



Positive Parenting Strategies for the Teenage Years

As children learn new life rules and lessons during the teen years, parents too, need to adapt their parenting techniques. Although teens generally begin spending more time away from their families, they still need active and aware parents. Parenting with love and approval, and taking a positive approach even in moments of frustration are effective ways to guide children during the teen years. This guide discusses strategies for positive parenting, including promoting self-esteem, communicating, resolving conflict and teaching responsibility. *Note*—this guide provides general information only. For specific questions or concerns about parenting issues, speak to your child’s doctor, school, or a mental health professional.

Parent-Teen Relationships

One of the most profound changes in parent-teen relationships is the amount of time parents and children spend together. Teens are home much less often than in earlier years and, when they are home, they are usually in their rooms. Not only do teens enjoy the privacy, it also provides them with an uninterrupted opportunity to listen to music, chat with friends, do homework, etc. Teens also go through periods in which they don’t want to be seen with their parents as they try to assert their independence. This peaks around age 14 but it typically fades quickly. While these natural tendencies of teenagers make it more of a challenge for parents to interact with teens, it’s important that you make time to do so. And, since your time together is limited, make that time pleasurable.

The following tips may help you and your teen spend enjoyable time together:

- **Let your teen see your fun side.** While your child still needs a parent, not a pal, show your teen that you are fun and interesting. Share your excitement about hobbies you have in common, talk to them about aspects of your work they may find interesting, and talk about activities that you find fun. Let your children see you as a person, not just as a parent.
- **Develop common interests.** A teen who enjoys baseball may enjoy talking with a parent about their favorite baseball team. An art-loving teen will appreciate a parent who can discuss the Impressionists or the modern movement. Even if you don’t share common interests, go out of your way to learn about their interests and try to find common ground.
- **Allow your teen space.** Don’t take it personally if your teen isn’t always in the mood to talk, or if he or she wants to be alone with his or her friends. Teens have the right to privacy (within safe limits), just as you do.

Promoting Self-Esteem in Teens

Having a positive self-esteem or self-image means feeling valuable and worth loving. Since teens spend so much time with their friends, a large portion of a teen’s self-image comes from their peers. However, it’s important that you also regularly praise your child and help him or her develop a positive self-esteem. The way teens perceive themselves directly affects how they act and behave.



Teens with a positive self-image tend to feel more competent, have more friends and do better in school. Try these suggestions for fostering self-esteem in your teen.

- **Pay close attention, but respect your teen's privacy.** Being involved shows your child that you care. Know what courses and extracurricular activities your child is involved in and who his or her friends are. Little things, like remembering the names of your child's friends and occasionally asking how they are doing sends the message that you consider your child's life important. At the same time, try to respect your child's privacy and don't pry into insignificant details that your child may not want to share.
- **Compliment your child often, and make sure the praise is genuine.** Your child may shrug off your praise, but underneath, he or she is likely to be glowing with pride.
- **Attend school events.** Your schedule may prevent you from going to every game or recital, but make an effort to be there for the most important ones.
- **Respect your child's concerns.** Don't belittle your child by dismissing his or her worries when he or she is upset.
- **Never criticize your child.** If you disapprove of a behavior, make it clear that you dislike the behavior—not your child. If you must comment on your teen's activities, behaviors, music or fashions, try to be positive rather than hurtful. For example, say, "I really like the sweater you wore last week. It's more flattering than the tank top you have on today."
- **Encourage your child to explore a variety of activities and find areas of expertise.** Succeeding at one or more activities will help your teen gain confidence. Additionally, those who succeed in one area of life tend to have successes in many areas of life.

- **Avoid teasing your child.** Many teens are so sensitive that even good-natured teasing can hurt their feelings.

Communicating Effectively With Teens

Most teenagers still want to communicate with their parents—just not all the time. Privacy, to many teens, is an important part of becoming an adult, and teens may not want to tell you everything that's happening in their lives. This doesn't mean that they are hiding information; rather, it's a sign of becoming more independent. You, in turn, may need to adapt your method of communication by making opportunities for meaningful conversations and learning to "read between the lines." The following tips may help you better communicate with your teen.

