

Controlling Your Teen

What happened to that little angel? It's called the teenage years and it can be trying on everyone. The combined stress of exploring their independence, the pressures of schoolwork and societal expectations and the hormonal changes your child experiences can create problems for everyone in your family.

Methods of parenting that worked when your child was young may no longer be effective and if your teenager has discipline problems you may find that you need to change your parenting style. Most teens will test the rules more than they did before they entered adolescence. This is normal. Here are some guidelines for teen discipline.

Give your teenager a bit of room to make mistakes and spread his wings. Limit the RULES to those issues that are critical - homework, curfew, health and driving safety. Feel free to provide advice and support on other issues, but don't cast everything in the light of a RULE or you will lose their attention.

While a 'time-out' does not work for an older child, you can use consequences to establish good behavior. By all means, you must tell your child the consequences before enforcing the rule. If she already knows she is responsible for doing the laundry and she does not do it, be sure she understands that the consequence will be that she cannot go out or talk on the phone until the laundry is finished.

While you may have changed things a bit to accommodate your teen you also need to be consistent and avoid changing the rules all the time. If you do find that something isn't working, talk to your teenager and let them know why you are changing the rules he is used to.

It's important to deal with your teen in an adult manner. This means being calm and not flying off the handle. You need to treat them like the adult they are becoming and let them know (in an adult way) that bad behavior is unacceptable. Also let them know you still love them and you will always be there to support them.

While it may be tempting, you must refrain from invading your child's privacy. Don't spy on them or go searching through their room. Give them their privacy and respect.

Also, do not threaten your child. Be consistent and firm. Don't hit them; don't threaten them, unless you want THEM to develop the same behavior.

One thing that is hard for parents of teens to do is to let them make their own mistakes. Don't do everything for them. They need to learn while you are still there to support them. And, they won't learn if you do everything for them.

Using guilt to control your teen is a no-no. Help them understand why it is in their best interests to do what you want them to do. Don't cry or make them feel badly about their behavior.

Establish an understanding of what you consider 'critical' versus what you would 'prefer'. For example, keeping their grades up and doing their homework may be paramount to you, while keeping their room clean EVERY WEEK may simply be a preference.

As your child ages, you'll have to change the kind of activities you share and the time you spend together to be something that you can both enjoy. Don't force your teenager to continue activities they've outgrown.

Try to establish a schedule that will keep you in daily contact with your teen. Be sure your family eats dinner together or spends family time together and don't use this time to complain or discipline. Make it a pleasant time, so that your teen will WANT to eat dinner with you the next night.

There are lots of other things you can do to keep your teen connected and to help them understand your goals and rules as they grow and test their independence. Take a step back and think about your own child. You know them best. Enjoy your teenager, while she is still living at home. Don't waste these precious years on fighting!

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