

Life with Teens

As children enter the teen years, a lot can change. Bewildered parents may feel that they are living with a distant acquaintance -a confused, stressed-out, self-absorbed, impulsive, emotional and over-sensitive houseguest. So how can you get along better with your teen?

Teens go through a lot during those years. Rapid physical, emotional and cognitive development impacts on them in many ways. Young teens have rapid gains in height and weight, rapid brain development, and are physically maturing into adults. They require more sleep, and may seem clumsy as they get accustomed to their new body size and shape. Emotional and behavioural changes are often the most marked. Parents may notice their teen showing rapid mood swings, impulsiveness, and a belief that they are invincible, which can lead to risky behaviours. Younger teens or preteens will behave differently than 14 or 15 year olds, who will be different from 17 or 18 year olds. And although 18 years may indicate legal adulthood, most older teens can still use guidance from their parents.

This can all be difficult for parents, but just think how challenging these years are for teens!

In addition to the many changes taking place, many teens feel pressured, stressed, worried, lonely, and also feel incredibly self-conscious, as if they are being watched and judged about everything, all the time.

How can a parent help? If you are concerned about your teen, seek help from a health professional. It can be very hard to tell what is an appropriate helping response, but if you are worried, seek help. And parents can try the following:

Although it may not seem like it, teens do appreciate their families, and need to be connected. It may not always be easy for parents to observe this, and some parents might pull away in an effort to give their teen the autonomy and 'space' they seem to want. Yet, teens need their parents, and generally do appreciate them, although they might not show it in obvious ways. Here are some suggestions from teens as to what they wish their parents would do (and not do).

- Listen. Teens usually want to vent. Don't immediately offer solutions and advice.
- Ask your teen what she thinks is fun.
- Recognize that he is growing up.
- Stay calm and don't overreact, when she tells you about an issue or situation.
- Treat him as a unique individual
- Let go of past mistakes and don't bring them up at every occasion
- Don't talk about him when he is present, as if he isn't there-it doesn't matter if the comments are negative or positive.
- Don't say she is too young to understand, or to make a decision, or just 'too young'.

-Don't say, 'you'll live, you'll get over it, it doesn't matter,' or any comment that belittles his concerns or feelings.

-Don't say, 'I know what you mean, I went through the same thing and it turned out okay'

-Don't always talk about school or sports achievement.

-don't focus on the negative, on the things he didn't do, or tell your team , 'we only want you to do your best,' but then be disappointed by the outcome.

-don't use sarcasm

-don't compare your teen to other peers or siblings.

Here are 4 phrases that parents can try as an opening to maintaining a positive relationship. Try saying;

I was wrong

Do you want my advice, or do you want me to just listen?

How can I help?

I'd like to understand you a little better. Would you tell me your ideas about.....?

Remember, if you have concerns about your teen's health or well-being, talk to a health professional. You can start by calling Health Link toll-free at 1-866-408-5465.

For more information on parenting, or for counselling information, contact Family Services of Central Alberta, 403-343-6400 or go to www.fsca.ca

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