Active/Empathetic Listening

Teenagers often complain that their parents don't listen to them. To listen actively to your teen, be sure your conversations take place at a time and in a setting where your complete attention is available. When your child speaks, listen and then repeat your child's major points by saying, for example, "If I understand correctly, you're upset because your teacher seems to be giving you work that is too advanced." It also helps to focus on what you perceive to be your child's feelings about a situation: "I gather you're really angry about this." In this way, you can avoid misunderstandings and, at the same time, help your child identify and manage his or her emotions. Toward the end of the conversation, ask your child if there is anything else he or she would like to talk about and make reference to the discussion. Over the next few weeks, follow up; for example, ask about the level of work the teacher is assigning, how your child is managing it, and how he or she feels now. By reminding your child of the conversation, you show that you were listening—and that you care.

Empathize With Your Teen

Everyone, including your teen, needs empathy—listening without judgment and connecting on an emotional level. For example, if your son complains about the way a teacher treated him, try not to lecture about how he should make an effort to get along better with the teacher; that won't ease his frustration. Instead, listen with a sympathetic ear and tune in to your son's emotions. Think about how you would feel if you had a conflict at work; do you want someone to listen, or hand out advice? Instead, reassure your child that you understand by acknowledging his or her feelings and offering empathy, support and guidance.

Talking With Your Teen

Meaningful conversations with your teenager can be extremely satisfying. An exchange of thoughts, ideas and observations with your teen opens the door, even if just an inch or two, to the many changes he or she is experiencing. It can reassure you that you are doing a good job as a parent; or, at other times, a conversation might tip you off to situations to watch out for. When talking to your teen, consider the following tips:

- **Avoid lecturing.** Teens generally don't like to hear how things used to be or how you think they should be—and may tune you out.
- **Don't act as if you have all the answers.** Ask your child for his or her ideas on how to handle situations. This shows you value your teen's thoughts and opinions.
- **Keep any judgmental thoughts to yourself.** Stick with the subject at hand.

- **Allow your child to talk without interruption until he or she gets to the point.** It may take your child a few minutes to state what is really on his or her mind.
- **Show respect for your child's point of view, even if you don't agree with it.**
- **Develop common interests with your child such as a sport or favorite movie.** Enjoying similar interests and hobbies provides a rich source from which to draw for future conversations.

Tip—Your child should be aware of your schedule and how to reach you at all times. Although teenagers may act as if they don't care, it may make them anxious not knowing your whereabouts and how to get in touch.

Developing Opportunities for Communication

With so many responsibilities and time pressures facing families today, opportunities for family communication can be few. It's important, though, to set aside quality, face-to-face time together to promote communication and assure your child that you are available and accessible. Consider the following approaches:

- **Build structure.** Consider making one dinner a week mandatory for all family members, allowing no telephone interruptions or visits from friends. This gives family members a chance to talk about what's going on and to focus on each other.
- **Seize the moment.** Catch up with your child whenever you have an opportunity, though this may require some spontaneity. Being in a car together is almost always a good chance to talk; ordering a pizza to share when you have a quiet night at home is another way to catch up.

- **Eliminate distractions.** Cutting down on household distractions, such as the radio and television, sets the stage for conversation. Try not to bury yourself in the paper or a book when it's possible to have real communication.

Disciplining Teens

In many ways, there is no more difficult time to practice discipline with your child than during the teen years. These years are a time when parents should be promoting independence by reducing the amount of input they have in their child's life, yet the consequences of bad decisions on the part of teenagers can be great. To help you strike a balance between being overly strict and overly permissive, the following discipline tips may help.

