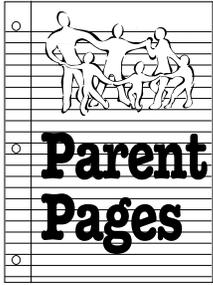


Teens Need Parents as Much as Young Children Do



Adolescents are as needy for the caring of adults as infants. They may be able to talk a good game, but teens are neither emotionally nor physically mature enough to take care of themselves. Despite the generational warfare that sometimes exists between parents and their teenaged children, parents still serve as the primary role models and primary sources of support for their teen sons and daughters. By definition, the teen years are years of change. And change, by definition, is scary. Our teenage children deserve abundant nurturing and attention.

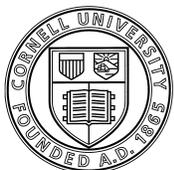
Parents provide important role models

In their search for and struggle to create a personal identity and a sense of self, teens will look to adults whom they admire for skills, attitudes and values that they can imitate. In some cases, teens may copy the fashions and behavior of contemporary celebrities whose values may not be the kind most parents want their kids to acquire. Parents can be good role models for their teens and have a positive effect on their development. The following practical tips may help a parent understand how their own behavior can positively influence the behavior of a teenaged son or daughter.



- ◆ If you want your teen to communicate openly and honestly with you, then you must be open and honest with them. Encouraging your teen to talk to you means being attentive and being willing to really listen. It also means being prepared to deal honestly and candidly with sensitive subjects like sex and drugs. Avoid being judgmental and eliminate "communication closers" like criticizing or sympathizing. When engaged in a meaningful conversation with your teen, do not let yourself be distracted or interrupted, which only gives a message that the interruption is more important than what the teen has to say. A good first step is turning off the TV or putting down the newspaper when your teen wants to talk.
- ◆ If you want your teen to deal responsibly with alcohol, you need to show them how. Do you drink when you are upset or stressed out? Do you over-indulge? Is drinking a significant part of the home environment? Do you drink to escape? If so, you may be teaching your teen those very behaviors you want to prevent.
- ◆ If you want your teen to be trustworthy, you need to demonstrate your trust in him or her. Teens need limits that are flexible enough to meet their changing needs and permit self-direction. Negotiating limits is a good way to build trust between you and your teenager. Giving your teen responsible choices also helps him or her to become more independent.
- ◆ If you want your teen to respect you, then you must, in turn, respect your teenager.

~Continued~



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Showing respect means respecting their privacy. It means acknowledging and accepting their feelings without trying to change them. It also means respecting the ways - dress, hairstyle, music, and choice of friends - in which a teen is trying to express himself or herself.

Parents provide physical and emotional support

Teens need their parents for support, comfort, reassurance, feedback and guidance - just like younger children. Here are some specific ways parents can support teenaged children.

- ◆ ***Be available.*** Being physically present isn't enough. Let your children know you are willing to listen, are interested in what's going on in their lives and want to be helpful when needed.
- ◆ ***Keep your problems to yourself.*** Teens have a full enough plate already. This means doing what you need to do to take care of yourself.
- ◆ ***Be nurturing, both verbally and physically.*** Don't assume that kids know you love them. These three words - "I love you" - can't be spoken too often. The same holds true for a hug or even a tuck up in bed. The bumper sticker's question: "Have Your Hugged Your Child Today?" applies to teenagers, too.
- ◆ ***Be companionable.*** Although teens begin to spend more and more time away from home, seize opportunities to participate with teens in activities they enjoy. It can be as simple as watching a favorite TV show together, following a sports team, cooking a favorite recipe or going to the auto show. Don't be afraid to issue the invitation. Sometimes all a kid is waiting for is to be asked.
- ◆ ***Don't assume the other adults in your teenager's life will clue you in.*** While your teen's friends may confide in their parents, don't assume these parents will give you the scoop on your child's behavior. Too often parents fear losing their children's confidence so much that they won't pass information on to other parents. Schools, too, can't be counted on. Guidance counselors and teachers may have little time to let parents know of difficulties their teen may be having in school.
- ◆ ***Be alert.*** Pay attention to the discrepancy between what a teen says and what they do or how they look. Changes in physical appearance can be early warning signs of disrupted sleep, unhealthy eating patterns or drug and alcohol use. Don't ignore what's right before your very eyes.
- ◆ ***Intervene when necessary.*** If you suspect your child is making dangerous or harmful choices, let him know you know and get help. Pediatricians specializing in the field of adolescent medicine can provide assistance, as can psychologists and other counselors.

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