

Parent Pages

Characteristics of Positive Parent-Child Interactions

Each age and stage of growth presents unique 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.

Be connected to your teen: Teens want parents who show interest and approval, who are available, and who let them know that they are loved. Your adolescent knows that you care about them when you show interest in them, spend time with them, and provide support. Although teens are moving toward independent behavior and forming their own identities, they still want and need a connection to their families. You can demonstrate to your teen that you are interested and connected by engaging in these actions:

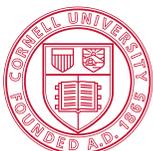
- **Take notice of what matters to your child.** Ask about their friends, school, activities, recent movies, and current events.
- **Spend time with your teen.** Go to their school events, participate in their extracurricular activities, see a movie together or take a walk. Engage in activities that your teen enjoys. Is your son a soccer player? Watch a soccer match together. Does your daughter like dancing? Take in a dance performance together. Research studies show that teens actually enjoy the company and attention of their parents. Participating in an activity that your child already enjoys is a great way to connect with your teen.
- **Be engaged in the conversation.** Ask questions and show a genuine interest in your teen's responses. Listen closely and respond in ways that show your teen that you care and that you are not judging their responses. Have conversations about everyday topics as well as serious discussions.

- **Show affection.** Most adolescents need their parents to show them love and affection. Although they will not admit to it (and may even act embarrassed) adolescents need both inward and outward displays of affection. For inward acts, use your words to encourage your teen, express how much they are appreciated and loved and how pleased you are to have them as your child. Also show your love through outward, physical displays such as hugs, taking your child to dinner, or doing something special together.
- **Be accepting.** Show your teen that you accept them for the person that they are—despite any faults or flaws. Try not to say, “I love you, but I just wish you would not hang around with Tim.” Or “I love you, but I wish you would clean your room more often.” Leave off the “*buts*” and simply express your unconditional love and acceptance for your adolescent. Teens need acceptance from their parents, even if they are not good at showing it. Accepting them as individuals increases their self-esteem and makes them feel like they are an important part of the family.

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.

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



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension

Prepared by Kimberly Kopko, Extension Associate in the Department of Policy Analysis & Management at Cornell University. Visit the Parenting in Context website at www.parenting.cit.cornell.edu.

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