



Healthy Lifestyle

Tween and teen health

Helping an adolescent become a caring, independent and responsible adult is no small task. Understand the parenting skills you need to help guide your teen. [By Mayo Clinic Staff](#)

Adolescence can be a confusing time of change for teens and parents alike. But while these years can be difficult, there's plenty you can do to nurture your teen and encourage responsible behavior. Use these parenting skills to deal with the challenges of raising a teen.

One of the most important parenting skills needed for raising healthy teens involves positive attention. Spend time with your teen to show him or her that you care. Listen to your teen when he or she talks, and respect your teen's feelings. Also, keep in mind that only reprimanding your teen and never giving him or her any justified praise can prove demoralizing. For every time you discipline or correct your teen, try to compliment him or her twice.

If your teen doesn't seem interested in bonding, keep trying. Regularly eating meals together might be a good way to connect. Better yet, invite your teen to prepare the meal with you. On days when you're having trouble talking to your teen, consider each doing your own thing in the same space. Being near each other could lead to the start of a conversation. You might also encourage your teen to talk to other supportive adults, such as an uncle or older cousin, for guidance.

Don't pressure your teen to be like you were or wish you had been at his or her age. Give your teen some leeway when it comes to clothing and hairstyles. It's natural for teens to rebel and express themselves in ways that differ from their parents.

If your teen shows an interest in body art — such as tattoos and piercings — make sure he or she understands the possible health risks, such as skin infections, allergic reactions, and hepatitis B and C. Also talk about potential permanence or scarring.

As you allow your teen some self-expression, remember that you can still maintain high expectations for your teen and the kind of person he or she will become.

Get to know the technology your teen is using and the websites he or she visits. Keep the computer in a common area in your home. Remind your teen to practice these basic safety rules:

- Don't share personal information online.
- Don't share passwords.
- Don't get together with someone you meet online.
- Don't use texts or other tools to gossip, bully or damage someone's reputation.
- Don't text or chat on the phone while driving.
- Don't plagiarize.
- Talk to a parent or trusted adult if an interaction or message makes you uncomfortable.

To encourage your teen to behave well, discuss what behavior is acceptable and unacceptable at home, at school and elsewhere. Create consequences for how your teen behaves. When setting limits:

- **Avoid ultimatums.** Your teen might interpret an ultimatum as a challenge.
- **Be clear and concise.** Rather than telling your teen not to stay out late, set a specific curfew. Keep your rules short and to the point.
- **Put rules in writing.** Use this technique to counter a selective memory.
- **Be prepared to explain your decisions.** Your teen might be more likely to comply with a rule when he or she understands its purpose.
- **Be reasonable.** Avoid setting rules your teen can't possibly follow. A chronically messy teen might have trouble immediately maintaining a spotless bedroom.
- **Be flexible.** As your teen demonstrates more responsibility, grant him or her more freedom. If your teen shows poor judgment, impose more restrictions.

Not sure if you're setting reasonable limits? Talk to your teen, other parents and your teen's doctor. Whenever possible, give your teen a say in establishing the rules that he or she is expected to follow.

While it's important to consistently enforce your rules, you can occasionally make exceptions when it comes to matters such as homework habits, TV watching and bedtime. Prioritizing rules will give you and your teen a chance to practice negotiating and compromising. Before negotiating with your teen, however, consider how far you're willing to bend. Don't negotiate when it comes to restrictions imposed for your teen's safety, such as substance abuse, sexual activity and reckless driving. Make sure your teen knows early on that you won't tolerate tobacco, alcohol or other drug use.

Enforcing consequences can be tough — but your teen needs you to be his or her parent, not a pal. Being too lenient might send the message that you don't take your teen's behavior seriously, while being too harsh can cause resentment.

Consider these methods when corrective action is called for:

- **Skip the drama.** Calmly explain the unacceptable behavior and the consequences. If your teen starts to overheat or melt down, put off the conversation and explain why. Tell your teen that you'll talk to him or her when the whining, sulking or yelling stops. Ignore your teen in the meantime.
- **Correct but don't scold.** Make sure you reprimand your teen's behavior, not your teen. Avoid using a sarcastic, demeaning or disrespectful tone. Also, avoid reprimanding your teen in front of his or her friends.
- **Assign more work.** Give your teen additional household tasks.
- **Impose additional restrictions.** Take away a privilege or possession that's meaningful to your teen, such as computer time or a cellphone.
- **Ask your teen to suggest a consequence.** Your teen might have an easier time accepting a consequence if he or she played a role in deciding it.

Be consistent when you enforce limits. Whatever disciplinary tactic you choose, relate the consequences to the broken rule and deliver them immediately. Limit punishments to a few hours or days to make them most effective.

Also, avoid punishing your teen when you're angry. Likewise, don't impose penalties you're not prepared to carry out — and punish only the guilty party, not other family members. Never use physical harm to discipline your teen.

Remember, teens learn how to behave by watching their parents. Your actions generally speak louder than your words. Set a positive example and your teen will likely follow your lead.

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