

Environmental Resource Council www.envrc.org

Navigating THE Teen Years

A PARENT'S HANDBOOK FOR RAISING HEALTHY TEENS



Dear Parent,

Navigating the teen years can be formidable. But research shows that kids who learn from their parents about the dangers of underage drinking, illicit drugs, tobacco use, dangerous driving and other risky behaviors are less likely to engage in them.

This booklet provides the information and expert advice you need to help guide your teen to a healthy life. From setting expectations and rules to monitoring your teen, to being a good role model, the advice is simple and easy to do, with suggestions for actions to take daily, weekly or monthly. Whether you are a mom or dad, single or married, grandparent or other caregiver, this handbook provides tips and advice that you can use.

The nation's pediatricians thank you for taking the time to focus on your teen's healthy growth and positive future. It's an investment you'll never regret.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN"

A Word About Parenting Teens

f you have a teenager in your life, you've probably done your share of worrying about the potential risks out there. Alcohol, tobacco or illicit drug use. Dangerous driving. Sexual activity. Maybe even the pressures of school, sports or fitting in.

You've probably also worried that you're no longer the most influential force in your child's life. Teens are facing a host of intense challenges and changes in their lives, and like to act as if they alone can deal with them. But the reality is that teens need (and secretly want) your help and guidance. In fact, now that you have a teenager, your job as a parent isn't done, it's just different.

The good news is that most of today's teens are thriving. Adolescents today are less likely to drink, smoke, do drugs, get pregnant, commit a violent crime or drop out of school compared to their parents' generation. They volunteer more than ever before and are actively exploring their spirituality. They are more tolerant and more likely to have friends with different ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. And most teens would even say they have positive relationships with their parents, siblings and friends. In short, they are finding their way, but not without the involvement and presence of YOU, the parent.

Surveys of teens show that they want and expect their parents to play a key role in their lives. They appreciate you. They listen. They remember your advice. Even when it seems like they're not paying attention.

That said, the risks facing teenagers today are real. They're also different for every teen, and they might even surprise you. Did you know that rural and suburban teens are more likely than urban youth to have problems with alcohol or illicit drugs? And, despite all the warnings about impaired driving, 30 percent of students report that they've ridden one or more times in the last month with a driver who had been drinking.

Remember when your children first learned to walk? They often searched for a table or mom's leg to steady themselves. Perhaps they even panicked if they couldn't find something to hold onto. You made sure they were protected from things that could hurt them if they fell. You stayed close enough to help if they lost their balance but gave them enough room to practice their newfound skill. It was probably a joy for you to see them grow in confidence as they went from crawling to walking, and from walking to running.

Adolescence is a lot like that. Your teens need you close by during this time of exploration or they will find something else to hold on to, just like they did when they were toddlers. They need your help to navigate the barriers. And they need you close enough to openly ask questions and talk about problems, but far enough away so they can begin making decisions for themselves.

Need more guidance? Experts have identified some practical parenting skills that can help prevent a wide range of risky behaviors among teens and lead to healthy, well-adjusted youth. What follows is a "nuts and bolts" summary of the experts' findings. In this handbook, you will find everyday tips on how to stay involved with your teen as she or he becomes more independent. Whether you are single or married, a mom or dad, or a grandparent or other caregiver, this handbook is for you.

Keep reading to learn how to put these simple principles into practice to raise a safe, healthy and happy teen.

PRINCIPLE #1: Tune Into Your Teen

The common thread among teens who do well academically and socially, and stay healthy and drug-free, is that they have close relationships with their parents. These teens report that their parents are interested in them, in what they do and in who they know. They also say their parents are curious about their lives and their ideas. They feel connected, because their parents listen to them and take time to find out what's going on in their world.

This only makes sense. Teens who are close to their parents or a trusted adult caregiver have more at stake when it comes to decisions about risk-taking. At that moment of truth when they are confronted with a risky choice, they don't want to disappoint their parents or betray their trust. They are also more open to their parents' advice. In fact, if you are connected, supportive and responsive to your teen, it will be much easier for you to take on the tougher parts of parenting,



such as setting rules and discipline. You can simply be a strict parent, but your teens won't have lasting respect for your rules unless they believe that you also care for them.

