

EXTENSION UPDATE

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Parenting Teenagers

It has been said that the teenage brain is like a car with a good accelerator but a weak brake. With powerful impulses under poor control, the likely result is a crash. Parents need to continue parenting their teens to help them accelerate and brake when necessary to avoid an accident. The following are seven guidelines for parents of teens.

What you do matters. Many parents mistakenly believe that by the time their children have become teenagers, there's nothing more they can do. Wrong. Studies clearly show that good parenting continues to help teenagers develop in healthy ways, stay out of trouble, and do well in school.

Stay involved. Many parents who were actively involved in their child's life during the early years withdraw when their child becomes a teenager. This is a mistake. It's just as important for you to be involved now, maybe even more so. Participate in school programs. Get to know your child's friends. Spend time together.

Adapt your parenting. Many parenting strategies that work at one age stop working at the next stage of development. As children get older, for example, their ability to reason improves dramatically and they will challenge you if what you are asking doesn't make sense to them.

Set limits. The most important thing children need from their parents is love, but a close second is structure. Even teenagers need rules and limits. Be firm but fair. Relax your rules bit by

bit as your child demonstrates more maturity. If he or she can't handle the freedom, tighten the reins and try again in a few months.

Encourage independence. Many parents wrongly equate their teenager's need for independence with rebelliousness, disobedience, or disrespect. It's healthy for adolescents to push for autonomy. Give your children the space they need to learn to be self-reliant and resist the temptation to micromanage.

Explain your decisions. Good parents have expectations, but in order for your teenager to live up to them, your rules and decisions have to be clear and appropriate. As your child becomes more adept at reasoning, it's no longer good enough to say "Because I said so."

You can still show love. Don't hold back when it comes to giving praise for their efforts and showing physical affection. There is no evidence that adolescents are harmed by having parents who are unabashedly loving, as long as you don't embarrass them in front of their friends.

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