

# 9 tips for parents of teenagers

## 1. Give your teen more independence as they seem ready.

- Decide with your teen which things can be done independently, including staying home alone or going out with friends who drive. Adjust rules as your teen becomes increasingly mature.
- Set limits on what kinds of shows your teen can watch, what kinds of electronic games they can play, and which websites they can visit. Violent content can lead to an increase in violent behavior.
- Enforce limits and consequences when rules are broken. Avoid power struggles by picking your battles.

## 2. Try to handle changes in your relationship with your teen gracefully.

- Understand that your evolving role includes helping them become independent and learn to make wise decisions.
- Be aware that your teen may be less willing to be involved in some family activities, and may challenge your authority.
- Respect your teen's need for privacy.

## 3. Be an active participant in your teen's school life.

- Show interest in what they're working on in school, and pay attention to grades and attendance problems.
- Help your teen understand why education is important and how it will help them in the future.
- If they're having problems, talk to them about what's wrong. If needed, talk to the school staff.

## 4. Help build your teen's self-image and self-worth.

- Pay attention to what your teen says. Really listen.
- Recognize and acknowledge positive behavior and achievements. Avoid yelling, nagging, and put-downs.
- Spend one-on-one time with your teen. Plan fun activities to do together.

## 5. Watch for signs of depression.

Teens who are depressed are at greater risk of abusing drugs or alcohol, having problems at school, getting in trouble with the law, frequently getting sick, and committing suicide. Common symptoms of depression include:

- Crying a lot, or feeling hopeless or sad
- Lack of energy and loss of interest in friends or hobbies
- Changes in sleeping or eating habits
- Irritability or anger
- Trouble concentrating
- Low self-esteem
- Complaints of headaches or stomachaches
- Talking about hurting or killing themselves
- Problems getting along with others; disruptive behavior at home or school
- Talking about running away from home or dropping out of school

If your teen seems to be depressed for two weeks or longer, make them an appointment with their doctor right away.

## 6. Be alert for signs of bullying.

Bullying includes picking on someone who is weak or alone, hitting someone without reason, calling someone names, destroying another person's property, and using scary language to show power over another person.

### If your teen is being bullied:

- Listen to their fears and concerns.
- Teach them not to react to bullies, to stay calm and walk away.
- Report your concerns to school officials right away.

### If your teen is being a bully:

- Take the problem seriously.
- Tell your teen you won't tolerate behavior that hurts other people.

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- Offer praise or rewards when your teen corrects their behavior.
- Establish consequences for bullying and take away privileges if bullying occurs.
- Talk to your teen's doctor. They may be able to find out what's causing the behavior.

## 7. Be a good role model.

- Buy and eat healthy foods.
- Don't smoke or use drugs.
- Get regular physical exercise.
- Use your seat belt every time you ride in a car, and a helmet when you're on a bike, motorcycle, or skateboard.
- Don't drive after drinking alcohol.

## 8. Help your teen develop healthy habits.

- Talk to your teen about the dangers of using tobacco, drugs, and alcohol.
- Encourage your teen to find fun ways to be physically active.
- Schedule well visits every year for your teen and let them have time to talk alone with the doctor.
- Stock up on healthy foods that make smart snacking easy:
  - Whole grain bread, bagels, and crackers
  - Peanut butter and low-fat cheese
  - Bananas, apples, and oranges
  - Bags of carrots and pre-cut veggies
  - Nonfat milk and yogurt

## 9. Teach your teen safe practices.

- **Violence prevention.** Unload guns and keep them locked up. Tell your teen not to carry a weapon of any kind. Help them learn to solve conflicts without violence, to talk it over or walk away.
- **Vehicle safety.** Emphasize the importance of always wearing a seat belt, and never riding with anyone who has been drinking or using drugs. Have them wear a helmet when they're on a bicycle, motorcycle, or skateboard. When the time comes, talk to them about safe driving. Make sure they understand what it means to be a responsible driver and passenger.

- **Smart internet use.** Teach your teen not to share any personal information over the internet. Encourage them to stop all communication with anyone who bullies or scares them, or invites them to meet in person.
- **Safe sex.** Even if you don't want your teen to have sex yet, talk to them about sexual feelings, relationships, and responsibility. Explain how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. Share your views about teen sex.

## Resources for parents of teens

Quit for Life® (to help you quit tobacco): **1-800-462-5327**

Kaiser Permanente Adolescent Center: **1-800-422-7932**

Kaiser Permanente Behavioral Health Services:

- First-time appointments: Call **1-888-287-2680** or **206-901-6300**

- Follow-up care: Contact the office of your teen's provider or call **1-888-287-2680** or **206-901-6300**

Kaiser Permanente Resource Line: **1-800-992-2279**

### Websites:

Kaiser Permanente: [kp.org/wa](http://kp.org/wa)

### Books:

- *Caring for Your Teenager*, Greydanus and Bashe (American Academy of Pediatrics)
- *Surviving your Adolescents*, Phelan
- *Get Out of My Life; but First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall: A Parent's Guide to the New Teenager*, Wolf

## Next well-child visit in 1 year