



HELPING TEENS NAVIGATE PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Parents, You Can Help!

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KEEP THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP GOING AND GROWING DURING TEEN YEARS

When it comes to influencing your teen, perhaps the most important thing you can do as a parent is to have a strong bond with your teen that can start developing long before the teen years. A close relationship with parents is the best insurance that teens will choose friends parents approve of. It also helps teens say “no” to peers when they don’t want to do something. Studies tell us teens still want and need the security of a strong parent-teen relationship.

- A good relationship between you and your teen will help weather storms such as disagreements over choice of friends or activities. Keep listening, setting limits, and providing support, even when your teen does not appear to be listening. Don’t get caught up in arguments over trivial issues.
- Make it easy to stay involved in your teen’s life and to be aware of his or her choice in friends. Talking with your teen about what he or she is planning to do and with whom can occur as part of day-to-day conversation, not just in response to your demand for information.
- Be sure your home is a comfortable place for your teen to really be his or her own person. It should be a place in which your teen can feel secure, relaxed and protected from the world. If your teen feels supported and loved, it will be much easier for him or her to talk with you about problems with peers.

CONTINUE TO SHARE YOUR VALUES AND STANDARDS

It is important to share values, beliefs, and standards throughout all your parenting years. Family beliefs and values influence teens in their choice of friends. For example, if parents value education, children will look for friends who also value education. Your influence may not show up immediately, but will surface as teens become older and begin looking toward their future.



HELP YOUR TEEN DISCOVER STRENGTHS AND TALENTS TO BUILD SELF-ESTEEM

When children are younger, they try and do many things. As they get older, their interests and activities naturally narrow. Help your teen discover what his or her strengths and talents are, especially those that aren’t as obvious. Knowing what he or she likes to do, wants to do, and is good at doing, can help build self-esteem and help guide your teen in setting his or her own direction in life.



ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE AND DECISION MAKING WITHIN THE FAMILY

Saying what you want takes practice, and teens may not feel comfortable voicing an opinion in a group of peers. Saying “no” to something that sounds like fun takes even more practice. For example, a teen might be tempted to go with friends to a party at the home of someone who has a bad reputation and whose parents aren’t home. The teen knows it’s a bad idea, but may or may not say so, depending on their level of confidence in speaking their mind and doing what they know is best.

That sense of independence and knowing oneself can be encouraged as children are growing up. The family provides an excellent context for teens to practice making decisions that are age appropriate and fit with their abilities, and to practice sharing their opinions. It is important for a teen to be okay with expressing one’s opinion and being able to respectfully say “no” to friends.

TALK WITH YOUR TEEN ABOUT SITUATIONS HE OR SHE COULD ENCOUNTER.

Encourage discussion that anticipates situations your teen may encounter with peers, and how he or she will respond. Have him or her think about alternative responses so he or she can choose one that feels right. That’s part of the practice needed to be independent and to make one’s own decisions.

GET TO KNOW YOUR TEEN’S FRIENDS

One way to positively influence your teen’s relationships with their peers is by getting to know his or her friends. There’s a difference between being involved and being intrusive, but if you maintain that balance it can be fun and you will learn to appreciate both your teen and your teen’s friends for their individuality and differences. Here are some tips:

- Look beyond the outward appearances of your teen’s friends. The teen years are the time to try out things. Some of those choices don’t always work out. But superficial things like hair color, choice of jewelry, and the latest fashions or music are just that — superficial. They don’t tell you about your teen’s friends’ personality, values, or goals.
- Understand that spending time with peers has moved up on your teen’s list of priorities. That probably means spending less time with you or the whole family. Be willing to adjust your expectations: Family time is still important, but so is time with friends.
- Make your home a welcoming place to your teen’s friends. That could mean providing food and a gathering place, and making sure teens have some privacy — even though you are still there to monitor things.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR TEEN’S CHOICE OF FRIENDS

If you’re concerned about your teen’s choice of friends, keep a close eye on their activities. Don’t openly criticize your teen’s friends, but don’t welcome them with open arms either. Your lack of response will give your teen a clue about your feelings.

Be clear with your teen about your non-negotiable rules - rules that you will not change since your teen’s well-being is involved. These rules also reflect important family values. An example of a non-negotiable rule would be: no riding or driving with anyone who has used alcohol or drugs.

Continue to stress the non-negotiable rules and continue to strengthen parent-teen communication and the parent-teen relationship.



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