Here are some ways to foster a close relationship with your teen:

- Spend time together regularly, doing things your teen enjoys.
- Talk openly and honestly.
- Use positive communication skills, especially when there is conflict. For example, think before you speak and acknowledge your teen's point-of-view so he or she knows you are listening.
- Acknowledge the positive qualities and behaviors of your teenager.

It's true that sometimes staying connected is easier said than done. How can you get through when your teen is resentful or argumentative? Remember that nearly all teens are working toward independence. They can't develop their own minds unless they challenge things you and others have taught them. So they will often argue just for the sake of disagreeing. It's their way of forming an identity. However, even when they are giving you a hard time, they are probably listening and remembering. So keep your messages brief, but don't stop talking and reaching out. Understand them by observing and respect them by listening.

TIP: Take advantage of everyday times like driving your teen to school or watching TV together to engage with your teenager. Or set aside a regular dinner "date" to check in. Ask about interests and activities and find out what's going on in your teen's life.

"My daughter talks to me. I pretty much know everything that's going on with her, in school and with her friends."

TUNING INTO YOUR TEEN: QUICK SELF-CHECK

- Do you praise your teen for accomplishments, even the small ones?
- Do you spend time each day talking with your teenager?

Do you regularly have meals with your teen and other family members?

Are you familiar with your teen's favorite interests and hobbies?

Do you know your teen's friends?



"Rules are their safety net... they like them! They want to know you have a boundary for them. It's better if you tell them 'no' than 'maybe.'"

– DAD, FROM VIRGINIA

Guide Your Teen

SETTING EXPECTATIONS & RULES

eens are inexperienced. Expectations and rules provide support and structure for young people dealing with new situations and challenges. Expectations and rules are different, but both are essential and they work hand-in-hand. Expectations help you define the broad standards of behavior you expect from your teen. For example, you expect your teen to make responsible decisions. Rules bring your expectations to life, such as requiring your teen to be home at a certain hour. Rules and their consequences provide a concrete way to help your kids understand your expectations and learn self-control.

Communicating your expectations is an important first step. Your teen may have a good sense of your attitudes about alcohol and illicit drug use and other risk-taking, but if you haven't clearly spelled out your expectations, you are missing an opportunity. You may feel like you're stating the obvious, but teens don't deal so well with "gray" areas. They need to know exactly where you stand.

There are many upsides to making your expectations clear. Sitting down with your teen opens the door to an important conversation about risky behaviors. Clear, firm expectations about risk-taking define limits for your teen and help prepare him or her for responding to temptation or a risky choice. And by discussing your expectations, you are sending a clear message that your teen is accountable for his or her behavior.

A discussion about expectations also gives you a chance to hear from your teen. Many teens have a sense of "it can't happen to me" and need help fully understanding how a risky decision could affect them. You can use the conversation to probe your teens' thinking about risky choices and to encourage them to think more realistically about the likely consequences of their actions.

While expectations are important, they may leave some room for interpretation. This is why rules about specific behaviors, actions and responsibilities help ensure there's no confusion.

What kinds of rules do you need? In addition to substance use and other risk-taking, you may want rules around curfew, unsupervised time, homework, chores, driving, cell phone, Internet and use of other media, such as movies, television and video games.

