

Can I Trust My Teen? Parenting Teenagers

The teenage years are fraught with challenges for you and your teen as well. What happened to that sweet child who used to be talkative, wanted to help around the house and go everywhere with you? Your child has reached another stage of his or her development and needs you whether he or she acts like it or not.

What is your teen going through to cause such behavioral changes? The struggle for independence, rising hormone levels, peer pressure and an emerging identity, these are universal factors for all teens. Throw into the mix your teen's personality, everyone else's in the household and the bombardment of cultural influences and you have a recipe for the "terrible teens."

Or do you? What we expect often shows up. There are many negative stereotypes about teenagers. Don't buy the stereotypes about anyone you don't know, and certainly don't buy them about your teen. Much of how the teen years play out will depend on the relationship they have with the adults in his or her life, most importantly, their parents. Three major areas are crucial to the parent/teen relationship:

- A consistent, **positive connection** with your child characterized by understanding, stability and love instills in them the ability to initiate and sustain social interaction, develop self-confidence, cultivate a positive outlook and build greater empathy for others. Active listening is a vital part of sustaining this connection. In general, teens with this kind of positive relationship with his or her parents struggle less with depression, are less likely to take drugs, and are less influenced by negative peer pressure.
- **Monitoring** your teen is essential to the job of effective parenting. When you take a genuine interest in your teen's activities and get to know his or her friends and what they like to do, they are less likely than their peers to get into trouble. And in the context of a thoughtful and respectful relationship, parental monitoring comes across, not as intrusive, but as caring.
- **Psychological autonomy** is what your child needs and is striving for to become an independent thinker and responsible adult. Psychological autonomy is nurtured when you genuinely respect your teen's point of view, even when it opposes your point of view. This is when your own parental commitment to nurture versus control is tested. It is natural for your teen to think for themselves, and by respecting and encouraging that you validate his or her feelings and demonstrate unconditional love.

Your teen needs guidance, structure and limits. Since parents are the authority in the household, it is your job to educate your teen about drug and alcohol use and other high-risk behaviors by making it clear that such behaviors are not allowed in your family. Be specific about what behaviors are unacceptable and why as well as what the consequences will be if the rules are violated.

To obtain more helpful information about parenting a teen, check out T.E.A.M.'s website at www.team-mn.com and click on the Work-Life Services tab. You can also call (651) 642-0182 to speak with a counselor or schedule an appointment to discuss parenting issues.