- **Don't overreact.** Overreacting to actions and attitudes that don't actually hurt anyone, including your child, shifts the focus away from what really matters. For example, if you really don't like your child's latest music or fashions, but they are not offensive or inappropriate, do your best to leave your child alone and complain to your spouse or a friend instead.
- **Be clear about the rules.** By making the house rules well known to all, your teen can't plead ignorance for breaking one. You may even want to post house rules in a common area. Additionally, it may help to get input from your teen when making the rules. For example, when setting your teen's curfew, decide together on the time he or she must be home. This may help your teen be more responsible in upholding the rule.
- **Listen before you act.** Sometimes teens honestly do have a valid reason for breaking the rules. It is entirely possible that there really was a flat tire, or that the person who was supposed to provide the ride home showed up late. Hear your child out before you reprimand him or her.
- **Let the punishment fit the crime.** The most effective lessons for teaching teens are consequences, and the seriousness of the consequence should match the crime. A 16-year-old who stays out two hours after curfew needs a strong enough penalty to underscore the seriousness of the offense, perhaps being grounded for two weeks. Not completing an assignment—and getting a poor grade as a result—is an example of a natural consequence that for some teens may be the best teacher.
- **Follow through.** Believe in the rules you set, and once you put them in place, be consistent and stick with them. You can probably assume that your child will come up with many reasons why “this one time” you should bend the rule; occasionally, there may be a valid reason, but consistency is usually the best policy.
- **Remember the power of praise.** Remember to compliment your teen for handling life well. Much of what he or she is learning now is new, and sometimes verbalizing what a good job he or she is doing can do wonders for your teen's confidence—and his or her willingness to cooperate with you.

Setting Limits

All teens need a solid structure in which to function, and the limits you establish and uphold—through your discipline—should provide that. For instance, you'll probably need to set limits for curfews, certain behaviors, school and household responsibilities, and treatment of others. The issues that are important to you, and for which you demand respect, are the real stepping stones in helping your child understand what it is to become an adult.

When setting limits for acceptable behavior, pick your battles. Teens enjoy doing things that make them distinctly different from their parents; it's a normal part of the separation

process, but it can be unnerving for you. For example, a few years ago your child probably dressed as you wished for special occasions; now your child may insist on wearing something you consider inappropriate. The question facing parents, then, is whether to make an issue of the situation. Ask yourself if the situation is worth a confrontation. It may help to remind yourself that your son's green-tipped hair or your daughter's moody behavior is temporary and your child will grow out of it. You may want to save your energy and the impact of your directives for the bigger issues, such as respect for others, academic responsibilities, etc. These are the ones that will help your child eventually create a framework for successful living.

Resolving Conflict With Teens

A certain amount of conflict is natural during the teen years, just as it was when your child was a toddler—also a period of growing independence. Whereas once your child accepted the hour he or she was to be home, now it may be cause for argument. The party your child just “has” to go to, which you won't allow, can trigger tears and tantrums. Even minor issues such as a comment you make about something as insignificant as a movie may be cause for an argument. This struggle is the result of two new directions your teen is starting to take. The first is the issue of separation; chronically disagreeing with you may be your teen's way of showing that he or she is a unique individual. The second is your teen's growing desire for more independence; you may feel that certain freedoms must wait for a few years, but most likely your child does not see things that way.

It may be helpful to know that the conflict most parents endure during their child's teen years usually subsides by the age of 16. In the meantime, here are some tips that may make conflicts easier to manage:

- **Determine the underlying cause of the conflict.** Think beyond the immediate argument to determine what is really at the base of the conflict. For instance, you might insist that your 15-year-old be home during the summer evenings by 8 o'clock—a time when his or her friends are still outside enjoying the twilight. The real conflict, in this case, may be that your child is mature enough for greater independence, but you may be establishing rules that are more appropriate for an 11- or 12-year-old. If you find yourself frequently arguing about similar issues, you may need to re-evaluate your child's maturity, and consider whether the rules you've set are appropriate.
- **Pay attention to your child.** If the conflicts with your teen are more random in nature—spontaneous outbursts that have no central theme—it may indicate that your child is simply seeking your attention. This can be confusing because teens, in their desire to be perceived as independent, often pretend they don't need their parents when, in fact, they need them as much as ever.
- **Don't attempt to resolve a fight when tempers are flaring.** During an argument, often no one can agree on a reasonable solution. Instead of shouting, both of you should walk away and calm down. Agree to come back to the problem later, when you both have had time to quiet down and give meaningful thought to the issue.

