

5 Tips for Building a Healthy Relationship with Your Teenager

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As any parent will know — or at least will have been warned — a child's teenage years can be some of the toughest. It can be particularly hard if their parents are [divorced or separated](#).

A whirlwind combination of puberty, hormones, high school years, and the growing need for independence can be a challenge for any parent. In a household with a teenager, every day can seem like a battle — sometimes over the smallest things. As a parent, you want to be able to love and guide your child like you always have, but you need to understand that just as they're changing, your relationship with them needs to change as well. These are some of the most formative years of their lives, so it's good for them to know that their parents are there for them, and are willing to realize that they have a young adult who deserves their respect and guidance.

The Benefits of Positive Parenting

As a parent, you've no doubt looked out for your child through all their early years. Now that they're an adolescent, they crave independence and the freedom to make their own choices. "As our kids grow into teenagers, they gain a great deal of independence," says [Planned Parenthood](#). "That's a normal and natural part of growing up. But even as they increase their independence, we need to keep our relationships as close to them as we did when they were small children. They still need us to love, guide, and have fun with them."

As much as your teen wants to control his or her own life, you as a parent need to project some measure of guidance and authority. Although a teen may be convinced that they know everything there is to know and that they're old enough to make their own decisions, a lack of life experience can hinder them from making the right decisions. This ties into the fear of any parent: that their teen will begin moving toward harmful behaviors.

Teenagers tend to experiment with their own boundaries and experiences, and they can be especially susceptible to peer pressure. Although you can't be around every hour of every day to monitor your teen's behavior, you can act as an authority figure, as well as someone to talk to and confide in. You just have to be sure you're communicating to your teen that you're present, and that any concerns you have are borne out of love and for their own benefit.

Communicating that you understand your child's adolescent independence but the parent is still the boss is important for setting healthy boundaries and creating a solid family structure. The goal is to raise a healthy, well-balanced young adult who knows right from wrong, cares about others, and takes pride in themselves and their abilities. This may seem like a tall order, but the adolescent years are the best time to start.

Here are five ways you can help keep your relationship with your teenager strong and happy for both sides:

1. **Spend time together.**

When a child becomes a teenager, it suddenly becomes a lot less cool to hang out with Mom and Dad.

However, reinforcing family structure can help provide support and a sense of [well-being](#) for a teen — not to



mention a potential avenue for a teen to confide in a parent. [WCSAP](#) suggests bonding activities such as family meals (without the TV on or cell phones present), joint chores, board game nights, or volunteering. Any way you can ensure your teen knows that you're present can be a good thing as they struggle through adolescence.

2. Set a good example.

You don't need to be a saint, but it certainly helps for teens to look up to their parents as role models for their own behavior. Be mindful of how many substances you use in front of your teen — including [excessive alcohol and smoking](#) — as they can easily mimic what they see at home as acceptable habits.

3. Set boundaries.

You may have a young adult in the house, but you are still the main adult, and you need to make sure your child knows that you're the one who sets the limits. The [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#) focuses on the importance of calmly and firmly setting boundaries for your teen. Not providing boundaries can lead to teens going into adulthood with the disjointed sense of having too much freedom.

4. Be respectful.

With the prevalence of cyber-bullying, teens these days have more to worry about than ever when it comes to criticism and taunts. "Teasing can feel like torture to a sensitive teen," notes WCSAP. Don't make fun of your teen, no matter how lightly, and refrain from using negative language or put-downs. Hearing this from their parental figure can hurt a teen's self-esteem, and can make them feel unhappy and unsafe at home.

5. Show you care.

Whether it's by making them a special lunch or by sending them notes "just because," it's important that your teen feels loved and supported by their parents during these turbulent years. If you have a fight with your teen, take the time to apologize and emphasize that you love them no matter what. Put a focus on the strength and unconditional love of the family unit, and encourage your teen to be a part of that as well.

It's not always easy being the parent of a teenager, but it's absolutely worthwhile to take the time to foster a strong, healthy relationship that promotes respect and love between both parties. Although every teenager is different, it's fundamental that a parent provide both guidance and support as their child works through the storm of adolescence.

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