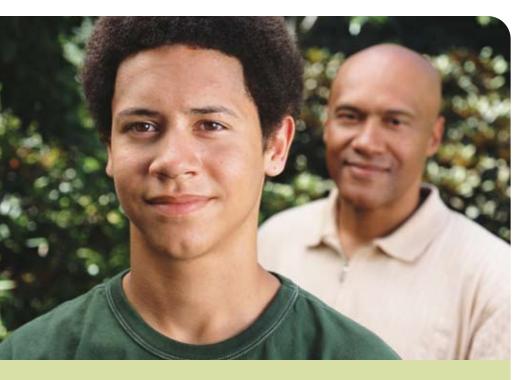
When it comes to rules, you'll get some push-back from your teen, but most kids expect their parents to set some limits. If your teen protests, be respectful, listen and explain your reasoning. Here are some other ideas to make rule-setting as painless as possible:

- Focus on setting rules for safety with an emphasis on providing guidance rather than using power and/or issuing punishment.
- Provide opportunities for give-andtake. Allow your teen to weigh in on some of the rules, but maintain the final say.
- Be firm, but not overly restrictive or intrusive.
- Set some fixed "house rules" regarding health and safety first, and then negotiate others with your teen. Be flexible and willing to renegotiate rules as your teen shows more maturity and responsibility.
- Be specific when it comes to rules about substance use. Tell your teens they are not permitted to use tobacco, alcohol or illicit drugs.
- Don't forget to address misuse of prescription and over-the-counter medications as well. Non-medical use of prescription drugs is now a popular category of drug use among teens. Tell your teen that taking these drugs without a prescription or a doctor's approval can be a dangerous – and even deadly – decision.

Keep in mind that it's important to communicate your expectations to other parents as well. Parents of your teen's friends and other adults in your teen's life can be key allies for you, and it's good for them to know where you stand. Finally, don't forget to set clear consequences when you're talking about rules. Consequences aren't only for punishment. They keep teens alert and mindful about breaking rules, and help slow them down the next time they're faced with a risky choice. Consequences also have a more practical purpose. They provide teens with a believable excuse to give their peers when resisting drugs or other risky behaviors.

Here's some advice for setting consequences:

- Try to keep consequences supportive; make sure they are about teaching, not about retaliation. They should be logical and not excessively harsh.
- Consequences need to be practical for the parent. You must be able and willing to enforce them consistently if they are to be effective.
- Follow through. Many parents have trouble upholding consequences consistently, and their teens are often aware of it.
- Use the power of praise to reinforce positive behavior. Look for opportunities to catch your teen being good. Praise your teen today as much as you did when he or she was a preschooler.
- Set some rewards and special privileges for your teen for following the rules.



TIP: Your teens will be more likely to accept and understand your rules if you take time to teach them about the values that are important to your family. For example, to talk about accountability, use real-life examples about people you know or stories in the news to reinforce the importance of taking responsibility for your actions.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS & RULES FOR YOUR TEEN: QUICK SELF-CHECK

- Have you told your teens you expect them to avoid alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other illicit drugs?
- Have you discussed and set "house rules" with your teen?
- Have you defined specific consequences for breaking rules?
- _____ Did you involve your teen in the rule-setting discussion?

MONITORING YOUR TEENS

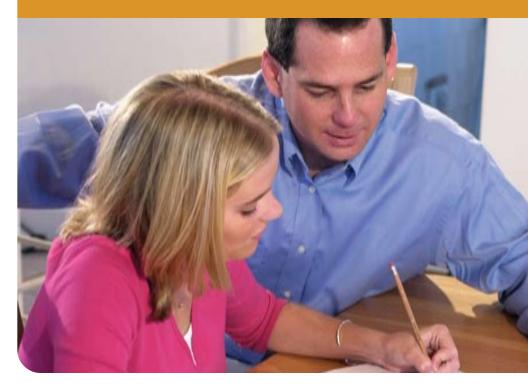
ids can't always be counted on to do the right thing. Just think back to your own teenage years. Many of us made choices that make us cringe today, and we're thankful that we escaped serious harm. Those experiences should be a potent reminder that it's always good to trust your teens but also to verify what they've told you. This is where monitoring comes in.

Monitoring is keeping tabs on your teenagers. It includes knowing where they are, whom they are with, what they are doing and when they will be home. It means asking questions, having your teens check in with you regularly, and checking up on them as well.

