- Get fresh air



- Wash your hands (the sensation of the soap and water on your hands can be helpful)
- Take a walk

Each situation will be different and may require different steps. As long as it is not a crisis, it is okay to sit quietly with one another or to step away and take a break. You can always come together later whether that is in a few hours or a few days. Once you and your teen can come together calmly, that is what matters. Try not to take your teens' behaviors and emotions personally, they are a part of their experiences and development, not necessarily a reflection of your ability to parent.

The best way to know if you are ready for a conversation with your teen is by asking yourself: Is this a good time to coach my teen on emotions? Am I feeling safe and calm? Do I have the time and energy to focus on my teen? If the answer is yes, then go ahead and begin emotion coaching. If the answer is no, take as much time as you need to get to a place where you are okay to begin emotion coaching.

Helping your teen through these types of situations and times is a wonderful short term because they will feel seen and heard. Long term, it will help to build a strong bond! Ask open-ended questions so your teen can become aware of their feelings and really listen to their answers. Once the conversation has started, keep it open as a two-way conversation, express empathy and understanding, and that their emotions are valid. Offering advice is tempting but don't do it. Teens will more than likely shut you down thinking they are being told what to do. Instead, wait for them to approach you asking for help finding a solution or problem solving.

Encourage Independence

It can be saddening when your teen begins to spend less time with you and starts doing more on their own. This is normal and healthy! Encourage teens to explore interests outside of the home. This can be discovering hobbies that teach them new skills, keep them active, and have fun.

Even though they may be spending more time outside the home, always make sure they know you are available. Try planning time for connections such as sit-down dinners, a game night, or other activities you can do together. Make sure you are really listening to them and responding empathically. These times together can help you both to feel connected when you aren't together.

Explain that all emotions are okay, but not all behaviors are. When your child gets older, it may be helpful to talk about reasonable expectations to encourage independent thinking and decision making including defining acceptable behaviors. If they are allowed to be apart of setting expectations, they may be more willing to follow your guidance. Expectations need to be shared clearly and openly. By talking to your teen about decisions they have made, listening to them can help them make better decisions or to see the connection between what they decided to do and the consequence of that decision. As teens get older, expectations will shift. Keeping an open line of communication is key so everyone is aware of what is expected.

Praising Your Teen

Of course, there are times of frustration and doubt, but there are also so many positive aspects of teen development. Teens look to the future, form their own opinions, and begin forming who they want to be. They build closer connections, begin romantic relationships, learn new things, and find ways that express themselves. Take the time to praise their efforts. Be aware of their day-to-day life, ask questions, listen closely to their answers, get to know who and what is important to them.

If you see your teen doing something that you like, be sure to acknowledge that. Be descriptive and specific because this will help your



teen to understand what they have done right and they will be more likely to replicate it. Encouraging words help your teen to know that they are loved and appreciated. If your teen is okay with it, follow up with a high five, hug, or other physical signs of affection. A smile goes a long way as well. The memories and milestones that you share today form the basis of a healthy relationship between you and your teen as they become adults.

Where can parents find more information?

CDC Parent Portal, Teens: Raising Healthy Children

www.cdc.gov/parents/teens/healthychildren.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/parents/teens/healthy_children.html

Healthy Children – American Academy of Pediatrics: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx>

Info About Kids – American Psychological Association: <https://infoaboutkids.org/>

National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASCM): Tools for Supporting Youth and Teens:

<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/resource/other/dbasse/wellbeing-tools/interactive/tools-for-teens.html>

National Association for Children of Addiction : <https://nacoa.org/>

PEPS: <https://www.peps.org/ParentResources/by-topic/resources-for-parents-of-adolescents-teens>

Emergency Resources:

If in immediate danger, dial 911

Suicide/Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988

Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Love is Respect National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline: Text LOVEIS to 22522 | Call 1-866-331-9474

National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline: 1-800-656-4673

Domestic Violence Hotline: Text START to 88788 | 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) | Chat online at thehotline.org

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline: Call or text 1-800-422-4453 | Chat at childhelphotline.org

National Resources on Substance Abuse Partnership to End Addiction: Text CONNECT to 55753

Resource: CDC, Essentials for Parenting Teens, 2024



The Illinois Coalition for Community Services (ICCS) is an organization that is committed to the goal of reducing poverty and increasing community health and well-being through direct action, community organizing, and providing critical services to address the fundamental needs of the most disadvantaged.