

# Parent Pages

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## 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.

**Monitor and supervise your teen:** Teens want parents who listen and try to understand, set good examples, and offer guidance. A delicate balance of allowing your teen freedom while still exercising a level of parental control is key to your teen achieving independence.

- **Eat dinner together.** Eating dinner together as a family provides an ideal opportunity to connect with your teen. Talk to your child about their day, their friends, and current events. It also shows that you care enough to take time to listen and learn about their interests. Research finds that teens who eat dinner with a parent five or more times during the week are less likely to smoke, drink, use drugs, get into fights and engage in sexual activity.
- **Monitor your teen's activities.** Know where your teen is at all times. Ask where they are going after school, when they will be home, and which friends they will be with. Parents who actively monitor and guide their teens tend to have adolescents who experience positive relationships with peers and who are less likely to use drugs.
- **Check-in regularly.** Talk to your teen after school to ask about their day. If your teen is scheduled to be at a friend's house, call the friend's parent to confirm the arrangement. Be involved without being overbearing. Your teen may protest your monitoring behavior, but setting boundaries and sticking to them will show your teen that you love them.
- **Try to parent in an authoritative style.** Authoritative parents are warm but firm. They encourage their adolescent to be independent, but as parents, they manage to keep limits and controls on their teen's actions. Authoritative parents openly discuss family rules with their teen, which allows the teen to express their views. Authoritative parents are nurturing, while providing the rules, guidelines, and standards that teens need.

- **Pay close attention to after-school time.** After school time has been called the “three-to-six o’clock problem” because it is during this time that teens tend to be alone at home while their parents are still at work. The absence of an adult in the home may lead some teens to get into trouble. If possible, enroll your teen in an after-school activity or coordinate with other parents to take turns watching each other’s children. Research shows that parents who monitor their children and parent in a style that is firm but fair help their children cope better in resisting peer pressure during the after-school hours.

## 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*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2008).



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