As teens get more involved in activities away from home, you have fewer opportunities to directly supervise them. Think about monitoring as plugging into the different areas of your teen's life, including school, work, peers, afterschool activities, adult relationships and free time. Sometimes it's a process of communication, and other times it means comparing notes with other adults in your teen's life, or observing your teen, like watching for changes in behavior.

It's true that some teens will resent being monitored, but they generally understand and respect monitoring, especially in the long-term. Your job as a parent is to communicate and be respectful. Here are some tips:

- Let your teens know you will be monitoring so they know what to expect.
- If you suspect your teen is getting into trouble, make occasional



surprise visits to confirm your teen is where he or she is actually supposed to be. If your teen is visiting a friend, call the friend's house. Let your teen know you may do this from time to time.

- Be respectful. Ask, don't interrogate, your teen about activities and whereabouts.
- Have a standing rule of "no parents, no party" so your teens understand they are not allowed at any party without adult supervision.
- Get involved in your teen's school and activities.
- Get to know other adults in your teen's life, including teachers, coaches, neighbors, employers and parents of your teen's friends. Use this network to compare notes about how your teen is doing.
- Check in with teens about their spending and where their money is going.
- Monitor your teen's physical and mental health and watch for signs of problems.

- Check in on your teens at home as well. Monitor your medicine cabinet to see if your teens have been using your prescription or over-the-counter drugs, such as cough medicines or drugs that contain dextromethorphan (DXM). And remember, some teens help themselves to their parents' supply of alcoholic beverages.
- Require your teens to check in with you when they get home at night. This serves as a deterrent to alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use because your teens know they will have to say goodnight. It also gives you an opportunity to check for signs of use, such as odors on clothing.
- Let teens know that safety is a priority and if they ever feel unsafe, they can call you.
- Be aware of messages in popular culture that encourage alcohol, tobacco or illicit drug use. Monitor your teen's use of movies, television, the Internet and other media.
- Be vigilant about your teen's activities online. Teens are easily able to order prescription medicines from online pharmacies. Check the Web sites your teen has visited and track purchases made with a credit card.

"My parents keep pretty close tabs. My friends' parents are all my mom's friends. So they cross check with each other."

- TEEN, FROM TEXAS

How much monitoring is enough? Many parents feel like they're doing the right level of monitoring for their teen. But there are times when you probably need to step it up. Here's some advice to help determine when you need to be doing more:

- When there are changes in your teen's friends, behaviors, attitudes, grades or other signs that something is going on.
- When your teen is going through a transition, such as starting a new school, living in a new neighborhood, entering high school or starting to drive.
- When your teen has already gotten into some minor trouble.
- If your teen seems unusually stressed. Some teens say they misuse or abuse prescription drugs because of stress related to family life, relationships, academic pressures or physical appearance.
- If your teen seems highly susceptible to peer pressure, lacks strong coping skills or suffers from anxiety or depression.
- If your teen has a high need for stimulation, novelty and excitement and becomes bored easily. These "sensation-seekers" are three times more likely to use illicit drugs.
- If your teen comes from a family with a history of substance abuse, violence or mental health problems.

If you strongly suspect something is going on, you have good reason to do more hands-on monitoring, such as looking through a room or backpack, or checking your teen's cell phone records or activity online. If you're worried about violating your teen's privacy, remember that your first responsibility is to keep your teen safe. Privacy is important but it has limits. Set some ground rules before there's a problem so your teen knows what to expect. If appropriate, give your teen an opportunity to explain before taking a more hands-on approach.

If you find out your teen is using alcohol, tobacco or illicit drugs, take action. Talk to your teen, reiterate your rules and expectations and enforce consequences. To get help, contact your teen's school counselor, pediatrician or family physician or call the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 1-800-788-2800 for a listing of treatment centers in your area. You can also find information online at *www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov.*

MONITORING YOUR TEEN: QUICK SELF-CHECK

- Do you follow up on your teen to confirm his or her whereabouts?
- Do you know where your teen is after school and who he or she spends time with?
- Do you know the parents of your teen's friends and do they know and respect your family's rules?
- ____ Do you have rules about where your teen can spend time?



