

# Parenting skills: Tips for raising teens

*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.

## Show your love

Positive attention is a must for teens. 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. Don't assume that your teen knows how much you love him or her.

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.

Keep in mind that unconditional love doesn't mean unconditional approval. You can discipline your teen while showing that you won't withdraw your love based on his or her behavior. If you're pointing out something that your teen could do better, keep your criticism specific to the behavior rather than making personal statements about your teen.

## Set reasonable expectations

Teens tend to live up or down to parental expectations, so set your expectations high. But instead of focusing on achievements, such as getting straight A's, expect your teen to be kind, considerate, respectful, honest and generous.

When it comes to day-to-day accomplishments, remember that teens gain confidence through success, which can prepare them for the next challenge. As your teen takes on more difficult tasks, instead of setting the bar yourself, support him or her to determine what he or she can handle. If your teen comes up short, react supportively and encourage him or her to recover and try again. It's more important to praise your teen's effort than the end result.

## **Set rules and consequences**

Discipline is about teaching, not punishing or controlling your teen. To encourage your teen to behave well, discuss what behavior is acceptable and unacceptable at home, at school and elsewhere. Create fair and appropriate consequences for how your teen behaves. When setting consequences:

- **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. Make consequences immediate and linked to your teen's choices or actions.
- **Explain your decisions.** Your teen might be more likely to comply with a rule when he or she understands its purpose. There might be less to rebel against when your teen knows that a limit is being imposed for his or her safety.
- **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.

When enforcing consequences, reprimand your teen's behavior — not your teen. Avoid lecturing your teen about his or her shortcomings and the abstract, far-off consequences, which can motivate your teen to prove you wrong. Don't use a sarcastic, demeaning or disrespectful tone. Embarrassing your teen can instill a sense of shame, put him or her in a defensive position, and distract him or her from reflecting on what he or she has done wrong. Before you speak, consider asking yourself if what you're about to say is true, necessary and nonjudgmental.

## **Prioritize rules**

While it's important to consistently enforce your rules, you can occasionally make exceptions when it comes to matters such as homework habits and bedtime. Prioritizing rules will give you and your teen a chance to practice negotiating and compromising.

However, consider beforehand 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 that you won't tolerate tobacco, alcohol or other drug use.

## **Set a positive example**

Teens learn how to behave by watching their parents. Your actions generally speak louder than your words. Show your teen how to cope with stress in positive ways and be resilient. Be a good model and your teen will likely follow your lead.

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