

Some Parenting Guidelines

Parenting is probably the most difficult job you will ever encounter. Knowledge about how to parent effectively and about the development of your child is the best and most useful tool you'll have. Another effective tool is your own diligence and control over yourself. How can we expect adolescents to have control over themselves if we do not first model it for them? This handout contains some of the most important information for helping adolescents navigate through those difficult teen years.

Brain Development

Starting at the age of 12, the brain develops in new ways at a rapid pace. The brain does not fully mature until age 25. We know that babies who do not bond with a parent or adult develop “attachment disorder”—the brain is actually stifled because of a lack of bonding interaction and closeness. Also illicit drug use actually changes the development of the brain during the teen and young adult years. The brain is rapidly making new pathways and neural connections. When drug abuse is a factor, the new neural pathways get switched with parts of the brain that are being pruned and discarded. So, some things being discarded should be developing and other things are being kept that need to be deleted.

The Importance of Talking

Talking with your adolescent does more to change behavior than disciplining.

1. Talking stimulates brain development
2. It helps them process their behavior
3. Teens process their thoughts and behavior through talking
4. Kids love dialectical thinking—point for point, debate. Use these.
5. Mutual discussion will *benefit discipline*.

The **more you listen** to a child, the **more power** you have; the child will respect you because he/she *feels respected* by your patient and sincere listening.

When setting limits or deciding on discipline, discuss with your child the rationality behind your decisions. This will help his/her brain develop, making rational and logical connections. You might invite your child to give her opinions. Be sure to be respectful of her thoughts and regard her input even if you do not use it.

To further help your child's brain develop, *teach him to negotiate and solve problems*. It might be an interesting experiment to ask the child what discipline methods or punishment might work. Parents can take on a supportive role instead of being demanding and always telling the child what to do.

Parent, Child Bonds

If the bond between a parent and her child is weak, the child will be more influenced and involved with her peers. Although, it is natural in the teen years to have a strong pull towards peers. This does not mean that her friends mean more to her than the family, but that it is a focus in her life, when before the family was more the focus.

Research has found 3 factors of parental involvement or neglect that contribute to adolescents becoming juvenile delinquents.

6. Inconsistent or harsh, punitive parenting style. Unpredictable, coercive or forceful parents.
7. Parental monitoring that is overly authoritative, parents micro manage their children and are extreme.
8. Parents do not continue to bond with child—engage in activities. The focus is on the problems.

Two parental **responses** that are helpful in raising healthy teenagers, are:

9. Demandingness—This means having reasonable expectations of your child, being flexible (not rigid), and being appropriate (the punishment fits the crime). Expectations need to fit the child's development (be sure to not expect too much or *too little*).
10. Responsibility—Does the parent respond when the child needs help? Does the parent soothe and comfort the child when needed?

Parenting Styles and Their Relationship to The Two Above Statements.

11. Authoritative—Parents make firm rules and boundaries but always consider the children's input. They are reasonable and caring. (Demandingness—High, Responsibility—High.)
12. Neglectful—Parents are uninvolved. They don't want to be bothered by the "hassles" of childrearing. (Demandingness—Low, Responsibility—Low)
13. Authoritarian—Parents are overly strict, too many rules, do not nurture. (Demandingness—High, Responsibility—Low.)
14. Passive—Parents have low expectations for child and tend to rescue and pamper. (Demandingness—Low, Responsibility—High).

Effective parents: 1) expect mature behavior from adolescents 2) set and consistently enforce reasonable rules and standards for behavior 3) and when necessary, discipline their children *firmly yet fairly*. (Feldman and Elliott).

Self-Worth is Based on Two Criteria

Worthy by nature—Worthy because you are a human being, because you exist.

Gain self-worth by what you do and who you are or are becoming.

Help your children find the strengths they have: character strengths, abilities, talents, use of intelligence etc. Notice these strengths, build on them, help your child find new ones and develop all these abilities. Help your child to see how these intrinsic characteristics can help them in their lives and in relationships. Do not give labels to your child, do not focus on bad behavior. Focus on the good things he does. Do not fix everything. Give problems back to them and ask them what are they going to do about it.

One of the best things parents can do for their children is to teach them to **problem solve**. Encourage your children to solve their own problems as much as possible or appropriate. This will greatly benefit them in their future life and will mature them.

Listening

The importance of good listening skills cannot be emphasized enough. When listening to your adolescent or anyone else these skills can help immensely.

15. Give your full attention. Be alone with the child, look into his eyes, turn your body to him.
16. Let him know you are listening by occasionally summarizing, in a few words, what he has told you.
17. Let go of your own agenda. You cannot afford to be defensive—this will stop any good progress.
18. Ask appropriate questions to clarify. Do not ask questions that do not pertain to what your child is saying. Do not interrogate.
19. Let your child talk until he feels completely understood. Give empathy throughout his talking as well as nods and "uh-huhs" so he knows you are with him.
20. **You cannot afford to be defensive in any way or lecturing.** This is his time to talk.
21. Results will be: he will feel heard, valued, validated, even loved and you will feel closer to him.