COMMUNITY MONITORING

Monitoring can be time consuming, but one way to ease the burden is to enlist the help of others. Your community and neighborhood can be valuable resources when it comes to keeping teens safe and healthy. Here are some ways you can use community monitoring to help prevent teen risk-taking:

- Stay informed of trends in youth risk-taking in your community and neighborhood, such as new drugs, drinking parties or dangerous driving. Talk to your teen and other parents about the risks.
- Meet with other parents, neighbors and adults in your teen's life, such as coaches or teachers. Share your expectations, develop common limits and forge an "early warning system" to identify kids having problems.

- Identify "hot spots" in your community where trouble occurs, including sources of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs. Restrict your teen's access to these spots and talk to other parents about your concerns. Let officials know about these areas and enlist businesses and community leaders to help keep teens safe.
- Be proactive about checking in with other parents when a party or other activity is being planned. Share your plans for supervision and other concerns. Encourage other parents to do the same.
- Get involved with parent groups and school organizations to connect with other parents and address risky teen behavior in your area.
- Get information about drug prevention coalitions or similar groups in your area and use them as a resource.

COMMUNITY MONITORING: QUICK SELF-CHECK

_____ Have you developed a reliable network of other adults to help monitor your teen?

____ Do you regularly compare notes with other parents about teen activities?

_____ Are you active in school, neighborhood or other community organizations?

____ Are you familiar with trends in teen risk-taking in your community?

Respect Your Teen

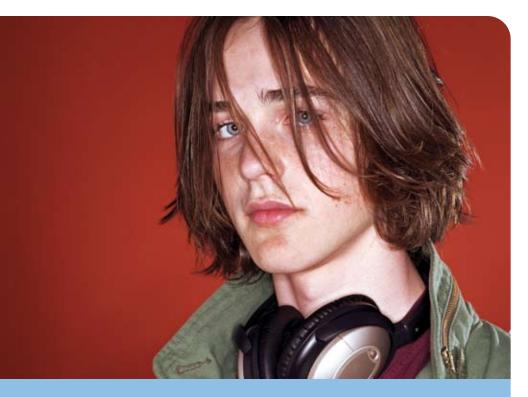
espect. It's all any teenager really wants, isn't it? As teens work on gaining independence, they want opportunities to assert their own identities and make their own decisions. They're craving respect for their ideas, opinions and beliefs.

But showing respect can be hard, especially when you are frustrated. Respect is a two-way street, and teens are very concerned about fairness. When you're disrespectful, they will probably respond in-kind. You don't have to agree all the time to show respect, but try to listen and treat them fairly.

Research shows that parents who respect their teen's individuality help prevent risk-taking and protect their kids against depression and other problems. On the other hand, when parents try to control their teen's beliefs or stifle their opinions, it can undermine confidence and lead to other emotional problems. Moreover, if you don't respect your teen, she or he's not likely to respect her or himself either. And a kid without self-respect is a kid vulnerable to risk-taking and the need to "fit in." Here's how to build respect in your relationship with your teen:

- Stay involved, but give your teen the privacy and space to be an individual.
- Encourage your teen to develop and express his or her own opinions and ideas.
- Don't be dismissive of your teen's beliefs if you don't agree with them. Instead, learn to engage your teen in a healthy debate.
- Make time to listen and be responsive to your teen's fears and concerns.
- When you have to criticize or discipline your teen, focus on the behavior, not on your teen. Don't call your teen names or use hurtful language.
- Don't belittle your teens' way of dressing or appearance or their taste in music or entertainment.
- Appreciate and acknowledge your teen's unique interests, skills and strengths.

TIP: Teens also need to learn to respect themselves. If your teen seems worried about fitting in, use the opportunity to appeal to the value your teen places on independence. Acknowledge the pressures he or she faces and emphasize the importance of individuality and independent thinking.



