

Parent-teen connection

TIP SHEET

Relationship Australia WA's education team has developed a range of tips to help support you during difficult times. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

As teens move toward greater independence and spend more time with their peers, parents often feel they don't have much influence. But teenagers' behaviour is highly correlated with the strength of their relationship with their parents.

Your child still needs a strong relationship with you to feel safe and secure as they meet the challenge of adolescence. The most effective parenting strategy with teens is staying connected as they move into the world.

Here are some suggestions to help you understand and stay connected to your teen:

1. Realise they are discovering their individuality

One of the main 'tasks' of adolescence is becoming an independent, autonomous person, capable of making decisions and running their own life. Young people need to establish a separate identity from that of their parents and discover who they are as individuals. Accepting and welcoming the changes can make the separation process less painful for everyone.

2. Remember, your child's brain changes during adolescence

Most of a teen's behaviour, even the most baffling and frustrating, can be explained by the changes that are taking place in their brains. Teenager's brains go through significant change and growth, and this affects their thinking, their emotions and their behavior. Be aware of those changes. Both you and your child will benefit from your understanding and empathy as well as your guidance.

3. Let your child take healthy risks

Seeking out new experiences, experimenting and taking risks is normal and necessary for your teen's growth and development. However, your teen's brain won't be fully developed until their early twenties. Support your teen to seek out healthy risks like sport, rather than unhealthy risks like drinking and stealing.

4. Look for ways to stay connected

Staying connected is about being responsive and building closeness with another person. Use everyday interactions such as chatting for a few minutes whilst washing the dishes. The best opportunities for connecting are when your child wants to talk to you. For this to happen you need to be available and be prepared to really listen.

5. Give your child opportunities to learn responsibility

Learning to handle responsibility is an important step towards becoming an autonomous adult. Giving your teen opportunities to learn responsibility – such as how they spend their allowance and going out with friends.

6. Establish clear boundaries with consequences

You may be surprised to learn that teenagers actually want boundaries - the trick is not to impose them, but to come to a mutual agreement. It will help to be flexible, so be prepared to negotiate and compromise. Consequences for a broken boundary will still be necessary, but be willing to pick your battles. Save your energy for important things.

7. Encourage a sense of belonging

Rituals can give your child a sense of security and belonging especially during challenging times. This could take the form of Friday night pizza night or a big breakfast cook-up on Sunday mornings. Eating together at dinner time is a great opportunity to strengthen family bonds and talk about the day's events. It's also an ideal time to tune into your teen's life and to spot potential problems.

8. Keep your expectations realistic

Every child is different and how they navigate adolescence will vary from child to child. Of course, they will slip up and make mistakes and break rules at times. Remember, their brains are still under construction. Testing boundaries is part of the process so it helps if you can be realistic about their behaviour.

9. Reassure your teen

The transition from child to adult can be difficult at times for your teen too. Teenage stresses are very real and may not be apparent. These can include peer pressure, conflict at home, worries about COVID or major life events such as changing schools or the death of a loved one. Encourage them to talk about how they are feeling and reassure them that whatever they are feeling is ok.

Staying connected so your child sees you as someone they can talk to will help them cope with stress.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on **Parent-Teen Connection**, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.