

Ten Tips from Dr. Kevin Leman for Surviving Your Child's Adolescence

Accept them where they are. Adolescence is a turbulent time for kids. They can be on a roller coaster of moods, emotions, and hormones. Affirm their feelings. They are what they are—and they are real.

Give them choices. Help your teens move toward independence by making sure they have opportunities to make choices and learn from the consequences. Giving kids choices will help them learn how to make good decisions. Responsibility is caught, not taught.

Respect their choices. This is a tough one for most parents. It's hard to stand by and watch our kids make choices we don't want them to make. But it's our goal as parents to move our kids from dependence to independence. This means we have to allow them to make choices and then respect their choices. There are some areas where we can't stand idly by and watch, like drugs and alcohol for example. But for the most part in an age-appropriate way, we should allow our kids to make their choices and live with the consequences, especially when the consequences are not life threatening.

Communicate positively. Clear communication takes work. Learn to listen to what your kids are actually saying. Understand that you've grown up in a different time, so be sure your kids understand you. Listening is the language of love. In doing so, you'll learn much more than if you keep on talking.

Don't talk in volumes. Some parents can't wait for an opportunity to unload verbally or to offer advice and instruction. Don't make every moment in life a "teachable" one. When it comes to talking with teens, less is more.

Handle hassles healthily. Conflict between parents and kids from time to time is a fact of life. These times can be a path to unloving behavior or they can be a path to greater understanding and loving behavior. Working through the conflict takes more emotional involvement than avoiding it, but it is the loving way to care for yourself, as well as your teen.

Do the unexpected. When it comes to setting and enforcing limits, be creative. No, you can't beat kids over the head and force them to do things, but you can't let them off the hook either. Dr. Leman uses the example of a child who was expected to prepare dinner. The child didn't get around to it, so mom and dad went out to dinner alone and then took the meal's expense from the child's allowance. Dr. Leman says, "Doing the unexpected creates a long-lasting shock value."

Don't pick at flaws. Teens are painfully aware of their shortcomings. Generally, they don't need parents to remind them constantly of their weaknesses, failures, and flaws. Criticizing doesn't make the list when it comes to effective parenting skills.

Watch your expectations. Parents want the best for their kids. But keep in mind our kids can't be a "10" in everything. So help your teens discover their God-given strengths and don't expect them to live up to all of your ambitions for them.

Ask for forgiveness. When was the last time you asked for your teen's forgiveness? The parent who tries to appear to be perfect is making a big mistake. In fact, you'll probably be amazed at how much credibility you gain with your children when you're honest with them about your shortcomings. We all make mistakes. Learn to extend the same grace to your kids you would like others to extend to you; it's the same grace God extends to all of us. Remember, God sent Jesus to die for us, not because we were good enough, but because he loves us (Romans 5:8).