- **Set up regular discussion times with your teen.** Having a scheduled time—perhaps Sunday after dinner—to talk or take a walk together can be enormously helpful. A critical part of these get-togethers is offering suggestions and ideas about changing or updating certain rules. This is also an opportunity for your teen to be heard. When your teen knows you are listening, he or she is more apt to listen to you.
- **Seek outside help if necessary.** Should the conflicts with your teen escalate, become more intense, or become destructive to your relationship, seek help. Talk to your child’s doctor or guidance counselor or ask if your employer offers any benefits that provide counseling, information or referrals on parenting issues.

Teaching Values to Teens

An important developmental task of adolescence is learning to make sound decisions that are guided by personal values and opinions. Ideally, some values have already been established in early childhood through the influence of family, friends and teachers. During the teen years, children are frequently required to act upon the values they have learned as they are faced with more important decisions that test their morals and beliefs. In making these choices, teens begin to refine their set of personal values.

To some degree, the values your child adopts may be defined by your own family and beliefs. Religion, attitudes toward the extended family, and ethnic and cultural identity are just some of the areas in which family values vary considerably. However, there are certain values, such as honesty and kindness that most likely you have been teaching to your child since infancy. Your job is to reinforce them in the teen years. Should your child come home announcing how “cool” it is that a friend shoplifted, be firm about your disapproval. It’s likely that your child is testing you with these types of remarks to see how important honesty really is to you.

Parents as Role Models

Parents serve as constant role models for their children. Although you may not realize it, your child watches you—so be aware of the messages you are sending. Ask yourself the following questions and think about the values you are exhibiting through your own behavior:

- Are you always honest? Do you ever ask your child to lie for you?
- Do you avoid gossip?
- Do you show respect for other people?
- Do you practice good health habits?
- Do you treat your own life as valuable? For example, do you seek out hobbies and pursuits that are pleasurable for you?
- Do you have a regular set of friends who you respect and enjoy?
- Do you take pride in what you do—at home and at work?

You can reinforce your value system with your child by taking advantage of teaching moments as they come along. The nightly news, current movies and books, situations at school and with friends—all of these contain subjects that can lead to a discussion of values. But most important, continually reinforce your own values through your actions and words—and be consistent. Inconsistency will only confuse your teen and make it difficult to determine what your true values are.

Mutual Respect for the Entire Family

Respect is another value that is important to teach within your home. When it comes to showing respect, you must truly act as the model for your children. As children turn 14 or 15, they become keenly aware of having a measure of respect shown to them. By showing this respect you are winning on two counts: You are helping your children feel good about themselves, and you are modeling what you expect in return—for yourself and others in the family. While parenting styles may vary, you may want to try these simple,

straightforward rules for establishing respect in your household, and adapt them as you see fit:

- Name-calling of any sort is not acceptable. Label the action if you must, but never the person.
- Bullying, either verbally or physically, will not be tolerated.
- Belittling, humiliating or other attempts to make another person feel less worthy are not allowed.
- Apologize when you are wrong.
- Listen without interruption to what others have to say.
- Respect others' rights to privacy, property and independent thoughts.

By establishing rules for living with others in a respectful manner, you are fostering an open, friendly and comforting environment for you, your partner and your children. These guidelines can also help your children learn how to develop strong, healthy relationships with others that are based on trust and respect.

Teaching Teens Diversity

Many teenagers in their mid high-school years have a strong sense of fairness and a tolerance for those who are different from themselves. This fair-mindedness, however, isn't typical of younger teens who still want to be like others and often ridicule those who are different. Not all young teens are intolerant, but be prepared to handle it should this attitude surface in your teen. The following suggestions may help you build tolerance in your child.

- **Don't let intolerant comments slide.** Any time your teen makes an intolerant comment, make it a point to ask why he or she feels this way (without becoming angry or defensive) and engage him or her in a general discussion about tolerance.

- **Point out examples of intolerance.** Be watchful for examples of discrimination on the news, in movies, etc., especially for more subtle forms of discrimination that your child may not pick up, such as why there are few women in certain jobs. Invite your teen to express his or her opinion of why this is so, and talk about how certain groups are excluded from the privileges that others enjoy.
- **Look for positive examples in your daily life.** Your child will benefit from seeing how people happily and successfully live in tolerance and acceptance of others. For example, point out similarities between your family and families of different races, religions and cultures.

