

# Parent Pages

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## Characteristics of Positive Parent-Child Interactions

Each age and stage of growth presents special joys and challenges, and the pre-teen and teenage years are certainly no exception. In fact, parenting during adolescence may present unique situations as a result of the physical, cognitive, social and emotional changes taking place in your child's life. The period of adolescence includes the stages of early adolescence (from approximately age 10 to 13); middle adolescence (ages 14-17); and late adolescence (ages 18-22), and how you parent during this period may differ depending upon whether your child is just entering adolescence or is in the middle or later stages of adolescence.

The good news from research studies is that parents have a great deal of influence on the behavior of their adolescents. This Parenting Page offers strategies to help you parent your teen during the adolescent years.

**Value your teen's independence:** Teens want to know that their parents trust them. They want to be treated like grown-ups. One job of adolescence is for the teen to begin to become independent from parents. During this process, the bond that you have with your child may feel different, even threatened. Know that this bond will not be broken, although it may change as your child goes through the process of becoming an independent individual. Here are some ways you can help your child do this:

- **Give up some control.** Be willing to give away some control in those areas where you trust your teen to make good decisions, while continuing to guide your child in those areas where you feel your teen has limited knowledge or experience. For example, you could allow your teen to stay out later on weekends as long as you know where they are going and whom they will be with. But continue to offer guidance in those areas where your teen is learning a new skill, such as driving a car or being exposed to new experiences such as balancing an after-school job with schoolwork.
- **Be open to your teen's new sense of independence.** Show an interest in your child's new ideas, values, and goals. Encourage your teen's different viewpoints and allow them to express their distinctive ideas freely. Provide opportunities for your teen to openly express their ideas, allowing the teen to feel valued as a member of the family. However, maintain a balance between a teen's need for independence and autonomy and setting limits and appropriate boundaries. For example, if your 13-year-old expresses a desire to see an R-rated movie, listen to the teen's point of view and then respond in a manner that is consistent with your values.

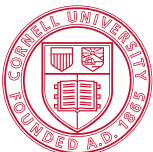
- **Resist the urge to clamp down.** As your teen moves toward independence, try not to become harsh in your parenting. This will only set the stage for arguments and power struggles. Save these types of discussions for important topics such as curfews, choice of friends, and safety issues such as driving. Be flexible on day-to-day decisions that you are willing to give up some control over, such as your teen's choice of hairstyle, and how clean or dirty their room is. Realize that your teen simply wants to try out new ideas that may be separate and different from your ideas. Choose your battles wisely!
- **Realize how important your teen's peers will become.** Teens will likely spend more time with their friends than with parents. Parents are often surprised at just how important friends become and how unimportant parents become! Knowing your teen's friends, welcoming them into your home and providing transportation to their events allows parents to monitor their teen's activities and remain connected to their child.

### STRATEGIES FOR PARENTING ADOLESCENTS

- Parent with warmth and respect, avoiding the tendency to be overly controlling or overly lenient.
- Show a constant and genuine interest in your adolescent's life. Spend time with your child and monitor their activity.
- Understand that your adolescent is undergoing developmental changes in cognitive, social and emotional development. Try to adapt to these changes in a supportive manner.
- Communicate your guidelines and expectations for standards of conduct to your teen.
- Be a role model for dealing with problems and conflict. Understand that some conflict is expected (and normal) as your teen strives for independence and autonomy. Your behavior will serve as a model for how to handle conflict.
- Commit to the journey. Adolescence is a *period of development* and teens do not turn into young adults overnight. Parenting during this stage may differ depending upon whether your child is in early, middle, or late adolescence.
- Be a resource for your teen. If you are warm and accepting in your parenting, your teen will feel free to express their concerns to you.

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Adapted from John W. Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2008).



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