Aha! Parenting

**Gameplan for Positive Parenting Your Teen**

Positive parenting a teenager? A terrific teen who's responsible, considerate, shows good judgment, at least most of the time? Yes, it is possible! Here's your game plan, with 12 essential Tips.



You may not feel like you have much influence on your child these days, but teens’ behavior is highly correlated with the strength of their bonds with their parents.

Good relationships between teenagers and their parents, as rated by both, are positively correlated with school success and general happiness as rated by the teen, and also by those around her.

By contrast, weak or conflictual parent/teen relationships are correlated with early sexual activity, experimentation with drugs and alcohol, the teen's involvement in violence (as either perpetrator or victim), and suicide.

How do you parent this blossoming person who sometimes seems to be becoming a stranger?

**12 Essential Tips:**

**1. Remember you're a parent, AND a friend.**

Teens crave the security of knowing their parents understand them, appreciate them, and love them no matter what--so they do want the relationship to be a form of friendship. But they also need to feel like they have some independence, so sometimes you may feel a bit shut out. If you can navigate your closeness in an accepting way that doesn't take advantage of your role as parent to tell your child what to do, he's more likely to open up and share with you.

Does a close friendship erode your teen's respect for you? No. Don't you respect your friends, and treasure those who are really there for you emotionally? If you offer your teen respect, consideration, and authenticity, that's what you'll receive in return.

And as close as you want to be to your teen, sometimes you will have to pull rank and say No. If you're doing it often, that's a red flag that something is wrong. But sometimes your teen will be looking to you to set limits they can't set for themselves. Sometimes you'll need to stick by your values and say no, whether that's to an unsupervised party or a very late bedtime. And, of course, sometimes your teen will be able to use your guidance to come up with a win-win solution that answers your concerns.

**2. Establish dependable together time.**

Be sure to check in every single day. A few minutes of conversation while you're cleaning up after dinner or right before bedtime can keep you tuned in and establish open communication. Even teens who seem to have forgotten who their parents are the other 23 hours a day often respond well to a goodnight hug and check-in chat once they're lounging in bed. In addition to these short daily check-ins, establish a regular weekly routine for doing something special with your teen, even if it's just going out for ice cream or a walk together.

**3. Parent actively and appropriately.**

Don’t invite rebellion by refusing to acknowledge that your son or daughter is growing up and needs more freedom. But don’t be afraid to ask where your kids are going, who they’ll be with and what they’ll be doing. Get to know your kids’ friends and their parents so you’re familiar with their activities.

**4. Try to be there after school.**

The biggest danger zone for drug use and sex isn't Saturday night; it's between 3 and 6 PM on weekdays. Arrange flex time at work if you can. If your child will be with friends, make sure there’s adult supervision, not just an older sibling.

**5. Keep your standards high.**

Your teen wants to be his or her best self. Our job as parents is to support our teens in doing that. But don't expect your child to achieve goals you decide for her; she needs to begin charting her own goals now, with the support of a parent who adores her just as she is and believes that she can do anything she aims to. Support your teen's passions and explorations as she finds her unique voice.

**6. Make it a high priority to eat meals together**

...as often as you can. Meals are a great opportunity to talk about the days' events, to unwind, reinforce and bond. They're also your best opportunity to keep in touch with your teen's life and challenges, and to spot brewing problems. Finally, an important factor in kids' happiness and overall success is whether they feel they get time to "just hang out and talk" with parents every day. Click here for more on [Dinner](http://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/family-life/dinner-connected-family).

**7. Keep the lines of communication humming.**

If you don't know what's going on, you lose all hope of influencing the outcome. Click here for more on [Becoming a Brilliant Listener, Getting Your Kids to Talk with You, and Family Conversations your Teen Will Love](http://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/communication).

**8. Encourage good self-care**

...such as the nine and half hours of sleep every teen needs, and a good diet. Coffee is a bad idea for early teens because it interferes with normal sleep patterns. Too much screen time, especially in the hour before bedtime, reduces melatonin production and makes it harder for kids to fall asleep at night.

**9. Continue family meetings.**

Held regularly at a mutually agreed upon time, family meetings provide a forum for discussing triumphs, grievances, sibling disagreements, schedules, any topic of concern to a family member. Ground rules help. Everyone gets a chance to talk; one person talks at a time without interruption; everyone listens, and only positive, constructive feedback is allowed. To get resistant teens to join in, combine the get-together with incentives such as post-meeting pizza or ice cream, or assign them important roles such as recording secretary or rule enforcer. Click here for more on [Family Meetings](http://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/family-life/family-meetings).

**10. Keep kids safe and connected to the family by keeping computers in your common space.**

It can be hard for parents to track what teens do on line because they usually know more about the computer than we do. But research shows that he'll be less tempted to spend time doing things you'd disapprove of if the computer is in a common space, where you can walk by and glance at what he's doing. Kids live online these days, but he can still stay connected to his family if online is in the heart of your home.

**11. Don't push your teen into independence before he's ready.**

Every teen has his own timetable for blossoming into an independent person. Real independence includes close relationships with others, and it never needs to include rebelliousness. It is NOT healthy for your child to feel that you're pushing him into independence -- that only leads to him becoming overly dependent on the peer group for validation. If he isn't ready to go to sleep away camp for a month, then he isn't ready. Sooner or later, he will be. Respect his timetable.

**12. Make agreements and teach your child to make repairs.**

If you've raised your child without punishment, he will almost certainly be close to you. Because he doesn't want to damage the trust between you, he won't lie to you, and he won't usually infringe on your limits. If he does, ask him how he can make repairs, including repairing your trust.

**13. What if you've raised your child with punishment, and now she's breaking your rules and lying to you?**

It's never too late to help her learn to take responsibility, but to start, she has to value her relationship with you. That means you need to stop punishing, and start listening and connecting. You also need to insist that she find ways to make repairs. That's a tricky dance, because punishment will make things worse, so she has to choose the repair-- and yet you are still insisting that she do so. No, it's not a punishment -- it's a way for her to make things better when she messes up, which is what all adults need to learn to do. But she'll only understand it this way if she wants to please you, so if you need to go to counseling together to create that relationship, don't hesitate.

**14. Stay connected even as she moves into the world.**

If we've accepted our child's dependency needs AND affirmed her development into her own separate person, she'll stay fiercely connected to us even as her focus shifts to peers, high school and the passions that make her soul sing.

It's appropriate for teens to want to spend more time with their peers than their parents as they get older, but kids who are well grounded in their families will respond well to parents' efforts to stay connected. And parents who have bonded adequately with their children at each earlier stage will feel invested enough in their teens to stay connected, even if a lot of effort is required.

It’s critical, during the teen years, for parents to remain their children’s emotional and moral compass. Kids will begin to experiment with intimate relationships outside the family, but to do that successfully, they still rely on those intimate relationships at home remaining solid. That means that a 14 year old who focuses mostly outwards is probably looking for something he wasn’t getting at home.

We need to invite our children to rely on us emotionally until they’re emotionally ready to depend on themselves. Too often, in our culture, we let teenagers transfer their dependency outside the family, with disastrous results. Teens often give up a great deal of themselves in pursuit of the closeness they crave, only to crash against the hard reality that other teens aren’t developmentally able to offer them what they need to flourish as independent young adults.

You may not be at the top of your teen's list nowadays, but work like the dickens to stay close, and don't take it for granted that your child will now push you away. That’s a sign of a damaged relationship. Don't give up. It’s never too late in your relationship with your child to do repair work and move closer.