Community Participation

It is also important to teach your child the value of helping others. In recent years, many schools have instituted a requirement for students to perform community work to help them build a broader sense of individual responsibility. The goal is to teach children the importance of volunteer work, and open their eyes to the situation of others who are less fortunate. Even if your child's school doesn't have such a program, you can promote awareness of the importance of community service. The following tips may help:

- Encourage your child to participate in extracurricular activities that promote active community work, such as Key club, Habitat for Humanity, etc.
- Suggest that your child participate in food or clothing drives, or fundraisers, and other charitable activities.
- Review charity requests as a family, discussing what each charity does and deciding together which ones the family should support.
- Involve the whole family. Take part in community activities through your church, neighborhood association, tenants groups or other volunteer groups.

Teaching Teens Responsibility

Another major role for parents of teens is encouraging freedom and independence and getting them to accept additional responsibilities. Of course, the amount of independence your teen should be given, and how soon, may cause some friction between you and your child. By the early teen years, a child should be practicing some routine household responsibilities such as chores. Throughout the teen years, increasing emphasis should be placed on academic work, family obligations, job responsibilities and finances.

Encouraging your child to make his or her own decisions—and holding him or her accountable for the consequences—may help your teen to become more independent. The following tips may help prepare your child for adulthood.

- **Support activities and friendships outside the family.** Holding your teen back will probably not stop him or her from exploring new activities or relationships. In fact, it may make your child hide things from you. Encouraging exploration allows your teen a sense of control over his or her interests.
- **Agree on weekly domestic chores.** Making your teen responsible for dusting once a week, taking out the trash, or cooking one meal each week may help your child feel like a part of the overall family and will prepare him or her for the day when domestic chores are solely your teen's responsibility.
- **Help your teen make wise decisions.** For example, if your teen wants to go on a camping trip the weekend before a math test, ask him or her to list the likely outcomes for each alternative (camping versus time for study). Stress that ultimately the decision is his or hers. Giving your teen the chance to make such a decision (and suffer the possible consequences) may teach the lesson that decisions have consequences.

- **Allow some flexibility.** Providing your child with some room to negotiate rules may teach him or her to plan ahead. For example, if your child's regular curfew is 11 o'clock, but he or she wants to attend a play that ends at that time, then agree upon a new curfew for that evening.

Teaching Teens Academic Responsibility

Beginning around the seventh grade, children often discover that school becomes more demanding. As they move into junior high and high school, teachers place more emphasis on the seriousness of academics. The work generally becomes more difficult, and regular studying becomes a necessity for most. Plus, this is a time when students learn about the importance of their permanent record—the transcript that spells out all of their grades. While school can become more stressful for many, these growing academic demands are also an important element in teaching greater responsibility toward life in general.

As your child progresses from junior high to high school, continue to support him or her in school as much as possible.

Although you may still wish to review homework and school projects once your child reaches high school, he or she should be able to manage most responsibilities with less guidance from you. In fact, an older teen may even resent too much parental involvement. Consider the following tips for teaching your teen academic responsibility.

- **Provide your child with an assignment book.** A notebook helps your child record, prioritize and meet deadlines. Help your child organize it so that his or her deadlines and priorities are met.
- **Promote a good study environment.** Make sure you provide all necessary materials for your child to complete assignments (e.g., pens, pencils, dictionary, calculator, etc.), and make any physical changes your child feels would help him or her study better (e.g., a quiet place to study, good

lighting, a bigger bulletin board, an atlas or world map, extra shelving, a desk elsewhere in the house, etc.).

