

# EXTENSION UPDATE

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## Thriving with Your Teen

According to research, teens themselves say their parents' beliefs, values, and actions do sink in. Those are the values teens come back to as they grow and develop.

This column doesn't have all the answers but it does have some ideas to help strengthen your relationship with your teen. Start with these 10 ideas to be the best possible role model.

You may find that you already know and practice many of these ideas, but it never hurts to be reminded of all the great stuff you do for your teens!

**1. Love them no matter what and let them know it.** Teens need large doses of compassion and love. They need to know you are someone who always loves them, even when you don't love their behavior.

It's normal for teens to be focused on relationships with their friends, but that doesn't mean your relationship doesn't matter. Researchers have asked lots of teens and they have responded: now is when they need you the most, so stay connected!

**2. When teens mess up, teach them how to do better next time.** Teens will go against their parents' wishes at times, some more than others. The important thing is not what they do, but how you react. You could lose your cool, but then nobody will be better off, including stressed-out you.

So instead, take a deep breath and use that incident to help your teen and you learn something. By doing this, you can:

- Strengthen your relationship – “What’s wrong? Let’s talk about this.”

- Teach teens how to make amends – “So you took something that wasn’t yours. How will you return it or repay the person?”
- Teach teens how to rebuild trust – “We had an agreement that you’d be in by 10 p.m. You should have called to tell me you’d be late. Now you’re grounded. Keeping the terms of the grounding will let me know you can be trusted again.”

The point is to help kids learn a better way of doing things and not to hurt them through angry words or actions.

**3. Tell the kids what’s good about them and tell them often.** Sometimes it’s hard to find good things to say about moody 14-year-olds who are driving you crazy. It’s not as easy as when they were seven, looking to you for guidance at every turn.

Find out what makes your kids unique and wonderful, and praise them over and over for it. You have no idea how powerful these six little words are: “You did a really good job.” Even if the only response you get is a shrug, you can be sure they heard you.

**4. Build trust.** Read this carefully, because this is a tough one. One of the hardest, yet most important tricks for parents of teens to pull off is to recognize their increasing independence but also know they still need you.

Teens may look like adults, they may tell you they’re grown up now, they may even act adult once in a while, but the truth is they’re kids who still need your guidance.

Teens are going to push, complain, whine and even try to get around your rules. Don’t give up. Know your rules and enforce them consistently. Predictability is your friend! When you become predictable, teens will trust.

**5. Listen, really, really listen.** When teens say, “I want to tell you something,” it’s time to give them your undivided attention. To show you are listening, make eye contact with them, nod your head,

show concern, and wait until they are finished to respond. Everyone deserves to be heard. The great thing is when you hear them out their ability to listen to you will also increase.

**6. Show respect.** Teens and adults who show respect to one another will spend more time working together and less time struggling against each other.

Show respect by acknowledging their feelings, their ideas and even their complaints. That doesn't mean you have to do things their way. You just have to let them know you heard what they said. Teens will show respect to you from the way you show respect to them.

**7. Help teens belong.** Teens who know they have friends, teachers, parents, family, and other adults in their lives have more fun and more success.

Encourage their interests and help them find positive ways to take part with others. Get to know their friends. Building bridges between a teen's family and friends is good for everyone. You'll know your teens better when you know their friends.

**8. You don't have to do it alone.** You deserve help and support. Raising a teen is a tremendous responsibility. Talk with other parents and family members to get support for the everyday stuff. Talk with counselors and health care professionals to problem-solve the tough situations.

**9. Don't give up.** It takes time to build solid relationships with teens. Don't give up when the going gets tough. You are shaping the life of another human being. This job really matters and the payoffs are great!

**10. Keep your sense of humor.** Being able to laugh together really builds a family and being able to laugh at your mistakes helps you carry on.

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