RESPECTING YOUR TEEN: QUICK SELF-CHECK

- _ Do you ask about and respect your teen's worries and concerns?
- When you disagree with your teen, do you take the time to listen?
- Are you respectful of your teen's friends and taste in music or clothes?
- Do you take care to treat each of your children as distinct individuals?

"Teens need their space but at the same time a parent should know what they're doing. If the kid feels like you do not trust him, he will not trust you. Period."

- ANONYMOUS TEEN

Be A Good Role Model

Remember when your kids were toddlers and they mimicked everything you said and did? Things are not so different today. You may not realize it, but your actions communicate a great deal to your teenager. Parents who set a good example through their relationships and social skills have kids who do better in the areas of school, employment, relationships, communication, coping and other life skills.

Setting a good example is especially important when it comes to substance use. Parents' or caregivers' abuse of alcohol, tobacco or illicit drugs significantly increases a teen's chances of using, using early and developing a substance abuse problem of their own.

The first thing you can do is deliver a clear and consistent message that you don't want your teen using these substances. Even if you do use these substances, telling your teens to stay away from them has a major impact on their actions and keeps their use down. Also:

- Don't smoke. If you smoke, quit for your own health as well as that of your family's.
- Don't allow your teen to drink or smoke in your home.
- Don't provide alcohol to teenagers in your home. It's not safe, it sends your teen the wrong message and you could be breaking the law.
- Don't involve your teen in your use, such as asking him or her to get you a beer or a cigarette.
- Never drink and drive.
- Enlist other family members or friends to serve as positive role models for your teen.

BEING A GOOD ROLE MODEL: QUICK SELF-CHECK

____ Do you have family gatherings and parties that don't include alcohol? It's important to show your teens that you can have fun whether or not alcohol is served.

Have you shared "funny" stories about your past substance use in front of your kids?

Do you use substances to cope with even minor problems or discomforts?

____ Get help if you think you have a problem with alcohol or illicit drugs.



"The only way to keep your children from going astray is for them to have a role model they can respect."

– MOM, FROM MISSOURI

The Busy Parent's Checklist

o what's a parent to do with all this information? To help, we've boiled down some key advice into a convenient checklist that helps you keep in mind simple, easy steps you can take each day, week and month to stay connected to your teen.

TRY TO DO DAILY:

- Know your teen's main activities and plans for the day.
- Know where your teens are when you are at work or not otherwise with them, and who they are likely to be with.
- ✓ If appropriate for that day, remind your teen about relevant rules.
- At the end of the day, ask about your teen's activities.
- Praise and thank your teen for good behavior.
- Check that homework and other responsibilities have been completed.
- Try to have family meals together or engage in a family activity on a regular basis.

TRY TO DO WEEKLY:

- ✓ Take some time to check in with each child. Set 20 minutes aside to find out how friendships are going, what's happening at school and what other events are important in your teen's life.
- ✓ Ask your teen mid-week if there are any special plans for the weekend that require your input. Do this early to avoid last-minute conflict.
- Every once in a while, check that your teens are where they say they are going to be.
- Encourage your teen to have a friend over or engage in fun activities together.
- Remind your teen about weekday/ weekend rules when appropriate.



TRY TO DO MONTHLY:

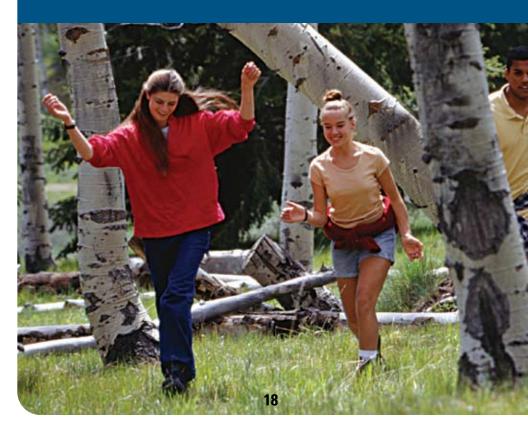
- Make sure you've had at least a couple of individual activities or outings with your teen.
- ✓ Check the temperature of your relationship. How are things going?
- Check in with your teen to see what has taken up his or her time and interest this month, and discuss it. Ask if there's anything you can do to help.
- Make sure you've followed through on any recent promises to your teen.
- Plan one special family event or activity. Try to do things that your teens enjoy.
- Get a report from teachers on your teen's school progress. Check in with coaches or a guidance counselor about extracurricular activities.