- **Discuss how outside activities impact his or her school schedule.** If your child has too much on his or her plate (e.g., sports, band practice, a part-time job, etc.), and schoolwork is suffering as a result, discuss why and when it might be necessary to scale back other activities to make sure academic responsibilities are being fulfilled.
- **Touch base with your child regularly.** Although you are teaching your teen independence, remain involved enough to ensure that he or she is meeting academic responsibilities.
- **Never do work for your child.** If you do your child's work, the lesson you are teaching your teen is that he or she can avoid responsibility.
- **Stress the importance of homework.** As work gets more difficult, children need the daily reinforcement of homework to advance in a subject matter. This will become more apparent to students as they reach ninth and tenth grades and are dealing with more demanding classes.
- **Be enthusiastic and compliment your child when he or she brings home good grades.** Avoid asking your child why he or she got a 95 instead of 100, or a "B" instead of an "A"—congratulate your child on the good grade even if it isn't the top one.
- **Discuss poor grades with your child and come up with a plan for improvement.** Ask your child why he felt he received the poor grade and brainstorm ideas on how he or she can improve. By talking to your child, you can help your child recognize that his or her academic performance is a direct reflection of his or her work and study habits—and consequently, he or she has the power to change it.

- **Stay involved.** Offer to help—perhaps by reviewing test questions, going over vocabulary words or Spanish lessons, etc.—but don't offer to do assignments.
- **Attend all parent-teacher nights, and talk to school personnel about your child's strengths and weaknesses and how you can best help your child from home.** Share what you learned with your child or have them attend certain portions of meetings (if appropriate).
- **Encourage your child to seek extra help if necessary.** Often, teachers offer to help students who are having trouble in class; or you can consider hiring a tutor for your child if he or she continues to struggle academically.

Preparing for College

If your child is planning to go to college, he or she will need to start the application process during the second half of junior year of high school. Often the school's college counselor or guidance counselor will hold a meeting for teens and parents to explain the process and the timeline for college applications, as well as the possibilities for financial aid. If your child's school doesn't have such a meeting, call for an appointment with your child's guidance counselor to discuss these issues.

Promoting Learning at Home

The value of a stimulating environment, so heavily stressed for children in their younger years, is sometimes forgotten when it comes to teenagers. However, the teen years are when some of the most exciting and interesting qualities of a child are starting to emerge, and regular conversations about a range of subjects can be both productive and

fascinating. Following are some suggestions for promoting learning at home:

- **Stay involved.** Initiate conversations with your child about various subjects; he or she will probably enjoy informing you about his or her teacher's observations and theories, as well as his or her own thoughts.
- **Discuss current events.** Bring up current events, community affairs and other topics to stimulate engaging conversations with family members.
- **Visit cultural places.** Consider seeing movies with a historical focus, visiting museums, art exhibits, cultural events, etc. Visit a Civil War battleground or a Revolutionary-era fort en route to your beach vacation.
- **Encourage reading.** Make books, magazines and newspapers a staple in your home. Be a role model by reading often. You may even want to choose books with your teen that you will both read and discuss later.

Television and Computers as Learning Tools

Teens, as a group, tend to be fascinated by the media—whether it's television, music or the Internet—and this can be a bonus in today's technology-driven world. More than ever before, teens are using media to research and complete assignments; communicate with friends and teachers; and even build their own web sites. Educational software can help your child get ahead in school, learn to manage money, create art and much more. At the same time, teens are at risk of being exposed to inappropriate content. As always, being involved in your child's life is the best way to make sure he or she is gaining educational benefits from the media—and avoiding the dangers. You can easily supervise your child's computer and television use by keeping them in the family room or a common area of your house. Ask your child regularly what types of assignments he or she is researching on the Internet; review software,

video games, television programs and movies before you allow your child to view them; and limit the amount of time your child can spend on the computer or watching television. Additionally, consider calling your local cable company to block inappropriate channels and/or install blocking software on your computer that can block access to certain web sites or chat rooms.

Teaching Teens to Manage Money

Teens need to learn how to handle their money—whether from an allowance or from a part-time job—in a responsible manner. Learning to manage money well may build your child's self-esteem and provide him or her with a sense of security. The following tips may help you teach your child to successfully manage money.

- **Consider giving your child an allowance as a way of teaching financial responsibility.** Decide with your child the amount that is reasonable and what expenses the money will cover. Start smaller with younger teens, providing enough money to cover weekly entertainment plans, school incidentals and small purchases such as nail polish or baseball cards. Older teens, though, may need more money to cover clothing or other larger purchases.
- **Help your child find a job that interests him or her.** This will help your teen realize that jobs have benefits other than just paychecks.
- **Create a budget with your teen.** Whether you provide an allowance or your teen earns money by working, help your child learn to budget. For example, if your child wants to go out for pizza with friends after school on Tuesday, show him or her on paper how this will impact his or her expenses.

