

SECRETS OF PARENTING

Building a Great Relationship with Your Teen

"You don't understand me at all!"

"You treat me like I'm still a kid!"

"You never let me have any fun!"

"Why does it matter to you?"

Has your teenaged son or daughter ever said these things to you? Does it seem as though you're always arguing with your teen? How does it make you feel? How does it make your teen feel?

Parenting teenagers can be hard work. Teens today face many difficult issues. And they often have to make serious decisions (like whether to use drugs or have sex) at a very young age.

*The **secret of parenting** is to help your teen make good decisions by building a close relationship with him or her.*

Teenagers are complicated and interesting. While they may be sweet, funny, and helpful one minute, they can often be grumpy and rebellious the next. Teens are constantly changing because they are facing many important tasks at this important stage of life. They are becoming more independent, developing important peer relationships, and trying to get used to their changing bodies.

What Can You Do to Help Your Teen?

Build a strong relationship. Teens who feel close to their parents are more likely to come to them for advice when faced with tough decisions. They are also more likely to follow their parents' advice. Teens who feel close to their parents often have higher self-esteem and are better able to stand up to negative peer pressure.

Show your love. You can show your love in ways that are comfortable for both of you. Be affectionate. If your teenager is comfortable with warm affection, hug and kiss him...tell him you love him. If your teenager is shy about expressing affection, respect his need for some distance and find other ways to show that you care.

Take an interest in what your teenager is doing and who her friends are. Be there for your teen. Go to her athletic events and science fairs. You can even exchange e-mail with your teenager to show your interest in her activities. E-mail may feel like a safe way for teens to talk through tough issues with you.

Show your support in your teenager's successes and failures. Let him know you love him no matter what. Being there lets him know you

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care and may help him decide to make a wise choice when faced with a tough decision to “go with the crowd.”

Have fun together. Try to spend some quality “fun time” with your teen each week, even if it is only 10 minutes listening to music or going to a ball game together. Look for common interests with your teen and build on them. Show your teen that she can have fun and relax with you! Do things she wants to do like going to the mall or practicing her driving skills in a big parking lot.

Talk to your teen. Open up communication about being a teenager by telling your teen what you were like as a teenager. Discuss your views on important issues like dating, drugs, and school. Talk about some of the mistakes you made growing up. Show your teenager that you’re not perfect, either.

Listen first; then ask questions. When your teen talks to you, listen! Make sure you pay attention to what he is saying, and don’t put down his thoughts and beliefs. Show interest. Ask your teen about things that are important to him. Ask about his friends, his interest in music, or his favorite subject at school. However, don’t quiz your teen, or you might drive him away. Instead, ask for his opinions. You can even ask him for advice. But then be silent and listen.

Relationships take time. Spend time together, listen, and let teenagers express themselves.

Reference

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When your child comes to you feeling angry, sad, or frustrated, how do you respond?

1. Don't worry about it. You'll be fine.
2. What do you have to be sad about? There are bigger problems in the world! What did you do to cause this?
3. I know how you feel. I have felt that way, too. That feels terrible. You will feel better if you cry.
4. Wow—it sounds as if you are sad about that. Situations like this are tough, but we can probably figure out a way to handle this.

These responses represent these types of parents:

1. The Dismissive parent plays down feelings. This parent faces a scraped knee or a social

- snubbing with, “You're all right.” This kind of parent feels uncomfortable with a child's display of emotions and feels uncertain about what to do.
2. The Disapproving parent criticizes or punishes the child for expressions and believes emotions make people weak or that negative emotions must be stopped.
3. The Laissez-faire parent accepts emotions and offers comfort, but doesn't teach problem-solving techniques.
4. The Emotion Coach accepts a child's feelings without belittling or denying them. This parent doesn't try to control the child's emotions. Instead, the emotion coach sees each expression as an opportunity to build a bond and teach problem-solving.

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