- Take a monitoring inventory. Who has your teen been spending time with? What has he been doing? Follow up on any red flags or concerns.
- What have they been spending their money on?
- Stay up-to-date on news and trends among teens in the area. Talk with other parents and discuss concerns with your kids. Check with local youth organizations to find out about problems in your community.
- Check in with your teens about rules. If they've been doing well, then be flexible and reward them in meaningful ways. When your teens are ready, allow them more freedoms. Discuss any new rules or limits for new activities.

A FINAL NOTE

t's worth remembering that most teens today are doing well, thanks in large part to supportive, loving and involved parents, like you. But there's no doubt that parenting a teen can be overwhelming. Even parents who do everything "right" sometimes have kids who turn to alcohol, tobacco or illicit drugs.

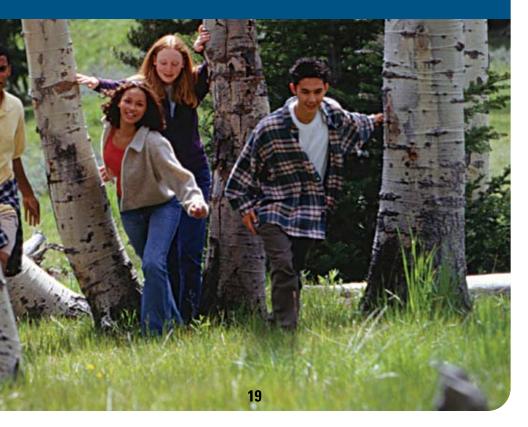
But despite all the competing influences in the lives of teens, parents remain their kids' first and best teachers. You don't have to be the expert. You just need to focus on being the parent and knowing how and when to access the information you need. Most parents wrestle with their role at some point during the teenage years. In fact, many parents and caregivers are already doing many things right, and just need to hear they are on the right path, however difficult the passage through adolescence may be. Other parents might look for more concrete ideas to help their teen navigate these tricky years. Your parenting style may be strict, lenient, or somewhere in-between, but whatever the case, the research shows that parents and families are a teen's best bet. Be there for your teen, and your teenager should be just fine.



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American Academy of Pediatrics (*www.aap.org*) National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (*www.teenpregnancy.org*) National Prevention Network, Public Information and Media Committee NYU Child Study Center (*www.aboutourkids.org*) Parent Corps (*www.parentcorps.org*)



FOR MORE HELP

This handbook includes information about risky behaviors teens are likely to engage in, including underage drinking, sexual activity and drugged driving. Many resources exist that address these issues in more detail. You can access these resources at *www.TheAntiDrug.com/parentresources*.

For more information and advice on parenting teenagers, visit *www.TheAntiDrug.com* (English) or *www.LaAntiDroga.com* (Spanish). *TheAntiDrug.com* has resources that can help you understand your specific style; your teen's emotional, psychological and physical development; and pressures facing teens today. The site also includes the latest information about illicit drugs and prevention, as well as booklets you can download.

You can also call 1-800-788-2800 or 1-877-SIN-DROGAS (Spanish) or email *nyac@theantidrug.com* for more information and materials.

My Parent Network

	PARENTS OF FRIENDS
NAME EMAIL	PHONE 1 PHONE 2
NAME	PHONE 1
EMAIL	PHONE 2
	TEACHERS
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OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY NATIONAL YOUTH ANTI-DRUG MEDIA CAMPAIGN



For more copies of this handbook or additional anti-drug and parent resources call 1-800-788-2800 or visit *www.TheAntiDrug.com*.

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