- **Don't give in to requests for extra money.** Once you have agreed on the amount of your child's allowance (or once his or her weekly paycheck has been spent) try not to give in to requests for more money. Strict adherence is the only way a child truly learns how to manage his or her money. If you are continually ready with your wallet in hand, your child will assume that somehow there will always be someone to rescue him or her.
- **Stress the importance of savings.** One way a child learns the benefits of saving, is to decide on a particular item he or she would like to own. Discuss with your child how much money is to be put away over what span of time; the reward at the end is not only the desired item, but he or she will also see how a little money saved regularly becomes a large amount.

There is some controversy among professionals and parents over paying a child for helping out around the house. If you feel strongly that unpaid regular chores are part of your teen's family responsibility, you should, of course, act accordingly. In fact, some experts say that having unpaid chores can help a child feel more confident about his or her role in the family unit. If, however, your child needs more spending money than you want to provide in an allowance, you may want to consider incorporating both points of view: Assign some regular, unpaid chores, and offer others as financial incentives.

Teaching Teens About Jobs

Whether or not your child is planning to attend college, teens can learn much about themselves and the world, and gain a good deal of independence and responsibility, by holding a job. Among other things, they learn the importance of being punctual, fulfilling duties, and how to manage their time and tasks. Plus, a job helps teens appreciate the value of a paycheck and can also teach them how to save and budget.

Note—A student applying for financial aid for college should be aware that any savings in his or her name are considered applicable for college—in fact, schools expect students to contribute around one third of their total assets, while parental assets are counted at a lower rate (around five to six percent of their assets). If your teen would like to find after-school employment, evaluate the situation together. In most cases, experts recommend that teens limit their work hours during the school year to no more than 10 to 15 hours per week to allow them enough time to devote to their studies, sports and other school activities. In fact, the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) is designed to protect minors by restricting the number of hours they are allowed to work. Restricting your teen's working hours assures that he or she has adequate time to spend at home—and gives you a chance to keep an eye on what is going on in your teen's life. Rather than regular, hourly employment, your child may even do better with occasional employment, such as baby-sitting, golf caddying, pet-sitting, doing yard and house chores, running errands, etc.—all of these offer opportunities for teens to make money without compromising time spent on school and family activities.

Helpful Resources

The following organizations may prove helpful with parenting teens.

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)

3615 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016
202-966-7300
www.aacap.org

This organization helps parents and families understand developmental, behavioral, emotional and mental disorders affecting children and adolescents. The web site offers fact sheets for parents and caregivers and information on child and adolescent psychiatry.

Family Education Network

www.familyeducation.com

This web site offers message boards, as well as tips and articles on a variety of family subjects, including advice from parenting, health and medical experts on school violence, education values, discipline, date rape, sex education and more. It also provides links to related web sites.

National PTA

541 N Fairbanks Court, Suite 1300
Chicago, IL 60611
800-307-4PTA (4782)
www.pta.org

The National PTA deals with a variety of education issues and develops current information, programs and projects encouraging parents to participate in their children's education. They focus on issues such as violence prevention, critical television viewing skills, environmental awareness, HIV/AIDS education, self-esteem in children, school bus safety, legislative issues, raising alcohol-and drug-free children and more.

The National Parenting Center

www.tnpc.com

This web site offers online articles written by parenting authorities, live chat and a list of book reviews and related web sites. Topics addressed include body image, communication, drug use, sex, suicide, education and family relationships. Members receive a monthly newsletter.

National Stepfamily Resource Center

www.stepfamilies.info

A nonprofit membership organization that provides education, training and support for stepfamilies. A quarterly publication is available, as well as books and other resources for adults and children. There is a fee to become a member of this organization. Non-members can also purchase its publication, "Stepfamilies."

TV Parental Guidelines

PO Box 14097
Washington, D.C. 20004
202-879-9364
www.tvguidelines.org

This organization offers precautionary information so parents can choose which television programs they want to see—or not to see. A copy of the guidelines can be requested in writing or can be accessed on the web site.

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