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## Stay Connected with Your Teen

As teenagers begin to make more decisions on their own, they are at risk of choosing paths that can lead to behavioral, emotional, and academic problems. Considering the risks that your teen is susceptible to, parenting today is a challenging responsibility. Parents guide their children to adulthood by:

- instilling values,
- helping them develop social skills,
- helping them set and achieve goals, and
- encouraging independence.

### **Connecting can be fun**

Do something fun with your teen - catch a movie, go to the beach, play basketball. In addition to fostering supportive parent-teen relationships, activities like these can also instill sportsmanship, creativity, etiquette, honesty, and respect for each other. Adolescents who think their parents are supportive are less likely to act out to seek the attention and support of their peers. Being more involved with your teen, learning their likes and dislikes, and sharing interests can reduce the incidence of conflict and help maintain a positive relationship.

Establishing an activity that the two of you can participate in together on a regular basis is a good way to keep a connection. You could start a tradition that every Saturday morning, you and your teen go for a walk in the park.

Be available for your teen when they need you. Teens will feel they can rely on you if they know that you will be there when they need you.

### **You are still the parent**

Sharing activities and interests in order to stay connected with your teen does not mean that you should neglect your parental responsibilities. You can maintain that connection and still discipline your teen when needed. Just be sure that you set rules, and expect your teen to follow those rules, consistently. Requiring that your teen follow your rules does not need to interfere with your relationship when rules are supportive of good behavior and not punitive. Explain why the rules are important and why they must be followed. When parents are close to their teens, the teens are more inclined to respect the rules, be cooperative, responsible and happy.

Be a positive role model and a positive influence in your teen's life. The way you treat your teen sets an example for them as to how they should treat others. If you try hard to make a meaningful connection with your teen, they will model that behavior and learn to make meaningful connections with others.

### **Get to know your teen's friends and their parents**

Parental supervision involves monitoring a teen's activities. You can't be with them all the time, so it can be helpful if you get to know your teen's friends and their parents. Knowing other people in the community will give you the opportunity to ask questions about your teen, and you may gain some valuable insight into situations they may not feel comfortable approaching you with. Teenagers need increasing degrees of freedom as they mature, and parents should monitor their behavior in a respectful and appropriate way. You have to trust your teen, and shouldn't let your casual inquiries turn into spying. Your goal is to be assertive, not intrusive.

You can also get to know your teen's teachers. This will give you a new perspective on their activities at school, and it will be easier for you to speak with them if there is a problem at school.

### **Respect and support your teen**

Parents also need to respect their teen's ideas, thoughts and beliefs and guide them in making decisions through problem-solving techniques. Avoid harmful teasing or ridicule. If your teen is struggling with a problem, you should try to help them through it in a positive way, even if you think the problem is silly. Teens have a different perspective than parents, and problems that seem simple for you to solve could seem like huge obstacles to your teen. Also be careful not to compare your teen to their siblings. Treat each of your children as individuals and you will connect with them on a much deeper level.

## **Communication is the key**

Establish open communication with your teen. If they know that you respect them and are willing to listen, they will be more apt to talk to you about tough issues. When they do talk to you, be sensitive to their feelings, even if you don't agree. When you are calm and empathetic about their feelings or their situation, they will be more likely to talk to you again because they will be able to predict your reaction.

Talk to your teen about a variety of topics - get to know them. These talks don't have to be structured lectures, just have a casual conversation. You'll be surprised how much your teen will tell you during a conversation while you are making dinner. Try to have conversations with your teen often and listen closely when you do. This will help you make and maintain a good connection with your teen.

To stay connected with their teens, parents must develop a kind, warm and solid relationship with their teens, demonstrate respect for their teens, show interest in their teen's activities, and set rules for their teen to follow. These positive parental practices may directly or indirectly deter criminal activity, illegal drug and alcohol use, negative peer pressure, delinquency, sexual promiscuity, and low self-esteem.