The Five Basics of Parenting Adolescents

Parents of teens need to hear positive, concrete ways to be a parent. They also need support. The five parent messages below give parents some things to do as well as reinforcing the fact that parents still matter in a teen’s life. The parent messages could be used in a variety of ways:

- Use a single total message in newsletters. Eventually use all five.
- Use just the main idea in places where there is limited space: school programs for drama, music or sports events, and letters to parents.
- Put on school websites in a parent section.
- Use in church bulletins.
- Use in places where parents will see them.

Please credit the source listed at the end of this resource.

For additional information on families with teens issues and resources, check out the University of Minnesota Extension website at: www.extension.umn.edu/family/families-with-teens/.

PARENT MESSAGE #1

Love and Connect – Most things about a teen's world are changing. Don't let you're your love be one of them.

Teens need parents to develop and maintain a relationship with them that offers support and acceptance. The relationship needs to change as the teen gradually matures. To keep the relationship going:

- Watch for moments when you can show affection, respect, and appreciation for your teen.
- Don't be surprised if your teen is critical. They are testing out opinions and ideas.
- Spend plenty of time just listening.
- Treat each teen as a unique individual.
- Pay attention to your teen's new interests and abilities.
- Continue to have your teen contribute to what goes on in the home.
- Spend time together.
- Be open to learning from your teen.
PARENT MESSAGE #2

Monitor and Observe – Monitor your teen's activities. You still can and it still counts.

Teens need parents to be aware of their activities including school performance, work experiences, after-school involvement, peer relationships, adult relationships, and recreation.

- Let your teen know that you are interested in their whereabouts, how they are getting there and back, what their activities are, and who they will be with.
- Know that monitoring is most easily done if you have a relationship with your teen that is built on love and trust.
- Rely on good communication, observation, and talking with other parents to help you monitor your teen.

PARENT MESSAGE #3

Guide and Limit – Loosen up, but don't let go.

Teens need parents to uphold a clear but evolving set of boundaries, which keeps encouraging increased competence and maturity.

- Maintain family or “house” rules around the non-negotiable issues like safety and family values while negotiating on things like household tasks and schedules.
- Communicate expectations that are high, but realistic.
- Choose your battles. Ask yourself what is really important.
- Use discipline as a tool for teaching, not for venting or taking revenge.
- As your teen’s abilities change, work out new responsibilities and privileges accordingly.

PARENT MESSAGE #4

Model and Consult – During the teen years, parents still matter; teens still care.

Teens need parents to provide ongoing information and support around decision making, values, skills, goals, and getting around in the larger world. Parents teach by example and two way communication.

- Set a good example around risk taking, health habits, and emotional control.
- Express your personal position around moral, social, spiritual, and political issues.
- Model the kind of adult relationships you would like your teen to have.
- Respond to your teen's questions truthfully, taking into account their age and maturity.
- Keep family traditions.
- Support your teen's education in and out of school.
- Help your teen get information for planning their future.
PARENT MESSAGE #5

Provide and Advocate – You can’t control their world, but you can add to and subtract from it.

Teens need parents to make available not only adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter and health care, but also a supportive home environment and a network of caring adults.

- Look for resources in your community, school, and religious institution that will provide positive adult and peer relationships.
- Make informed decisions about opportunities as you work with your teen.
- Arrange or advocate for preventive health care.
- Seek out people and programs to support and help you handle parental responsibilities and challenges in raising teens.

This fact sheet was originally written by Colleen Gengler, Extension Educator, for use with the Research Update for Professionals online course in 2006. It was reviewed November 2012 by Jodi Dworkin, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Department of Family Social Science, University of Minnesota.

This fact sheet was adapted from the following resource:
An online version of this resource is available at http://hrweb.mit.edu/worklife/raising-teens/?q=worklife/teens-young-adults/raising-teens.